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Narratives on Longing, Being, and Knowing: Envisioning a Writing Epistemology

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Abstract: In this paper, I problematize the inextricable relationship between how I constitute knowledge and how I articulate knowledge. Through various narrative reflections I explore my own reckoning with dominant ways of articulating knowledge that reinforce ways of constituting knowledge that are inherently strange to me. I also outline my sojourns and departures into and from emergent modes of articulating knowledge such as personal narrative and autoethnography. Even though I acknowledge the emancipator nature of these modes, I show myself in tension with them in terms of their fit with my own geographies and topographies. I conclude with a discussion of a larger project I envision which implicates new modes of articulating knowledge that assume a much larger notion of self and personhood. I argue that a larger notion of self is vital to the making of a more expansive and inclusive definition of knowledge

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This is one story about writing^[1]. This is also many stories about writing. It contains stories of loss and recovery, of forebodings and longings, of love and tears. This is a story about writing, about the experiences of one person who discovered what the words style, rhythm, and form meant long after she discovered the performance of self in writing.

Questions and Answers

I am in boarding school in the foothills of the Himalayas in India. I've been here for almost three years. I must be 12 now. I was barely 10 when my parents brought me here. I have been missing my parents for sometime. We meet once, maybe twice in a year. One visit is only 10 days long, the other is a three month trip home, and then I am back to this school-home. The reason I am here, so I believe at that time, is that there are religious riots in Punjab, the north Indian state where we live. We are Hindus, so my family has received many threats. My parents feel better with me here. It is safe^[2].

This evening, I am feeling very angry about this unnecessary distance between my parents and myself. I am missing my dog, Whiskey. I am missing the parrot, Mithoo. I'm even missing pumpkin curry, something I can barely stand to eat when it is cooked at home. I am just missing home -- its smells, its sounds, its hominess.

I am angry. I don't know how to think about it. I can't think of what to say.

There are some other girls here who cry about going home to be with their mothers. I don't feel like crying, but today I am angry. Not at my parents, but at those terrorists who want a separate 'country.' They want to split the state away from India and form another nation. They want to call it Khalistan. I am in this home-school because of them. Do they know what they have done? Can I tell someone? How? I can't speak. I am too angry. I begin to write.

When it is finished it is a letter to the editor of a children's magazine, Target. All of us read it. It is like the New Yorker of kiddi-land. We also read Nancy Drews, Hardy Boys and Enid Blytons. But, in Target, children like us tell their stories. I have read them before. I need to make sense of why I am angry. I battle with my anger in the letter. It shows me the origins and secrets of my anger.

I wish I had saved this letter. In fact, I have no memory of what I put on the title. I've always needed titles for anything I wrote. It is almost as if the writing cannot begin without it. I have not understood why that is so. I wish I could have read the future and have known that in almost 19 years, I would be trying to remember what I wrote to the editor of *Target* that evening in boarding school. I do know that my English teacher, who lived in school like I did, encouraged me to send it. It never saw print. I know that in it, I spoke to the uselessness of 'terrorism,' of how children like myself had to live without their parents just because we happened

to be of the wrong religion in the wrong place. I wrote about my mother who was forced to be by herself all day waiting for her husband to come home. I spoke about missing my brother who was in another boarding school like mine. I came to know the symptoms, the causes, the complications, and the intensities of my anger in the letter.

The letter was rejected. The rejection came in the mail. Some explanation about the editorial board receiving too many excellent submissions every month. I took the rejection letter to Ms. Diaz, my English teacher. She told me that I should be happy to have received a letter from the editor. If they had not read the letter, they would have just not acknowledged it – not even replied. The letter would have been lost. I was happy, but I really did not care. I must have saved the rejection somewhere. I don't have it now. But, I came to know my anger in writing it.

This was a time when I was friends with writing. She came to me whenever I needed her. She needed no invitation. We were inseparable as best friends often are. I told her my troubles and she made sense of them for me. With her I helped my mother see my days and months in school. In her, I could return home and even imagine other homes. In her, I knew I would find some answers to some questions. But our relationship would change. One of us was forsaken.

Double Lives/Two Voices

I am an undergraduate at the University of Delhi in the year 1993. I am studying literature. We are reading the Greeks. These days we have been reading the Odyssey. I am enmeshed in the books of the Odyssey (1996; first published in 800 B.C.E.). I think, dream, and live the plots. I walk along with Odysseus, pretending that I am a fellow traveler.

I write long essays about what I believe are the moral challenges faced by the characters in the stories. I converse with Odysseus's struggles. My reading is simple. I am not a chic reader. I think of the plots of the ten books as I would live them. I want to be able to imagine the writer and then imagine myself inside the book. Writing and reading become travels for me. I imagine myself in the places the writer finds for me, and those I discover in the reading. I write autobiographically about my association with the characters in the book. I am a 'radical empiricist,' (Jackson, 1989) only I am not aware of what that means. I am seventeen and I am traveling in these books. I imagine myself in Homer's worlds, I find myself in (unworldly) places. But, to Professor Rao who teaches the Greeks, I turn in tutorials in which I am a tourist who identifies, critiques, applauds the literary allusions that Homer seems to be drawing upon when he recited the Odyssey. I make an object of what is already been made into an object – by its translation into text.

I am rewarded for this. My tutorials are read in class as excellent critiques that are skillfully argued, and analytically written. I am praised for the structure of

my essays – they include clear introductions, arguments, and conclusions. I do well. Yet, I am left unmoved. The writing leaves me cold. There is a mismatch in what I read, how I live, how I experience, and how I narrate it in text. Is it a mismatch of medium? Or is it more than that? I cannot know. I am new to this. It will take years before I begin to know. I have no saved copies to show. This was 15 years ago.

Learning/Refining Patterns

In a university in middle America I am taking a graduate seminar for master's and doctoral students. I go to that class every Tuesday evening. It is an introduction to graduate studies. It could be every class in graduate school, save a few. It is no particular class. The department is one of the social science disciplines. This happened seven years ago.

Every other week, I have to write a five page paper. I read about the philosophy of science, about nomothetic versus idiographic approaches, about social constructionism, about conflict, about rhetoric, and so on. This, that, and the other. I understand some of it, some goes over my head. Sometimes, I pretend to myself, and to others, that I understand it. Then I have to write a reaction to it all. Every other week. Some nights, I cannot sleep because my experience of understanding these works never reveals itself in how I write about them.

One night when I am unable to sleep, I write two papers, thus officially beginning my double writing life. In the first or 'real' paper, I narrate what I feel and experience – there is poetry, rhythm, even dialogue in the paper. It is multi-voiced. It is how I experience life in its rhythms, its sounds, sights, smells, and sensualities. I tell myself stories about the readings. In the second paper, I outline, I highlight, I use the right introduction, internal summaries, conclusions, I argue, I critique, I become the passive voice. I lose myself.

The next day it is the second paper that is turned in to be read. I have hated writing what will now be read. The first, the other, is placed in the closet. I have no courage to turn in the paper that follows no accepted academic structure, and is instead a stream of consciousness dialogue about what I think.

I am lonely during these times. I have not been sharing this suffering with anyone. Since when did writing become a chore? I met her so unconditionally in that year when I turned 12. Where did the honesty go? I am leading a double life. And only I know it.

And so began the process of losing her. I began to hide her from other eyes. I also began to write two versions of every paper. The first one was for me, the one I had to write, needed to write. It remained hidden away. The second one was for others, the one that was required of me, expected of me. This is the one I submitted to others to assess me.

The one for me...

My intellectual preoccupation with identity began with my geographic dislocation from India to America. Four years ago, I joined the ranks of thousands of international students who move to the United States for higher education. As I journeyed through graduate school in America, I found myself re-evaluating the past to try to understand who and what had shaped my reality. In my condition of differentiation through dislocation, I felt a sense of 'in-betweenness' in how I valued myself as an Indian in the United States – living and negotiating multiple realities. One of these is a semi-traditional Indian past, and the other an American present where I am constantly relearning some of the social rules with which I was raised. I continue to struggle between being a good individual and a good Indian woman. As a single Indian woman living in America, I am forever caught in the pull between separateness and connectedness, between dependence and independence, between being a good Indian woman and a woman, between the euphoria about being alone and guilt about leaving home.

The one for others...

The first main argument will address the notion of identity as a social, relational, communicative, and cultural process. This will be developed by, first, reviewing literature on identity and gender. Thus, structural and process-oriented approaches to identity will be explored; as in identity as a socially constructed process that is influenced by everyday experience and time. Second, essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to gender will be overviewed. After this, emphasis will be placed on approaching identity and gender from a Third World, postcolonial stance. This section will address the need to study gendered identity from a non-essentialist process-oriented lens.

The night before I am to turn in the paper with the 'acceptable' stanzas, I am in pain. I feel invisible in the writing, as if the research that I speak of is taking place in a body outside of mine. At seven the next morning, I make a decision to 'come out.' The paper written in autobiographical voice which interrogates the personal roots of my interest in identity sees the light of day. It becomes the official paper. This is not my first 'break' with conventional writing styles, but all the 'breaks' have occurred in this fashion.

During these times, in class after class, symposium after symposium, I write 'reaction' papers that show my mastery of the materials and my expertise in the use of the academic jargon that we are all required to master. In one particular class, I am feeling beaten down because all my attempts to relate to the material on a personal level are being shunned. The professor desires writing that toes the line, exhibits academic jargon, and utilizes a conventional format. I am being urged to write in 'a' specific way. I am struggling to remain impersonal, and so apolitical in how I engage with the reading and my writing.

Then, a moment occurs in the class that re-fashions the way that I view writing and knowledge. We reach the segment on power and begin reading about class conflict, hegemony, Marxism, Neo-Marxism, ideology, and so on. As we discuss some texts, words such as ‘resistance,’ radical,’ ‘colonialism,’ ‘emancipation,’ ‘transformation’ are thrown around freely. We are engaging in, albeit in an abstract fashion, the meaning of class reproduction and how it comes about, hegemony and how it is transmitted and understood, emancipation and how one can be emancipated, if at all. I am excited about the ideas that I am reading.

The moment comes when I am to write the infamous ‘response’ paper. When my fingers hit the keyboard, I am unable to feel the meanings of the words that I have read. I am unable to connect with the language. It is an alien language that just scrapes my skin. I want to feel it inside my pores. I find myself unable to ‘regurgitate’ and ‘critique.’ I feel no connection with the words in the text and how I am trying to represent them. After much struggle, I do what I have been doing, I co-opt the dominant writing style and write the ‘acceptable’ paper.

After completing it, I feel the same sense of incompleteness. I feel compelled to rewrite it. I know that I am being intellectually dishonest by turning in a type of writing that I consider impersonal and apolitical. I read and re-read the paper and decide against owning it as my own. I make a decision to come out of the closet and write a paper which I am proud to own as mine. As my writing emerges, I reflect upon the assignment and find it ironic that I am being told to write about resistance in a class that reproduces the dominant order, akin to intellectual imperialism. I decide to write about my experience of hegemony in that class. Since I cannot do so overtly, I use my role of teaching assistant to show how I reproduce an intellectual imperialism in my classes. The big difference is that I am really writing about the class I myself am enrolled in. In fact, I am even using comments given on my own papers as examples of hegemonic discourse. I explore the ideas in the readings by interrogating my own experience as a teaching assistant who teaches undergraduates and reproduces the ‘voice of order, a kind of intellectual hegemony. The paper is inherently reflexive and reflective – it is a resistant act, a ‘coming out.’ Consider the following paragraphs from the paper:

When do we know that our “acts of resistance are ineffectual and impotent versus emancipatory and transforming?” As I began reading the topic questions for the week, I began to ponder upon the notion of emancipation? What does it mean to emancipate and be emancipated? How can we be transformed? And, can we be transformed? What are “acts of resistance” and when do they become impotent and/or ineffectual? I engaged Paul Willis’s *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*, with the hope of finding answers to some of these questions.

As I began to understand Willis’s claims, I began look inward and around me. As a teaching assistant, I am entrenched in the institution of academe where I find myself, to some extent, reproducing a pedagogical order

that is as hard to resist as class reproduction. In this paper, I hope to explore, in brief, some characteristics of this form of reproduction of the pedagogical order as I myself perpetuate it. I try to understand the “acts of resistance” that I, as an instructor, engage in and how this resistance is perhaps no match for the formal structure. Finally, I hope with the aid of Paulo Freire’s (1970) ideas about education, to support a model that can perhaps foster greater emancipation than our current pedagogical models. My goals in this paper could perhaps be considered too “grand,” yet, I am ‘beginning’ a process of reflection that presents one ‘micro’ way at looking at pedagogical order...

As I read Willis, I was well aware that he had made the decision to study the school from the point of view of “the lads.” Yet, as I read further, I became intrigued by the notion of pedagogy as a hegemonic order. This notion interested me because it was an area of silence in the book. This area of silence helped me to investigate my own role in the reproduction of a pedagogical order. The question that I wanted to explore from my own positionality became—How do dominant pedagogical practices reproduce subordination and marginalization? Is there an interplay of class and culture in this reproduction? What are the acts of resistance in this form of reproduction? What is the penetration, if any? Does this system foster acts of agency and can it be transformed?

I began by interrogating the syllabus which I have crafted for the interpersonal communication class that I teach. Stylistically and semantically this syllabus resembles (consciously or subconsciously) what I have been given as syllabi in all of my own classes. It begins with a discussion of the objectives of the course, which, in many ways, are an outline of a political (academic/mine) agenda. It looks and reads like other syllabi. For example, my syllabus contains a course description, an outline of assignments, a course schedule, assigned readings, a break down of grade percentages, and written (and oral) assignment guidelines. On the surface level it is a socially produced cultural artifact, yet it functions at a deeper level to shape expectations.

The paper entitled, “Emancipatory Pedagogy as Insurgency” is a ‘resistant act’ that frees me, but I discover that freedom in the process of writing alongside understanding rather than ‘after’ understanding (the distinction is not merely temporal). As in, writing ‘with’ rather than ‘about.’ In it, I make an argument against the ‘bourgeois model’ of the academy (West, 1991), and how this model is stultifying for academics whose ideas and ideologies may not be part of the dominant order. As

I do so, I am careful in expanding the stultifying nature of this model to those other than minorities.

Later, this exercise culminates into a paper about the writing of this 'reaction' paper for my class (see Chawla & Rodriguez, 2001). I publish an article about the process of writing this paper. Even though, I know I have risked my grade in the class by writing about the class (even if it is veiled), my bravery is restricted. I send the paper to a marginalized publishing outlet because I am afraid of being found out and of having professional doors closed upon me. I truncate my own resistance as the anxiety of being shunned takes over the act of courage.

It was in these times that I played hide and seek with writing. I found her in some places, and I played with her. We would depart only to meet again. When I was brave, I would show myself to her. When I was not, we met as strangers.

This is my first substantive resistance to the apolitical treatment of writing in graduate programs. I have directly resisted the 'writing skill-set' that I am being forced to imbibe by writing a paper that critiques the system from within and then publishing a narrative about the process of this writing. This is the first step in what becomes, for me, a commitment to trying to understand writing as an epistemology, as a process of coming into understanding. Yet, I do not come by this commitment so soon after that one paper. Nor does my style change in any drastic manner. I move in and out of many styles, genres, and modes. One of these is the very influential and generally controversial, autoethnography.

Finding Auto/ethnography: A Detour

My movement into (and later out of) autoethnography occurred as a graduate student when I was searching for embodied writing, for a writing that carried me beyond representation and expression. I was seeking an experience of writing that demystified my understanding of my understanding. There is no doubt that autoethnography fulfills all the goals that I had set for myself as a student writer. In fact, it is one of the movements that has returned 'life' to writing. Yet, it remained for me a temporary home for many of the reasons upon which I now briefly ruminate.

When I began exploring autoethnography, I believed (and still mostly do) that autoethnography, perhaps, more than any other writing genre illustrates my 'ownership' of my life. Or, in other words it allows me to discover that the only discourse that I own may very well be just my 'own.' I was and am aware that an ownership of ourselves is highly contested in post-modern times because we are presumably artifacts of discourses that are social, political, ideological, religious, institutional, and so on. These discourses, we are told, run through our beings in different ways such as positionality, agency and voice. I understand autoethnography as a return to the subject. Autoethnography may be considered the post-colonial turn that ethnography traditionally rooted in colonial discourses has taken because it centers the researcher as integral to the field (Clair, 2003; Crawford, 1996; Ellis &

Bochner, 2000). In other words, this genre has reclaimed the subject and recognized that it exists; this time the subject is the ethnographer who is really in the process of autoethnographic construction when s/he goes out in the field. While there are various debates about the blurred lines between ethnography and autoethnography, autoethnography has been recognized as a separate genre within ethnography.

I came to experience autoethnography as a reflexive stance about text, context, and participants, and less about deconstructing my own life or transitional life events. I also experienced it as a coming to awareness about the embedded relationship between the culture that I observe and the one that I have a hand in 'making.' It is perhaps a new name for gaining voice and living agency. Yet, the troubling questions that I always encountered was: Who gets to speak as an autoethnographer and how is voice constituted in autoethnography?

Is autoethnography about writing the 'self?' Or is it about writing culture 'personally?' I place my own experience of it in-between the two previous questions. Autoethnography, for me, is about writing culture as we experience and make it through the process of self-reflection and reflexivity. While this is one of my own various understandings of this genre, ethnographers have understood it in many other ways. I look specifically at some directions in which it has gone.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as, "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). They suggest that the autoethnographic process begins by first gazing through an "ethnographic wide angle-lens," (p. 739) at the social and cultural aspects of their experience and later turning inward and looking at personal experiences. Often this going back and forth between the social, personal and cultural reveals to the ethnographer that the lines between the three phenomena are blurred. To make it more complex, autoethnography is referred to variously -- as personal narrative, radical empiricism, reflexive ethnography, personal writings, confessional tales, ethnobiography, ethnographic memoir, and so on. Even though proponents of this strand of the genre believe that the lines between the personal and the cultural are imaginary, they nevertheless maintain a distinction between the two. In this school of thought, autoethnography is somewhat disparate from ethnography in being something that is especially written out in the form of an essay, stories, poems, photographs, sculptures, and other performances.

Others have taken a more fluid approach to autoethnography and explore how perhaps a distinction may not be made between ethnography and autoethnography. For instance, Crawford (1996) explains, "Autoethnography epitomizes the reflexive turn of fieldwork for human study by (re) positioning the researcher as an object of inquiry who depicts a site of interest in terms of personal awareness and experience" (p. 167). For Crawford, as it is for me, autoethnography is a stance and a sensibility, even perhaps a 'post-colonial spirit' that privileges writing 'with' participants rather than writing 'about' them and theirs in elsewhere places (see also Jackson, 1989; Kondo;1990; Narayan,1993). It comes with being self-consciousness of my 'self' in the ethnographic process. For example, why one chooses a line of research and worries about positionality within that area may be a matter of personal history, a history that must be acknowledged and recognized at some point/s in the research

process. At the same time, we must also reveal other histories that we encounter in the research process. Whether we need to make ourselves 'particular' case studies, as is encouraged by some proponents is a point to be debated elsewhere in other textual spaces.

I came to understand autoethnography as a claiming of my selves in ethnographic fields and accounts. I am always a persisting presence in the fields that I make my own, but I do not become the field. Instead of becoming the field, I want to be ravished by the field, so that the contexts, words, texts, and voices course through me, not inside of me. For instance, in my own ethnographic work, I do not become one of the women who were involved in urban Hindu arranged marriages as I did not experience their experience, but I reflexively translate what I experienced of their stories. The stance I am privileging is one of reflexivity and 'radical empiricism' (see Jackson, 1989).

As my travels into autoethnography continued, I also saw the field being dominated by a turn toward the study of the detailed deconstruction of personal events and experiences that deal with illness and difference. Arthur Frank's exemplary book, *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), explores illness-narratives and giving 'voice' to sick bodies, and argues the need for ill bodies to have a 'voice.' Frank's goal is more political and his hope is to "to shift the dominant cultural conception of illness away from passivity-the ill-person as 'victim of' disease and then recipient of care-toward activity" (p. xi). For Frank, telling an illness narrative is giving voice to a body, so that the body can begin to heal in its changed state. This illness narrative is about the 'sick body' and the institutions that sustain it may or may not enter the frame. Frank's call is truly for the mingling of the personal, cultural, and political in medical discourse. I experience his call as a call for action.

In a recent essay, Bochner (2001) defends stories about illness and points out that these stories show us struggles between cultural and personal meanings. He tells us, "the ill person must negotiate spaces between the domination of cultural scripts of bodily dysfunction out of which one's meanings are constructed and defined, and the situated understanding of one's experience that seeks a unique and personal meaning for suffering. This struggle is personal, cultural, and political" (p. 147). And, indeed, I fully agree.

As I read through these writings, I get a sense that there are two types of autoethnographies/personal narratives emerging. On one hand, both deal with change and transformation; however, whereas one deals with 'change' events, the other deals with bodily illness events. The sheer physicality of bodily pain, illness, death, birth and bodily change are very concrete experiences, which in my mind sets some stories apart from others. While I am uncomfortable making a mind-body split, I still believe that there is something very profound about bodily change/illness that makes these narratives different. These are essential stories that need to be heard, in order to, as Frank tells us, change the dominant medical paradigm which makes the patients into warriors who finally finish successfully. There are tales of suffering that need to be made public for the dominant paradigm to acknowledge pain, suffering, healing, coping and loss, rather than merely victory over illness.

At the same time, even though I understand their importance in our world, I do not want to privilege illness narratives. As we voice stories about illness do we de-privilege stories about the ordinariness of living? What becomes of those who experience miniscule transformations that may never be spoken of? Who gets to tell those stories? In my own readings (and these may be limited) the stories that have tended to dominate autoethnographic narratives are those that involve tragedy/sensationalism/body change/death. Of course, there may be others that I am yet to encounter, and my apologies to those people who attempt to study the average, the everyday, and the ordinary (about themselves). But my attempt here is to explore reasons for my own movement out of autoethnography.

When I first encountered this genre/mode/style/methodology, I deeply wanted to find a writing home inside of it, but my stay remained a hiatus. I believe that there were several reasons for this temporariness. First, I was seeking stories of everyday political struggles that seemed to me to be erased from the autoethnographic discourses that I was reading. Second, I was finding 'other' writing that was intricately personal and inherently political, but was treated as 'outside' of discussions about autoethnographic writing. I began to wonder why Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), bell hooks (1994), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), Cherrie` Moraga (1993), Sandra Cisneros, and others were not appearing in these vital discussions. Was I becoming complicit in a new movement that ignored, thus further marginalizing work that was already thriving in the area of personal narratives? Was I helping to perpetuate new forms of marginalization, even neo-colonization?

Finally and most importantly, I began to feel enslaved by the personal. I felt bound to myself, conducting internal conversations, showing myself my own transformations, when what I had hoped for was a 'personal conversation' with the text, the context, the reader, and the participant. I came to agree with Trinh T. Minh-ha whose critique of the overtly personal best fits here:

I am so much that nothing can enter me or pass through me. I struggle, I resist, and I am filled with my own self. The "personal" may liberate as it may enslave. We set it up against "impersonal" as if the two were mutually exclusive of each other. (1989, p. 35).

For myself, I wanted to reside in the space between the personal and the political. I wanted to become the writer who resists both author-saturation and author-evacuation. I was seeking what has been referred to by anthropologists as the "missing genre" (Geertz, 1988). In autoethnographic writing, I detected movements from the personal to the personal, but there never seemed to be a movement or even a bypass from the personal to the cultural. My comments are generally directed to autoethnographic work that stands out for its insiderness. An overt emphasis on 'insiderness' makes me a voyeur 'about' myself. I remain imprisoned in writing that is still 'about.' When all is said and done, it remains limited by its desire to represent and express. The one difference being that the 'about,' the 'object' is oneself. In the other 'distanced' writing (the one I had first met), I was writing 'about' others. Therefore, 'about' remained a prison in both genres. I wanted to breathe in and breathe with words and with understanding. I wanted words and understanding to give birth to each other. I began other sojourns.

So I lost her again. This time it was more painful because we had become so close. But there was too much confusion – we didn't mingle, we merged. I lost her to myself. There was too much myself.

Leaving Insidedness: Moving Ahead

After my detour into autoethnography and an exit from the over emphasis on my own self as the object of writing, I find myself robustly engaged in demystifying the relationship between writing, knowledge, and understanding for my own intellectual evolution. The process of understanding the entwined relationship between these three began with reflecting upon how writing is approached in graduate programs in the social sciences. To do this, I again turned to Marquez, whose struggles in so many ways parallel my own.

The way in which we both had experienced it, writing (whether author-saturated or author-evacuated) in graduate school is an apolitical process which involves mastering a 'writing skill-set' that allows for a production and dissemination of knowledge. Learning this skill-set occurs in different ways. We are instructed in the reading of journals that display and reproduce this skill-set. We are also instructed in an understanding of knowledge that recursively institutionalizes, reinforces, and thus re-legitimizes this skill-set. Ultimately, we are expected to acquire a certain level of proficiency in this style. There is hardly any discussion about the epistemological dimensions that come with writing. There is also no discussion of the inextricable relationship between how we constitute knowledge, how we frame knowledge, how we relate to knowledge, and how we articulate knowledge.

In other words, by emphasizing logic, lucidity, coherence, structure, grammar, clarity, and so on, we infantilize writing and make it a tool to be used when our thinking is done – it becomes a pen. Ultimately, we infantilize ourselves as our writing estranges us from the world and from each other. Writing, on the other hand, can and should be approached as a constant learning of the alphabet, a re-visioning (not re-finishing) of the slate in order to think, to know, and to understand. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has so elegantly told us, "To write is to become. Not to become a writer (or a poet), but to become, intransitively" (1989, p. 90).

However, our current models – the ones I was disciplined into – teach us to privilege the research product, rather than the process whereby, very often, we come to knowledge. We pretend that thought occurs, unfolds, and organizes itself, and then we begin to write (see also Richardson, 2000). We pretend that writing is an expression, the means we use to represent ourselves and articulate our stories. So, a book, an essay, a story, perceived as "an isolated materialization of something that precedes and exceeds it (the author's life, her/his thought or passion) is therefore bound to be a finished product, one whose content is expected to be entirely predetermined, but whose form can always be ameliorated and further polished according to the ruling ideology of the "well-written" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 29)."

Indeed, to summarize, Audre Lorde (1984), the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house.

What are the consequences of leaving the relationship between writing and knowledge un-interrogated? They can only be tragic, and especially so for those of us who belong to historically marginalized groups and communities. However, I want to emphasize that these consequences are not limited to 'minority' scholars. Think to times in your own intellectual life when writing was a 'chore,' as something one did 'after' research as if the mind worked separate from the body. When we (anyone and everyone who is committed to knowledge) ignore the relationship between writing and understanding, we become complicit in the formation of and/or adding to a new imperialism that is directed at us intellectually.

Of course there is no denying that there are scholars from many disenfranchised groups who have been calling attention to matters of writing. For instance, feminist and postcolonial scholars have been emphasizing the 'representational' aspects of writing for a long time (see Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Said, 1979; Stacey, 1991). Yet, most of these projects save a few -- such as those of Anzaldua (1987), Anzaldua & Keating (2002), Cisceneros (1984), Conquergood (1991, 2002), Madison (1999), Minh-ha (1989), Pollock (1998) among others -- emphasize writing in how it 'represents knowledge.' In my reading, what seems to always be left unattended is the profound relationship between writing and knowing, and of understanding writing as a 'coming to know.'

When this relationship is bypassed in graduate programs (as they were in all my graduate classes, save the ones that focused on representation) we leave intact the illusion that there is no politics to the relationship between how we constitute and frame knowledge and how we articulate and engage knowledge. As we sustain this illusion we undermine our obligation to the creation of knowledge, and we perpetuate understandings that mask the integral role that our fears, anxieties, insecurities, vulnerabilities, and paranoia play in shaping our view and knowledge of our world.

Ultimately, what this means is that in treating writing as a medium, we are complicit in the formation of an intellectual imperialism. In doing so, we help to maintain all the institutions that perpetuate and even legitimize this type of stance toward writing. Often, we believe that we are involved in research that is 'radical,' that it is capable of causing seismic shifts in the way readers will begin view the world. We believe we will shake the status quo with putting the product out there. I, for one, cannot name 'studies' that have shifted my world, but I can count on my fingers reflexively political writing that has caused some disruptions in the way that I encounter knowledge. Some examples of these are writings by Anzaldua, Didion, Madison, Minh-ha, and so on. My point is that as long as we continue to engage scholarship from a certain mode of writing, that scholarship will never really pose any threat to the status quo. Indeed, "the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984).

I believe that if there is no disruption in how we articulate knowledge, then there is no disruption in how we understand knowledge, and therefore no disruption in how we relate to knowledge. I also think that for many of us these dilemmas are not new, yet they remain significant, primarily because when one begins to question what

constitutes knowledge then we are engaging in more than an academic activity. We are, in fact, beginning to engage in a deeply political activity because knowledge is always entwined with relationships of power. I know that in taking issue with knowledge, I take issue with power. And so, in disrupting the way knowledge is articulated, I take a political stance.

We are often taught about such political stances in the form of critical theory when we are led into frameworks such as feminism, structuralism, post-feminism, postcolonialism, and so on. Yet, our engagement with the 'critical' is limited to representation, and not aimed at writing as a methodology/an epistemology. Undoubtedly, there are some references to writing as a method of inquiry in singular outlets and some spaces, but it is not an area of discussion given any space in graduate programs in social research (see Pollock, 1998; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2004).

Some of the experiences I have articulated illustrate the sufferings that I underwent when I had to master ways of articulation that were rooted in abstractions and disconnections. My experience was one of classic alienation. I was finding a mismatch between how I experienced my research and eventually how I articulated it. I felt estranged from the matters I was engaged in. The writing that was supposed to represent my work, speak to others, and speak to me, was leaving me cold. My work would appear to me as a mental artifact with my human-ness erased from it. Such writing erases emotionality, sensuality, sexuality, and all the other dimensions of our selves that we draw upon when we engage with other human beings. I am quite confident that no human being comes to her work with the ability to pick and chose dimensions of their humanity. These include the relational, the historical, cultural, emotional, spiritual, sensual, sexual, and so on. If these are removed there can only be incompleteness.

Yet, I was being required to leave these 'selves' out, and no one can justify to me why we should leave these selves out. 'I' was being erased, this erasure a condition to conquer the skill-set.

Later, during my travels into autoethnography, a different type of alienation and erasure was occurring. This time I was alienated from con/text by drowning the writing with all of the personal. My own selves were being represented, so much so that I could not acknowledge a oneness with those around me. My story is of someone being caught in the tension between the overtly objective writing ideology and the overtly subjective one. I find it important, even necessary to tell my story, but I find it almost crucial for myself and the reader to come to an understanding of matters beyond 'myself' from the story. The question is not one of the 'moral' of a given tale, but rather its connectivity and dialogue with others. This is the tension on which I presently reside. Sometimes, I sway one way, other times I sway the other. There is no resolution, but the tension has certainly been acknowledged.

Why do I sway? Why not choose an in-between spot and be comfortable? I sway because the writing skill-set, the one that I inherited is embedded in larger institutional forces. These are forces that shape and maintain the integrity of the writing model that we inherit. They constrain and force us to keep writing apolitically, thereby binding knowledge. These are the forces that allow us to be

employed and continue with our academic careers. How we write determines where we will be published, which in turn determines tenure and promotion, which determines job security, and later job options. So, even though I (and others such as myself) may come to a recognition that our writing is apolitical, we may not have the courage to make the seismic shift out of the writing skill-set. The epistemology of fear drives this swaying person. This is primarily so because there are immense career risks that come along with ignoring the existing model. Yet, I have never considered these to be intellectual risks. Such risks are intellectually liberating.

I myself found two choices as I began to learn and uncover this model. Choice one was easy. Remain and stay confined in the knowledge that was available. Or take a risk of moving away. Can one afford to take the risk? In the entry phase of my career, I have taken the risk to step outside the model. This essay itself is testimony to that maneuver. I am certainly not oblivious to the price that I may have to pay for doing so, but the alternatives are not alternatives anymore. I need writing and understanding that embeds my humanity in the research, it is more than owning my 'I' in the writing process, it is about unraveling and uncovering newer truths as I write to understand, to know, and most importantly, to become.

Conclusion

I consider it tragic how dominant modes of inquiry violently oppress the human element. So much so that we have been literally forced to fight for our lives, to join and create the autoethnographic project to help reclaim our humanity in our inquiry. Yet, I also believe that this project is much larger than that of merely reclaiming a self that has been oppressed. Broadly, I believe that autoethnography is a beginning on our way to interrogating larger issues of writing epistemologies. Uncovering different writing epistemologies is fundamentally a project about changing our ways of being and understanding the world in writing. I acknowledge that other ways of being and knowing have been proposed and explored, especially performative ones. I salute those ways, yet my emphasis here remains on writing.

I believe that our notion of selfhood and personhood is inextricably bound up with the world and each other. To therefore speak of our relation to writing is to speak to our relation to the world, each other, and our own humanity. As such, to be estranged from writing is to be estranged from the world and from each other. Thus in striving to embody writing differently, I am striving to embody a project that fundamentally alters our ways of being and understanding the world.

For us, autoethnography merely skirts the surface of a much larger epistemological project by operating on limited notions of the self. Undoubtedly, it can create some instances of local change, but we believe that pedagogically it is not a large enough project to alter and revision our ways of knowing and thereby altering life around us. In other words, autoethnography, by focusing on merely the personal and cultural, ultimately may pose no threat to the status quo. As the condition of the world is bound up with our knowledge of the world, the only way to change the condition of the world is by changing our knowledge of the world. This is our project and we believe that integral to the creation of a new and more heuristic knowledge is

our centering of the human condition in how we constitute and articulate knowledge. For us, this project begins with how we embody and perform writing.

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Notes

^[1] This paper was conceptualized, theorized, and stylized equally by both authors. For reasons of coherence and clarity, we have made a deliberate creative decision for the paper to be narrated by one author, the first one.

^[2] I have written, in greater detail, about my stay in this boarding school in an auto/ethnographic essay entitled, "Two Journeys" (2003).

In the belly of paradox: Teaching equity in an [in]equitable space as a graduate Teaching Assistant (TA)

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Abstract: While much has been written on teaching equity and social justice issues in the higher education classroom from a faculty perspective, there exists scant literature on these issues from the perspective of graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs). In this paper, a TA of a research intensive university, using a variety of sources of evidence, analyzes his experiences teaching equity studies in the university context. Using an anti-colonial discursive framework he offers answers to the following questions: What are the paradoxes, contradictions and challenges of teaching equity and social justice issues as a TA in the university context? Some of the issues he raises are the inequitable curricula, engaging with student difference in an inclusive manner, privileging certain bodies in assignments and classroom discussions, and dealing with student diversity without marginalizing equity studies itself. He concludes with a discussion on the implications of the challenges in teaching equity studies in the higher education context.

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Introduction

Recently there have been numerous authors discussing the neoliberal restructuring of higher education and how it impacts teaching and learning (see Nast & Pulido, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). Despite this restructuring, programs such as Women Studies, Ethnic Studies, Anti-racist Studies, Disability Studies, and others, are slowly starting to gain some recognition as legitimate fields of study within the university (Nast & Pulido, 2000). However the legitimization of these programs is painfully slow, as there are many paradoxes and sites of contestation for those who are involved with such programs (see Agnew, 2003; Ellsworth, 1992; Flores, 1997; Nast & Pulido, 2000; Ng, 1993). The university has historically been a site of elitism and has been used to privilege dominant group members in terms of their gender, class, race, sexuality and religion (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002; Braithwrite, 2003; Churchill, 1995; Farnum, 1997; Schick, 2002). As a pedagogue who has been involved in equity studies, I have experienced first hand the contradictions involved in teaching equity studies in an inequitable environment. In this paper, I refer to equity studies as the compounded study of issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, globalization and anti-colonialism within an anti-oppressive framework. In this paper, I relate my personal reflections and analyze my experiences as a graduate Teaching Assistant (TA) who has dealt with a diverse student body in a course focused on equity.

While much has been written on teaching equity and social justice issues in the higher education classroom from a faculty perspective (see Agnew, 2003; Ellsworth, 1992; Eyre, 1993; Fernandes, 2003; Hoodfar, 1992; Laubscher & Powell, 2003; Ng, 1993), there exists scant literature on these issues from the perspective of TAs. As TAs we “help professors meet the pedagogical demands brought on by more students and larger courses, and in the process, learn to teach and earn a living” (DeCesare, 2003, p. 3). In a recent comprehensive review of the published literature on teaching assistants, Park (2004) found six areas of focus. These are: selection and preparation, training, supervision and mentoring, practical issues, personal issues and professional development. The following are some of the most commonly analyzed specific issues: selection criteria (e.g. Pickering 1988; Yule & Hoffman, 1990), TA training programmes (e.g. Burk, 2001; Prieto, 2003), supervisory challenges (e.g. Nyquist & Wulff, 1996), peer mentoring (Bollis-Pecchi & Walker, 1999-2000), communication issues (e.g. Feezel & Meyers, 1997), identity (e.g. Anon, 1995; Lal, 2000), and international TAs (Rubin, 1993; Smith & Simpson, 1993). Among these issues the question of training of TAs has received the most attention (Park, 2004). However, a significant gap, which needs more attention, is that most of the literature *on* TAs is by faculty and/or researchers, rather than *by* TAs reflecting on and discussing their own experiences. As DeCesare (2003) eloquently states:

Today’s graduate teaching assistants have rarely reflected in print on the joys and frustrations of playing the TA role. As a result, we know less than we should about the day-to-day course related experiences of TAs, as they themselves live them and describe them. (p. 3)

In addition, there is scant literature that discusses TAs’ experiences teaching within an anti-oppressive curriculum (a recent exception includes Lal (2000)). This paper seeks to contribute to this latter body of literature. My foremost objective is to offer answers

to the following questions: What are the paradoxes, contradictions and challenges of teaching equity and social justice issues as TAs in the university context? What are the implications of these challenges and sites of contestation on higher education in general and equity studies? Issues such as inequitable curricula, knowledge production, student diversity, critical thinking, and assessment will also be addressed throughout the paper.

I begin by outlining the framework informing my approach to the issues, followed by locating myself and discussing my methodology for this paper. I then explore the questions and issues related to teaching equity studies in the university context. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications of the issues raised in the context of a transformative teaching project in higher education.

Theoretical framework

I use a critical anti-colonial discursive framework (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001) to situate my discussion and my experiences as a TA within the academy. The goal of this framework is to interrogate power inherent in social relations emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Dei, 2000). Anti-colonial discourse also challenges “the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures, and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300). Colonial, here, is conceptualized not only as foreign or alien, but as imposing and dominating (Dei, 2000). An anti-colonial framework acknowledges that colonial relations are reproduced in schooling through the denial of difference (Dei, Asgharzadeh, Bahador & Shahjahan, 2006). As we argue with respect to schooling:

For those who are asked to subsume their difference under the rubric of the ‘common’, the intellectual stakes are high, particularly as a result of hidden and open emotional and spiritual injuries that are inflicted on victims when the expression of their differences are denied. (Dei et al., 2006, p. 57)

Furthermore, colonial relations are also perpetuated in “the differential treatment of bodies, the hierarchization of particular knowledges, and the peripheralization of certain experiences, cultures and histories” (Dei et al., 2006, pp. 8-9). Knowledge, in this framework, is understood to come from multiple sources, conditions, and sites, such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, religion, language, sexuality and lived experience. An anti-colonial discursive framework acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing the world and that traditional academic disciplines are grounded in cultural worldviews that are antagonistic to other knowledge systems (Smith, 2001). As Smith (2001) argues, “In their foundations, Western disciplines are as much implicated in each other as they are in imperialism” (p. 11). Throughout history, hegemonic knowledges have allowed the colonizers to secure their dominance through the discourse of sameness and commonality at the expense of difference and heterogeneity (see Blaut, 1993; Smith, 2001; Stewart-Harawira, 2005). Similar to the construction of nation-state, where the liberal rhetoric of sameness has subjugated minoritized bodies materially and discursively (Loomba, 1998), the university as a colonial site has produced new relations of ruling through the imposition of asymmetrical power relations among groups (Mohanty, 2003). An anti-colonial thinker recognizes the academy as a site where social inequalities along the lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality are reproduced as subordinate voices and

their knowledges are delegitimized (see Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Miheisah & Wilson, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). For instance, Marker (2004) states:

For both aboriginal and non-aboriginal students the university is a journey through a particular kind of knowledge. In the course of their academic progress...they encounter themes that challenge their values and worldviews; they develop cognitive and communication skills that ask them to critique the home and community culture from which they come. (p. 104)

While there are many sites of convergence, an anti-colonial framework shifts from a post-colonial framework in a number of ways. Anti-colonialism, unlike the post-colonial discourse, argues that “colonial constructions affect knowledge production with profound material consequences” (Dei, 2006, p. 13). Furthermore, borrowing from postmodernism, the emphasis of postcolonial theories’ on difference takes away from the local and collective resistances in the colonial encounter and may lead to nihilism and relativism. Anti-colonialism takes a different turn in terms of agency. Here the value is not placed on autonomous individuals shedding away “oppressive notions of essentialized identity”, but on “collectives comprised of bodies who are cognizant of differences and who unite around common struggles against social structures of oppression” (Angod, 2006, p. 165). It stresses that power held locally and in practice can outlast colonial and colonized encounters, and it acknowledges that discursive agency and resistance resides among the colonized and marginalized groups (Fanon, 1963; Gandhi, 2002; Memmi, 1991; Thiongo, 1986). Anti-colonial theorizing recognizes the power of local/indigenous knowledges as sources of knowledge that allow for daily resistance and the pursuit of effective political practice to subvert all forms of dominance. Following these considerations, it is important for me to locate myself and discuss my personal, political and academic interest in speaking and writing about my TA experiences within the university context.

Locating Myself and Methodology

I am a South Asian Canadian Muslim heterosexual able bodied male who was a doctoral student and whose area of interest is in equity and diversity issues in the higher education context. I was a TA for an equity studies course located in a research intensive university. This course was a requirement for those students who were in the Equity studies program and an elective course for those who were not. As a TA, I was responsible for facilitating the learning of two groups of tutorial students, each of which had an average of 18 to 25 students and met for one hour every week. I come to this paper, because I experienced first hand many of the contradictions of teaching equity and social justice issues within the university context that privileges certain ways of knowing over others and also gives privileged access to certain bodies over others in the practice of knowledge production. During my TA experience, I felt I was perpetuating many of the systemic discriminations that I was critiquing and teaching in the course, yet this time it was embedded within the higher education context. Since I was a student whose own work was on equity and diversity issues, indigenous knowledges and anti-colonial practice within the university context, I could see in reality many of the issues I was learning and critiquing in my academic work (such as classism, racism, colonialism, sexism and so on) reproducing themselves in the classroom. However, unlike the textual discourse, where I could counteract through

writing back, I saw the challenges of doing equity work in the halls of the ivory tower. I became disempowered by what I was seeing and decided not to renew my TA position until I had resolved these issues in my mind, body and spirit. In addition, my doctoral dissertation was also another factor in my choice not to come back. This, however, also reflected the social privilege I had as a heterosexual able bodied male doctoral student who had managed to get enough external funding to “free” him from teaching duties. This kind of choice is not available to many of my other TA colleagues. When I shared my experiences with other TAs, I found I was not alone in having difficulties and frustrations teaching with an anti-oppressive framework as a TA. I wanted to do something to heal from those experiences and make people aware of our issues. I should also emphasize that throughout my TA experience I had a lot of support from the faculty instructors and other TAs involved in this course. Therefore, the challenges I faced were not due to a lack of support among colleagues, but more importantly they were due to the systemic barriers embedded in the very institutional structure of the academy itself. It is also important to highlight that many TAs who experience these challenges and contradictions, may not be in the position to voice these opinions in public (especially in print) because their jobs or careers may be at stake. Therefore, the act of writing this paper, is not only a counterstory, it is also a sign of my social privilege.

In addition to making use of secondary sources, this paper includes my own teaching experience as a TA. My purpose in this paper, like Sheth and Dei (1997), “is to drag” my own body “into our very own printed articulations” (p. 158). As an anti-colonial pedagogue I have always experimented with unconventional teaching techniques. Since, the tutorials began I kept a record of my own and student’s responses to my tutorials in this course. These records inform in various ways the writing of this article, as data, reflections, and analytical remarks (Ng, 1995). While the use of anecdotes is not normally considered scientific status in scholarly writings, “I am advocating their use in explicating the taken-for-granted features of everyday life” (Ng, 1995, p. 134). Furthermore, I use end of the course student evaluations as evidence of the impact of my pedagogy on students. Moreover, I also use course assignments and university grading schemes as pieces of evidence. Rather than rejecting these pieces of information as evidence, these slices of evidence are treated as vital features of a larger social organization (Ng, 1995). Borrowing the words of Ng (1995), “I attempt to preserve the knower/writer as an active subject in the text, grappling with [his] own multiple locations and contradictions.” I sincerely believe that “it is in confronting these contradictions and dilemmas that all of us may come to grips with what haunts us and propels us to work towards a better world” (p. 135).

I wrote this paper first based on a thematic analysis of the paradoxes or sites of contradictions I experienced as a TA in the equity classroom based on the pieces of data mentioned above. After that I went to the secondary literature and identified the issues or contradictions other scholars were writing about anti-oppressive pedagogy. Secondary literature is treated as a source of evidence in supporting my claims and experiences, and theorizing upon my experiences. The four themes that emerged as a result of comparing my data with the secondary literature are: 1) inequitable curricula, 2) dealing with difference and diversity in an inclusive manner, 3) privileged bodies doing well in assignments and classroom discussions, and 4) dealing with difference and diversity without marginalizing equity studies itself¹.

The inequitable curricula: privileging the mind and readings over experiences, emotions and the body

In our tutorials, students engaged with “the concepts and histories of domination and oppression, the skills of structural analysis, and the attitude of critical reflectivity of their social locations in terms of power” (Wong, 2004, p. 2). In addition, I facilitated student learning in critically analyzing “the power, privilege, inequity, discrimination and domination along identities of race, gender, class, sexual orientations, religion, age and dis/ability” at the individual, institutional, systemic and transnational levels (Ibid). These equity issues were usually raised and covered in the course lectures, my job was to clarify the concepts, generate a discussion and cover the topics that could not be dealt with in depth during lecture time. However, if we wish to enact equity and social justice in society then we also have to interrogate *how* one is allowed to theorize about equity and *who* has access to equity studies. I found that while I wanted to base the readings on the concrete experiences of the students’ lives, I could not because I was supposed to gear the discussion towards the course readings (I argue why later on in this paper). As one student wrote in his/her evaluation:

I think it would be useful and more productive in terms of engaging the course material if tutorials were less informal of a structure but also if students were encouraged to relate readings/locate them in their personal life as opposed to primary, exclusive focus on the reading—it excludes a lot of things from the discussion.

The course readings became the entry point of discussion for equity related issues, rather than student’s experiences or viewpoints about the issue at hand. This is a constant challenge. For instance, Pinterics (2001) with regards to critiquing second wave feminist literature argues that this literature moves “away from the concrete realities of women” and moves more towards “increasingly complex issues stemming from academic discourse which according to Alfonso, ‘are not the socio-political problems ordinary women of different races, classes, sexualities, ethnicities face in their everyday lives’” (p.19). Similarly, I would argue that this idea not only applies to feminist literature but also to many of the equity related readings. Having said that, I can also understand the problem with making the classroom a site of sharing personal experiences, as this may perpetuate power relations (Ellsworth, 1992; Razack, 1998). Commenting on this issue in the context of antiracism, Srivastava (1993) states: “The use of personal experiences of racism to educate others not only makes us vulnerable, it puts us on display” (p. 107). Therefore we need a balance between sharing experiences in the classroom and theoretical readings. Many authors have argued that we need to be able to live authentic lives in the academy (hooks, 1994; Palmer, 1998; Shahjahan, 2004). Silencing the personal experiences of students can also be disempowering and can continue their internalized oppression (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). Critical pedagogues, anti-colonial scholars and feminists have always argued for legitimizing the personal experiences that students bring with them (see Dei & Kempf, 2006; Freire, 1970, 1997; Giroux, 1986; hooks, 1994; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; McLaren, 1998; Shor & Freire, 1987; Weiler, 1988). As McLaren (1998) argues, “[a]ny emancipatory curriculum must emphasize student experience..... Critical educators need to learn how to understand, affirm, and analyze such experience.... [K]nowledge must be made meaningful to students before it can

be made critical” (p. 217). After all, an individual’s personal history can play a vital role in his or her own scholarship and learning (Collins, 2000). Theorizing our personal experiences helps us to make sense of the world we live in. As Mohanty (2003) puts it: “it is..[the] understanding of experience and of the personal that makes theory possible” (p. 191).

We cannot, then, continue to privilege the notion that abstract arguments are the only legitimate form of theorizing (Minh-ha, 1989). Many of these critical discourses have perpetuated the fiction of a disembodied learner despite advocating for embodiment in their theory (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Martin, 1992; Orr, 2002; Wong, 2004). The place for the emotions, spirit and body must be part of the learning experience and of our theorization of the world (Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003, Wong, 2004). Yet, how can we do this in an inclusive manner in the university classroom?

Dealing with difference and diversity in an inclusive manner: How do I facilitate decolonizing pedagogical tools?

In the classroom I had students who not only came from diverse social locations because of their race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, but also from different programs of study. In my experience, I noticed that students who came from programs of study, such as social sciences and the humanities, where they had dealt with equity studies, were more likely to understand the course readings compared to those who came from Business and Science programs. In addition, coming from privileged social location played an important role for students who didn’t come from the same program of study. These latter students could still be part of the discourse because of the language privilege they had. One of the challenges I faced was a student who was a mother who had recently immigrated to Canada from South Asia. She was always quiet. So one day I made an appointment with her to discuss why she wouldn’t speak in the classroom. She related to me her experience of the first day in the classroom for this course. She pointed out that when she entered the classroom, all eyes gazed upon her. She felt very uncomfortable. The gaze, she pointed out, made her feel unwelcome, because most of the students in the classroom were in their early twenties, whereas she was in late thirties and was a mother, who also happens to be a woman of colour. She didn’t feel her body belonged in the classroom. She said she wanted to run away from the classroom on the first day. She also said that she wouldn’t speak because of her “accent” and how as a result she might be negatively perceived. I was shattered when I heard this story. I asked her why she continued with the course. She pointed out that she was interested in the issues that the readings dealt with because they corresponded to her own personal experiences as a woman, an immigrant woman, a mother, and as a South Asian. She said that she would do the readings and come prepared to the classroom, but she couldn’t speak, outside of small groups. Hence in my pedagogical style, I tried to have as many small group discussions to make sure that those students who did not feel comfortable in the larger group could participate in the discourse on equity in a small group setting. Yet, how do we make the classroom inclusive so that no bodies are left behind?

While many authors have argued for and critiqued the idea of voice within the classroom (see Ellsworth, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Razack, 1998), here I wish to relate an exercise I used in class for the purpose of making students aware of how subtle

forms of domination could be perpetuated in classroom discussions. This exercise was done to make students conscious of how much space each of them did or did not take in the discussions of the classroom. I brought hundreds of coins and a piece of cloth with me to the classroom. I asked the students to rearrange the chairs into a circle. The cloth was put in the center of the circle. Then each student was given four coins. I told the students that as we discussed the issues and topics of the week and as each student took her/his turn to speak, she/he had to throw one of their coins onto the cloth. This way they will all be conscious of how much space they took in the discussion. In addition, if a student finished all their four coins, then they would have to ask one of their fellow students to throw a coin in for them. This way students who finished their coins realized that they were taking space from other students, but also those students who did not speak had the power to decide whether or not they would allow someone to take their space. Although this coin method was not perfect, its purpose was to raise awareness of how certain students dominated in the discussions, and how that was a sign of social privilege. It also raised awareness about how students themselves were responsible for class dynamics and how and what knowledge was generated. Yet this process had a significant impact on students who used to dominate the discussion in the classroom. Many of these students, I realized became more self conscious of how much they spoke. I noticed this through changes in their body language in subsequent classes where they would hesitate to jump in without scanning their peers first. As some students remarked in their evaluations, such methods helped students interrogate their “voice” in the classroom:

He has made me think about my own privilege and the way I am contributing to equity projects and sometimes ignoring others’ stories by asserting my own views so dominantly.

He really helped me realize the concept of ‘voice’ and how this relates to power structures and hierarchies.

He made me interrogate my own role in tutorial in that when I speak I might be discouraging other people’s stories

Thus this coin exercise helped students, in the words of Freire (1997), to “speak democratically” in which they practice the “need to silence themselves so that the voice of those who must be listened to is allowed to emerge” (Freire, 1997, p. 306). This was one way of teaching equity issues not just in terms of content, but also through the process of teaching and learning. It is also important to highlight the fact that many students feel pressured into speaking because they have been taught that it is important to speak, and in the classroom context speaking has become privileged over listening (see Wong, 2004). As a decolonizing pedagogue facilitating tutorials, for me both speaking and listening are equally significant. As Wong (2004) eloquently questions: “How can we possibly listen and understand each other if we are all preoccupied with speaking?” (p. 2). Similarly, Freire (1997) notes, “If we don’t learn to listen to [other] voices, in truth we don’t really learn how to speak. Only those who listen, speak. Those who do not listen, end up merely yelling, barking out the language while imposing their ideas” (p. 306). Further on, however successful my coin method might have been with the student, I remain very much aware of the fact that it still does not remove the power and privilege that has been conferred to me as a TA by the institution (Ellsworth, 1992; Ng, 1995). As Ng (1995) passionately states:

The university classroom is not, by definition, a democratic class. To pretend it can be is to deny that hierarchy and institutional power exist. It is to delude ourselves that democracy and empowerment can be achieved by good will alone. (p. 140).

So, although I used this coin method to raise the awareness around how much one takes/does not take space, I am still stuck in the academy that I wish to decolonize, and my hands are cuffed by colonial tools. As Marker (2004) argues:

It is exceedingly difficult to make indigenous knowledge, which is place and experience-based, relevant in the academy that exalts the most abstract and placeless theories about reality....The university...is oriented toward the transportability of both knowledge and credentials; it gazes toward a vast ocean horizon, but misses its own reflection....Intellectual work often proceeds removed from the natural ecology and without regard for human or environmental consequences. (p. 107)

To this end, in my tutorials my main objective was to rupture the Eurocentric modes of knowledge production and classroom practices that tend to focus on the mind and conceptual ways of knowing. As a result, I used circles, drawings, drama based techniques to raise issues of equity and to generate discussion² (see Graveline, 1998; Harris, 2002; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). I found such tools helped me engage students who normally couldn't engage with the readings because either they were too shy to speak out, or couldn't engage with the readings because of language and class issues. As some students commented:

He stimulated intellectual thought through his varied and inclusive teaching methods that addressed multiple social locations, interests, and learning styles and abilities...sometimes using dramatic and visual arts to enhance our understanding.

He encourages diversity forms of expression....challenged taken-for-granted western knowledge or ways of seeing and doing

My main objective in using such methods was to demonstrate to students that there were multiple ways of knowing. Yet while I was doing this, I was struggling with the fact that I didn't want to disadvantage the students in our tutorial from the rest of students in other tutorials with other TAs. This is a very specific dilemma, which is unique to the TA experience. Faculty do not have to worry about this issue, as they don't have to worry about their students taking the same course with other instructors and doing the same exams and assignments. At the end I didn't want to disadvantage the students in my tutorial in terms of their performance on the final and take-home exams, which were primarily based on the course readings and lectures. The course exams evaluated how students engaged with the course lectures and readings, and how they applied critical analysis to the concepts and issues raised in the readings. Although I tried to engage the students with different ways of knowing, this process however hampered our time to discuss the readings in depth as a larger group. We were limited by time. As a TA who facilitates one hour tutorials, I don't have the same luxury of time as faculty normally do who teach in seminar courses or have over 2 hours of class time (for instance Ellsworth, 1992; Ng, 1993; Vacarr, 2001). These

were some of my struggles to decolonize teaching practices in the academy, as I had to conform to standard practices of facilitating discussion in the context of readings, so that I didn't disadvantage the students in terms of marks. After all I didn't want the students in my tutorials to have low marks and jeopardize their academic careers or hopes to go to graduate school.

However, another dilemma I faced was that students themselves sometimes resisted other forms of teaching styles. Some students, especially those who came from science and business preferred having a lecture style class. After all, some of my students had years of indoctrination in the Western Eurocentric models of learning, regardless of their geographic location and had internalized this mode of learning as the norm (Wane, Shahjahan, & Wagner, 2004). So, although students are conditioned and are used to certain ways of knowing and doing, there are many other ways of knowing that are just as valid and they should be seen as important (Erica Neegan, personal communication, February 21, 2005). I believe enabling other forms of knowing allows for different habits of learning.

Privileged bodies doing well on exams and assignments and classroom discussions

I found it very frustrating to see that students who do well on the course assignments are from dominant groups (in terms of race, class and gender) who have access to the language, resources, time and cultural capital to do well and provide great analyses of courses. This is consistent with what Shor (1996) has pointed out, "grading in school, while being supposedly unbiased, is based on a value system that advantages more privileged students and, therefore, perpetuates inequalities in class, race, and gender" (p. 81). What is more frustrating is that once in you are in a classroom, students are usually there for their marks, you don't want them to jeopardize their grades, because after all their Grade Point Average (GPA) is important for them to continue their academic career or have access to other opportunities (see Nast & Pulido, 2000). As one student commented in his/her evaluation:

Yes, grades aren't as important, but still very much part of why I come to school.... I want to attend grad school as well!

While I say all this, when it comes to grading students and giving them marks, I go against many of the tenets of the principles I had discussed earlier in this paper. This contradiction arises as a result of the grading scheme. For instance, "A" in our university, should only be given to those who demonstrate: "Strong evidence of *original thinking*; good organization, capacity to *analyze* and *synthesize*; superior grasp of subject matter with sound *critical evaluations*; evidence of *extensive knowledge base*" (University of Toronto Faculty of Arts and Science Calendar, emphasis added). In contrast, an "F" is given to those who show "Little evidence of even *superficial understanding* of subject matter; *weakness in critical and analytic skills*; with *limited or irrelevant use of literature*" (University of Toronto Faculty of Arts and Science Calendar, emphasis added). If I critically *analyze* this grading scheme by comparing what is graded an "A" and a "F", I find that it privileges the use of the intellect or mind and the knowledge and use of literature, not what personal experiences one brings, nor does it recognize multiple ways of knowing. So for

instance, if a student came up to me with a critical and anti-colonial project based on his/her experiences, would the university grading scheme allow me to give “A” to this student? Not really. One student came up to me with an assignment along this line, based on his personal experiences, but I could not give him an “A” because he did not follow the question and what was expected of him. The assignment asked him to analyze a document and do the following 1) identify the equity issue(s) addressed; 2) summarize the author's point of view; 3) provide a historical context to the issue(s) and/or the author's arguments; and 4) discuss how the author's comments advance and/or inhibit the achievement of equity. His analysis stemmed from his own personal experience with the equity issue in hand in the document. However, the assignment asked him to analyze the document in terms of the document itself and use the readings to interrogate the document. Here the emphasis is on summarizing, evaluating the author's arguments based on evidence and the use of literature. Similarly, in other exams and assignments, students were asked to summarize or define terms using the literature, or interrogate certain concepts and equity issue based on literature and lectures. This is consistent with the grading scheme outlined above. Harrison (2003) argues that such a process of knowledge production perpetuates colonial relations on minoritized bodies:

When we ask students to argue a particular case, we expect that they will support it with evidence. We expect that they will draw on the relevant readings and authorities in the field and in doing so they will position their statements in relation to these authorities. But in requiring students to reference their position to an authority we are also perpetuating a historical power relation where Indigenous people have been situated in an unequal power relation to non-Indigenous authority.... We are not only training students in the rules of referencing, we are also constraining and disciplining them through a technology of power which positions them as objects of power and (white) authority at university. (p. 6)

In short, Harrison (2003) notes that, “[c]urrently, the multiplicity of voices are subverted in a hierarchy at university which values analysis and interpretation over description and narration” (p. 9). This is also in line with what Yuk-Lin Wong (2004) argues with respect to the privileging of conceptual knowing:

In a culture of “discursive rationality”, the dominant form of knowledge is one that objectifies, organizes, conceptualizes, normalizes and dictates. To “know” the world, we categorize what we see and experience in the world—things, people—into concepts and ideas. Instead of being open to the rich moment-moment experiences in our encounters with people and things, we “know” and relate to them primarily through our presumed concepts about them. Such orientation produces a sense of cognitive order and control in our relations to the world. (pp. 2-3)

The primary language we use for our readings is English, and we mark students according to how they think critically and write within the colonial protocols of this particular language, where the norm is clarity and conciseness. As Giroux (1996) notes, “clarity becomes a code word for an approach to writing that is profoundly Eurocentric in both context and content” (p. 166). I teach and ask students to paraphrase and cite references as they write. Paraphrasing, in general, is

to restate what the author(s) states in your own words. But how does a student put into his/her own words an author's idea that is not in his/her first language? What does "your own words" mean? Who does it privilege (see Leask, 2006; Leathwood, 2005)³? For instance, sometimes I had to grade a mother who is a recent immigrant from South Asia, or an Aboriginal man who has been away from university for many years and has gone through residential schooling, with the same evaluation criteria as other students. To this end, Shor (1996) asks: "[s]hould grading be based on individual social conditions, then? Should it be structured first around the already unequal situations among working-class students of different genders, colors, and family situations, and structured secondly around the economic inequality between worthy students and those from wealthy background?" (p. 84). This is a great challenge I faced as an equity teacher. As Clarke (2005) reflecting on her undergraduate schooling points out:

Coming from a working-class background and from another country where I did not use "standard" English in the home, exacerbated my inability to write in the academic manner.... It has been difficult for me to adjust to the conventions of academic writing, to its distinctive way of "putting together individual words with established meanings in order to make new meanings. Stringing them together and remembering their arrangement produces syntax" (Brand: 2000).... My adjustment in the discourse community of the university was challenging. The discourse was already established, with agents (teachers) who were sometimes unwilling to accommodate a new member. (pp. 35-36)

How do we deal with this? I find the language in critical scholarship to be elitist and not accessible for many of our students. It is a lot of jargon. While I discuss issues of class, race, gender, I believe the language that we use to talk about issues of equity is classist. What I am saying is nothing new and has been argued by others. For instance with regards to feminist philosophy, Alfonso and Trigilo state:

I have serious problems about the difficult, specialized, jargonistic language in which much recent feminist philosophy is being presented...[t]his type of language perpetuates elitist power relations associated with who gets to speak of oppression. (cited in Pinterics, 2001, p. 18)

Similarly, in terms of critical scholarship, McLaren (1997) asks:

How can criticalists develop a cultural politics that is able to phenomenologize ideology critique and critical analyses at the level of lived experience so as to avoid a leftist elitism? How can a public vernacular develop around critical studies that is inclusive and life-world-sensitive? (p. 118)

Equity related readings have become a 'jargonic exercise' where people have to use such loaded terms in order to say things in a clear and concise way. Sometimes certain terms can be a means to make oneself short and to the point. The criteria for students' learning do not reflect the diversity of experiences of student's lives and ways of thinking and are still rooted in an academic culture that "reflects the dominant discourse of the student as young, white, middle class and male" (Read et al., cited in Leathwood, 2005, p. 315). As Marker (2004) eloquently points out: "the

academic language used to describe reality has a built-in ethno-bias toward individualism and against traditional forms of knowledge” (p. 104).

In addition, the culture of critical thinking within anti-oppressive pedagogy, which I believe is a very privileged notion, can hamper many of the students’ experiences and ways of knowing. Bowers’ (1987) book, *Elements of a Post-liberal Theory of Education*, provided me with some insights into the Eurocentrism lying at the heart of critical pedagogy. As Bower argues with respect to the tenets of Freirean pedagogy, this type of pedagogy “is based on western assumptions about man, freedom, progress and the authority of rational process” (p. 127). Further, Bowers posits that, “[t]he problem with Freire’s position is not that he advocates critical reflection but that he makes it the only legitimate source of knowledge and authority” (p. 129) (see also Bowers, 1983; Margonis, 2003; Roberts, 2000, 2003)⁴. I am not trying to negate the importance of critical thinking, but at the same time, I want to interrogate the privilege and epistemic bias involved in *solely* engaging in this kind of way of knowing (see Brookfield, 2003; Norris, 1995; Wong, 2004), to which many people might not have access because of their social location (see Egege & Kutieleh, 2004), or because they have no time nor the privilege to do this kind of thinking⁵. As Ellsworth (1992) argues:

[S]chools have participated in producing “self-regulating” individuals by developing in students the capacity for engaging in rational argument. Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic others. (pp. 93-94)

Similarly Ng (1995) points out with respect to critical pedagogues: “what we know how to do well, that is, teach students how to construct rational arguments and conduct objective analysis, is also shot through with gender, racial, and class subtexts” (p. 140). I am not arguing that critical thinking is an innate process, that cannot be learned but we need to problematize this kind of thought process and ask who does it privilege within the social context of the academy (see Alston, 1995; Bailin, 1995; Harrison, 2004; Norris, 1995; Wheary & Ennis, 1995). It is important to recognize that our social location interacts with our schooling experiences (Apple, 2004; Dei, 1996; Giroux, 1992). In addition, the Socratic method of critical thinking, which is very much part of equity studies, is also part of the Eurocentric colonial pedagogy. As Peter Hanohano (1999) states:

Nearly 20 years ago I started law school and became exposed to the Socratic learning method, which is to question everything, doubt everyone, and trust no one. Purpel (1989) described the Socratic method as placing “great emphasis on clarity and on the thorough examination of propositions and statements on skepticism, and on logical analysis” (p. 78), and by, “relentless, persistent and brilliant displays of unsettling questions and probes that often led people to a state of intellectual bewilderment and devastation (and rage).” That is the state I that I found myself in while attending law school, and I clearly felt alone and set adrift from the cultural moorings of my culture and community. (p. 24)

Yet how do we reconceptualize the idea of grading, critical thinking and so on, and not continue to marginalize equity studies as being not academically rigorous (Shor & Freire, 1987), and thus marginalize further our already marginalized

students? Kenway & Modra (1992), with respect to the grading dilemma in the context of Women Studies state:

Grading is certainly a problem for educators who see part of their mission to be the complete transformation of androcentric education systems, which are hierarchical and based on competition and credentialing. Yet to refuse to award quantitative grades may weaken Women's Studies' legitimacy within these structures.... The issue becomes one of exploring styles and modes of assessment rather than refusing to assess. (p. 154)

Similarly, Ira Shor is critical of the current assessment environment which he argues involves undemocratic approaches. He argues that assessment should not be removed from the classroom, but is a necessary part of higher education. To this end, he promotes forms of assessment to be integrated in the learning activities that are consistent with the democratic processes of the classroom. He states:

The instruments used to test and measure students should be based in a student-centred, co-operative curriculum. This means emphasizing narrative grading, portfolio assignments, group projects and performances, individual exhibitions, and essay examinations that promote critical thinking instead of standardized or short answer tests. (cited in Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 13)

Yet, the vision proposed by Shor or Kenway & Modra is still problematic. Shor's argument, still privileges rationalism as the only mode of learning and knowing and ignores the fact that "the critical classroom, too, is located within this [meritocratic] award system. To survive students have to get good grades by competing with one another" (Ng, 1995, p. 147). Kenway & Modra (1992) fail too in that they ignore the crucial difference that access (or lack thereof) to the "culture of power" within the university makes for students especially from marginalized groups (see Delpit, 1988; Ng 1995). As Delpit (1988) argues, a process-oriented approach in teaching and learning works well for those who already know the codes and rules of the subject matter. This is the dilemma I faced with some of my students who came from marginalized groups. I had one aboriginal student who constantly complained that he didn't understand what was expected from him in terms of course assignments. According to him, he felt that he answered the questions, and had difficulty with this "critical thinking stuff", as it privileged the mind, as opposed to the learning he was accustomed to in his community where the world was seen as living relationships rather than just mere concepts. We had an extensive discussion of whether or not he should quit the university. I tried to reason with him and encourage him by saying that it was very important for him to stay and not quit because he could make it, and that he needed to learn these "critical analytic writing" skills to survive, so he could move further in the university context and finish. I argued that we needed him to be within the system for the sake of his aboriginal community, and that by finishing his degree he could later give back to his community. But on the other hand, in my anti-colonial mind, I was thinking, "Why should he stay? Was this curriculum a reflection of his experiences and his ways of knowing?" I have heard many colleagues of mine who get upset when I say this, because the usual response I get from them is "I'm not going to give up on students who come from marginalized groups. They can learn these skills and do well with some hard work." But my response is: Whose skills, languages and ways of knowing are being privileged in the university? Are we not

perpetuating “epistemological racism” this way (see Scheurich & Young, 2002)? Are we not just pushing these students out? Am I not being complicit with the colonization of this student? How many of us are working hard to produce and implement a curriculum that centers indigenous knowledges and recognizes multiple ways of knowing (see Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005)?

The question of assessment and evaluation is critical here. While faculty may have some freedom to develop evaluation tools for assessing their students (even though this may be limited due to institutional regulations as mentioned earlier), TAs have no such freedom. TAs basically have to follow the guidelines given to them by the course instructor. So while faculty may discuss different ways of evaluating their students, TAs do not have that same power. For instance, I may have control over evaluating my students’ tutorial contribution and participation, but I do not have direct control over what kind of evaluation methods are used for exams and assignments. I do have some say over what kinds of questions are posed, because my course instructor was open to it, but not the format. Therefore, as a TA I am faced with much more restrictions than a faculty member to deliver an equitable curriculum⁶.

Addressing issues of difference and diversity without marginalizing equity studies itself

In courses involved in equity studies, we want to be able to practice what we preach. Having said this, it is also a struggle to understand that our role as facilitators of learning is to ask students to be agents in their own lives and to take the responsibility for their own learning. This has been a constant struggle where I am dealing with students from diverse backgrounds and each student has unique needs. For me being a good teacher is to look at the student from a holistic perspective. By this I mean, students aren’t just bodies filling space in the classroom. Rather, they bring many sides of themselves as a person to the classroom.

At times, however, students may take advantage of my awareness of equity issues, and use it to as an excuse to put off their readings or assignments on equity studies and instead focus on their “traditional mainstream courses.” But by doing this in a way they continue to perpetuate the marginalization of equity studies and equity related issues. It is considered not to be as pressing to deal with or understand equity studies compared to other “mainstream” courses in the university. For instance, sometimes students would complain that equity studies exams were at the same time as other final exams, arguing that this was not equitable. Other times, I would observe how students put equity related course assignments as their last priority, or may not wish to do all the work that is needed to finish the assignments, because they had “other more important exams or assignments to deal with.” In a way they were marginalizing equity studies within the university context, by un/consciously pushing equity towards the periphery of their learning rather than at the center. This is problematic, as equity studies in the university is already at the periphery, and the fact that students do not see the problem with trying to make this program of study ‘special’ only pushes this program of study further to the margins of the mainstream university (see Nast and Pulido, 2000).

Sometimes dealing with students can create a false dichotomy between us the teachers (faculty and TAs), and them the students. This is problematic, especially for

us as TAs, because it's difficult to cross the border between being a student and a teacher. We are both students (as graduate students) and teachers in the university context. Faculty, on the other hand, have a clear boundary between themselves and students. This dichotomy is usually created by traditional university structures. Many times, the simple fact that many TAs, like myself, have our own graduate work to do, makes us easily feel frustrated by the challenges we face when interacting with the students. The easy way out for me is to just blame the student. The challenge is to take responsibility, but that takes time, and sometimes we just don't have it, precisely because of the demands of our double duty as both TAs and graduate students. This predicament, however, creates tension for those of us who want the best for the students, and yet still want them to respect our time. So it has been a struggle with this dichotomy. It is easier for me to objectify my students as the "other", and move on, rather than deal with them. For instance, in the first few of my classes, I had one student who would never bring her readings to the classroom. One of the requirements for the tutorial was that she had to bring the readings to the classroom. When I asked her why she didn't bring the readings, she replied that she couldn't afford to buy them. All she could do for the moment, because she had not been paid for the month, was to photocopy the week's readings from another student. This kind of situation exposes the presence of differential access to sources among the students, yet it may be ignored. Such kind of experiences are not usually mentioned in higher education, because students rarely talk about their social locations in the classroom, and also teachers seldom want to find out about who their students are. This can help continue to objectify students and perceive them as equals among their peers. In addition, TAs like faculty who might be well intentioned to find out more about students cannot do so, because of the time constraints inside and outside the classroom, and also because of the challenge of large undergraduate class sizes (Shore & Freire, 1987; Sweet, 1998). But once a teacher takes time to understand who her/his students are, we end up with a different picture of what kind of bodies are prevalent in our classroom, and learn how dangerous it is to assume that all the students in the classroom have the same access to learning opportunities in the university. This kind of issue is not part of our discourse as teachers, rather we are always focused on whether students can understand the content. One needs to ask the question: who has access and time to actually read the content of the readings?

Implications for higher education and future research areas

I believe it is important to challenge the status quo in the education system, i.e., ask ourselves: what does academia mean? We can use our pedagogical style to challenge and redefine what are considered legitimate and valid ways of learning in the formal classroom environment. We have to rethink what constitutes academic standards. As Leathwood (2005) argues: "'Standards', 'quality' and 'assessment' are not neutral and value free, but socially constructed and open to multiple interpretations" (p. 320). What's more, when we look at students from historically marginalized groups, it becomes important for us to go beyond what is considered the 'norm' and make ways of including their voices and silences, which have been marginalized for so long (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Wane, Shahjahan & Wagner, 2004; Zhou et al., 2005). We need to work in solidarity with these students in order to decolonize the academy and make it inclusive to diverse bodies and knowledge forms.

The overriding question that my experiences and reflections lead me to is: Who is equity studies for within the university context? Is it just a space for critical scholars to disseminate their work? Discussions of answers to these questions should be foremost in the minds of critical pedagogues who are based in the university context. As authors such as Dei (1996), Giroux (1992), hooks (1994), Mckenna, (1991), McLaren (1998), Mohanty (2003), Shahjahan (2004) and Shor and Freire (1987) have argued, equity studies is not some kind of discourse, but it is praxis, and situating this praxis in the university runs the risk of it being transformed into theoretical talk and complacency. As Agnew (2003) observes:

The Women's Studies program is like a middle-aged woman unconscious of how she has aged and lost her youthful vigour and dynamism. Over the years it has been transformed from a radical oppositional voice to just one more academic field, sometimes invisible, like a middle-aged woman, and often unfathomable to all but the most select among its theoreticians... Becoming an established, respectable part of the university has meant that Women's Studies has had to abide by the rules and regulations that govern curricula, even if they conflict with feminist principles. (p. 177)

We don't want equity studies to be "unfathomable" and a mere "academic field". Neither do we want equity studies to just become a commodity that can be sold by the corporate university to meet the demands of a diverse community (Mohanty, 2003; Nast and Pulido, 2000). Like any other profession that teaches students to have particular skills, equity studies tap into the minds, ethics and morals of students in order to further the project of social justice in the community and their surrounding world. Hence, who has learned equity cannot be determined by marks, but rather can be measured in terms of what kind of actions students take outside in the community. This is the biggest challenge for equity studies.

Administrators and social justice educators need to challenge not only the curriculum in terms of its diversity, but also the mode in which it is taught and evaluated (see Leathwood, 2005). Classrooms, assignments, and exams "are not mere sites of instruction", but they "are also political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 194). The overriding challenge is: Can we imagine different ways of evaluating the students without marginalizing equity studies as being non-academically rigorous? We need to also dismantle the academic regime that regulates what is valid knowledge and how knowledge is produced and disseminated (see Dei et al., 2000; Shahjahan, 2004; Tierney, 1993). Another overriding questions is: How do we center equity studies within the university context and make it more equity responsive? How do we challenge students to respect equity studies as a legitimate field of study, which is relevant to equity and social justice in society? How do we make students more proactive not only in their minds, but in their hearts and souls with respect to equity and social justice issues? Can the latter be done within a university context that privileges rationality over other ways of knowing? Questions such as these are what TAs like myself grapple with in order to imagine a different way of teaching equity studies within the university context. I believe equity studies in the university cannot be effective in promoting equity and social justice within society, until they are at the forefront of equity initiatives within the university, particularly in making higher education more inclusive of diverse bodies and knowledge forms. The question of diversity should not occlude discussions about how questions of difference are linked with neo-liberalism in higher

education, where the relationships between different bodies and knowledge production are being redefined along utilitarian rules and market relations (Arnowitz, 2001; Giroux & Giroux, 2004). Addressing difference means taking head on such issues of capitalist exploitation in the academy, and understanding the intimate relationship between the academy and the new imperial world order (Alexander, 2006), that either homogenizes and silences difference, or appropriates and commodifies diversity for neo-liberal ends (Mohanty, 2003). I believe this discussion is only a stepping stone, and a new dialogue has to emerge between TAs and faculty, students, administrators within higher education, for us to imagine a more equitable space in the university so that we are consistent with our praxis.

Notes

1. One of the limits of this analysis is that it privileges my “voice” over my students and other TAs in this course. Furthermore, this analysis is based specifically on my own experiences at a particular university, at a particular program of study and at a particular historical time. Therefore, it does not represent *all TA’s* experiences in anti-oppressive pedagogy. Other salient themes not discussed in the paper are: 1) how questions of my race, sexual orientation and gender affect classroom practices and the impact this had on the students and their response to my classroom practices; 2) social dynamics both between faculty and TAs and among TAs. 3) social dynamics between students in the classroom and how this plays out along the lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all these issues.
2. While drama, circles, art are not necessarily non-Eurocentric methods of teaching and learning. But the idea of moving beyond Eurocentrism in knowledge production is to question the dominant modes of knowledge production that are derived from European culture which is largely based on rationalism and empiricism.
3. It is important to note that this course had writing clinic services just for the sole purpose of this course, which is quite rare for many courses in the university setting. There were also workshops given within the classroom about how to answer the questions, paraphrase and so on. While this is a beginning to remedying the language problem, students whose first language is not English still had challenges of accessing these resources in terms of appointment times and finishing their assignments ahead of time so they can take it to the writing clinic. Furthermore, students cannot access these writing clinics during the exam sessions. While one can argue that marks were given for the points that the students raised, the writing style and language skills still played a role in how we perceived who should get what in terms of marks. As instructors and TAs we are biased towards those who can write very well and in a concise manner (see Clarke, 2005).
4. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a thorough analysis of the Eurocentrism that underpins Freire’s ontology and epistemology (for further discussion on this topic please see Bowers, 1983; Glass, 2001; Roberts, 2000; Margonis, 2003). However, it is important to note that non-Western traditions have ontologies and epistemologies that do not privilege the anthropocentric humanistic mind as the dominant way of knowing (see Bowers, 1983; Nakagawa, 2000, Hanohano, 1999; Orr, 2002). Furthermore, according to Roberts (2003), it is also significant to highlight, while Freire draws “heavily on ‘rationalist’ traditions from Plato onwards”, his “ideal of critical consciousness is concerned with *political change*, not merely with a change in thinking.” Roberts continues, “Freire’s focus on social structures and political action distinguishes him not just from liberal philosophers and educationists but also from many who count themselves as members of the ‘critical thinking’ movement” (p. 160). Moreover, Freire himself has never advocated for universalizing his pedagogical methods in all contexts, instead he provides us with “certain parameters in dealing with issues of oppression as these issues relate to the pedagogical context” (Freire, 1997, p. 309). Freire also

advocates for love, emotions, intuition, embodied knowledge and passion as legitimate ways of knowing in anti-oppressive pedagogy in his later works (see Freire, 1994, 1998a, b; Shor & Freire, 1987).

5. Here I am contesting the notion of what constitutes “critical theory.” Is it only rational thought and conceptual ways of knowing? I believe personal experiences along with intuition, dreams, embodied knowing and other forms of indigenous knowledge should also constitute critical theory. The epistemic bias of rationality in critical theory is being problematized here, not the practice of using critical theory to inform practice in praxis. I am also arguing against an evaluation method that is informed by an epistemology that assumes that knowledge is constituted only in conceptual ways of knowing and rationality.
6. As a TA, I don't have the freedom to change the assignments to fit to students needs. I may have some freedom to interpret the grading schema based on my own teaching philosophy. But then the question this raises: is the real problem the course professor's expectations rather than the university grading scheme? I don't think these two components are separate but are intertwined. A grading scheme structures professor's assignments as it is the same scheme faculty can use to argue with students when it comes to appeals for remarking. Furthermore, in a large class it is very difficult to have personalized assignments which may work in smaller seminar graduate courses. Therefore class size, grading scheme, professor's expectations, all play a part in how a TA can mark assignments and what kind of knowledge forms get validated.

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The Information Inquisition: High Priests of Knowledge

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Abstract: In this paper the author examines the relationships between the educational technology movement, the computer industry, the Bush administration's education policies, and the Inquisition. Examples of ways in which information is manipulated, distorted, and denied public scrutiny are discussed.

Key words: educational technology, sophism, deception, Bush administration

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...was there ever any domination which did not
appear natural to those who possessed it?
(John Stuart Mill, 1869)

Introduction

Despite well coordinated attempts by the popular media, corporate interests, the U.S. government, and educational bureaucrats to oversimplify and mediate the events that shape postmodern existence, close examination of recent trends in each of these areas, as well as interactions among them, suggest that, perhaps, a well-articulated and concerted effort to deceive the public is a more accurate representation of the current intellectual environment in the United States of the 21st century. This manuscript will attempt to clarify the religiously inflected discourse surrounding educational technology/big business, examine and provide examples of the historical basis for such rhetoric, demonstrate how such rhetoric has impacted public schools, and finally, disclose the manner in which the current Bush administration has willfully employed misinformation in keeping the populace “in the dark,” and purposely quashed democratic involvement.

In the last 10-20 years educational technology has become increasingly ubiquitous in the popular discourse of the school reform movement. As argued in earlier manuscripts (Engle 2001a, 2001b), the privileged position of technology in the understanding of the evolution of human cognition has been accomplished largely through the promotion of what Lewis Mumford (1966) referred to as the “myth of the machine.” This self-perpetuating belief system, or mythos, has surfaced as the primary form of materialism informing educational thought in the late 20th century (see Engle, 2001a). Largely through a systematic, highly organized, and well-financed public relations campaign the high tech industry and its supporters in government and education have created the popular perception that educational technology is immune from all forms of critical analysis. Those who dare to openly question technology’s role in education have been routinely cast as postmodern heretics and subjected to various forms of marginalization. It is my contention that today’s proponents of educational technology have more than a little in common with earlier practitioners of the Spanish Inquisition.

Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, in Europe, the institution of the Inquisition evolved, in order to preserve orthodox religious beliefs, identify and punish heretics, and suppress unpopular opinions from being openly expressed (Peters, 1988; Coulton, 1929). Although the Inquisition developed, in large measure, as a highly complex institutional counterbalance to the turmoil and intellectual stagnation of the dark ages, the Roman See rapidly amassed papal authority that eventually evolved into universal jurisdiction over all matters concerning the fate of mankind. Even the humblest priest wielded purported supernatural powers that elevated him above the level of common humanity, protected him from prosecution for criminal activities, and often conferred upon him virtual immunity in all legal matters (Lea, 1955).

Despite the passing of approximately 500 years and the putative evolution of academic institutions predicated on the same democratic ideals which led to the creation of the U.S. Constitution, postmodern citizens are subjected to systematic

ploys by bureaucrats, multinational corporations, and politicians designed to preserve orthodox beliefs (religious and otherwise), identify and punish those who oppose their vision for the future, and suppress opinions that are not in consonance with officially sanctioned versions of reality.

One need not look far back into the history of the United States educational establishment in order to identify the precursors of this postmodern bureaucratic notion of information management. In the 1930s Harold Rugg, a faculty member of the Teachers College of Columbia University was experiencing professional success, as the author of a popular social science textbook, and receiving accolades from other progressive educators concerned with issues such as freedom of expression, racial cooperation, and social equity (Spring, 1988). In 1939 a well-funded, highly orchestrated campaign, by the Advertising Federation of America, the American Legion, and the National Association of Manufacturers was launched against Rugg and the textbook. As a result, between the years of 1939 and 1944 annual sales declined from 300,000 copies to less than 21,000 copies. In some communities the banning was actually celebrated by public burning of the book (Schugurensky, 2001).

His series of social studies texts was not radical in the sense of being Marxist, but it did portray many of the difficulties and failures in American society. During a period of racial intolerance, the books promoted racial understanding and social justice. Rugg also advocated national economic planning and included problems related to unemployment, immigrants, and consumerism (Spring, 1988, p. 135).

The manner in which special interest groups freely exercised their hegemonic dominance in public spheres was a mere hint of what was to come. Today, postmodern educators are confronted with a formalized and systematic assault on all forms of critical discourse that may potentially constrain the profit-making capabilities of corporations, intent on transforming American school children into the next "killer market."

Manufacturing the Information Age

The rhetoric of "the information age," has emerged as the dominant theme of both corporate and educational discourse in the twenty-first century. This is no accident, but rather a well-articulated campaign that has come to fruition, only after arriving at favorable sociohistorical conditions, in which the intellectual and economic environment is ripe for aggressive marketing strategies, stable markets (school children), and palpable public support. Close examination of the historical record, however, demonstrates that the "public relations/advertising" industry had already begun employing the term "information age" as early as 1903 (Lubar, 1993). After several generations of advancing the ostensible benevolence of information technologies and all that surround them, the high tech industry "has generated a religiously inflected rhetoric celebrating moral, political, and social improvements" that reportedly accompanies them (Czitrom, 1982).

Most scholars concur that certain monumental historical events have dramatically altered the educational endeavor. These events typically include the development of cuneiform writing (circa 3500 BC), the rapid appearance of hieroglyphic writing in Egypt (circa 3100 BC), the invention of the Phoenician

alphabet (circa 1500 BC), the Gutenberg press (1496), and the Common School movement of the 1800s, to name a few.

It might be argued however, that one of the most significant, yet commonly overlooked, educational developments in the late twentieth century is related to the notion that management and business leaders, trained not in education, but in manufacturing and marketing, might understand the educational endeavor better than educators themselves.

This was clearly the belief of Frederick W. Taylor, spokesperson and promoter of the field of scientific management (Spring, 1990) referred to as Taylorism. Taylorism adhered to a rigid "top-down" hierarchical model, in which all decision-making was concentrated, and limited to those managers /school administrators, who purportedly had the benefit of scientific data, inaccessible to mere classroom teachers. In a short several years scientific management literally exploded onto the educational scene, resulting in an unprecedented epistemological shift that provides the historical framework for today's assault on education by the corporate business community.

Tyack and Cuban (1986), assert that: (p. 114)

In the early decades of the twentieth century, business and professional elites increasingly controlled the school boards of cities. In their attempt to counter criticism that the schools were inefficient, superintendents and university education experts rushed to borrow language and concepts from business, and "businesslike" became almost synonymous with "scientific."

By the 1930s the role of school administrator had already undergone a dramatic conceptual shift from the traditional role as scholar and philosopher, to that of business manager, fund-raiser, and account executive (Callahan 1962). Although the routing of Harold Rugg from the educational community offers one example of the burgeoning influence of corporate attempts to monopolize the dissemination of information and direct public opinion away from open scrutiny, it is certainly not an isolated case. In fact, by the early 1930s the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) and its CEO Thomas Watson had already initiated a sordid collaboration with Nazi Germany in order to establish a market monopoly (Black, 2001). Through an elaborate series of illegal, and insidious machinations, Watson provided Hitler with the necessary, custom-designed IBM equipment that enabled the Third Reich to successfully round up Jews, deport them to concentration camps, and ultimately enact the Final Solution (Black, 2001), all the while deceiving the American public and business community by camouflaging profits in clandestine foreign accounts that were illegally funneled into IBM accounts in the U.S.

After the war, anxious to benefit from the politics of the Cold War economy, IBM aggressively marketed the same technologies in the U.S. intelligence community (Black, 2001), while simultaneously canvassing the U.S. government for public tax revenues for basic research and development. By the late 1950s criticism of schools from the military and business reached a fevered pitch (e.g., Rickover, 1959; Eisenhower, 1957), resulting in the successful passage of the National Defense Education Act, legislation which explicitly laid the blame for perceived deficits in

national security on the alleged scientific/ technological indifference of American schools. The National Defense Education Act provided for funding of computer research at a rate of more than \$20 million (current) per year (Flamm, 1988). Furthermore, Congress concurrently created the National Science Foundation (NSF), and aggressively began work on development of a communications system capable of withstanding a nuclear attack. One significant outcome was the Advanced Research Projects Administration Network (ARPANET), designed to link a number of military sites together. ARPANET was the conceptual design for what is now the Internet.

Although the Internet was clearly a product of the military-industrial establishment, for many years (1969-1996) basic research in computer networking was, in large measure, conducted in academic institutions and funded through various federal granting programs including the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), the Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board (CSTB). By 1995 federal support for research in computer science had climbed to almost \$1 billion per year (National Research Council, 1999). As such, the vast majority of academic scientists involved in the creation/development of the Internet were neither apprised nor consulted about negotiations between the U.S. government and private vendors to open the Internet to the commercialism that pervades the media industry.

All historians of the Internet recognize that it is a product of the public sector, and that it was closely associated with the military. But every bit as important, many, perhaps most, of the university scientists who designed the architecture of the Internet did so with the explicit intent to create an open and egalitarian communication environment. They had a vision of a noncommercial sharing community of scholars and eventually, all citizens of the world. It would be a public utility (McChesney, 1999, p. 129).

Although the official rhetoric surrounding the Internet still hearkens back to its publicly funded, noncommercial, egalitarian origins, providing information access to communities of learners and scholars, those very attributes have recently become the latest victims of a clandestine market takeover by the high tech industry, which has been fully sanctioned by the U.S. Congress.

In 1995, after more than 25 years of public sponsorship and funding, the National Science Foundation (NSF) relinquished its role in maintaining and providing Internet services to the academic community and the world. In a virtual "giveaway" the backbone of the Internet was transferred over to media giants such as IBM, MCI, GTE, and AT&T.

This was accomplished with little fanfare. In fact, it was virtually ignored in the popular media, the very entities that would benefit most from it, and, not surprisingly, current popular histories of the Internet seldom include reference to its existence or impact.

In 1996 the U.S. Congress contributed a further weakening blow to the notions of benevolence and egalitarianism on the Internet, by passing the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The legislation enacted dramatic deregulation of the entire telecommunications industry and led to massive wave of corporate consolidations. Cognizant of dramatic growth potential in the technology sector, the telecommunications industry and popular media reconceptualized the Internet to be one of numerous modes of delivery (e.g., cable television, satellite television, radio, film, etc.) that would become part of an indistinguishable, highly efficient, anonymous information pipeline, delivering digital information in a seamless, global fashion to information-hungry consumers. In 1995 Nicholas Negroponte, director of the MIT Media Lab wrote:

..computers are moving into our daily lives: 35 percent of American families and 50 percent of American teenagers have a personal computer at home; 30 million people are estimated to be on the Internet; 65 percent of new computers sold worldwide in 1994 were for the home; and 90 percent of those to be sold this year are expected to have modems or CD-ROM drives. These numbers do not even include the fifty microprocessors in the average 1995 automobile, or the microprocessors in your toaster, thermostat, answering machine, CD player, and greeting cards...And the rate at which these numbers are growing is astonishing. The use of one computer program, a browser for the Internet called Mosaic, grew 11 percent per week between February and December 1993. The population of the Internet itself is now increasing at 10 percent per month. If this rate of growth were to continue, the total number of Internet users would exceed the population of the world by 2003 (p. 8).

Caught in the endless hyperbole surrounding the wonders of the Internet and instructional technologies, the U.S. Congress has consistently funded educational technology endeavors at a rate exceeding \$5 billion per year (Cordes and Miller, 2000), a figure that the Clinton administration recommended be increased by \$15 million.

In 1999, under the authority of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Congress authorized the U.S. Department of Education to expend \$75,000,000, in awarding grants to educational institutions desiring to engage in the dramatic "transformation of teacher education" through the use of technology. In 2000, the funds were matched, and in 2001 the funding was increased to \$125,000,000. In spite of the virtual absence of empirical evidence linking technology to demonstrable learning gains, technology proponents continue to employ gushing terms, such as "revolutionize," "transform," and "digital schoolhouses," in their discourse related to educational technology. Furthermore, "Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology Program" (PT3) oversight has been disappointing. In some institutions PT3 funds have been misused, funding projects that are totally removed from the realm of teacher education. This is not surprising, given the nature of PT3 evaluation. On the U.S. Department of Education's official PT3 website (2003) grantees are informed: 1) there are no systematic standard methods designed to evaluate PT3 projects, and 2) grantees may modify evaluation models at any time, employing "internal" or "external" reviewers.

Ironically, the same laxity was not exercised by the National Reading Panel. In 1997 Congress passed legislation authorizing the creation of a panel of fifteen experts (e.g., leading scientists in reading research, representatives from colleges, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents) to examine the extant literature in the field of teaching reading. While lending the appearance of objectivity, the panel was actually comprised of twelve hand-picked university professors (five with absolutely no background in reading), two medical doctors, one teacher of language arts, one parent, and one school principal. Conspicuously absent from the panel were any reading teachers. More troubling, was the fact that of the university professors “All held the same view of the reading process” (Yatvin, 2002), that being a “bottom-up” view, which adheres to the belief that reading is a discrete, sequential process, that focuses primarily on student ability to translate graphemes into sound, or phonemes. During the first meeting of the panel, it was decided that this model of reading was the only legitimate model, and that no other model would even be considered in their review of the reading literature. The panel referred to such research as “scientific based reading research,” or SBRR. In other words, the panel consciously decided to simply ignore any view which diverged from their own, pretending that other views (e.g., top-down, interactive, and constructivist) were nonexistent. This is reminiscent of the infamous wholesale buyout of the academic community by the tobacco industry, in which the truth about the dangers of tobacco were suppressed for fifty years, in order to maximize profits from tobacco sales.

It is no coincidence that the NRP (National Reading Panel) played prominently in President George W. Bush’s plans for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, dubbed “No Child Left Behind.” It seems that since Bush’s early days as Governor of Texas, he has had a cozy relationship with the publishing industry. In fact, the Bush and McGraw families have been intimates since the 1930s, when they met on Florida’s Jupiter Island, a vacation destination for wealthy socialites and industrialists from the Northeast (Metcalf, 2002). Bush himself is close friends with the current CEO, Harold McGraw III. Neither is it coincidental that McGraw-Hill happens to be the largest publisher of discrete, skill based, phonics books in the world. Bush has invited Harold McGraw III into the White House and in fact, appointed him to his transition advisory team, along with other McGraw-Hill executives. The day that Bush took over as the President he stated that he would eliminate the nation’s “reading deficit,” and “loosen the purse strings” on the condition that instructional practices be based on “scientifically based reading research.” It seems McGraw-Hill’s mantra has been, “scientifically based,” and that McGraw-Hill will realize huge profits from the new legislation.

Another important facet of the legislation mandates yearly testing of all students from third grade through eighth grade (Metcalf, 2002). According to Bush, and his cadre of “educational leaders,”(including Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM, Harold McGraw CEO of McGraw-Hill Publishing, and former Houston Public School Superintendent, Rod Paige), “results matter.” Results, of course, are dependent on testing regimens. Thus, in the last 5 years alone, state expenditures for standardized testing have tripled. It is no coincidence that this provision to NCLB may potentially funnel as much as \$7,000,000,000 (more than a third of the entire 1998-1999 federal contribution to education) into the hands of the “Big Three” standardized test producers, McGraw-Hill, Houghton-Mifflin, and Harcourt General (Metcalf, 2002).

Rod Paige (the former Secretary of Education in the Bush administration) was so enamored with “results” that, not unlike Enron’s Ken Lay, he was willing to fabricate them. Recently, several principals working for Paige during the purported “Houston Miracle” have reported that Paige held frequent meetings in which he demanded principals “make their numbers,” or lose their jobs (Winerip, 2003). Among a host of strategies to “make the numbers,” administrators were directed to replace the established curriculum with non-stop test practice drills, encourage low scoring students to drop out of school, and place ninth grade failing students into a category dubbed “technical ninth-graders,” where they could remain “ninth-graders” for three years, and never take the tenth-grade exit exam (Dubose & Ivins, 2003). Paige, appointed by Bush in 2001 to head the Department of Education, had reported dropout rates of under 1.5% during his tenure as the Houston School District superintendent. In some inner city high schools in Houston dropout rates were reported to be zero, leading to a state audit of the Houston School District. Upon completion of the audit it was found that the actual dropout rate was closer to 50%. It seems Paige was able to “get results” simply by offering \$5,000.00 bonuses to principals and \$20,000.00 bonuses to district administrators who were willing to lie about the true numbers (Winerip, 2003). In a recent letter to the New Yorker magazine Paige stated:

Henry Ford created a world-class company, a leader in its industry. More important, Ford would not have survived the competition had it not been for an emphasis on results. We must view education the same way. Good schools do operate like businesses (Paige, 2003).

In fact, Paige seems to have adhered closely to the practices of renowned businessman, and close associate of George Bush, Enron CEO, Ken Lay. Lay, known to Bush as “Kenny Boy” (Schorr, 2002), illegally cashed in Enron stock options that netted him, and his Enron cronies over \$500 million, while investor, employee, and pensioner holdings were reduced to nothing. Neither Paige, nor Lay has faced punishment of any sort, and according to most analysts, Lay may never be brought to justice (Toobin, 2003). Despite public awareness of Lay’s gross malfeasance, he and other Enron executives attended a total of six clandestine meetings with Vice-President, Dick Cheney, in which national energy policy was drawn up. Cheney, a huge supporter of deregulation of the energy industry (still on Halliburton’s payroll), refuses to release details regarding the meetings that will affect all Americans.

Neither does Cheney desire to discuss his blatant misrepresentation of facts, regarding rumors of Iraqi attempts to purchase materials for “weapons of mass destruction.” In November of 2001, an unsubstantiated rumor emerged, suggesting that Iraq was buying weapons-grade uranium from Niger. Two officials from the CIA (ex-diplomat Barbro Owens Kirk-Patrick and ex-diplomat Joseph Wilson) were sent to Niger by Cheney to attempt to substantiate these claims. Both Kirk-Patrick and Wilson reported back to CIA director, George Tenet, that the claim were absolutely ungrounded, and in fact nothing more than “crude forgeries” (Thomas, 2003). Unswayed by facts, Cheney met with Tenet and insisted that the unsubstantiated rumor be included in Bush’s State of the Union Address to the American people (McIntyre and Ensor, 2003), in which Bush made a case for the invasion of Iraq. Unfortunately (for the American people), Bush neglected to mention that Cheney’s

company, Halliburton, had already been awarded a multibillion dollar, noncompetitive contract to “rebuild” Iraq (Dobbs, 2003), after the war.

Therefore, it should be no real surprise that Bush, the self proclaimed “education president,” has proposed a federal budget for education (\$50 billion) that is approximately one fiftieth of proposed amount of tax cuts for the country’s wealthiest one percent (AFL-CIO, 2003). In reality, the education bill is a thin disguise by the administration to further promote the transfer of public funds to private schools. The centerpiece of the bill would drastically slash funding for public school vocational training, after-school programs, and higher education, in order to supply hundreds of millions of dollars to support a voucher program, in which private, religious, and home schools would receive federal funds for operation (Miller, 2003). Conveniently, private schools are not, nor will they become, accountable to meet standards, as public schools are. More importantly, private schools may openly reject any applicant, for any reason, whether it be a special need, limited English proficiency, or socio-economic status. The myth that vouchers will provide “choice” for all students is simply another smokescreen by the Bush administration to funnel public tax dollars into private and religious enterprises.

Despite Bush’s unflagging loyalty to the corporate elite, he is clearly cognizant that his ideas may be incapable of garnering popular support if spoken about, and discussed openly. To avoid public awareness of the types of misrepresentation and lies described above, the administration has initiated a campaign of extreme and unrelenting secrecy. Since George W. Bush assumed the presidency, he has taken every measure possible in order to protect himself, and his administration from public scrutiny (Ivins, 2001). Essentially, any topic that might hinder the ability of his corporate cronies to maximize profits has become taboo. This is clearly demonstrated in Bush’s appointment of corporate lobbyists, executives, and convicted criminals to key government positions that purportedly regulate those industries (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Appointment	Post	Qualification
B. John Willimas	Chief Counsel Internal Revenue Service	Creation of tax havens for corporations to avoid paying taxes
Steven Griles	Deputy Secretary Department of Interior	Lobbyist for oil, gas and coal industries
Linda Fisher	Chief of Staff Environmental Protection Agency	Vice-President Monsanto Corporation
Jon Huntsman Jr.	Deputy Trade Representative	Has paid millions in fines for burn-offs of benzene, butadiene & other carcinogens (A Bush associate from Odessa, TX)
Michael Leavitt	Adminstrator Environmental Protection Agency	Former Governor Utah, has worked to undermine environmental protection
David Hager	Food & Drug Administration	Has authored books on Christ's ability to help women heal illnesses through prayer
Mark Rey	Undersecretary of Natural Resources & Environment	Served as lobbyist for timber industry & authored "salvage rider," enacting the suspension of all environmental laws & allowing the clear cutting of old growth forests
Ken Lay	Energy Department Transition Team	A Bush "Pioneer" (raised in excess of \$100,000 for Bush campaign)
Elliot Abrams	Office of Democracy Human Rights & International Relation	Secretly funnelled arms, lied under oath during Iran-Contra scandal, & referred to himself as "gladiator"

In order to insure that public watchdog organizations are kept “in the dark,” and democratic involvement is quashed, Bush has authorized the EPA to classify any document that might cause unrest or questioning, as “secret.” Furthermore, under the leadership of Attorney General, John Ashcroft, the “Freedom of Information Act,” enacted by Lyndon Johnson to insure that “no one should be able to pull curtains of secrecy around decisions which can be revealed without injury to the public interest”(Public Citizen, 2003), has been reversed. In a memorandum written by Ashcroft, government agencies are encouraged to find reasons to deny the public access to information, and assures agencies that the Department of Justice will provide legal counsel and resources to avoid any such release (Public Citizen, 2003). The result of Ashcroft’s reversal immediately created a trend of increased denials of public requests for information. Pulitzer Prize nominated reporter, Duff Wilson, who relies heavily on FOIA documents for his stories, claims that since George W. Bush has taken office, denials have become more and more frequent. Futhermore, Wilson states that even documents that are successfully obtained are so heavily censored (blacked out) that they are seldom usable (Dunham, 2003). According to researcher Jennifer LaFleur (2003), the incidence of government agencies denying FOIA requests on the “privacy” exemption has risen from 55,000, in 1988, to 380,000 in 2002, a sixfold increase (LaFleur, 2003).

Such draconian measures will become even more common if Ashcroft succeeds in gaining congressional support for Patriot Act II. The original USA Patriot Act, passed within seven weeks of the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, gave the federal government unbridled power to engage in wiretapping, confiscation of suspected terrorist property, spying on the American citizenry, and examining libray patron check-out records. Patriot Act II would expand these powers even further, to include:

1. Revocation of American citizenship to anyone found to have contributed “material support” to an organization deemed by the government to be “terrorist;”
2. Legal permanent residents could face instantaneous deportation, without any criminal charge or evidence;
3. The creation of a huge database of citizen DNA information. Anyone refusing a “cheek swab” could be fined \$200,000 and jailed for a year;
4. Authority to wiretap any citizen for 15 days, and to indiscriminately (without a warrant) monitor Internet usage and email correspondence;
5. Engaging in “secret” arrests of suspected terrorists with no notification to the suspect’s immediate family;
6. Police who engage in illegal searches would be granted automatic immunity;
7. Local law enforcement agencies would be given new freedom to conduct citizen surveillance and spying;

8. American citizens could be subject to surveillance by the government on behalf of foreign countries;
9. The “Sunset” provision to the USA Patriot Act (which limited the duration of expanded powers) would be erased, making the act permanent (Welch, 2003).

Shredding the U.S. Constitution and severely curtailing American civil liberties, however, appears to be just the beginning for the Bush administration. Not content with dictating K-12 educational policy and curriculum, it seems that recent legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 3077) has recommended the creation of an “International Education Advisory Board.” The board would be appointed by the administration, with members from homeland security, the Department of Defense, and the National Security Agency. Ostensibly, the board would function to increase accountability, serve in an advisory capacity, and provide counsel on matters related to textual and curricular materials used in courses at universities that receive Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) funding. In particular, the bill would provide a mechanism by which authors such as Arundhati Roy, Robert Fisk, Tariq Ali, and Edward Said could be removed from college curricula (Kurtz, 2003), or have sanctions imposed on professors who choose to use these books in their courses. Each of these authors has openly criticized U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, as well as the recent U.S. war in Iraq. While it is difficult to imagine that the right actually possesses the hubris to wage such blatant intellectual imperialism, the events of the last two years give one reason to wonder. Already, the Bush administration has amassed unprecedented financial and legal power, assumed unilateral, hegemonic jurisdiction over the world, protected itself and its followers from legal prosecution of any sort, and blatantly disregarded the traditions that have defined “scientific discourse” for the last 500 years. In June of 2003, the White House deleted large portions of the Environmental Protection Agency’s “state of the environment,” report. The report purportedly contained descriptions of the risks of global warming and identified industries that emit greenhouse gases (Public Citizen, 2003). The White House didn’t like the report, so they simply altered it.

Like the medieval inquisitor, modern conservatives and their supporters (i.e., educational bureaucrats, CEOs of multinational corporations, politicians, etc.) appear to be intent on preserving orthodox beliefs, punishing dissenters, and suppressing opinions at virtually any cost, even if it entails dismantling the civil liberties that have represented the hallmark of our free, democratic society.

Conclusion

Postmodern educators have found themselves in a precarious situation in which political and educational discourse has been reduced to clichéd euphemisms (e.g., “no child left behind,” “transformational technology,” etc.). Public policy is discussed and determined behind closed doors, often excluding stake holders who possess the deepest understanding of the issues in question.

The dilemmas confronting teachers and others in the educational community concerning the suppression and manipulation of information are neither mysterious, nor new. As demonstrated, the high tech industry, political conservatives, and

bureaucrats have exerted an incredibly pervasive force upon the educational community. Once again, greed has trumped the altruism that has for time immemorial characterized the education profession. Teachers and other educational professionals must re-conceptualize their roles in determining course content and reclaim the territory usurped by market force and efficiency. Schools and schooling are much too important to be handed over to a market regulated industry. Educators should:

1. Organize and lobby state legislators to return curricular decision-making and funding formulas to local districts, schools, and teachers.
2. Create non-profit entities to provide objective evaluation of curricular materials, and provide legal services for educators that come under attack from state and federal legislation such as Patriot Act II.
3. The literature pertaining to the uses of educational technology should be critically re-examined with an emphasis on who funded the purported research.
4. Educate parents, children, and the public about blatant conflicts of interest that currently exist at the highest echelons of the U.S. government, the textbook publishing industry (e.g., Harold McGraw, CEO of McGraw-Hill served as the head of Bush's transition team and has garnered huge profits from recent administration initiatives, such as NCLB's notion of SBRR, and Bush's recent call for annual K-12 standardized testing), and the high-tech industry.
5. Move away from scripted "critical thinking" approaches that emphasize convergent, textbook driven outcomes, and adopt "critical thinking" outcomes that emphasize a) drawing upon student background knowledge, b) drawing upon diverse sources of information, c) teaching students to critically evaluate information for veracity and bias, and d) adopting constructivist teaching strategies that encourage students to examine any and all information and drawing their own critical conclusions, which they can openly articulate and defend before their peers.

Critical educators must engage in a continual questioning and challenging of simple panaceas offered by industry, politicians, and educational bureaucrats who typically conceive of children as a captive market for their next money-making scheme. Despite measures designed to create the illusion that market domination of schools is natural and benevolent, critical educators must create an intellectual environment in schools, in which the tyranny of the market is openly exposed, bringing about a post-modern enlightenment, grounded in ethics, humanitarianism, and logic.

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Miscellany

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