TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Re-viewing the Practice of Critical Pedagogy through the Lens of
Cultural Myths about Teaching

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to generate new ways of understanding and imagining what it means to educate for and from a critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). My research is focused on my experience of trying to put critical pedagogy theory into practice in the context of teaching a grade 11/12 high school class. In contrast to oppressive pedagogies that functioned to “prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing society” (McLaren, 1994, p. 191), as a critical pedagogue, I was guided by the goal of liberating the students in my class by raising their consciousness. However, when I attempted to put critical pedagogy into practice, I soon found myself reproducing an oppressive, transmission-style pedagogy. If the goal of critical pedagogy was to emancipate students by providing them with a transformative educational experience, why did I continue to view myself and my students in ways that were oppressive and paternalistic?

Critiques of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993) offer important insight into this question. Yet, a limited amount of research had been performed into how dominant cultural myths about teaching (Britzman, 1986, 2003) inform teachers’ desires and efforts to put critical pedagogy theory into practice. My thesis aims to shed light on the relationship between critical pedagogy and cultural myths about teaching by examining the discursive roots and mythologies reflected in my desire to “make a difference” in the lives of my students with critical pedagogy. In exposing how pedagogy, desire, and identity intersect in complex, creative, and contradictory ways, my research makes visible one of the most difficult lessons that teachers who wish to educate
for and from a critical consciousness have to learn: “That the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice” (Brookfield, p. 1).
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My decision to become a teacher was grounded in a desire to make a difference in the world. My introduction to critical pedagogy marked a profound shift in the way I thought about this goal and what I felt I needed to do to accomplish it. Convinced by my belief at the time that critical pedagogy was the answer to the problems of schooling, my research was guided initially by the question: How do I become a critical educator? But in the process of reading and writing and reflecting, my focus shifted so that I began to wonder: What does it mean to be a critical educator and from what source does my desire spring to educate critically? My thesis may be read, in part, as a response to this question. In the process of writing this work, I have developed a newfound respect for what it means to “critically” reflect on experience and how, by focusing on and exploring the assumptions embedded within everyday experience, it is possible to more fully comprehend how one’s experiences in life always contain more than what can at first be seen. My thesis may also be read as an account of my coming to terms with this idea.

I feel it is important to note that my theses is not work about critical pedagogy per se, and my point is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on critical pedagogy or its theoretical roots; rather it is about my engagement with critical pedagogy as I understood it at the time. I also feel it is important to point out that, while at certain point in my thesis I am critical of critical pedagogy, I do not imagine my work to be anti-critical pedagogy; in fact, if anything, it desires to more completely understand the efforts of educators who wish to engage students in critical thinking and supporting thinking differently by revealing the complexities of “helping”.

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In problematizing the notion of helping by uncovering the dynamics of power embedded within all pedagogical relationships, I have come to reflect on the ways pedagogy, desire, and identity intersect in complex and creative ways. Writing this thesis has allowed me to re-imagine myself and my relationship to my students in ways beyond that of a saviour. In pursuing questions that encouraged me to re-view what it meant to “help” students in my class, I came to see other things such as power, knowledge, identity, and experience in a very different light, as well. Since beginning this work, I have come to rethink how my assumptions about these concepts were embedded within the ‘heroic’ discourse on which my goal of ‘empowering’ students was based. For the first time since I began teaching, I wondered about the difference between being an ally with my students and being a hero to them.

In many ways, my research makes visible my understanding of the link between the everyday experiences in which we are immersed and how these experiences occur in a larger political, social, and historical context. I have learned to appreciate the interdependent relationship between our experiences as teachers and these larger and often hidden aspects that inform our understanding of everyday experience. In this work, I attempt to place my practices, beliefs and interpretations of experience under a theoretical microscope in the effort to expose the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded within such moments. The payoff of such work, I believe, is a deeper, more meaningful understanding of experience and, as Magda Lewis (1993) has noted, “understanding things makes it easier to change them” (p. 9, author’s italics).

Viewed in this way, my work is largely about the process of learning to see things differently. Seeing ourselves and our worlds differently can be challenging and painful
work; however, as the writing of this thesis has taught me, the rewards are undeniable. Challenging also is the fact that reflecting critically on one’s own experiences and beliefs never really ends and that the particularities of life ensure that certain questions may never go away. As such, critical self-reflection challenges a desire embedded deeply within me to fully grasp something that is inherently “true”. And yet, as this work demonstrates, I feel that I must take efforts to position myself around Greene’s notion that there is no fixed or final framework and that I must engage in the necessary self-reflection in ways that do not result in a sense of hopelessness or despair.

At one point in my research, I ask: “What is left for the teacher who loves to teach and wishes to positively influence a student’s life? How – and even is – it possible to educate for and from a critical consciousness in light of the knowledge that oppressive discourses and myths can work through and around us in our work as teachers without our knowledge or consent?” (see below, p. 135). Although I feel that I am still struggling with this question even now, in hindsight I see that my work is not (nor could it ever have been) about answering this question. Rather, my thesis is about arriving at this question and sharing the conditions under which it became conceivable.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Although this research is focused on an experience I had while in the midst of my Masters studies in 2005, the path I followed in my research led me to a time four years earlier when I first enrolled in a Faculty of Education, pre-service program at Queen’s University. Like many of my fellow student-teachers, my decision to become a teacher was grounded in a desire to make a difference in the world. At the time, I believed this desire was the product of personal choice; however, I did not consider that my ideas about teaching and learning had been largely shaped by the culture in which I lived even before my entrance into the B.Ed. program. In fact, upon reflection I realized many of my ideas about what it meant to be a “good” teacher were based on a combination of my own experiences as a student and images of teachers from popular films and other popular cultural forms.

When I thought of the kind of teacher I wanted to be, I always thought of the great teachers that I had had or teachers on the big screen, like Mr. Keating, from Dead Poets’ Society (Wier, 1989) or Mr. Holland, from Mr. Holland’s Opus (Herek, 1995). Although I had no idea how I was going to become a great teacher like these people, there was no confusion in my mind about what teaching was and what “good” teaching looked like. I believed that good teachers “do more than just their jobs in a limited academic sense; they are good and helpful people who demonstrate unfailing moral purpose and patience” (Joseph and Burnaford, 1994, p. 10). They care about their students – much more than themselves – to the point where they will “sacrifice their private lives and even their health in order to devote themselves to their profession” (p. 10) and they accomplish this “all the while doing battle with idiot colleagues, the dull-witted
administration, and the dangerously backward parents. He is a solitary hero” (Ayers, 1996, p. 228-229).

It was not until two years later, after I began my studies in the Master of Education program, that my beliefs about education were directly challenged. As I completed course readings and spoke with my professors, I found myself grappling with pedagogical questions I had not before considered. What kind of difference did I want to make, and for whom? What did I mean by “better” when I said that the role of a teacher was to “make schools better”?1 Several of the texts I was reading at the time such as Barthes (1972), Ellsworth (1997), and Bowles and Gintis (1976; 1986), had the effect of unsettling a number of my deeply-rooted ideas about teaching and learning. But none caused me to rethink the nature and purposes of schooling in quite the same way as the literature on critical pedagogy. Through the work of Freire (1970; 1985), Giroux (1988a; 1988b, 1991), McLaren (2003), and Simon (1987; 1992), my belief that schools were sacrosanct sites where students could improve their position in life through hard work and study were challenged. Instead, I began to understand how schools could work as sites of social reproduction, whose latent function was “to maintain the status quo,” (McLaren, 2003, p. 176). But while schools functioned to “prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing society” (McLaren, 1994, p. 191), they were also sites “for addressing social problems and helping students understand what it means to exercise rights and responsibilities as critical citizens” (Giroux, 1999a, para. 2). It was a watershed moment for me to consider that:

there is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education functions as either an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the

1Magda Lewis, personal correspondence.
logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women learn to deal critically and creatively with reality to participate in the transformation of their world. (Shaull, 1970, p. 34)

In my second year of Masters’ studies, a local school board posted a teaching position for one period of interdisciplinary History/Media Studies at a local high school. After seeing the posting, I decided that I would apply for the job and use the experience as an opportunity to practice critical pedagogy and use my reflections on this experience as a basis for my thesis research. Using an electronic voice recorder, I created a “diary” of my thoughts and feelings about my experiences at Riverside Secondary School\(^2\) (RSS)\(^3\). Although most of the early diary “entries” were created on my way to and from work, by the end of the teaching at RSS, I was recording entries at all times of the day throughout the week. Lesson plans and assignments, and various curriculum materials that I produced for the course made up the other set of data I created while at RSS.

When, at the conclusion of the semester, I began the process of analyzing my self-reflections, I focused intently on the difference between what I thought might have been the ideal teaching practices needed to be a transformative teacher and what I was able to achieve at the school where I worked. My passion for critical pedagogy had informed my decision to conduct this reflective work in the first place and I was eager to see how well my practice aligned with the teaching models in critical texts. I was deeply disappointed when, upon reflection, I perceived a huge gap between what I set out to accomplish as a “critical pedagogue” and what I

\(^2\) All names of places and individuals been changed.
\(^3\) I refer to Riverside Secondary School by the acronym RSS at different points throughout my thesis.
was able to actually achieve by the end of my teaching that term. Not only had I failed to practice core parts of critical pedagogy, as I understood this, effectively, it was clear from my reflections upon my practice that I continued to use teaching methods consistent with the transmission-style pedagogy that I had set out to discard. From this, I inferred that I was unable to provide my students with a transformative learning experience because I did not understand or have any previous experience teaching from the perspective of critical pedagogy.

**Statement of the Problematic**

As I continued to analyze and reflect on my experience, a number of questions and contradictions began to appear that my initial reflections could not adequately explain or failed to address altogether. It is within these questions that I identified the problematic for this work. For example, if I genuinely desired to provide a transformative learning experience for my students (and I did), why did I long for and utilize teaching methods traditionally associated with transmission-style pedagogy? If, according to critical pedagogy, teachers are to be “transformative intellectuals”, why did I frequently disparage and reject theory at different points in my practice? If the goal of critical pedagogy is to help students overcome their oppressive positions and become liberated subjects, why did I continue to view myself and my students in ways that were oppressive and paternalistic?

In the process of reading and reflecting on these questions, I was introduced to the early work of Deborah Britzman (1986; 2003) and her concept of “cultural myths” as related to the practice of teaching. Britzman (1986; 2003) identified three cultural myths around which many pre-service teachers make sense of the process of learning to teach: The myth that everything depends on the teacher, the myth of the teacher as expert, and the myth that teachers are self-
made. According to Britzman, these myths are the “familiar themes” that emerge from the “shared persistent dilemmas, contradictory realities, and common narratives” (2003, p. 6) reflected in teacher practice. As “authoritative discourses”, these myths encourage teachers to make sense of their desires, goals, and experiences through a generally homogeneous “set of ideal images, definitions, justifications and measures for thought and activity” (Britzman, 1986, p. 448). Initially, I did not view Britzman’s work as relevant to my work. Her focus was on how pre-service teachers experience cultural myths; my thesis was on critical pedagogy. It was not until after I read several critiques of critical pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore; 1993) that I began to see a connection in my work at my school between critical pedagogy and cultural myths.

According to Ellsworth (1989), although critical pedagogy seeks to provide a democratic educational experience for students, her view is that

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

Ellsworth’s critique brought to mind for me one of the most pervasive cultural myths in Western society: The myth of the “rugged individual”. Britzman explains: “The discourse of the rugged individual represents a familiar and admired legend in the dominant culture, a lesson, so to say,
in the possibility of overcoming any inherited circumstance through sheer ingenuity and individual effort” (Britzman, 2003, p. 235). When applied to educational settings, Britzman goes on to say, “the cultural myth of the self-made, autonomous, expert teacher...ultimately promotes a simplistic understanding of the operation of power in educational life” (p. 236).

With a clearer understanding of the contradictions of critical pedagogy and the ways in which these contradictions can function to sustain and promote underlying cultural myths, I began to see my struggles to implement a critical pedagogy at my school in a different light and new questions began to emerge: If there was a relationship between cultural myths and critical pedagogy, what was it? To what degree were my desires and goals as a critical pedagogue informed by certain cultural myths at this time? What does it mean to educate for a critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) in light of the complex and contradictory ways in which teacher identity is formed, pursued, and contested?

When efforts to practice critical pedagogy fail to consider the “authoritative orientations” (Britzman, 2003, p. 235) contained within its theoretical tenets, mythologized aspects of teaching can continue to operate, often without the teacher’s knowledge. Through reflections upon my own practice, I came to better understand that the result is a “critical” pedagogy with revolutionary goals and language, but no transformative substance.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to generate new ways of understanding and imagining what it means to educate for and from a critical consciousness. In many ways, my purpose is to answer the question “How do I become a critical educator?” However, I believe this question cannot be addressed without also considering the ways in which our ideas about what it means to
be a critical educator have been formed and the sources from which our desire to educate critically spring. This work attempts to shed light on these areas by examining the cultural myths and discursive practices at work in my pedagogy at this time. In this way, I hope that my reflections upon my practice will create new spaces for thinking about the ways in which pedagogy, desire, and identity intersect in complex, creative, and contradictory ways.

In problematizing the desire on the part of teachers to “make a difference”, my intention is not to diminish efforts teachers make in their desire to educate for social change or to condemn individuals who work in the service of this goal. In fact, this was the very reason why I became a teacher in the first place and it is why I continue to teach today. Rather, my aim is to make visible one of the most difficult things that teachers who wish to educate for and from a critical consciousness have to learn: “That the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice” (Brookfield, p. 1). In exposing the discursive roots and mythologized parts of my own attempt to “make a difference”, I hope that my thesis will move readers to tap into their own stories and consider what being a teacher means to them and what informs these meanings.

**Rationale**

The rational for this research stems from my desire to more fully understand what it means to teach for and from a critical consciousness. To achieve this goal, I will draw upon the literature of critical pedagogy work and the critiques of critical pedagogy to reflect upon my own practice, a practice that is continually transforming as I reflect upon it within the context of my own commitments to transformative teaching. In centering my thesis on an experience from my own life, I understand my work as contributing to, but distinct from, research focused exclusively on questions of theory. It is my hope that by applying theory to my personal
experience, I will more completely understand both the experience itself and the theoretical tools I used to make sense of it. As Britzman (2003) has noted, insight into experience in this way can help individuals to shape and respond to the forces that inform how experience becomes lived or, as Lewis has succinctly expressed: “Understanding things makes it easier to change them” (Lewis, 1993, p. 9, author’s italics).

Conclusion

My research is divided into three parts: The first section establishes the context within which I elaborate my reflective practice: Chapter I – Introduction, Chapter II – Methodology, Chapter III – Literature Review, and Chapter IV – Conceptual Framework. In the second section, I present my reflective analysis using the conceptual tools outlined in chapter four. My analysis is organized by topic and is presented in three separate sections within Chapter V. The final section of my research is Chapter VI – Conclusion, in which I discuss the consequences of my findings for teachers committed to educating for and from a critical consciousness.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the challenging process of developing my research question and of gathering, organizing, and interpreting the data. In this work, the word “data” refers to the taped recordings, or “entries”, I made before and after school while teaching at Riverside Secondary School (RSS). The story of my research method is complicated and was marked by moments of self-doubt and discouragement. Throughout this chapter, I will describe the challenges I faced in the research process and explain how these challenges informed my methodological choices at different points in my work.

Getting Started

By the end of my first year in the Master’s program, my introduction to critical pedagogy had displaced many of my previously-held beliefs about the nature and purposes of schooling. The ideas reflected in this body of literature caused me to see my responsibility as a teacher in a completely different way. As I reflected on my past experiences as a classroom teacher, I became convinced that I had not provided my students with a critical education and wondered how differently things would have gone had I been introduced to critical pedagogy at an earlier point in my practice. I had been out of the classroom for over a year by this time and I missed working directly with students. I was eager to teach as a critical pedagogue and apply what I learned in the first year of my graduate programme. The opportunity to do just that appeared about a month later after a job was posted for a part-time teacher at RSS. I immediately applied for the job in order to do what I wished I had done years earlier: provide a truly democratic educational experience for my students through the practice of critical pedagogy.
Background on the Job

The teaching job was posted on the School Board website as one period of “Interdisciplinary History/Media Studies”. After I learned that I was the successful applicant, I contacted an acquaintance at the school who gave me an overview of the position, what the course was like and why it was being posted as an interdisciplinary course (history/media studies). According to my contact, enrolment in the school that year was higher than had been expected; as such, they needed to add another course to the school’s academic calendar to house students not registered in a course at the time. This decision was made two weeks into the school year; as such, the students who were to be enrolled in this class had not been in a classroom for at least one period of the day. When I asked what they were doing during this period, I was told that mostly, they were playing cards in the cafeteria. I also learned that the reason that the course was classified as interdisciplinary was because the administration wanted the classroom teacher to have a hand in determining the content of the course. As the teacher, I was expected to work with the English Department Head to develop curriculum for the course tailored to meet the students’ needs and interests. The impression with which I was left was that as long as my department head was satisfied with what I proposed to do in my class, I could anticipate little or no interference from the administration. Finally, I was also told that I could expect the students in this class to be difficult in terms of classroom management. Not surprisingly, when the students had been told of their new class, many were not thrilled about giving up their free time in the cafeteria. Moreover, because the content of the course had not yet been determined, the description given to the students lacked depth and specificity. The result was a group of less-than-enthusiastic students forced to attend a class that had something to do with media and something to do with history.
Finding Direction

I approached my thesis supervisor about the possibility of turning this experience into a potential research topic for my thesis work having to do with my reflections upon my teaching practice. I had a few general questions in mind such as: What does critical pedagogy look like in practice?; What are some of the challenges teachers face when attempting to put critical pedagogy into practice?; and so on. However, no clear problematic had emerged at this point. Nevertheless, I was certain that I wanted to focus on my experiences in the classroom as I attempted to put critical pedagogy into practice. I had been introduced to autoethnography in a research methods course in the previous year and when I considered what I was trying to accomplish in this proposed project, autoethnography seemed well-suited to my research interests.

Autoethnography: A Brief Introduction

Autoethnography is widely recognized as a powerful research method for making meaning from one’s own lived experience, for connecting the personal to the cultural, and for understanding one’s self and others in more profound and meaningful ways (Behar, 1996; Denzin, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 2003; Glassner and Hertz, 1999; Lewis, 1993; Patton, 2002; Pinar, 1994). Ellis and Bochner (2003) define autoethnography as

an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural…Usually written in the first-person, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. (p. 209)
In privileging everyday moments as sources for inquiry, proponents of autoethnography reject a “narrow definition of social inquiry, one that eschews a social science with a moral centre and a heart” (Ellis and Bochner, 2003, p. 221). Thus, in autoethnographic texts, “concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language” (p. 209). Like many terms in the social sciences, the meanings and applications of autoethnography vary widely. Writers who focus on the events of their own lives and present research as autobiographical texts cite a variety of similar terms to describe their work such as “self-study”, “narrative inquiry”, and “self-ethnography”. Researchers often move back and forth among such terms and meanings in the same articles. Because such overlap makes a precise definition of autoethnography difficult, it is perhaps more helpful to define autoethnographic texts by what they seek to accomplish. In this way, I am in agreement with Ellis and Bochner (2003) that autoethnography is an acceptable and widely-accepted term for describing “studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural” (p. 211). It is upon this definition of autoethnography that I have structured my methodological framework.

**Purposes and Challenges of Autoethnography**

My decision to approach and present my research from an autobiographical perspective is well-suited to my research goals. The relationship between reflecting on one’s everyday experiences and the development of future possibilities is explained by Lewis (1993):

How we attend to and formulate ideas about the possibilities that exist for us come directly out of the lived realities of our daily lives. It is out of these realities that we draw
the meanings we allow ourselves to make. And these meanings can confine as much as they can create possibilities. (p. 119)

Research focusing on one’s own experiences is also important because “it is out of these ordinary and deeply idiosyncratic moments that the politics of the personal emerges” (Lewis, 1993, p. 120). Because “the ideas and practices of hegemony are part and parcel of everyday life” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 15) and are reflected in “the stock opinions, conventional wisdom, and commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world that many of us take for granted” (p. 15), research that seeks to more fully understand lived experience must also seek to more fully understand how power is at work in such moments.

Because power is neither stable nor fixed, identifying the workings of power in a moment of lived experience can be a challenging task. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) has likened networks of power and social positioning in pedagogical relations to “the twisty and entwined chocolate bands running through a marbleized cake. Try to follow one of those bands. Better yet, try to extract one for a good look. It takes surgical skill” (p. 7). I believe that my choice of methodology will allow me to perform this kind of surgery and, in examining the “chocolate strands” of power in an experience from my everyday life, allow me to more clearly understand how power and identity are intertwined in complex and complicated ways.

At the heart of this desire to understand is a commitment to critical self-reflection. But what makes reflection “critical” and how is it different from other types of reflection encouraged in educational research and practice? As Brookfield correctly observes: “Reflection is not, by definition, critical. It is quite possible to teach reflectively while focusing solely on the nuts and bolts of classroom process” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 8). According to Brookfield, critical self-
reflection on teaching is distinguished from other types of reflection by its two main identified purposes:

The first is to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions. The second is to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best long-term interests. (p. 8)

It is with these two purposes in mind that I apply a critical autoethnographic lens.

The kinds of challenge faced by the researchers in this field are by no means limited to theoretical matters. Autoethnographic texts are, by their very definition, personal. Researchers often experience their work in very emotional terms. As explained by Ellis and Bochner (2003): “Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts – and emotional pain. Just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well, that’s when the real work has only begun” (p. 207). In the course of writing this work, I experienced such pain as critical pedagogy and critical theory slowly destroyed the positive image I had of myself as a teacher dedicated to critical pedagogic practice. It was extremely difficult for me to learn that my intentions and my actions as a young teacher may have had the exact opposite effect that I desired by apparently disempowering the very students I was trying to serve. Yet, Ellis and Bochner elaborate, as the conceptual rug is pulled out from under us, “you come to understand yourself in deeper ways. And with understanding yourself comes understanding others” (p. 207). In this way, autoethnographic research “functions as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation, for the author as well as for those who read and engage the text” (p. 221).
Collection and Organization of Data

The data analyzed in my research came from two main sources: reflections that I spoke into a voice recorder and curriculum resources that I developed for the course. Using a hand-held voice recorder, I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and general observations about anything connected to my teaching experience at this time in the form of an “audio diary”. Diary “entries” were usually recorded as I drove to and from work, though, by the end of the semester, I was recording entries on weekends and in the evenings. The other set of data I analyzed was in the form of lesson plans, assignments, and curriculum materials that I created for the course. I stored these resources in binders and organized the material inside them by unit. By the end of the course, I had developed resources for four units of study under the following headings: Bullying; Anti-Semitism; Homophobia; and, Paradigms. By the end of the semester at RSS I had slightly more than four hours of voice recorded data and two regular-sized binders of resources for the course. Throughout my research, I have indicated from which tape my recorded data came by using the letter “T” to refer to the word “Tape” and the letter “S” to indicate the word “Side”; thus, a recorded entry for which the reference (T3, S2) is given should signal to the reader that the entry was recorded on the second side of the third tape.

After my data collection was complete, I transcribed the entries from the audio diary onto paper so I could code the information more easily. I used a colour-coding system to identify recurrent themes in the data and created a shortlist of topics about which I spoke often in my diary. This process was complicated by the fact that several entries could be classified under the same headings. For entries like these, I used two colours and made a note of the fact in the margins. After this process was complete, I had a large number of potential topics on which I could focus, but no clear way to organize the data. I began the process of creating sub-categories
for some of the major points and excluding data that was outside the scope of my research focus. Although I was still unclear about the exact headings that I would use to organize my analysis, I felt like it made sense to correspond my data with major themes and concepts in critical pedagogy if I wanted to understand how well I had practiced critical pedagogy in the first place. While my decision to shift theoretical lenses part-way through my analysis forced me to look at my data differently, it did not require me to abandon my existing data or collect new data through different means. I also found that it made sense to continue to organize my data around themes common to the literature of critical pedagogy. I will begin the next chapter by introducing these themes and exploring how critical pedagogy views the teacher’s role in a critical classroom.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my research in the existing literature on the practice of educating for and from a critical consciousness in the context of formal education. Specifically, I will examine my problematic as connected to literature in the following three areas: Literature associated with the desire to practice critical pedagogy; literature focused on the challenges teachers face in implementing critical pedagogy theory, including critiques of critical pedagogy; and, literature that explores the role cultural myths play in teachers’ conceptions of their purpose and identity. The first of these three sections is explored below.

Literature focusing on efforts to practice critical pedagogy

At the centre of my research is the desire to teach for and from a critical consciousness. The specific pedagogy on which I have decided to focus is critical pedagogy. There is a substantial body of literature on critical pedagogy theory (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2009). In this literature, the heterogeneous ideas and philosophies behind critical pedagogy are explored in order “to better understand what is implied by a critical perspective of education, society, and the world” (p. 9). However, my research is focused more on the practical implementation of critical pedagogy theory, an area which still has yet to be explored to a significant degree. As Ellsworth (1989) observes, “while the literature states implicitly or explicitly that critical pedagogy is political, there have been no sustained research attempts to explore whether or how the practices it prescribes actually alter specific power relations outside or inside schools” (p. 301). Though I referenced the following observation by Ellsworth earlier in my work, her point about the potential dangers of this lack of critical research is worth highlighting again:
In the absence of such an analysis and program, their efforts are limited to trying to transform negative effects of power imbalances within the classroom into positive ones. Strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student intact. (p. 306)

Gore (1993) extends Ellsworth’s point by noting that, while discourses of critical pedagogy do not need to lead to concrete suggestions for classroom practice in order to be meaningful, “critical pedagogy risks deluding itself insofar as it considers its proclamations to be sufficient guidance” (p. 111).

It is my hope that my research will build upon the work of those authors who have generated personal narratives about implementing critical pedagogy at the classroom level (Britzman, 1986, 2003; Ellsworth, 1989; Kincheloe, 2005a, 2005b; Lewis, 1993; McLaren, 1989, 2003; Shor and Freire, 1987; Wink, 1997) by offering another account of the experience of “living out” critical pedagogy as a teacher. Thus, my effort to flesh out the practice of critical pedagogy is in keeping with Kincheloe’s (2005a) goal of creating a “hopeful, democratic, challenging, and pragmatic portrait of classroom teaching that engages the mind, heart, and creative impulse” (p. 1).

In contrast to research that uses critical pedagogy as a theoretical lens through which to re-view teaching experience (McLaren, 1989, 2003), my intention in this research is to use a theoretical framework to reflect on the practical implementation of critical pedagogy theory. In this way, my research is similar to that of Ellsworth (1989), Shor and Freire (1987), Knupfer (1995), and Lewis (1993), all of who offer up personal experiences about their struggle to put
critical pedagogy into practice. The contribution of research grounded in personal experience is explained by Knupfer:

> Although I do not doubt that critical pedagogy holds potential in terms of engendering productive thought and expression, building literacy skills, and creating a more meaningful curriculum, I recommend that critical pedagogy theory needs to be further informed by and grounded in school and community studies. Through the juncture of theory and practice, critical pedagogy may become more self-reflexive as it examines its own language, discourse, and inscribed authority. (p. 237)

In reflecting on my experience with critical pedagogy, my intention is not, as some authors have attempted (Wink, 1997), to provide an introduction to critical pedagogy theory and offer suggestions on how this pedagogy may best be implemented. The purpose of such research is to “provide access to the theory and practice of critical pedagogy…[in order to ] help all educators know they can really make a difference” (Wink, p. xvi). While, well-intentioned in nature, I feel that such research does not apply the practice of critical self-reflection (Brookfield, 1995) that is central to my thesis work. In fact, my hope is that my thesis may encourage teachers who are currently practicing critical pedagogy to reflect on their own relationship to critical pedagogy theory and its stated goals and purposes.

**Critiques of critical pedagogy theory**

As explained in the opening chapters of this work, my introduction to the concept of critical pedagogy was primarily through texts focused on the theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b; Giroux and McLaren, 1986; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren, 1989, 2003). It was not until after my data collection was complete that I discovered the existence of
literature which critiqued various aspects of critical pedagogy theory (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993). This body of literature allowed me to see for the first time how certain tacit assumptions were at work within the critical pedagogy theory that I was trying to put into practice. From this experience, I learned that there is a need for research linking efforts on the part of teachers to practice critical pedagogy and literature critical of this particular pedagogical approach. As explained by Knupfer’s (1995), “clearly, there is a greater need to link theory and practice by further classroom studies of critical pedagogy, as well as by addressing the institutional and ideological constraints faced by critical pedagogues” (p. 220). According to Knupfer, this type of research is an invaluable method for improving efforts to apply critical pedagogy for, “as the tensions and articulated positions are raised, the tensions and articulated positions of multiple voices not only add depth and nuance to theory but give flesh to the language of possibility” (pp. 223-224). I imagine my thesis contributing to that body of research committed to advancing theory in this area through the practical application of and critical reflection on challenges of implementing critical pedagogy theory.

Research has been conducted into the challenges faced by educators attempting to implement the theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy at various levels of study in schooling. While most of these studies have focused on work at the college-level (Dillard, 1994; Ellsworth, 1989; Picciotto, 1992; Shor, 1992), a few have been conducted at the elementary-level (Knupfer, 1995; Schaafsma, 1998). While I imagine parts of my research being transferable to all areas of study, it is in the context of the practical application of critical pedagogy at the secondary level (Bigelow, 1990; Christensen, 1989, 1991; Doyle, 1993) that I feel my research will have the most specific applicability.
Generally speaking, critiques of critical pedagogy based on the struggles associated with its practical implementation focus on two main points: the abstract nature of the discourse of critical pedagogy and the tension surrounding issues of power and control in the classroom. Ellsworth (1989) explores how the rationalist assumptions that give rise to the vague and non-specific nature of critical pedagogy discourse can undermine teachers’ desires to realize the goals of critical pedagogy at the classroom level. Ellsworth shows how democratic and liberatory pedagogies can themselves become vehicles for reproducing the very oppression they seek to end by encouraging teachers to imagine and pursue a pedagogical project of “empowerment” in only the broadest of possible humanist terms. The problem, according to Ellsworth, is that such an approach encourages teachers to reproduce the paternalistic nature of teaching and sustain existing power imbalance between students and teachers. I imagine my research extending Ellsworth’s push to encourage teachers to directly face the repressive myths of critical pedagogy in a way that allows them to own up to the potentially oppressive formations of pedagogy and changing their relation to and investments in these formations.

Gore’s (1993) research builds upon that of Ellsworth’s by demonstrating how the lack of practical supports for critical pedagogy and the didactic language in which much of the literature is couched unfairly places the responsibility for unproblematically translating the abstractions of critical pedagogy into practice. Teachers who are unable to successfully accomplish this task can engage in a cycle of self-blame and personal disappointment, a phenomenon I intend to explore in this work.

A unique critique related to the utopian discourse of critical pedagogy comes from Cho (2006) who argues that “the inherent limitations present within the dominant discourses of critical pedagogy are what stifle the possibility for change” (p. 126). For this reason, Cho
claims, “critical pedagogy will at best modernize, rather than change, the system” (p. 126).

However, Cho’s critique of critical pedagogy has less to do with its abstract language than with what he feels is its recent failure to link to struggles for democracy and equity in larger social, economic, and political contexts. “In its search for ‘possibilities’, Cho writes, “[critical pedagogy] needs to explore and produce real, feasible narratives by linking the micro to the macro, the subject to the structure, the culture to the economy, and the local to the global” (p. 138). And while I disagree that research focused on the body or the politics of difference does not link the micro to the macro, Cho’s observation points to a need for further research that links theory and practice in ways that concretize theoretical abstractions in a meaningful way.

The second area on which many critiques of critical pedagogy are focused is in regards to the question of power and authority. Research of this kind aims to highlight implied or explicitly stated contradictions inherent in a great deal of critical pedagogy literature. According to theorists in this field, these contradictions function “to negate any structure or any possible hint of authority in critical pedagogy classrooms as a way to achieve total freedom and the elimination of domination” (Cho, 2006, p. 132). A number of these studies have focused on the problematic ways in which authority is constituted in the literature of critical pedagogy (Darder, 2002; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993; Knupfer, 1995). Specifically, Gore (1993) has examined how “the notion of emancipatory authority can be seen to function in the interests of the teacher who is able to exercise a great deal of power in deciding who should ‘have a voice,’ which voices are in the interests of democracy, and so on” (p. 100). My thesis work will draw from and, ultimately, contribute to research aimed at more clearly understanding the underlying assumptions of power and authority in the literature of critical pedagogy that give rise to such condition. In this way, I hope to add to the current critiques of critical pedagogy by focusing on
how “educators’ shifting role as authority figures, facilitators, researchers, and cultural workers
demonstrate the very difficulty of engendering a democratic classroom wherein student voices
and histories are represented, respected, and reconstituted” (Knupfer, 1995, p. 223).

Cultural myths, dominant discourses and teacher identity

The role that cultural myths played in how I understood my goals and identity as a
teacher is at the centre of my thesis work. As such, I imagine my research contributing to
studies focusing on how cultural myths inform the practice and beliefs of teachers. A number of
studies have focused exclusively on the role myths play in the experience of student-teachers in
the context of learning to teach (Britzman, 1986, 2003; Fenimore-Smith, 2004; Moore, 2004);
other studies (Tobin, Espinet, Byrd, & Adams, 1988; Tobin and Gallagher, 1987; Tobin and
Imwold, 1993; Tobin and McRobbie, 1996; Tobin, Tippins, & Hook, 1994) have focused on the
impact of cultural myths on the work of experienced teachers.

Britzman’s (1986, 2003) work on cultural myths is of particular importance to my
research as it forms the basis for my conceptual framework. Britzman’s research is focused on
more clearly understanding how cultural myths about teaching inform “how we become
entangled in and can become disentangled from the dynamics of cultural reproduction” (2003, p.
232) and how, in the context of learning to teach, “our meanings are organized, disorganized,
and produced within the multiple positions we inhabit” (p. 218). Like Britzman, my research
will explore “how our teaching selves are constituted in the context of learning to teach, and how
the selves we produce constrain and open the possibilities of creative pedagogies” (p. 26). As
Britzman notes, to begin to answer these questions “requires an understanding not simply of the
structure of schools or the skills necessary to teach there, but the construction of one’s identity as a teacher” (p. 26).

Building on Britzman’s findings that cultural myths about teaching often manifest themselves in the individualization of the profession, Fenimore-Smith’s (2004) research focused on the relationship between collaborative approaches to teaching and cultural myths that summoned student teachers. The study revealed possibilities for a democratic teamed model approach to encourage student teachers to reconsider teaching from an individual act to something understood as a socially negotiated experience.

Similarly, Moore (2004) draws heavily on the work of Britzman (2003) to explore how a range of cultural influences contributes to the concept or image of a “good” teacher in the context of teacher education. Moore explores this idea, in part, through re-presentations of teachers in popular cultural texts and identifies three dominant discourses in teacher-education programs: discourses that support the view of the teacher as a competent craftsperson; discourses that support the teacher as a reflective practitioner; and, discourses that support the construction of the teacher as a charismatic subject. While I do not believe that my research will have a direct impact on literature focusing on how pre-service teachers rely on cultural myths to make sense of experience, I believe that it will contribute to the research that attempts to “theorize the consequences for education of the ways in which knowledge, power, and desire are mutually implicated in each other’s formations and deployments” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 316), specifically, in the context of experienced teachers attempting to implement new pedagogies.

I also see my research contributing to that body of research that is critical of cultural myths that support a view of teaching as a heroic act conducted in the service of saving students.
Britzman (1986, 2003), Ayers, (1996), and Moore (2004) each explore this myth and the consequences for students when teaching is positioned as something that involves saving students. My hope is to extend the work of Ayers (1996) who, in his “critique” of the teacher-saviour ideology, concludes that “real teachers need to question the common sense, break the rules, become political activists in concert with kids. This is true heroism, an authentic act of courage” (pp. 239-240). Unlike Ayers, I do not wish to re-visit or propose a new vision of the teacher-as-hero myth; my research is instead focused on problematic role such myths play in the effort to teach for and from a critical consciousness.

In contrast to literature focusing on how cultural myths about teaching pre-service teachers is research explores how cultural myths about teaching and learning played out in the classrooms of experienced teachers. In a study of one grade 11 chemistry class, Tobin and McRobbie (1996) found that four myths figured prominently in teachers’ conceptions of their work and purpose as classroom teachers: cultural myths related to the transmission of knowledge; myths pertaining to the rigor of the curriculum; myths about efficiency; and, myths about preparing students for success on examinations. Similar findings were reported in other studies by Tobin in collaboration with other authors (Tobin and Gallagher, 1987; Tobin, et al., 1988; Tobin et al., 1994). In one a study of the implementation of national standards in mathematics, Tobin and Imwold (1993) described how myths of transmission, efficiency, rigor, and preparing for tests were used by parents, administrators, colleague teachers, and students in repeated endeavors to persuade a middle school mathematics teacher to abandon her efforts to implement the standards and revert to her traditional practices. As a result of these studies, Tobin and McRobbie (1996) concluded that “in terms of research undertaken within our own program of research there has been a strong trend, over more than 10 years, for these cultural
myths to be apparent in studies undertaken in Australia and the United States at middle and high school grade levels” (p. 236).

**Conclusion**

Research focusing on the challenges associated with the practical application of critical pedagogy must work to expose the ideological shortcomings and contradictions inherent within critical pedagogy itself. While the influence of cultural myths on the experiences of teachers and student-teachers has been explored by a number of authors, little has been written about how the tacit assumptions of critical pedagogy and cultural myths about teaching intersect in ways that complicate efforts to effectively educate for and from a critical consciousness. It is my hope that this research will contribute to ongoing research in the areas of applying critical pedagogy in the context of formal schooling and to ongoing research in the area of cultural myths about teaching.
Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate key theoretical concepts using Britzman’s (1986; 2003) work on cultural myths explained in detail in Practice Makes Practice: A critical study of learning to teach (2003). I will draw upon on Britzman’s work in which she elaborates on the cultural myths in the making of teachers and how these myths inform the process of how pre-service teachers understand what it means to be a teacher. In the course of analyzing my data in the chapters that follow, I will focus on four of Britzman’s myths: 1) the myth that everything depends on the teacher; 2) the myth of the teacher-as-expert; 3) the myth that teachers are self-made; and, 4) the myth of the teacher as rugged individual. Taken together, these myths will form the conceptual lens through which I will view my data in the subsequent chapter.4

In this chapter, I will also elaborate on work of other critical theorists whose insights I use to work through my reflections on my data. Specifically, I will focus on how Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) and Jennifer Gore (1993) contribute to the critique of the discourse and conceptualizations in one strand of critical pedagogy literature. In calling on these educational theorists, I use the work of Ellsworth (1989) and Gore (1993) to identify the assumptions embedded within the critical pedagogy literature, and I use Britzman’s work to highlight the mythical qualities of those embedded assumptions and how power, knowledge, and identity are shaped in the process of adhering to those myths.

4 While I elaborate on the first three myths in chapter 5, I will explore the fourth myth in the concluding chapter of my thesis.
Important to note is that although Britzman (2003) focused her work on the ways in which pre-service teachers made sense of their experiences of becoming a teacher, I believe that there is a great deal in common between the process of learning to teach and the experience of attempting to implement a pedagogy with which one is not familiar. In both cases, teachers are simultaneously teaching and learning, developing their own teaching identity, and struggling to make sense of their experiences in light of their preconceived ideas about what it means to be a teacher. In the same way that cultural myths “provide a semblance of order, control, and certainty in the face of the uncertainty and vulnerability” (p. 222) for pre-service teachers, so too was I drawn to the sense of certitude offered up by cultural myths and the feeling that I was “making a difference”.

Moreover, the practice of unconsciously adhering to cultural myths about teaching is not limited strictly to beginning teachers. In the process of writing my thesis, I have been a full-time teacher and witnessed, first-hand, the ways in which experienced teachers, including myself, make sense of their practice through dominant cultural myths. In my observations of and conversations with teachers coupled with my own self-reflections, I have seen how cultural myths are produced and reproduced in the warehouse of stories, practices, and philosophical reflections one acquires over a lifetime of teaching. For these reasons, I believe that it is appropriate to use Britzman’s concept of “cultural myths” in research that aims to more clearly understand the purposes and motivations behind the work of new and experienced teachers.

**Somehow, I Just Knew**

When I reflect on my ideas about teaching before I became a teacher, it is clear to me that I felt that, somehow, I just “knew” what was involved in being a teacher and the qualities of
“good” teaching. But as I had no actual experience teaching prior to being a student in the teacher education programme at the Faculty of Education, I wondered, from where did I acquire this knowledge I felt myself to have? Britzman’s (2003) work offers some insight into my understanding of this question. She observes that our ideas about teaching stem from our experience with education as students and the numerous representations of this profession in popular culture. She explains: “the story of learning to teach begins actually much earlier than the time one first decides to become a teacher. The mass experience of public education has made teaching one of the most familiar professions in this culture” (pp. 26-27). For this reason, pre-service teachers often enter into the profession with pre-conceived images of what teaching should look, sound, and feel like. As explained by Britzman, pre-service teachers

bring to teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and commonsensical images of teacher’s work. In part, this accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate out thinking and, in unintended ways, select the practices that are available in educational life. (p. 27)

Embedded within these worldviews are assumptions about teaching. Popular representations of teaching are loaded with overt and subtle messages about what it means to teach. These images and ideologies reinforce a naturalized image of the “good” teacher.⁵ In light of these cultural constructions of teacher’s identities, the practice of examining our own teaching experience becomes critically important if we are to identify and move beyond the potentially oppressive assumptions embedded within these beliefs about what it means to teach.

⁵ See Mary Dalton’s (2007), The Hollywood Curriculum: Teachers in the Movies for a comprehensive analysis of popular images of teachers in film.
Examinations of this kind are critically important for understanding the roots of identities as teachers; for, as Adrienne Rich notes, “until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (Rich, 1979, p. 35).

The relationship between cultural myths about teaching (re)presented in popular film and literature and one’s identity as a teacher is significant (Britzman, 2003). Pre-service teachers are quick to recognize their own efforts and desires reflected in the stereotypical images and characters presented in film and other cultural texts. In this way, these mediums and the messages they carry appear to confirm certain “truths” about teaching, what it means to be a teacher, and how one becomes a teacher. Such images confer as much as they confirm with the consequence that pre-service teachers exit these texts with a set of normalized fictions about teaching. Barthes explains this complex function of myth: “it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us (Barthes, 1972, p. 117). In this way, as Lewis (1987) explains, there is a dialectical relationship between the text and the reader: “The individual, in projecting her ‘knowledge’ onto the image, has its ‘truth’ reaffirmed through the dialectic process: the image feeds the common understanding which in turn, in part, defines the image” (Lewis, 1987, p. 113).

In this sense, “cultural myths are not so much mechanical recipes as they are authoritative orientations for interpreting. They work to interpellate the world of teachers and students” (Britzman, 2003, p. 235). Britzman borrows the concept of interpellation from Louis Althusser (1971) to describe “the complex process whereby persons choose to identify with the ideologies that ‘summon’ them; in turn they understand themselves to be the source rather than the effect of that summons” (Britzman, 2003, p. 223). As Stuart Hall (1985) notes, interpellation “suggests
that we are hailed or summoned by the ideologies which recruit us as their ‘authors,’ their essential subject” (Hall, 1985, p. 102).

At the time of my teaching at RSS, my concept of “critical consciousness” was closely tied into my ideas about teaching for social justice. I believed that raising the consciousness of my students involved educating them about social in/justice in the world. However, teachers who desire to educate for and about social justice are not “outside” the dominant systems about which they desire to educate and, as a result, must also commit themselves to the practice of identifying and rooting out assumptions in their own thinking. In speaking of post-secondary and graduate students, Lewis (1993) explains that simply being aware of oppression does not automatically guarantee one a position outside of oppressive systems:

Many students enter our classes acknowledging the social existence of sexism or racism or homophobia or class privilege. Yet they often stop short of the necessary self reflection that might reveal how we ourselves might be complicit in practices that perpetuate exactly these same social inequalities. (p. 148)

The phenomenon of teachers reproducing the very conditions they seek to remedy has also been addressed by Mary Dalmau (2005): “The capacity for educational research to make a positive difference in the lives of students and communities is limited by the complicity (albeit unconscious) of researchers and research institutions in maintaining the status quo in education” (p. 43). While Dalmau does not elaborate what she means by the term “positive”, her point is important in signaling that teachers may unknowingly reproduce oppressive conditions for students. In this context, educators who wish to teach for and from critical consciousness must caution themselves to remember that “before we can ‘go out’ and do something to change the
rest of the world, we must begin with ourselves and the bases from which we operate” (Wattsjohnson, 2005, p. 192)⁶.

It is clear, then, that “while we are immersed on our personal history, our practices are not simply the products of our intent and will” (Popkewitz, 1988, p. 379); thus, engaging in the type of critical self-reflection that leads to identifying the myths upon which our beliefs about of teaching have been built is central to the task of teaching for and from a critical consciousness. The conceptual framework that I have applied to my thesis is focused on exposing the taken-for-granted assumptions contained within my ideas about what it means to be a teacher and the ideological roots of my desire to make a difference.

**Overview of “Myth” and Introduction to Britzman’s work**

At the centre of my thesis work is the idea of “myth” and the relationship between cultural myths about teaching and one’s identity as a teacher. In my research, I will be using the term “cultural myths” about schooling as Britzman (1986, 2003) does, to refer to “familiar themes made from that strange and volatile combination of school biography, school structure, and the desires of wanting to become a teacher but not yet knowing in advance what precisely this entails” (2003, p. 6). According to Britzman, cultural myths about education inform the ways in which student-teachers develop their teaching identity and make sense of their ideas about what it means to be a teacher. These myths are based on “a set of ideal images, definitions, justifications, and measures for thought, feelings, and agency” (p. 222) and provide

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⁶ For an interesting discussion of this same idea in the context of volunteer service, see Ivan Illich’s “To Hell With Good Intentions” (1968)
student-teachers with “a semblance of order, control, and certainty” (p. 222) in the often volatile and uncertain life of a pre-service teacher. Britzman goes on to note:

Each myth authorizes a discourse on power, knowledge, and the self that works to promote the impossible desire of assuming the self to be capable of embodying a noncontradictory subjectivity and capable of asserting a form of control that depends upon the individual’s unambivalent acceptance of authoritative discourse. (p. 223)

What is significant about these myths is that they encourage pre-service teachers to make sense of their experiences in the classroom in particular ways by providing them with “a language for describing who they might become and what they should desire” (Britzman, 2003, p. 223). As a form of speech, then,

myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which it not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.

(Barthes, 1972, p. 143)

Because “all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness (Barthes, 1970, p. 110), pre-service teachers “plug into” existing, naturalized ideas of what it means to be a teacher even before they set foot into a classroom and feel that, somehow, they just “know” what good teaching is and looks like.

Like Britzman, I am interested in understanding how “the overfamiliarity of the teacher’s role, the taken-for-grantedness of school structure, and the power of one’s institutional biography are open to the suggestions cultural myths offer about the work and identity of teachers”
(Britzman, 2003, p. 31). Specifically, I am interested in understanding how these suggestions were reflected in my own efforts to teach for critical consciousness at RSS and the relationship between cultural myths and conceptualizations of power, knowledge, and experience in the discourse of critical pedagogy. Applying Britzman’s work as a conceptual lens will allow me to see the tacit assumptions that were at work without my knowledge or consent in my teaching at this time. In the sections that follows, I will describe three cultural myths identified by Britzman that form the basis for much of my analysis: the myth that everything depends upon the teacher; the myth of the teacher as expert; and, the myth that teachers are self-made. I will also outline her concept of the myth of the “rugged individual” to which I will return in my conclusion.

**The Myth that Everything Depends on the Teacher**

The first myth that Britzman (1986, 2003) identifies as informing the process of learning to teach is the myth that the teacher should be in control of everything that happens in the classroom. According to Britzman, contained within this myth is the belief that “everything – student learning, the presentation of the curriculum, and social control – is held to be in the teacher’s domain” (2003, p. 224). Not surprisingly, matters of control figure prominently in this myth as teachers are expected to be in charge of all aspects of the classroom experience. My own experience in school confirmed the fact that effective teachers had control of the class, a fact confirmed by the several discussions about and workshops on managing classroom behaviour in my B. Ed. year. The question of how to control students and direct the learning in the class were common refrains in the teacher education programme of which I was a part; almost every teacher candidate appeared to struggle with questions of how control student behaviour and direct what was being learned in the class and how.
For Britzman, teachers’ directivity manifests itself most prominently in the form of the delivery of the curriculum and the control of classroom behaviour, both for which teachers are responsible. Because teachers are expected to direct and control the path of learning in the classroom, when the unexpected arises (as it always does in teaching), it might be met with fear and apprehension on the part of the teacher. Under these conditions, “the institutional push to present a stable appearance tends to make the student teacher perceive the unexpected as a ‘bind’ rather than an opportunity” (p. 224). Of course, the same may be said for all teachers who consider the control of student learning to be one of their sole responsibilities. The problem with this construct, however, is that it encourages beginning teachers “to evade the complicated uncertainty that realizes learning in the first place” (p. 225) and reinforces the idea of knowledge as a commodity to be controlled, withheld, and given under the authority of the teacher. When teachers attempt to direct, predict, and control every aspect of classroom experience, learning becomes synonymous with control and teaching is re-presented as a quasi-scientific, technical act (Britzman, 1986, 2003).

Central to the goal of controlling learning is the teacher’s identity, particularly as it relates to students’ perceptions. Teaching-as-control suggests that teachers need to portray a unitary and non-contradictory image, often either as a tyrant or a comrade in order to successfully respond to the awesome responsibility they embody. This idea is reinforced in Faculties of Education either between and among the students and/or in the ways that students are taught by education faculty. Beginning teachers are advised to adopt one of many different approaches, e.g., be harsh with the students at the very start of the semester and let them know who is the “boss”; once your role as the powerful figure is established, ease up slightly so as to appear understanding; or, clearly dissociate yourself from the heavy-handed, authoritarian
teacher by opening up to students and letting them know that you are their friend – that you are one of them and do not desire to control them.

As Britzman (2003) notes, “each end of this spectrum of fear and desire is problematic: the tyrant imposes an autocratic rule, while the comrade discards all rules” (p. 225). Constructing one’s identity along such binary lines is not sufficient for creating a democratic and participatory classroom experience precisely because “such identities are only capable of defining students in terms of what they lack – authority or freedom – and of defining the teacher as the sole agent in the classroom” (p. 226). Applying Britzman’s work as a conceptual lens to my analysis will allow me to more fully understand the construction of my identity at RSS and the relationships between my constructed identity and my goal of “freeing” students from their ignorance by raising their consciousness.

**The Myth of the Teacher-as-Expert**

The second myth that Britzman (2003) identified in the struggle over learning to teach is the myth that teachers must be experts in both their discipline and in matters of pedagogy. Britzman explains how the fear of “not knowing enough to teach” is actually “two fears collapsed into one: knowing how to teach and knowing everything there is to teach” (p. 227). As a result of their educational biographies, student teachers “have naturalized the construct of the teacher as expert” (p. 228) and view “good” teaching as synonymous with expertise in one’s subject area. Thus, this myth reflects the “larger cultural expectation that teachers be certain in their knowledge and, that knowledge express certainty” (pp. 227-228).

However, embedded within this view are assumptions not only about how teachers should handle their “expert” knowledge, but assumptions about the nature of knowledge itself.
Specifically, “knowledge is understood as unencumbered by values, interests, and ideology, and is handled as if it were transcendent” (Britzman, 2003, p. 229). Although I was exposed to new critical knowledge in the Master’s program, when I began to teach at RSS, I did so with much the same conception of knowledge that I had as a beginning teacher, i.e. as a set of facts – though now “critically informed” facts – to be transmitted. Thus, Britzman’s work is helpful for understanding how I approached and understood knowledge in my teaching at RSS the consequences of this conceptualization.

The Myth that Teachers are Self-Made

According to Britzman (1986, 2003), the myth that teachers are self-made serves contradictory functions by suggesting that at once teachers are, on the one hand, “born” and that, on the other hand, they are, through their own efforts, “made”, as well. The idea of ‘the natural teacher’ who “somehow possesses talent, intuition, and common sense” (2003, p. 230) is central to this myth. “Good” teachers are believed to inherently possess these “natural” qualities essential to effective teaching. Surviving the “baptism by fire” that accompanies pre-service teachers’ foray into teaching is key to this process. In this experience, learning to teach is viewed as a torturous affair designed to test the mettle of novice teachers. Under these conditions, a kind of social Darwinism takes root, where only strong teachers survive while weak ones don’t make it past Christmas. In this ways, the myth that teachers can “make” themselves “provides a commonsense explanation to the complicated problem of how teachers are made” (p. 230).

Thus, beginning teachers believe themselves to be solely responsible for their success or failure in the classroom, a view shared by the larger community both in and outside of schools; if
they cannot make the grade as a teacher, they are either blamed for not developing the qualities essential to “good” teaching, or they are forgiven for simply not possessing the “natural” traits with which, it is believed, all great teachers are born. In either case, teaching is reduced to a set of personal traits which one either does or does not possess. However, the problem with this view is that “in such an essentialist discourse, the historical forces and institutional structures that naturalize this particular brand of subjectivity are denied” (p. 230) and teachers are left to shoulder the responsibility for their success or failure on a deeply personal level. In this way, “the myth that teachers are self-made serves to cloak the social relationships and the context of school culture by exaggerating personal autonomy” (p. 232).

This myth also encourages the stance of anti-intellectualism through “the rejection of any concept of theory and the valorization of an essentialized self as the sole source of knowledge” (p. 230). In this view, any effort to learn and understand how to teach appears useless and unnecessary. What is the purpose of learning how to do something that one already does or already does not have? In this way, the suspicion of theory that accompanies the myth that teachers are self-made “functions to devalue any meaningful attempt to make relevant teacher education” (p. 230). What is viewed as meaningful by pre-service teachers in the process of learning to teach is the amount of teaching experience one has. Teaching experience is viewed as a guarantee of one’s strength as a teacher and a marker against which beginning teachers may measure their own progress. In this context, “instead of the effort to critique, produce, and ground theories, there is a pervasive expectation that the [experienced] individual exhales everything that makes a teacher” (p. 230). Yet, as Britzman points out, this “reliance on experience is, in actuality, a reliance upon a particular discourse of experience that works to cover its own narrative tracks by valorizing what is constructed as authentic” (p. 231). I will
return to this conceptualization of experience in my analysis chapter when I discuss my feelings of inadequacy as a critical pedagogue. Though, unlike Britzman’s pre-service teachers who viewed experience as a guide, I relied on it as a crutch by allowing myself to discount “theory” outright and revert into the hallowed memories of my past practice.

**Contributions of Jennifer Gore and Elizabeth Ellsworth**

In researching for my thesis, I was exposed early on to the work of Jennifer Gore (1993) and Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), each of whom offer a critique of critical pedagogy, though along very different lines. Reading the work of these authors allowed me to see critical pedagogy in a different light and made it possible for me to imagine a link between cultural myths and practical shortcomings of critical pedagogy that I had experienced first-hand at RSS. In exposing the hidden assumptions and contradictions inherent in certain strands of critical pedagogy literature, the work of these authors was helpful in allowing me to see the “potential dominating effects of critical pedagogy discourse” (Gore, 1993, p. 93). Not surprisingly, my re-viewing of critical pedagogy theory caused me to re-view my experiences of trying to put this theory into practice and, for the first time, I began to see a connection between the dominant discourses of critical pedagogy, my desire to practice this pedagogy, and Britzman’s cultural myths.

In this way, I use Gore (1993) and Ellsworth’s (1989) texts in my analysis to highlight conceptions of power, knowledge, and identity embedded within critical pedagogy literature and Britzman’s work as a lens through which to make sense of what these conceptualizations meant for me at the time.
Closing Thoughts

My goal in applying a theoretical lens that will address the mythical qualities of my teaching at RSS is not to get at the “truth” of the matter, or what is good and bad about critical pedagogy. As Blacker (1998) notes, “instead of espousing ‘truth,’ the primary role of the oppositional intellectual should be to combat the way it is arbitrarily mass manufactured and disseminated. This process is a precondition of, and is therefore indispensable to, the functioning of hegemonic power” (pp. 357-358). In this sense, my work is not intended to articulate the “truth” about my experience when trying to implement critical pedagogy at RSS. Foucault (1986) warned against the danger of supposing unmediated access to the “truth”:

There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naïve positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through a practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. (p. 9)

Through this research, I am attempting to explore what might be changed about my own practice and understanding of teaching through the application of critical self-reflection. In this way, my hope is to move beyond my current conceptualizations of power, knowledge, and identity by critically reflecting on the myths and desires that encouraged me to perceive critical pedagogy and my role as a critical pedagogue in uncomplicated and straightforward terms.

I found this process of reflection to be difficult, not because it was “out there” waiting to be found, but because it was within, and deeply embedded in my everyday habit and practice. As Blacker (1998) has stated, “self-overcoming must never fear to look where it is so often
hardest to: right under its very nose, at the forces and relations of its own production and renewal” (p. 365). Thus, attention must be paid to what Brown (2005) has expressed as “the interdependent relationship that exists between our subjective experiences as educators/students and the sociohistorical realities that shape our personal and professional lives” (p. 70). Reviewing teaching experience through the lens of cultural myths not only help us make sense of our previous experiences, but what we are capable of perceiving as possible in the future, as well. In this way, our lived experiences and the way we make sense and imagine realities beyond those experiences are connected to and inform one another. Lewis (1993) observes:

How we attend to and formulate ideas about the possibilities that exist for us come directly out of the lived realities of our daily lives. It is out of these realities that we draw the meanings we allow ourselves to make. And these meanings can confine as much as they can create possibilities. (p. 119)

In hindsight, I believe now that despite the “revolutionary” pedagogy I believed I was practicing at the time, oppressive cultural myths were operating around and through me in my teaching at RSS. Neither teaching experience nor exposure to critical texts guaranteed my ability to reflect critically on the ways in which inherited discourses were working through me at this time. Both as a beginning teacher and, as my analysis will show, as a critical pedagogue, I felt “summoned” by certain cultural myths about teaching, myths which, by and large, offered conflicting ideas about what it meant to a “good” teacher.

In the following chapter, I will present my reflection data. Drawing in large part on the work of Gore (1993) and Ellsworth (1989) my intention is to conduct analysis through the conceptual framework of Britzman’s (1986, 2003) texts. Each section of the following chapter is
organized around one of the three cultural myths described above and interrogates key concepts in the literature of critical pedagogy in the context of my reflections.
Chapters 5: Data Analysis

Introduction

Throughout my thesis, I draw heavily on Britzman’s (1986, 2003) notion of cultural myths to make sense of my experiences putting critical pedagogy into practice. However, it was only after I had already finished my teaching at Riverside Secondary School that I was introduced to Britzman’s *Practice Makes Practice* (2003), the work on which a great deal of my analysis is based. Prior to this, my analysis was focused primarily on understanding ‘what went wrong’ in my efforts to practically apply critical pedagogy. As a result of my interest in critical theory at the time, I believed that this question was best answered through an analysis of the larger social, economic, and political forces at work in the education system. I felt that if I could more clearly understand the larger context in which my teaching at RSS occurred, then, obviously, I would be able to more clearly understand why my efforts to practice critical pedagogy had failed and what steps I needed to take to improve my practice the next time. With my introduction to Britzman’s text, however, my focus shifted inward, and, for the first time, I began to wonder how my beliefs about teaching might be connected to the difficulty I faced trying to implement critical pedagogy. Was it possible that my beliefs and desires as a teacher were (and had always been) based on those cultural myths detailed in Britzman’s work? If this was true, then from what source did my desire to practice critical pedagogy spring? In what ways did critical pedagogy “plug into” my deeply embedded assumptions about what it meant to be a teacher and what “good” teachers “should” and “shouldn’t” do?

These questions did not appear to me immediately after reading Britzman’s work. In fact, initially, I found it difficult to critique critical pedagogy on any grounds because I believed
so strongly in its goal of creating a more socially-just and equitable world. It seemed absurd to me that critical pedagogy could in any way reinforce the status quo or support traditional lines of power and authority between students and teachers. How could a pedagogy grounded in democratic principles of equity, empowerment, and inclusion, possibly contain anything that was harmful or injurious to students? Yet, the more deeply I reflected on the roots of my beliefs about teaching and the more widely I read about the ways in which teachers are positioned as knowledge-bearers the literature of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993), the clearer it became that there was more in common than I had first thought between the uncritical teacher I was in my first two years of teaching and the “radical” teacher I believed I was at RSS. Although I felt like a completely different person and teacher after my introduction to critical pedagogy, reading and reflecting on the work of other authors allowed me to see that, in fact, for me, nothing had changed much at all.

For example, though the content of my lessons was much more critical than in years past, there was never any question that I, as the expert classroom teacher, should not be the one to introduce and direct the learning around this new curriculum. In fact, I came to regard it as my responsibility as a critical pedagogue to raise the consciousness of my students; who other than the enlightened teacher could possibly lead this process? By encouraging me to see my practice of critical pedagogy in paternalistic terms, critical pedagogy became simply another way for me to imagine myself as a saviour to my students; an approach that, ultimately, disempowered my students.

It is important to note how my desire to practice critical pedagogy and my unconscious reproduction of these cultural myths intersected in contradictory and complementary ways. On one hand, certain myths acted as barriers to my goal of teaching for and from a critical
consciousness. For example, my belief in the myth that teachers are self-made encouraged me to blame myself when I was unable to successfully translate the highly abstract language of critical pedagogy into practice. On the other hand, certain myths were complemented by the literature of critical pedagogy, a fact reflected in my belief that everything depends on the teacher was reinforced through the concept of “emancipatory authority”, a key feature of critical pedagogy theory (Ellsworth, 1989). The purpose of this chapter, then, is to analyze the relationship between my unconscious reproduction of cultural myths and my effort to implement critical pedagogy theory and, in so doing, more fully understand what it means to teach for and from a critical consciousness.

A central focus of my analysis in this chapter is on the meanings I gave to my experiences of “becoming” a critical pedagogue. This difficult process was characterized by the constant tension I felt between fulfilling my role as a critical pedagogue and feeling summoned by deeply-ingrained cultural myths (Britzman, 1986, 2003) about teaching. In many ways, I felt like I was torn between two teaching identities – my “old” identity as a beginning teacher and my “new” identity as a critical pedagogue (a feeling to which I will return in the third section of this chapter). Through my introduction to the literature on critical pedagogy, I was well aware of what my responsibilities as a critical pedagogue were. However, I was completely unaware of the degree to which my beliefs about teaching were (and had always been) informed by deeply-embedded cultural myths or how, through these myths, “particular orientations to authority, power, and knowledge are offered [and] discursive practices are made available” (Britzman, 2003, p. 223). For this reason, the only way I could see to explain the discrepancy between my expectations of what my critical classroom should look like and the reality that occurred was by either blaming myself or rejecting “theory” en masse. As explained by Britzman (2003), the
problem with this is that “when the power of individual effort becomes abstracted from the
dynamics of the social...teachers cannot effectively intervene in the complex conditions that push
them to take up the normative practices that discourage their desires for change (Britzman, 2003,
p. 223). Thus, in spite of the enlightened feelings produced in me by my exposure to critical
theory and critical pedagogy, I still lacked the conceptual tools necessary for breaking the cycle
of self-blame and anger in which I was trapped during much of my time at RSS. This is one
example of the types of meanings I gave to my experiences at RSS which this chapter seeks to
analyze.

Another area on which I will focus my attention in this chapter concerns the potentially
dominating effects of the discourse of critical pedagogy and how assumptions about power,
knowledge, and authority reflected in much of the literature on critical pedagogy intersect with
cultural myths about teaching in complex and contradictory ways. For example, critical teachers
are expected to “engage unyieldingly in their attempt to empower students both as individuals
and as potential agents of social change” (McLaren, 2003, p. 221) and to do this in a democratic
and non-authoritarian manner. However, critical teachers are also expected to lead the process of
student “empowerment” at each step in the learning process. In this way, “strategies such as
student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the
authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship in tact” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 306). This
view of education, in which the teacher, “as the agent of empowerment...is placed at the center
stage” (Gore, 1993, p. 100), functions to sustain the myth that everything does or should depend
on the teacher. In this way, despite critical pedagogy’s goal of creating “a critical democracy,
individual freedom, social justice, and social change” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300), its treatment of
issues relating to power and authority can actually contribute to reproducing cultural myths that
support the status quo. Throughout this chapter, I will explore intersections between the assumptions and the shortcomings reflected in the discourse of critical pedagogy and my own unconscious reproduction of cultural myths about teaching. In the process of writing this thesis, I have learned that critical pedagogy theory and cultural myths about teaching converge and diverge in complicated ways and, although an examination of their relationship is difficult to undertake, such analysis is necessary to the question of means to teach for and from a critical consciousness.

This chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, I will discuss my goals as a teacher at RSS and what I understood my role to be as a critical pedagogue. More specifically, I will analyze how my desire to raise the consciousness of my students and “empower” them by turning them into critical thinkers, echoed the goal I had as a beginning teacher to “save” my students. Implicit within this goal is the belief that teachers can or should be heroes or saviours to their students, an idea supported largely by the myth of “rugged individualism” explored by Britzman in Practice Makes Practice (2003). Examining my goals as a critical pedagogue in this section will provide a context for understanding my pedagogical choices as a teacher and set the context for a later discussion about how, in unconscious and subtle ways, I inadvertently reproduced at RSS the very conditions I sought to change. In the second section, I will discuss how I set about achieving this goal through my organization of the course, my choice of curriculum, and my approach to the daily activities of teaching such as planning and delivering lessons, creating assignments, and leading class discussions. This section will focus primary on analyzing how critical pedagogy and cultural myths converged and diverged around questions related to power and connected to the cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher. Throughout this section, I will analyze both my specific teaching
practices and the way that I made sense of the challenges I faced trying to implement critical pedagogy at this time. The third section of my analysis is focused on the myth of the teacher-as-expert. In this section, I will explore how cultural myths and my efforts to implement critical pedagogy converged in complex and contradictory ways around issues related to knowledge and knowledge production. In the final section of my data analysis, I will focus exclusively on the problem of identity and how critical pedagogues are “made”. In this part, I will explore how the discourse of critical pedagogy intersects with the cultural myth that teachers are self-made in ways that are problematic for the work of teachers who seek to educate for and from a critical consciousness.

**Section 1: Goals and Purposes as a Critical Pedagogue**

*Introduction*

In this section, I will discuss my goal as a critical pedagogue to raise the consciousness of my students and “empower” them by turning them into critical thinkers. I will describe how the work of Paulo Freire (1970) impacted these goals and encouraged me to understand my task as a critical pedagogue in very specific and purposeful ways. I will then analyze the reflections I audio recorded concerning my goals at RSS and identify some themes that emerged from this data. I will conclude this section with a brief comparison between my goals as a critical pedagogue and my goals as a beginning teacher.

Examining my goals as a critical pedagogue in this section will provide a basis for understanding my choices and motivations as a teacher at RSS and illuminate the unconscious and subtle ways in which teachers who wish to teach for critical consciousness may unintentionally reproduce the oppressive conditions they wish to change.
Meeting Freire

Although I had been introduced to the work of several critical theorists before I began my work at Riverside Secondary School, it was Paulo Freire’s critique of the “banking method” of education described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that had the greatest impact on the development of my goals as a critical pedagogue. According to this model of teaching, the teacher’s primary task is to “fill” the “empty” heads of students with “deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (Freire, 1970, p. 76). Students in this model are treated as “‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher; ‘the more completely she fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are’” (p. 72). In this oppressive and paternalistic approach to teaching, education simply “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72).

The assumptions, beliefs and attitudes which sustain the banking method of education is described in detail by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970):

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;

(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

(d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;

(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

(j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (p. 73)

Prior to my entrance into the Masters of Education program, I had always assumed that many of Freire’s statements about education were “obvious” and “true”. As a result, I took it for granted that the power imbalance between students and teachers was a natural and normal part of schooling. But after reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and talking with my professors at Queen’s, I began to wonder about the authenticity of these claims, where these beliefs actually came from, and whether there was anything really “natural” about them in the first place. The more I read, the more convinced I became that “education can never be neutral” (Freire, 1974, p. 132) and that it always “functions as either an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women learn to deal critically and creatively with reality to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaull, 1970, p. 34). Thus, after reading Freire’s (1970) work, it became clear to me that, despite my intentions to have a positive impact as a teacher, through my unconscious
application of the banking method of education, I had reproduced existing lines of power and privilege in the classroom and, by extension, in society at large.

In contrast to the banking approach to teaching, “a problem-posing pedagogy” is grounded on “a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). In this model, “the students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (p. 81). Freire explains: “Whereas banking education anesthetises and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (p. 81). In this model of education, the role of the teacher is clear: “Her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (p. 75). The work of other critical theorists that I was reading at this time including Giroux (1985; 1988a; 1988b), Giroux and McLaren (1986), McLaren (2003), Kincheloe (2005a; 2005b), and Simon (1992), all seemed to confirm the correctness of Freire’s ideas and solidified my belief that critical pedagogy was the answer to my question “how should I teach now, in light of the knowledge that schools can actually harm students?”

In my own words

Thus, it was on the basis of these ideas that my goals as a critical pedagogue at RSS were constructed. In contrast to the oppressive classroom I had unknowingly created as a beginning teacher, at RSS, I wanted to “construct a compelling, challenging, motivating, socially
responsible, and just classroom” (Kincheloe, 2005a, p. 2), one that would “empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (McLaren, 2003, p. 186). I wanted to turn my students into more critical, self-aware, and empathetic citizens by raising their consciousness, just as Freire had done for his *educands* and how my professors in the Masters program had done for me.\(^7\) The classroom I envisioned was one in which students felt comfortable asking questions and challenging authority – even my authority as a teacher, if they saw fit. Rather than talking *at* my students about the things that *I* thought they should learn, I wanted to talk *with* them about events and objects from *their own lives*. It would be a classroom in which students would “study the world around them, learning who they are and what has shaped them in the process” (Kincheloe, 2005b, p. 28).

At the time, I believed strongly that for this kind of transformative learning to occur, it was necessary for me to first pierce through students’ superficial readings of the world; only then, could they intervene critically in reality and transform it in a meaningful way. I felt that “critical teachers must work to expose the insidious ways that power shapes our consciousness and the knowledge we are exposed to both in and out of the classroom” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 15) and that my role as a critical pedagogue was central in this process. In order to help my students overcome “their false perception of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 86), I needed to create a space for “the emergence of consciousness” (p. 81) to occur. Throughout my voice recorded entries, I referred to the quality of this space and what would happen within it on a number of occasions. I felt that my responsibility as a critical pedagogue was to “create the conditions under which

\(^7\) It is somewhat ironic that my response to a pedagogy which failed to transform society was to reproduce the educational conditions I had just undergone.
students can begin to really, wonder, question...[and] imagine” (T4, S1). I believed that within the “spaces for wonder” (T2, S1) I had created, students could begin to “not just simply accept the world as it is, but to understand that it is a product of human decisions” (T1, S2). I believed that if I could arm my student with the same tools of critique that I learned in the Master’s program and help them to learn about and be able to see ideology at work in their everyday practices, then I would actually make a real difference in the lives of my students – the kind of difference that I had tried, but failed, to make as a beginning teacher.

Focus on social justice

Thus, one of the ways in which I came to distinguish my work as a critical pedagogue from the work I had done as a beginning teacher (and from the work I believed or observed other teachers were doing) was by placing the rationale for my pedagogical choices and daily classroom teaching in a larger social political or economic context. The desire to “make things better” had been characteristic of my earlier teaching practice; now, with my introduction to critical pedagogy, what I meant by “better” and “better” for whom were clear: I was creating a more just world for oppressed groups by teaching for social justice and raising the consciousness of my students and “introducing [them to] something other than the dominant ideology” (T4, S1). Though my goal of improving the students’ political awareness was clear in my mind, I did not always use the same terms to describe my efforts to this end. I designed a series of lessons early on in my teaching around, ironically, the concept of “myth busting”, while, at another

8 As indicated earlier, I have identified the tape from which tape my recorded data came by using the letter “T” and the side of the tape by using the letter “S”; thus, a recorded entry for which the reference (T5, S1) is given should indicate to the reader that that particular entry was recorded on the first side of the fifth tape.
point, I described dominant ideologies to my class “filters” about which I wanted my students to become aware:

It’s more important for the kids that they just become aware of the fact there are different ways of seeing the world and that we see things through these filters. I think it’s important that they understand the existence of the filters alone. Now, how they [the filters] work specifically, and the exact nature of each one is a different thing altogether; it’s more important that they understand the existence of them. They have to at least be given the opportunity to present the possibility that they, in fact, exists and then, we go from there, and from there they learn to see more things, old things and new things. (T4, S1)

My desire to create awareness of myth, ideologies, and filters by people and institutions with power was based on my belief that, at minimum, “resistance or the search for alternatives to the hegemony of capitalist Empire calls for at least the awareness, explication, and criticism of the [capitalist] ideological strategies” (Suoranta and Tomperi, 2002, p. 40), and that my students at RSS should have access to this kind of information. Creating a space for the awareness of critically important issues of social justice, ensures that “pedagogy becomes a driving mechanism of political agency, as citizens come to recognize the potential of a new social order and are thus compelled to challenge what exists” (Trend, 1995, p. 4).

One noteworthy way in which I expressed my goal of teaching for political and social justice was through the music of the Seattle-based rap-rock group *Rage Against the Machine*. I connected with the political messages in their songs and throughout my time at RSS I constantly made references to their music. One song in particular, “Take the Power Back” (appendix A)
served as a rallying point for me, and I returned to this song constantly whenever I felt the need to put what I was doing at RSS into context. I wanted my students to be able to “take the power back”; I felt that my role in regard to this goal was outlined in the following lyrics:

The present curriculum
I put my fist in 'em...
With lecture I puncture the structure of lies
Installed in our minds and attempting
To hold us back

Drawing on the work of Giroux and McLaren (1986) and Shor and Freire (1987), Ellsworth (1989) describes the kind of “radical educator” that I desired to be at the time:

The radical educator who recognizes and helps students to recognize and name injustice, who empowers students to act against their own and others’ oppressions (including oppressive school structures), who criticizes and transforms her or his own understanding in response to the understandings of students. (p. 300)

This was in sharp contrast to my practices as a beginning teacher and the unconscious ways in which my efforts supported the status quo. I felt that the kind of uncritical and politically-ignorant teacher I used to be was accurately described in another part of the same song:

The teacher stands in front of the class
But the lesson plan he can't recall...
His composure is well kept
I guess he fears playing the fool
The complacent students sit and listen to some of that Bullshit that he learned in school.

I believed that because I was now armed with critical pedagogy and a critical understanding of the world, that I would no longer create the conditions wherein students would be oppressed.

I viewed questioning as centrally important to this task and an essential part of my goal of teaching for critical consciousness. At the time, I viewed the main challenge facing me as a critical pedagogue was creating a space in which critical questioning could occur. At an early point in my teaching, I wondered “how do I create the conditions under which – or create a space within which – my students can begin to look at something and wonder and question ‘why?’” (T1, S2). However, throughout my time at RSS, I was not specific in regard to what my students should be asking questions about or how a “critical” question differed from a “non-critical” question. The general nature of my desire for students to question, was reflected at an early point in my reflections when I stated that “I think it’s important that they leave here with an ethic of questioning” (T1, S2); I felt that I was responsible for “giving them a framework for being able to discuss, and think about, and question any issue” (T3, S2). Even when I felt students successfully demonstrated this goal, I was still vague on the details, as clear in another, later entry:

A very good class today – good, in the sense that there was a lot of thinking, a lot of questions were raised. Certainly, questions that did not have easy answers, but I think that was part of the thing that made them good questions. (T4, S1)
In fact, it was not until near the end of my teaching and in the midst of a conversation about my own learning, that I became more specific about what the purpose of “critical” questioning might be:

I think that it is important to note that I am going through the motions of questioning or identifying the ideological roots behind everyday practices and beliefs...this is an ongoing process, it never ends. The best I can do is to foster this in my students and help them along the way. (T4, S2)

In the final part of this chapter, I will analyze in greater detail the unintended consequences of encouraging my students to simply “question” in the absence of any specific purpose or context. Furthermore, as my discussion in the next section will illustrate, my effort to create the conditions under which students could begin to “take the power back” was inherently flawed as a result of both the contradictions within the discourse of critical pedagogy and as a result of my unconscious reproduction of cultural myths about teachers.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this section was to provide an overview of my goals as a critical pedagogue, how certain authors contributed to the formation of these goals, and how I talked about and imagined by goals as a critical pedagogue at RSS. In the section that follows, I will discuss the methods through which I went about trying to achieve my goal of raising the students’ consciousness and turning them into critical thinkers through the organization of the course, the choice of content, and my daily classroom practices.
Section 2: Critical Pedagogy and the Myth that Everything Depends on the Teacher

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to describe how I pursued my goal of teaching for and from a critical consciousness through my organization of the course I taught at Riverside Secondary School, my choice of curriculum, and my approach to the daily activities of teaching such as planning and delivering lessons, creating assignments, managing student behaviour, and leading class discussions. In this section, I will analyze how critical pedagogy and the cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher intersected and diverged in complex and contradictory ways and the impact of these intersections and divergences on my goal as a critical pedagogue. Specifically, I will address how conceptions of power in the concept of “emancipatory authority” contributed to the challenges I encountered trying to implement critical pedagogy at RSS by “plugging into” my belief that everything in the classroom depends on the teacher.

Setting the stage

One of the first responsibilities I had at RSS was planning the course and choosing the curriculum to be studied. Because the course I was teaching was classified as an interdisciplinary course, I was granted more leeway than what was normally afforded to teachers when it came to decisions concerning the organization and choice of curriculum for the course. From my previous experience as a social sciences teacher, I knew that teaching about controversial issues was an effective way of developing critical thinking skills in students. For this reason, I initially considered organizing the course around a series of controversial issues of my choosing. However, from the critical pedagogy literature, I had learned that if I wanted to raise the consciousness of my students, the starting point on the path toward consciousness rested
within the students themselves and not in my teacher knowledge. As Freire (1970) explains: “The point of departure must always be with the men and women in the ‘here and now,’ which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene” (p. 85). For this reason, I agreed with Giroux (1999b) that "teachers should construct curricula that draw upon the cultural resources that students bring with them to the school” (para. 1). If I could create a critical dialogue around things that mattered to my students, I believed that I could avoid reproducing the banking method of education which I was strongly against and begin to engage in practicing critical pedagogy. Yet, I also knew from my experience as a beginning teacher that “unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning” (Britzman, 2003, p. 224). Thus, I believed that if I didn’t create a plan and create some sense of control at the beginning of the academic year, then students would quickly lose interest in the course, assume that I was a “pushover” and begin to test the limits of my patience. No learning, however critical, would occur in this kind of classroom. Thus, I eventually gave into my fears about a lack of control and decided that I should prepare something to do with students on the first day of class, even if it meant feeling that my first act as a critical pedagogue involved violating the very tenets I sought to follow.

Though I viewed my decision to control the direction and focus of the students’ learning as a temporary measure, I had no idea at the time that I would eventually assume ownership for practically every pedagogical choice possible in the course. In the following section, I will provide examples of the directivity I exercised in regard to these decisions, including choices relating to the planning and delivery of lessons, my organization of the course, the assignments I gave to the students, and my approach to classroom management. I will also explore how power is conceived of in the literature on critical pedagogy by examining the concept of “emancipatory
authority” and how this concept supported my unconscious reproduction of the cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher. In light of my previously discussed goal as a critical pedagogue, the degree and type of directivity I exercised at RSS may be seen as attempt on my part to “save” my students by laying a path toward a raised consciousness. My analysis of my reflections in this section supports this view and will be discussed in detail throughout.

The first day of school

If I had to go against the dictates of critical pedagogy and direct the learning for the students, I felt that I should probably focus the lesson on a “critical” topic. My recent exposure in the Master of Education program to critical theory seemed like an excellent place to start in terms of developing an idea for a lesson. I wanted to get students to begin to think how their everyday actions are connected to the larger social, economic, and political forces at work in society and how unaware they were of their own position as passive consumers of goods. It was with this aim in mind that I designed a lesson for the first day of class in which students would play a game based on the idea of cultural currency. The purpose of the lesson was to help students become aware of the degree to which corporations had influenced their thinking and turned them into simple consumers of goods and services. I drew liberally from a variety of sources, including critical theory, teaching resources on media literacy that I had used in the past, and the work of Hal Nedviesky (2000), an author I was reading at the time. I began the game by telling students that they were going to earn some currency, but a particular type of currency, cultural currency, for every right answer they got in regard to identifying some pictures. I then held up pictures of various corporate symbols (e.g., the Nike ‘swoosh’, the Apple computer logo, etc.) and asked students to identify the company with which the logo was associated. Students were instructed to draw upon their background knowledge and to shout out the right answer once
they thought of it. The more answers a person got right, the more cultural “currency” they earned.

Initially, students viewed their high scores as evidence of a job well done and wanted to earn more currency the longer that we played. Many were surprised when, at the end of the game, I revealed that the amount of one’s currency was relative to the degree of their enculturation, (i.e. the more currency you had, the more enculturated you were). I ended the lesson by leading a class discussion around what it meant for students to be able to recognize these symbols so quickly and the dangers of being uncritical consumers of mass media. Though some students clearly enjoyed the game, not all were as enthusiastic about playing. In a diary entry a few days later, I recalled my impressions of the activity:

I remember the first day that I went in there, I had a really great lesson plan with this game set up and it was exciting, it was fun. It was all about pop culture and media – the stuff that I was looking at. I was focusing primarily on Hal Nedviesky’s work, but also was bringing in some of my own ideas and knowledge about the idea of cultural currency. Some of the kids took to it, but I had a couple of kids [didn’t] – one in particular AJ, who, just did not want to do any work – he still doesn’t want to do any goddamn work, but y’know, what can I do? (T1, S1)

Despite the game and our class discussion about the issue of media consumption, what it was, and why it mattered, I was disappointed that some students failed to see any value in why we were even looking at these topics in the first place. After students offered more resistance following a second day of focusing on the same topic, two things became clear to me: I needed some sort of framework for organizing the course; and, ideas for the content of the curriculum
needed to come from the students themselves. I saw an opportunity to resolve this dilemma by returning to my original idea of organizing the course through controversial issues, but instead of choosing the topics for the students, I would ask them for input in these decisions. In this way, I could provide some sort of structure for the learning in the class and still draw upon the students’ voices to determine the direction of the course.

I began the third day of class by distributing the *Controversial Issues through Film and Media* (appendix B) questionnaire to the class and delivered a short speech to the class informing them of the new direction for the course. I told them that “we were going to do a radically different course and that it was going to be looking at controversial issues through film and media.” (T1, S1). However, soon after I collected the questionnaires and began to categorize their choices, I quickly realized that, logistically, I couldn’t possibly accommodate all of their choices. Many students had circled anywhere from five to ten topics and many more had added new topics of their own. Typically, there are five to seven units of study in a social sciences course; if, as I had imagined, we would cover one topic per unit, then I felt I had to make some choices with regard to what units we would study.

Though I believed it would have been preferable for each student to study topics of their own choosing, in my opinion, many students in this class did not at that time possess the skills required to be successful at this type of self-directed learning. As a result, I felt compelled to decide for the class what the topic would be for the first unit of study. Once again, I found myself violating the principles of critical pedagogy that I so desperately wanted to put into practice. Though my understanding of critical pedagogy led me to believe that making these kinds of decisions for my students was to engage in the banking method of education, I felt that I simply had no choice in the matter; someone had to make these decisions if we were going to do
anything at all in the class. As the classroom teacher, I felt that this was ultimately my responsibility; certainly, students couldn’t be expected to plan lessons and assignments!

Furthermore, if the goal of the course was to raise the students’ consciousness, I felt that I was the most qualified to do this, as a result of both my education and my recent experiences in the Master’s program. I felt that my introduction to critical theory and critical pedagogy started my process of conscientization and that I knew what it felt like to have your core beliefs challenged. Therefore, I was, I believe, in the best position to lead my students through this process.

It was through this line of reasoning that I effectively ignored my students’ choices on the questionnaires and planned the organization and the curriculum for the course by myself. I always tried to consider the interests of the students, but, in hindsight it is clear that, ultimately, what we studied was what I thought was important and how we studied it was always the product of decisions I had made. Before I begin an analysis of specific lessons, assignments, and my approach to managing student behaviour, I will begin with a brief introduction to the concept of emancipatory authority. I will return to this concept again at the end of this section and discuss its connection to the cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher.

Emancipatory authority: An overview

I did not realize at the time that the dilemma I faced concerning the degree and type of directivity I should exercise in my critical pedagogy was connected to larger questions related to the power of teachers in a critical classroom and how this power should be used. Several theorists have commented on the experience of teachers who desire to create a democratic learning environment. Antonia Darder (2002) notes that “often progressive teachers voice tremendous angst over the quantity and quality of direction they provide to their students...This
seems to be strongly influenced by fear of being authoritarian on one hand and being excessively permissive and unfocused on the other” (p. 111). This was precisely my concern at RSS where I struggled to shed my institutional and historically established authority as the “Teacher” in charge.

In the literature of critical pedagogy, however, a distinction is made between authoritarianism and being an authority in the class. As explained by Darder (2002):

Authority refers to the power teachers possess to influence (direct) learning, thought, and behaviour through their responsibility to educate students; authoritarianism is linked to the expectation that students should and will blindly accept and submit to the concentration of power in the hands of the teacher as the exclusive knowing subject. (p. 113)

The purpose toward which the kind of authority critical pedagogues should use and the purposes toward which this authority is directed is explained by Jennifer Gore (1993):

In the discourse of critical pedagogy two basic ‘types’ of authority are recognized: a ‘good’ or ‘empowering’ type of authority and a ‘bad’ or repressive type...The critical pedagogue/teacher is to make use of this authority in order to empower students and transform society. (p. 94)

In this way, critical pedagogues are distinguished from “regular” teachers by how they use their power to empower others. In this way, the authority used by the teacher “emancipates” the students from old ways of thinking and supports the larger goal of self and social empowerment through raised consciousness. The litmus test for me at RSS was to always ask
myself whether I was controlling the learning in the service of liberating my students or whether I was controlling them to instil knowledge that I felt was important. Though at times I wondered about the logic of the means justifying the ends (a point to which I will return in the conclusion), I rarely failed to convince myself that everything in the class was done in the interests of raising the consciousness of my students, including directing their learning from beginning to end.

Who’s in charge here, anyway?

I followed a relatively familiar pattern in terms of my lesson planning and delivery. I would plan my lessons in isolation at home and would choose the critical topic to be studied in the next period. My lessons had a clear beginning, middle, and end, and, while I tried to keep in mind assignments that the students could do at the end of the period of learning, because there were no previous assignments associated with this course, I could not prepare students for a specific task. In the absence of any specific direction, every lesson had the same far-reaching goal, namely, to make my students more critical thinkers.

As explained above, I tried to base my decisions for the course on the students’ responses to the questionnaire. But, in addition to being nearly impossible to take into account all of the choices made by students, I found that I often “disagreed” with their responses and felt that they didn’t want to learn about the things that they should learn about. The presumptuousness of this position is clear to me now and I see how my behaviour was dangerously ideological. Yet I believed my intentions to be pure and I genuinely desired to improve the lives of students and the world at large; there was no way that I would use my power to promote hate or violence. And while I believe it is true that I did not advocate for violence or prejudice, I failed to comprehend how my representation of complex issues in simplistic and isolated terms could contribute to the
reproduction of oppressive conditions by ignoring the complex ways in which individuals are positioned within and around these issues. My time in the Masters program had opened my eyes to the social, political, economic, and institutional forces that inform and reproduce complex issues like racism or sexism. Yet, despite my awareness of these forces, I found myself teaching in ways that encouraged students to view racism and sexism as “bad” things done by “bad” people and that the only logical and morally justified position was to speak out against them. In this way, my teaching was, in fact, less about creating the conditions where students could experience a shift in their consciousness and more about instilling the “right” lessons in them.

A clear example of this may be seen in how I approached the unit on homophobia. Most students did not identify this on the questionnaire as something that they wanted to learn more about, a fact that I interpreted as evidence that they needed to learn about it and why, obviously, homophobia was wrong. My approach to lesson delivery (and all my lessons were delivered to students) was essentially the same: I would bring in a resource connected to homophobia, students would do an activity connected to the resource (e.g., answer questions, write a response, etc.), and, at the end of the period, I would lead a class discussion about what we learned.

At an early point in this unit, I reflect on the success that I felt I was having in class:

So, a really good class today. We’re still dealing with the issues of homophobia. It’s funny, y’know? Because I leave some of the classes and I think ‘this is a good thing’, y’know? I can actually see them learning something stuff; by that I mean thinking about things they didn’t think before. (T2, S1)
Though not stated explicitly, I believe that when I stated my students were “thinking about things they didn’t think before” what I was actually saying was that they were thinking like I wanted them to think and questioning the taken-for-granted myths and assumptions about homophobia.

Anyway, we’re basically talking about myth-busting today...we explored some of the myths about homophobia...again, it’s not so much about proving this or that to them; it’s more about creating opportunities for them to think in the future. So that, what is made possible is the ‘thinking about’, the ‘wondering about’ the ‘asking of questions’ – like, these [ways of thinking] are possible, where once maybe they weren’t. (T2, S1)

I would hand out myths about students in regard to the activities of “anti-gay” religious groups and “straight camps” in the United States, I showed the film “The Laramie Project” (2002) about the murder of Mathew Shepard, an openly gay man in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998, and I led discussions that made the point that the actions of people who hate others based upon their sexual orientation is wrong. This was, in my mind at the time, the essence of critical pedagogy – getting people to open their minds. That I should be at the centre of this process was never up for question; neither was my complete lack of experience with homophobia or what, exactly, made me an authority in these matters (a problem discussed in section 3 of this chapter). In fact the only way that students could participate in this unit was by completing the daily assignments and participating in class discussion that I lead.

When I reflect on how I approached and taught this unit of study, I am extremely disappointed. Not only did I presume the worst about every student in my class (i.e., I worked from the assumption that they obviously harboured prejudice against the LGBTQ community as a whole), but at no point did I consider how my lessons or my implied expertise in this area
affected students who, themselves, may have identified as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, or queer. Never, at any point were members of any one of these groups ever considered present in the classroom or portrayed as anything other than a victim – a person to be saved. By recruiting my students to speak out against this kind of behaviour, I fear that I was reproducing future generations of “saviours”.

*Positioning power*

Though I did not realize it at the time, at the heart of this approach to teaching is a specific conception of power as property to be traded, withheld, and given from one person to another. As Gore (1993) notes:

Critical pedagogy discourse often conceives of power as property...power as property can be seen as part of the notion of ‘empowerment’ itself, inasmuch as to em-power suggests to give power, to confer power, to enable the use of power. Power is transferred much as property is. (pp. 94-95)

The problem is that this conception of power positions the teacher as an omnipotent force in the classroom and sustains the inherently paternalistic relationship between students and teachers. Power remains in the hands of the teacher until such time that they can and are willing to share it with the students. In this way, it can be seen how critical pedagogy and the myth that everything depends on the teacher converge in complementary ways to ensure that the power is structured in such a way that imbalances between teachers and students remain unchallenged unless the teachers approves. This simplistic view of knowledge does not consider the complex and hegemonic ways in which people are positioned within and around relations of power or how teachers are privileged in problematic ways as a result.
Looking back, I can see how critical pedagogy “plugged into” the cultural myths about teaching that I brought with me to RSS. In this paternalistic relationship, “the teacher is constructed as the primary agent in the process of empowering students, and must use his or her authority to that end” (Gore, 1993, p. 97). As explained by Giroux (1998a), “the concept of emancipatory authority suggests that teachers are bearers of critical knowledge, rules, and values through which they consciously articulate and problematize their relationship to each other, to students, to subject matter, and to the wider community” (p. 90). The danger, however, rests in the degree of authority critical pedagogues are prepared to use to achieve this goal and who may be affected as a result. Gore (1993) notes the consequences of this approach:

The notion of emancipatory authority can be seen to function in the interest of the teacher who is able to exercise a great deal of power in deciding who should ‘have a voice,’ which voices are in the interest of democracy, and so on. (p. 100)

In this way, as Gore (1993) notes, “as the agent of empowerment who uses emancipatory authority, the teacher...is placed at centre stage in the discourse of critical pedagogy” (p. 100).

The belief that I needed to direct my students’ learning was reflected in a number of my recorded reflections, often in causal and taken-for-granted terms:

Just the importance of introducing something other than the dominant ideology. My role’s not to bring them to a point, but rather to begin the walk, to begin the journey, and to do it in such a way that they can walk on their own, that they have a desire to walk on their own, that they think it’s possible to walk on their own, and [that] they have the courage and are comfortable with the uncertainty that comes with making a path as you walk. (T4, S1)
Another clear example of the type of leadership for which I felt responsible as a critical pedagogue was reflected in a question that I asked aloud after seeing a jeep Pathfinder during my drive home from school: “If they [the car company] really wanted to be clear, they should’ve called it a ‘Path-maker’....[pause], Am I a ‘path-maker?’ Am I making paths in my class?” (T2, S2). Thus, when “we” did activities in class and when “we” had discussions about issues, the role of students in my class was remarkably different from my role:

Today was a good day. We were talking some more about paradigms and the notion of a paradigm, and why I feel that this is important to teach, and why it might be important for these students to become aware of their paradigms in a class like this and the importance of introducing complexity. (T4, S1)

Entries such as these seem to confirm the “fundamental assertion, in critical pedagogy, that leadership is necessary in the process of liberation. This leadership comes from the direction provided by the theorist and from the agency and authority of the teacher” (Gore, 1993, p. 98). But how, then, are students positioned in this process any differently than in the banking model of education against which critical pedagogy is contrasted? In the approach I took to implementing critical pedagogy, students in my class were required to be passive recipients of my knowledge. In this way, while my message was revolutionary, my approach to conveying this message was dreadfully traditional.

When I reflect on how I talked about certain students who embraced the critical content I was sharing, it is clear that what I desired was to have students, like Travis, who fulfilled my idea of what a student in a critical classroom should look and sound like:
Travis is really is kind of interesting because he seems to (pause), yeah, I think I’ve baited him, y’know what I mean? I think I’ve really got him opened to the idea that something more exists. Y’know I think he’s really open to that idea that, um, there might be more there that, um – I guess I’ve opened his mind, I guess, I was I’m trying to say. I say things in class...and I can see Travis looking at me, nodding his head, squinting his eyes, and kind of saying to himself ‘yeah, yeah’. He’s kind of getting it, y’know? (T3, S2)

As Travis was leaving the library today, he said something like ‘Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Ghandi – they were all renegades’ – and I knew that he was referring to the song “Renegades of Funk” by Rage Against the Machine. And I said ‘yes! Yes, indeed – I heard you singing “Testify” in class the other day’...I really feel like Travis is enjoying the course; I feel like I’ve connected well with him. It gets me excited – I think it’s cool. (T3, S2)

In hindsight, I think that what I valued in Travis more than anything else was his willingness to let me control the process of his emancipation. He was an example of what critical pedagogy can look like when everyone “plays their part”. When I compare my reflections on Travis’ comments in class to my responses to the resistance offered by other students, it is clear that I was more ready to share power with those who were prepared to be passive recipients of my knowledge.

*Take the power back*

The ways in which I understood my role as the classroom teacher to direct my students learning and toward a critical consciousness was also reflected in the references I made to the
song “Take the Power Back” by *Rage Against the Machine* (appendix A). I made mention of this song several times on the tapes and believed that the lyrics echoed my efforts as a critical pedagogue at RSS. I saw my decision to introduce and discuss controversial issues as the “fist” puncturing “the present curriculum” and “the structure of lies”.

Within the song was a description of the kind of teacher I used to be and needed to avoid becoming again at all costs; it was against this very image that I imagined my role at RSS:

The teacher stands in front of the class,
But the lesson plan he can't recall.
The student's eyes don't perceive the lies
Bouncing off every fucking wall.
His composure is well kept;
I guess he fears playing the fool.
The complacent students sit and listen to some of that
Bullshit that he learned in school.

I imagined that the “bullshit” I used to share with my classes were those things I had learned in my undergraduate classes; it did not occur to me at the time that this “bullshit” could have been extended to include what I had learned in graduate school, as well. Thus, despite my strong desire for my students to “take the power back”, I did not realize the irony contained within such a desire: I wanted my students to empower themselves, but to do so from the position of a passive recipient in the context of an unequal and paternalistic relationship.

The belief that I should be in control in the process of emancipation manifest itself in every facet of my teaching at RSS. It was a belief deeply anchored in cultural myths about
teaching and reaffirmed in the concept of emancipatory authority. This convergence of theory and “instinct” allowed me to continue to act as a saviour to my students and remain ignorant of the dependent and paternalistic aspects to which this type of relationship gives berth.

I felt that students in my class who resisted my efforts as critical pedagogue “forced” me to behave in ways that were authoritarian. In no other area was this clearer than in my approach to classroom management and my interactions with one particularly challenging student. In the following section, I will discuss how my approach to managing classroom behaviour was based on a similar set of assumptions about my role as the classroom teacher, namely, that the empowerment of students depended upon me and was ultimately my responsibility.

Classroom management

Although there were a few students in the class who were clearly uninterested in the material being studied and disengaged from class activities and discussion, when it came to classroom management and discipline almost all of my effort was focused on one student: Jarrod. From early on in the semester, it was clear that Jarrod was the type of student who was not afraid to challenge me directly:

On the first day, I gave them the spiel about how ‘this is an open class, and I’m open and flexible, and if you feel like we aren’t doing anything that is worth your while, put up your hand and tell me because maybe we’re not [doing something useful] and I wanna hear your views on it’ – all that sort of stuff. Well, Jarrod took advantage of that the next day and put up his hand and said something like ‘y’know honestly, I think everything we’re doing is pointless’, ‘all of this is pointless’, ‘I know this stuff already’ – stuff like that. (T1, S1)
However, at this early point in the semester, I was undaunted. I had taught students like Jarrod before; we always got along eventually – it just took a bit longer to get to that point. Jarrod seemed no different than any other student I had taught in this regard, and I imagined that he would ultimately learn to like and trust me once he saw that I cared and was actually trying to help him by sharing a critical, challenging curriculum.

I was disappointed then, when the relationship between Jarrod and me got progressively worse as the course continued. I chronicled the deterioration of our relationship on several occasions. Early on, I was intrigued by Jarrod’s behaviour and questioned why he was challenging my directivity when my goal to empower him by raising his consciousness. I considered the possibility that I had become used to my life as a student in the Master’s program and had forgotten just how challenging it was to work with some students:

Again, Jarrod, with going to sleep during the movie and saying “I’m listening” and once I say that’s not good enough [and that he has to actually watch it], he pulls this big hissy-fit. He’s really testing me – there are individuals in the room that are really testing me, they’re really testing me. Patience is something that I may have learned to forget in the [Masters] program, where everyone is so understanding and cordial, and will listen. It is not so in the high school classroom where they come with so much different history. (T1, S2)

I did not elaborate on why I felt students in a graduate program did not have different histories, but it was enough of a reason at the time to explain why Jarrod was acting out in class. Even when Jarrod’s behaviour in class got progressively more challenging, I still wanted to engage
him, to the point where I felt guilty about not caring whether or not he was enrolled in the course:

Jarrod’s probably going to drop the course and, y’know, part of me just wants to say ‘good riddens’, but that’s not what ‘good’ [made verbal air-quote-sound] teachers do, or say, or think, or feel – the believe that it’s possible all the way to the end and I do hold on to that as well. I wish he would stay, but only if that meant working and trying and caring, y’know? If he doesn’t want to care about anything, then it’s hard for me to want to want him there. (T1, S1)

Jarrod did not, however, drop the course and things between us continued to get worse. Over time, I became increasingly intolerant of Jarrod’s lack of interest in the curriculum and frustrated by the power he had to influence a few individuals in the class. Eventually, I decided that the class would function more smoothly without him in it, a feeling reflected clearly in the following entries:

Jarrod’s up to his old ways again. It’s amazing y’know how he is in class. I dunno. I just want to kick him out. I wanna kick him out, like, everyday. He just starts in with his bullshit. Talking his bullshit speech. He’s going to get eaten alive in the real world. (T1, S1)

My depth of my frustration with Jarrod erupted in a passionate recorded entry just one day later: “I want Jarrod out of my fucking class. I just want him out. I’m sick of his bullshit” (T2, S1).

Eventually, I was successful in my bid to have Jarrod removed from class. The vice principal worked out an arrangement with him that he would come to my class at the beginning
of the week to pick up work to complete and the end of the week to drop it off. Even though I got what I wanted and Jarrod was no longer in my class, I felt like it was a failure on my part to not connect with a student. Now, he was doing essentially make-work projects which were, by and large, a waste of time, and, as I saw it, he was not benefitting from the conversations we were having in class. Even at the end of the course, I still could not understand why Jarrod had resisted my efforts with such vigour.

*The more things change…*

When I consider the ways in which Jarrod was positioned as a result of my approach to classroom management, it is clear to me that his resistance may have had less to do with any critical message I was attempting to convey and more with the manner in which I conveyed it. At the time, I was unconsciously clinging to the myth that everything depends on the teacher and, because this myth “constructs learning as synonymous with control” (Britzman, 2003, p. 224), I was viewing Jarrod’s behaviour not as an invitation to reflect on my own pedagogy, but as an act against the education I was trying to provide.

Reflecting on the concept of emancipatory authority, I should not be surprised at this at all. I was still in control (i.e., the paternalistic nature of the teacher-student relationship was still intact) and Jarrod really had no voice, other than to object. Though my goal was a democratic and transparent classroom, nothing in my daily pedagogy seemed to support this approach! It was more a case of the means justifying the ends, wherein I would control the learning and the behaviour of students, they could only comply, and then, voila!, they would be saved, and I, of course, would be their saviour. Of course, students may occupy only one of two positions under
these conditions: a passive, complacent student (such as Travis) or a resistant, non-compliant student (such as Jarrod).

In this light, when I consider my “invitation” to students at the beginning of the year to question my teaching or the curriculum at any point, I think that what I was really doing was creating the appearance of a democratic and transparent classroom, but doing so while maintaining an inflexible power structure. There was never really any question that I was going to be in control of the class – everything depended on me as the teacher – even the work of making it appear as it this were not the case. In a pedagogical model that implicitly or explicitly privileges control, anything that functions to disrupt the plan of the teaching is something to be feared and managed. I could not control Jarrod and his behaviour was a direct threat to my goal as a teacher even if I considered myself to be a critical pedagogue.

Although, at times, I was very frustrated by Jarrod’s behaviour, what I think I found the most offensive was that he didn’t seem to provide any logical reason for hating me or the material so much. As I saw it at this time, if Jarrod wasn’t listening, Jarrod wasn’t learning what I felt was important for him to learn. Without realizing it, in my effort to gain control of the class, I played out many aspects of the myth that everything depends on the teacher and violated the very essence of critical pedagogy by excluding and marginalizing a student who I saw as challenging me at the time.

In light of the poor approach I took to managing Jarrod’s behaviour in the name of practicing critical pedagogy, I am left wondering in what ways it differs from those pedagogies that unapologetically demand control of student learning. While the concept of emancipatory authority distinguished between authority for learning and authoritarianism, it did not change the
fact that I was left with the feeling that I was betraying my democratic aims by silencing Jarrod. Ira Shor (Shor and Freire, 1987) admits to a practice that was somewhat similar to what I experienced with Jarrod. The author writes:

> All my reasoning and ingenuity and good intentions are not always enough, and I have to regularly ask students to leave the course. I can’t let them wreck my work or the learning possible with other students, so I tell them to drop the course if they don’t change or else give them work outside the classroom. The other students are often relieved that I asserted my authority to expel such a disruptive person from the room. I do this because it has to be done. (p. 94)

I agree with Gore (1993) that stories like these do little to distinguish critical pedagogy from other progressive pedagogies. My experiences at RSS seem to suggest that the struggles and desires that critical pedagogues face in regards to classroom discipline are informed in complex ways by the cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher by forcing them to choose between and ultimately assume responsibility for denying the freedom available to non-compliant students or losing control of the class altogether. In hindsight, it would have been interesting to consider what I could have asked Jarrod that would have made him responsible to himself to answer the questions I was asking. That is not to say that there are not occasions when teachers are faced with students whose intent it is to disrupt at all costs. But, when I consider what options existed for me at the time, I wonder what I could have done to create the conditions for Jarrod to face himself, not me as the teacher, but himself as himself.⁹

⁹ Magda Lewis, personal correspondence.
Resisting the saviour

In hindsight, I think in many ways, my frustration with Jarrod came from his resistance to my efforts to save him. Evidence of this may be seen in my reaction to his claims that I wasn’t telling him anything he didn’t already know early in the semester:

I know there’s no way he knows this stuff because I had stuff on there [the board] from Paulo Freire, and I just can’t imagine him having experience with this stuff before, I don’t know, maybe he does, but I doubt it. At any rate, so he says all this stuff – ‘there’s no point to this’. (T1, S1)

Yet I had only recently been exposed to the work of these authors myself and found it difficult to believe that Jarrod was familiar the work of Adorno, Marcuse, or Eagleton. While it is certainly possible that Jarrod had, in fact, read critical theory literature, it is more likely that his statements may be read in a more complex light. Perhaps Jarrod was already aware that culture was a sham and that consumerism was working on him. Perhaps his life experiences already confirmed that things are not always what they seem, including the intentions of teachers who control students in the name of their own well-being and “liberation”.

What is perhaps more interesting than the degree to which his statements were true was my reaction to them. In rejecting the curriculum, Jarrod was, in essence, rejecting the defining feature of my critical pedagogy, i.e. the critical message! This was the primary means through which I was going to “save” my students and what distinguished me from other teachers and my own sense of myself as a beginning teacher. Is it possible that I was so upset with Jarrod because he did not agree to be saved by me? Was I reacting to Jarrod’s rejection of the role my pedagogy cast for him, namely, that of the thankful, willing, and enlightened student?
The fact is that I never wanted to be this kind of teacher when it came to classroom management; I wanted to be the kind of teacher I had been – friendly, outgoing and by no means authoritarian. As a critical pedagogue, I desired to create a democratic space in which students could openly and comfortably challenge my position as a teacher. However, looking back, I think that the kind of interaction I imagined happening was either outside of the real and lived power dynamics of which both the students and I were a part.

_Closing thoughts_

Critical pedagogy’s call to reconstruct schools as democratic sites is particularly appealing to teachers who genuinely wish to create social change through education. However, the practice of critical pedagogy continues to leave problematic power discourses intact and ignore the complex histories of teachers and students. In this context, mythologized aspects of teaching continue to exist and teachers continue to desire to “save” their students but by raising their consciousness instead of raising test scores. The result is that in both the transmission and transformation models of education, the power imbalance between students continues to exist and thus subverts the goals of the would-be critical pedagogue.

When I look back on my time at RSS, I see how the roots of many of my pedagogical decision at the time were based on certain assumptions about power in the classroom, who should have it, and to what end it should be used. The way I set up my class (I was at the front, with all eyes on me), the way I structured lessons (almost always in a dialogue format), the way dialogue was structured (I was the source of all questions and answers and all students’ responses would pass through at one point or another) – all of these things made it clear that,
despite my statements to the contrary, I had the power to authorize discourse (Britzman, 2003) and was at the centre of power in the room.

At the time, I believed that it was an acceptable arrangement so long as I used my power as the teacher to try and “emancipate” my students by raising their consciousness. Yet embedded within this belief were assumptions about my role as the teacher as the obvious leader of students. It is interesting that, despite the very similar nature of my goals as a critical pedagogue and the goals I had as a beginning teacher, I viewed my work at RSS as unique and radically different from anything I’d done before. The sense of difference I felt from my two teaching identities can be seen in my reflections on a metaphor I used to describe my efforts as a teacher: “I used to think about the role of the teacher and I would speak of the seed and the flower; now I find myself talking about taking care of the soil – the soil as the equivalent of creating the conditions” (T3, S2). What I failed to comprehend, however, was that in both examples, I was the metaphorical gardener, charged with the care of the plants! Everything, still, depended on me as the teacher.

My exposure to the work of critical pedagogy theorists further contributed to the distinction I felt existed between my work as a beginning teacher and my work as a critical pedagogue. Where, as a “regular” teacher, I had unknowingly been part of “the system” that worked to oppress students, as a critical pedagogue, I had the “truth” at my disposal and could now effectively empower my students by showing them how people are oppressed in society. Implicit in this view was the belief I felt that, unlike before, I was fully aware of the consequences of my actions as a teacher and could truly act in ways that were consistent with my beliefs. As the data presented in this chapter has shown, however, this was not always the case.
Critical pedagogy, then, for me, became simply a means through which I could finally, really make a difference in the lives of my students, unlike my earlier work as a teacher, when I had, in fact, made things worse. I was so convinced of the political correctness of my own worldview at the time and so enamoured by critical pedagogy’s promise to ensure “a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300), that I saw nothing problematic about my assumption that I was outside of the oppressive practices and institutions in which I worked and lived. In my mind at the time, my exposure to critical pedagogy ensured my emancipation from oppressive ways of thinking and acting, an experience I could replicate for my students now that I had access to the “right” information. The irony of arguments premised on an “authentic” reading of “reality” is noted by Hall (1985): “The notion that our heads are full of false ideas which can, however, be totally dispersed when we throw ourselves open to ‘the real’ as a moment of absolute authentication, is probably that most ideological conception of all” (p. 105).

However, in my thinking at the time, the means justified the ends, if only because the ends – a more critical, just, and empowered citizenry – were so important. As Ellsworth (1989) explains, “the contortions of logic and rhetoric that characterize these attempts to define ‘empowerment’ testify to the failure of critical educators to come to terms with the essentially paternalistic project of traditional education” (p. 307). Thus, while critical pedagogy employs the concept of empowerment as a means for sharing, giving, and redistributing power to students, “the critical pedagogue is one who enforces the rules of reason in the classrooms” (p. 304) and their superiority as a “fully conscious” person is implied or expressly stated. Understood in this way, “‘empowerment’ is a key component in this approach, which treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched” (p. 306).
It is worth noting that it was not only those deeply embedded cultural myths about teaching that acted as barriers to me being able to unproblematically implement critical pedagogy theory. There were a number of institutional factors that also prevented me from simply “giving” power to my students as I would have liked to do. I was expected to fulfill my daily responsibilities as a teacher including preparing and delivering lesson, assigning readings, preparing students for tests and exams, and generally direct the learning of the class. Thus, the requirements of my job prevented me from acting as if the power dynamic between my students and I did not exist; as a result, when I followed “the rules”, I felt like I was “selling out” as a critical pedagogue. I expressed this feeling early on in one particularly difficult entry:

It’s hard because I hear myself talk, like there are things I want to do, but I know I need to dig deeper within myself, as well, but there’s just so much that needs to be done – each one seems possible, but all together, they’re overwhelming...how do I approach this when only half of my class is showing up. It seems more like I have to settle every day; I feel like I settle a little bit more each day, just bit by bit. (T1, S2)

I was expected to do these things as a teacher and would have faced consequences had I ignored or not fulfilled these requirements of my job.

Yet, even in those moments when I appear to be aware of the contradiction between my beliefs about how critical pedagogy should look in my classroom and what I was actually doing in mine, I still appeared to cling to the assumptions contained in the myth that everything depends on the teacher. In one reflection, I lamented the fact that I was still at the centre of the class discussion after a month of doing critical pedagogy and trying to transfer power over to the students:
The problem that I had with the lesson was that it all came from me – I initiated the conversation [and asked all of the questions], but I think I pulled it off though, generally well...I think that hardest thing to unlearn would be something you do well...and I think that when it comes to teaching, in terms of addressing my class, I am an engaging speaker – I get the kids involved, I care about my subject matter, and, there’s techniques that I have and the more I do it, now that I’m teaching again, the better I’m getting at it. So, the trick has to be taking that power of speech out of my hands and putting it back into theirs. That’s a hard thing to do when you think that you can best lead that conversation...Isn’t that ironic? That I would give a whole talk today about unlearning stuff and the very thing I should be unlearning is the means by which I talked about unlearning. (T2, S1)

Yet, nothing in my approach changed after this insight! Why did I not act? How was it possible for me to overlook such glaring contradictions in my own practice and ignore the unsettling ways in which I was positioned as the teacher? I wonder, now, about the degree to which my desire to be a teacher-saviour was behind my actions at this time. Was it possible that I allowed myself to “look past” the paternalistic nature of critical pedagogy and the ways in which this pedagogy positioned me as the omniscient and omnipotent teacher not because of what it offered my student, but because of what it offered me, namely, the opportunity to continue to “save” “my” students? Thus, while I did not explicitly state my goals in terms of “saving” my students, the concept of emancipatory authority encouraged me to position myself in ways that supported this myth. I explore this possibility further in the section that follows by exploring the second of Britzman’s myths in my work at RSS: The myth of the teacher as expert.
Section 3: Critical Pedagogy and the Myth of the Teacher as Expert

Introduction

In this section, I will examine the relationship between the literature on critical pedagogy and the myth of the teacher as expert. I will then analyze how this relationship informed my goal of teaching for and from a critical consciousness at RSS. Specifically, I will explore how critical pedagogy’s conception of knowledge supports the myth of the teacher-as-expert and, in so doing, reinforces a paternalistic, transmission-style model of teaching. Before I begin, I detail the distinction between my use of the concept of the myth of the teacher as expert and how this concept was used by Britzman (1986, 2003) in her original work.

Britzman (2003) examines the myth of the teachers as expert in the context of the experience of learning to teach. She begins by examining two main fears that plague prospective teachers: “knowing how to teach and knowing everything there is to know about the material” (p. 227). My circumstances at RSS were different from those of Britzman’s pre-service teachers, many of whom expressed fears and concerns unique to student-teachers. Surviving the initial ‘baptism by fire’, making connections with mentor teachers and developing a unique teaching ‘style’, were all problems that I felt I had overcome after two years of teaching. As a result of my prior teaching experience, I felt that such concerns no longer applied to me; I believed I already knew how to teach, as evidenced by my success and my survival as a beginning teacher. Thus, when I began at RSS, I had no immediate concerns about “how” to be an effective teacher. This is not to say that my impression of myself were at all accurate, only that I believed that the lessons I had learned as a beginning teacher could be unproblematically applied to my new role as a critical pedagogue.
I was much more aware of the second of the two fears Britzman identified as a concern to prospective teachers, namely, the fear that I did not know enough about the material to teach. My view of teaching at this time was based largely the result of my belief that teachers can and should be experts in their subject matter. This myth seemed so obvious to me that I never considered it as anything other than completely true. Thus, when I made the decision to organize the course around controversial issues, it seemed only natural that I should learn about and demonstrate expertise in regards to each of the topics we would be studying. To maintain my position as the “expert” in the room, I had to choose the topics in advance so I would know what to study in preparation for the next unit. In this way, the myth of the teacher as expert also acted as a barrier to structuring the course in a more democratic manner and involving the students in the planning of the course and the course of curriculum. What I did not realize at the time was that my view of knowledge reflected a deeply-embedded belief in the myth of the teacher as expert and was based on a set of assumptions that were contrary to my goal of creating students who became independent critical thinkers. In fact, many of these assumptions were reinforced in the critical pedagogy literature which, in turn, reinforced my unconscious practice of the myth that teachers can and should be experts in their subject areas. The purpose of this chapter is to identify these assumptions in the literature and in my reflections and analyze how my unconscious reproduction of the myth of the teacher as expert impacted my goal of teaching for and from critical consciousness.

A view of knowledge

Although my belief that “good” teachers were experts in their subject matter was based largely on assumptions I had about the nature of knowledge as a beginning teacher, in many ways, the myth of the teacher as expert was reinforced by the literature on critical pedagogy.
Certainly, critical pedagogy caused me to question a great deal of what I knew to be “true” about teaching and learning. However, by and large, critical pedagogy literature did little to disrupt my beliefs about how knowledge is constructed, in whose interests, or why. Moreover, the lessons I took away about knowledge were contradictory in nature. From the literature, I had learned that to impose “my” knowledge as the teacher on to my students was counterproductive to the goal of teaching for critical consciousness. But, at the same time, I felt responsible to educate my students how the world “really” works, about the evils of capitalism at the heart of oppression in society and how they are unconscious victims of oppressive corporations and media giants. I agreed with Giroux (1991) that central to the task of educating for a critical citizenry

is a notion of community developed around a shared conception of social justice, rights, entitlement. This is especially necessary at a time in our history in which the value of such concerns have been subordinated to the priorities of the market and used to legitimate the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor, the unemployed, the homeless. (p. 56)

As Suoranta and Tomperi (2002) rightly observe, students can only intervene in matters of which they are aware. As such, “resistance or the search for alternatives to the hegemony of capitalist Empire calls for at least the awareness, explication, and criticism of the [capitalist] ideological strategies” (p. 40). Thus, making my students more aware of the dangers of capitalism and the neoliberal agenda was a central part of raising their consciousnesses.

The problem is that, in this model of teaching, “knowledge” assumes the form of a commodity to be given by the teacher and consumed by the students, an approach eerily reminiscent of the banking method of education. While it is true that the facts I was sharing with
the students at RSS were much more critical and explicitly political than the supposedly
“neutral” facts I shared with students as a beginning teacher (e.g., facts about names, dates, battles, etc.), I still conceptualized knowledge in essentially the same way – as something to be possessed, traded, or withheld by the expert teacher. A barrier to my ability to re-view knowledge and my role as the teacher in regard to teaching about knowledge was my initial shock at just how little the students knew about the issues we were studying. I often found myself having to give numerous lessons on a certain topic before students had an adequate amount of background knowledge to discuss it in a critical manner.10 To ensure that students had acquired this background information, I would assign weekly readings and question packages; I would later test students on this information in class. As much as I hated creating these packages and delivering factual information to students in a transmission-style manner, I felt that I had no other choice if I wanted the students to be able to understand the issues well enough to discuss them comprehensively later in the course. At one point in my reflections, I distinguish between “teaching” (which I equated with the banking model of education) and “creating the conditions” (which I equated with critical pedagogy) and identify the moment when I have to relay factual information as “the moment when things start to breakdown. And, it just becomes so easy, to teach to them, rather than to create the conditions” (T3, S2). In another entry, I recall the disappointment with which I reviewed the heavy focus on information associated with these packages:

Like, it was facts and it was important that they have a base of knowledge. Maybe I overdid it on the base of knowledge and how I did it was just, very, ‘do the package’, ‘do

10 The words of a former colleague in my B. Ed. year come to mind in regard to the challenges associated with getting students to a place where they can deconstruct: “You have to build up, before you can break down”.
the package’ and we read the book along the way [Wiesenthal’s, “The Sunflower”].

Looking back, I wish we’d done it differently. (T3, S2)

The fact that I continued to take this approach throughout the course tells me that I was either unable or unwilling to imagine alternatives that would allow me to, in fact, “do it differently”. Such an approach would have required me to conceive of knowledge as something other than “a set of discrete and isolated units to be acquired” (Britzman, 2003, p. 228). Had I instead adopted a view of knowledge “as socially constructed, subject to political, economic, social, and cultural forces” (p. 62) I may have begun to ask questions “attending to the deeper epistemological issues – about the construction of knowledge and the values and interests that inhere in knowledge” (p. 228). As it was, my desire to “debunk the cherished myths of capitalism” (Giroux, 2003, p. 66) and “expose the insidious ways that power shapes our consciousness” (Kinchele, 2005a, p. 15) lead me to conceive of knowledge in ways that were oppressive to my students and counter to my goals as a critical pedagogue by leaving unchallenged the cultural myth that I should be the teacher-expert in charge of providing my students with access to the “right” information.

In the following sections, I will describe two ways in which the myth of the teacher as expert subverted my goals as a critical pedagogue: through the lack of room for spontaneity and through the impossibility of being an expert in relation to these complex social issues.

**Lack of spontaneity**

When knowledge is approached as a set of facts to be learned, the spontaneous, unpredictable nature of learning is compromised. As Britzman (2003) explains, viewing knowledge as something to be mastered or controlled “does not show how the uncertain can open pedagogic
opportunities” (p. 228). Realistically, “the conditions of spontaneity and the unexpected disrupt any attempt to predict the effects of teaching” (p. 224). When knowledge, however critical in nature, is treated as simply information to which students should be exposed, the “teacher feels compelled to predict, contain, and thus control what is to be learned” (p. 225).

I remember feeling like I was a “bad” teacher in those moments when I couldn’t predict what my students were going to say or where they were going to go with their thoughts. To be sure, I wanted them to grow, but I was unprepared or unwilling to allow the learning to go in a direction in which I was not the expert in the room. I recall one incident in particular. It is interesting for several reasons, not the least because it points out the way that students began to apply a critical lens to my efforts to raise their consciousness by introducing them to important social issues. The incident and my response is worth describing in detail as it points to pressure I felt to contain the spontaneous effects of learning:

So, today we were going through the Holocaust packages and as we did the propaganda and debating techniques activity, Trevor asked a question that I thought was just unbelievable – he asked: ‘How do we know that all this stuff that you’re giving us, isn’t just propaganda?’ I immediately stopped what I was doing and asked Trevor to repeat his question to the class. My immediate thought was, “Oh, my God – if I don’t respond to this question, then the students may begin to question whether the Holocaust even happened; if they think that it might have not actually happened, then I’m like [James] Keegstra…So, I said to Trevor, ‘Well, think about the music you listen to – is that propaganda?’ And he said ‘Well, no, because propaganda tries to convince you of something’ and I responded to him with a story about how some people believe that propaganda and news are synonymous… [Basically], I went into an answer mode – which I wish I hadn’t done – but I think I left it with questions
‘how far does propaganda exist?’, ‘what do we mean by ‘propaganda’?’ In the end, I think it closed it on a good note by nurturing Trevor’s question. But this fear, that I have about what will happen if I don’t have the right answer (pause), I don’t know. It’s scary. Like, if someone asks me ‘Did the Holocaust happen?’...What does my answer do?...What happens if I say ‘I don’t know’ or ‘that depends”? I mean, am I mis-educating the students at that point as far as these things go? (T3, S1)

My immediate response to control the spontaneous learning illustrates how “the institutional push to present a stable appearance tends to make the…teacher perceive the unexpected as a “bind” rather than an opportunity” (Britzman, 2003, p. 224). Under such conditions, the appearance of omniscience was paramount for me if I was to maintain my position as the emancipator-saviour to my students. Closely connected to this idea is the way in which the teacher as expert myth reinforces the belief that it was possible and preferable for teachers to assume an essentialized, non-contradictory identity. As Britzman explains, “the fear of never knowing enough to teach, expresses the larger cultural expectation that teachers be certain in their knowledge and, that knowledge expresses certainty” (pp. 227-228). In this way, “the construct of the teacher as expert also tends to produce the image of the teacher as an autonomous and unitary individual and as the source of knowledge” (p. 299).

The effect of this approach is also reflected in the lack of interaction that students have with the curriculum. According to Britzman (2003), “recognizing that knowledge can only take the form of a construction can open us to the dialogic, a discursive practice that can produce knowledge capable of deconstructing the discourse of common sense” (p. 230) – the very goal I had for the class. But because I failed to approach knowledge in this way and, instead, believed that exposure to the “right” (i.e., “critical”) knowledge would lead to emancipation for my
students, I was not able to engage students in the very work I wanted them to be able to do. In this way, I failed to engage my students in perhaps the most important lesson about the nature of knowledge: “that all knowledge is a construct and can thus be deconstructed and transformed by the knower” (p. 229).

The impossibility of being the “expert”

While teaching at RSS, I was unconsciously practicing the myth that teachers should be experts in regard to their subject matter; as such, I felt it was necessary for me to be an expert on each of the controversial issues I introduced to the class. Because “this myth works to reduce knowledge to an immediate problem of knowing the answers” (Britzman, 2003, p. 228), it is not surprising that I never doubted that it was possible to be an “expert” in anything, given enough time and the right conditions. What I did not realize was that, in fact, I had made an assumption that I could actually “know” racism or homophobia or sexism. But the fact is that I did not understand these issues any better than some of my students and I was certainly not in any position to imagine myself as an expert on these matters. This belief was fueled by the previously discussed concept of emancipatory authority which “implies the presence of or potential for an emancipated teacher” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 307). As experts in the matters of social justice, critical pedagogues are expected “to ‘shed’ their own social casings and personal preferences in order to uphold the discourse of objectivity that beckons individuals as if they could leave behind the social meanings they already embody” (Britzman, 2003, p. 234). Of course, such a position is impossible, for, as Ellsworth (1989) states, “my understanding and experience of racism will always be constrained by my white skin and middle-class privilege. Indeed, it is impossible for anyone to be free from these oppressive formulations at this historical moment” (p. 308). The fact is that, like Ellsworth, “I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated
knowledges to light when I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism. No teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions” (pp. 307-308).

This assumption was reflected in the earliest stages of the course when I defined the lived realities and experiences of sexism, and homophobia as “topics” or “issues” to be studied. Equally offensive was the idea that there was something “controversial” about these things in the first place, as if to suggest that there was more than one position one could reasonably take on the “issue” of racism. Thus, in my sincere efforts to raise the awareness of my students about the oppression associated with these oppressions, I inadvertently reinforced the idea that complex social problems could be understood as “issues” that one could know and speak out against. I assumed, wrongly, that students should study and “know” about racism strictly for the purposes of fighting against it. My role as the omniscient teacher, carrying the assumption that omniscience protected me from being racist, was to ensure students took up this fight and not, as I now believe it could be, to create the conditions under which the students and I could begin to think about what it means for members of a dominant group to live in and speak out against a racist society. As Britzman (2003) notes,

to refuse the effects of such meanings does not banish them from the lived world of the classroom, or from the subjective world of teachers and students. Instead, the repressed always returns: the denial of difference is lived as the suppression of difference. (p. 234)

Closing thoughts

My experiences at RSS suggests that the way knowledge is conceived in critical pedagogy encourages teachers unintentionally to take up the myth that teachers can and should be experts
in their critical subject matter. In my case, the capacity for critical understanding assumed that students will become critical once they are exposed to the knowledge presented by the expert, emancipated teacher. However, in “giving” my critical knowledge to the students, I did not realize that I was, in fact, undermining my own goals as a critical pedagogue by re-creating the transmission-style pedagogy to which I was opposed.

In hindsight, I think my desire to “give” my knowledge to the students was, in many ways, made possible through my exposure to critical theory. After reading Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer, I felt that I was seeing the world as it really was, for the first time. I felt “emancipated” me from my state of ignorance and that I had a moral obligation to help “free” my students in the same way I had been “freed”. Central to this process was providing students with access to the “right” information and analyzing it in the “right” way. What I did not realize at the time is that “to know the material cannot be reduced to one universal meaning. Nor should it be...The point is to theorize about such dynamics and to construct views of knowledge that permit reflection upon how it is constructed and interpreted” (Britzman, 2003, p. 216). Because I understood knowledge at the time as something “unencumbered by values, interests, and ideology” (p. 229), I was unable to move beyond my commonsensical position that I was “right” in my knowledge and that, as the expert, I should give me knowledge to my soon-to-be emancipated students. Such a view positions students as passive recipients of knowledge and trivializes the agency of students to act upon the world and change it – the very goal I wanted them to achieve.

It is clear to me now that as both a critical pedagogue and a beginning teacher, I held a deeply-seeded view of knowledge as a fixed thing residing in the mind of the expert teacher. As Britzman (2003) notes, “the theory of knowledge here depends on stasis; knowledge is
understood as unencumbered by values, interests, and ideology, and is handled as if it were transcedent” (p. 229). Given the transformative goals I had as a critical pedagogue, it seems somewhat ironic that I would adopt a pedagogical approach that “sustains the discourse of common sense, where the tyranny of the obvious cannot call on itself to demonstrate its own contradictions” (p. 229). Some insight into this problem may be found in the previous experiences I had as both a teacher and as a student, a fact Britzman (2003) elaborates:

Having been students themselves, teachers have taken up a view of knowledge overdetermined by classroom life and governed by the compartmentalization of curriculum. The combined effect of compulsory school – and university – education has naturalized the construct of the teacher as expert. (p. 228)

Certainly, I had viewed my teachers as experts and assumed that they “had the answers”; as such, it is perhaps not surprising that I would take up a similar position when I became a teacher. The problem, however, is that such a response does nothing to alter the conditions of schooling. For this reason, the myth of “the teacher as expert, then, is in actuality a normalizing fiction that serves to protect the status quo, heighten the power of knowledge to normalize, and deny the more significant problems of how we come to know, how we learn, and how we are taught” (Britzman, 2003, p. 229).

The fact that I was delivering more critical knowledge is irrelevant; I was still delivering knowledge to the students and that knowledge was mine. As a result, I unintentionally positioned myself as the sole source of knowledge upon which students were to construct their view of their world (a view which was, of course, just like mine). Under these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that I felt that I wasn’t making much of a difference; all that had really
changed was the content. I still had far greater authority and voice than my students in almost all of the aspects dealing with the choice and delivery of the enacted curriculum. The end of the course, how we would get there, and who was in charge hadn’t changed at all; I was still very much in the driver’s seat of this “radically different” and “democratic” classroom.

The view of knowledge that sustained this myth was also reflected in statements I made about the reasons for my struggle to implement critical pedagogy at RSS. I believed it was my lack of knowledge about critical pedagogy that was the barrier to my success:

I feel like if I had spent an additional year in the Masters [before I came back to teaching], then I could come out and say ‘Now, I know exactly what to do here’ and there would be no confusion. (T1, S2)

I felt that if I just knew more about critical pedagogy, then I could effectively put it into practice. Of course, implicit in this statement is a belief that simply exposing one’s self to knowledge will automatically translate into understanding and the capacity to act without contradiction or complication upon that understanding – the very view of knowledge underpinning my approach to filling the students’ heads with “critical” knowledge.

Looking back, I see statements such as these as evidence of just how much work I needed to do conceptually before I could begin to view knowledge in a way that would allow to me act in a manner consistent with my goal of moving past the banking model of education. And yet, at the time, I imagined my identity and my work as a critical pedagogy as clearly distinguishable from my previous efforts as a “regular” teacher; in my mind, I was clearly doing radically different teaching – the kind of teaching that was really changing the hearts and minds of my students. In hindsight, I think that I presumed, naively, that simply being exposed to critical
issues alone was enough to ensure that student’ consciousnesses would be raised. Since this time, through the process of writing my thesis, I have come to believe that shifting one’s consciousness has less to do with the things one sees and more to do with how one sees things.

Section 4: Critical Pedagogy and the Myth that Teachers are Self-Made

Introduction

In this section, I will analyze my reflections through the lens of Britzman’s third cultural myth – the myth that teachers are self-made – to more clearly understand the problematic ways in which the discourse of critical pedagogy encourages teachers to imagine their identity in individualistic and self-constructed terms based on an exaggerated sense of personal agency. I will begin by distinguishing the difference between how Britzman (1986, 2003) uses this concept in her work from how I intend to use it to make sense of my experiences. I will then turn my attention to exploring the link between critical pedagogy literature and the myth that teachers are self-made as a result of my reflections made at RSS.

According to Britzman (1986, 2003), the myth that teachers are self-made is a normalizing fiction that functions to provide “a commonsense explanation to the complicated problem of how teachers are made” (2003, p. 230) and how one becomes a teacher in the first place. However, in order to understand the relationship between Britzman’s research and my efforts to implement critical pedagogy as an experienced teacher at RSS, it is important to distinguish between how Britzman applied this myth to the experience of pre-service teachers and how I intend to explore it in this chapter.
The discourse of experience plays an important role in the operation of this myth by reducing the complex task of learning to teach to a problem of acquiring experience. For Britzman (1986, 2003) the myth that “good” teachers are made in the classroom through their teaching practice is characteristic of pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the process of learning to teach. Often, pre-service candidate subscribe to the myth that one cannot “learn” to teach in education classes by reading textbooks about pedagogical theory; rather, they believe they learn to teach by doing it directly. In this model, the myth that experience is the primary means through which good teachers are made is problematic for beginning teachers who often possess little or no “real” classroom experience (Britzman, 2003).

In a manner similar to how Britzman (2003) explored the ways in which the identities of pre-service teachers were informed by the discourse of experience implied in the myth that teachers are self-made, the purpose of my chapter is to explore how the discourse of agency implied and expressly stated in the literature of critical pedagogy informs the way teachers come to think about who they are and what they should do as a “critical pedagogue”. In that same way that the discourse of experience “serves to cloak the social relationships and the context of school structure by exaggerating personal autonomy” (p. 232), the discourse of agency within the discourse of critical pedagogy encourages teachers who wish to practice critical pedagogy to ignore the social and institutional pressures reflected in every educational relationship and embrace the “rugged individualism” at the heart of the myth that teachers are self-made.

When one’s sense of identity as a teacher is constructed on an exaggerated sense of personal agency, success or failure on any level is seen as the sole responsibility of the teacher. Thus, when my vision of politically-motivated and critically-conscious students failed to develop at RSS, I felt personally responsible for this outcome. I responded to this feeling in three distinct
ways: First, I blamed myself for not being able to effectively practice critical pedagogy; secondly, I abandoned critical pedagogy under the argument that it is overly theoretical and never really “practical” enough; and, finally, I valorized moments from my teaching practice before my introduction to critical pedagogy and took refuge in the feelings of “certainty” that came from being able to do something well and being aware of the outcome of my efforts as a classroom teacher.

Before I explore these responses in greater detail, I will begin by analyzing how the discourse of agency implied and explicitly stated in the literature on critical pedagogy literature encourages teachers to imagine their identity in self-constructed terms. I will then focus on my varied response to the awareness that I was not fulfilling my responsibilities as a critical pedagogue. Finally, I will explore how the relationship between this discourse and my unconscious reproduction of cultural myths impacted my goal of teaching for and from a critical consciousness.

Critical pedagogy as a choice

On the surface, it seems strange that a pedagogy which calls itself critical and stresses the importance of theory could possibly support the anti-intellectualist myth that teachers are self-made. However, pressure is placed on would-be critical pedagogues by the didactic and authoritarian language found in the literature of critical pedagogy. One of the key ways in which it does this is by framing critical pedagogy as a “choice” that teachers can and should make. For McLaren (1989), the choice to adopt a critical pedagogy is at the core, a moral choice:

The challenge of critical pedagogy does not reside solely in the logical consistency or the empirical verification of its theories; rather, it resides in the moral choice put before us as
teachers and citizens…We need to examine that choice: do we want our schools to create a passive, risk-free citizenry, or a politicised citizenry capable of fighting for various forms of public life and informed by a concern for equality and social justice? (p. 158)

This same idea is echoed by Giroux (1988a) who believes that “educators have a moral and ethical responsibility to develop a view of radical authority that legitimates forms of critical pedagogy aimed at both interpreting reality and transforming it” (Giroux, 1988a, p. 68). The problem with framing critical pedagogy in these terms is it reinforces the idea that teachers are solely responsible for the success or failure that follows this choice. In this way, educators who “choose” critical pedagogy appear to “own” everything that goes along with it, including its inherent contradictions and shortcomings; thus, teachers come to understand failures that follow their efforts as “their” failures in a very personal way, often in terms of blaming themselves.

As Gore (1993) explains, McLaren’s argument “supports critical pedagogy’s emphasis on agency – the teacher has the capacity to make a choice” (p. 98), but it is a choice based on an “oversimplified dichotomizing of the world into us and them, oppressors and oppressed, powerful and disenfranchised” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 212). Implied in this binary construction is the idea that that teachers who “choose” critical pedagogy are somehow automatically working on the side of “good”. Separating the world into distinct and oppositional orderings and by forcing teachers to “choose” their position relative to these orderings functions to support the myth that teachers are self-made by implying that critical pedagogy never oppresses students and that a non-contradictory identity is guaranteed to teachers who choose to practice critical pedagogy. Yet as my previous analysis of the concept of “emancipatory authority” has shown, it is very much possible for critical pedagogy to function in ways that are oppressive to students. The idea that choosing to adopt and implement the tenets of critical pedagogy will somehow
guarantee an uncomplicated and non-contradictory teaching identity is equally flawed. Thus, this view leaves little room for the complexities in which teachers live and the multiple and contradictory discourses they are often encouraged to take up to make sense of events in their classrooms.

Critical pedagogy as didactic

The second way in which a discourse of agency is created is through the explicit expectation of teachers to fulfill the lofty goals outlined in the discourse of critical pedagogy and to be able to achieve these goals through their own efforts. In reading the work of several different authors before, during, and after my time at RSS, it became clear to me that implied within the literature of critical pedagogy is the expectation that they should live up to or work toward achieving the lofty goals set down in the literature, and, in this way, become responsible for making themselves as critical pedagogues. Below are several examples from a range of authors that instruct teachers on what their goals “should” or “must” be:

- Teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving. This means that they must take a responsible role in shaping the purposes and conditions of schooling. (Giroux, 1988b, p. 126)

- The teacher’s task must take the form of a critical pedagogy…He or she must make classrooms into critical spaces that truly endanger the obvious culture…. must function as more than [an agent] of social critique. (McLaren, 1989, p. 241)
• Teachers must recognize how schools unite knowledge and power and how through this function they can work to influence or thwart the formation of critically thinking and socially active individuals. (Darder, 1995, p. 329)

• For critical pedagogy to become viable within our schools, teachers must learn to employ critical analysis and utopian thinking. (McLaren, 1989, p. 238)

• Teachers should become transformative intellectuals if they are to subscribe to a view of pedagogy that believes in educating students to be active, critical citizens. (Giroux, 1985, p. 379)

• [Teachers] must speak out against economic, political and social injustices both within and outside schools. At the same time they must work to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to become citizens that have the knowledge and the courage to struggle in order to make despair unconvincing and hope practical. (Giroux, 1985, p. 379)

• Critical teachers must work to expose the insidious ways that power shapes our consciousness and the knowledge we are exposed to both in and out of the classroom. (Kincheloe, 2005a, p. 15)

The consequence of expressing theoretical aims through this didactic language is explained by Gore (1993). She observes: “When so much of critical pedagogy discourse takes that form of ‘teachers should...,’ ‘teachers must...,’ ‘teachers ought to...,’ the failure to provide specific (versus universal) guidance can have effects which are just as immobilizing as dogmatic
prescription” (p. 107). In this way, critical pedagogy “is a pedagogy of closure and a politics, not of debate, but of direction” (Lusted, 1986, p. 10).

The result for me at RSS was feeling overwhelmed and stressed – that there was simply too much to do as a teacher and that, even though no person could possibly do it, I had to if I wanted to feel like my efforts as a critical pedagogue were going to make a difference. The feelings stemming from the pressure to implement the directives of critical pedagogy was expressed in one of my earlier entries:

I feel this constant pressure…that I’m not doing everything I should – that I’ve short-changed the kids today, that I haven’t been critical enough, that I haven’t placed what they know or don’t know in a larger historical, political, economic, social context! Sometimes, I just feel like I let them down or that (pause) that I’m fucking up, that I’m not doing everything that I should be doing. That I might actually be mis-educating these students. That’s the pressure I feel. (T1, S2)

I describe this same feeling in a later entry:

Whenever I leave [the classroom], I’m always doubting myself…I leave there thinking about how bad[ly] I handled all of the concrete stuff and, in addition to that, feeling like I am short-changing them [the students] in terms of my theory…I fall back into… old modes [of teaching] so quickly. (T1, S1)

Later in this chapter, I will discuss my tendency to “fall back” into “old modes” of thinking and acting. For now, it is enough to highlight the pressure stemming from the feeling that I was personally responsible for putting the directives of critical pedagogy into practice.
The literature of critical pedagogy is highly abstract

Furthermore, the broad and abstract language used to express critical pedagogy’s imperatives is often viewed as far beyond the scope of what is realistically possible in context of daily classroom teaching. An example of the awesome challenge issued to classroom teachers is expressed by Giroux (1999b). He writes that teachers

must be able to understand how power works productively through the poetics of imagination, that is, they must be able to distinguish between reality as a fact and existences [as] a possibility. But such dreams must be forged not in isolation but in solidarity with others. (para. 4)

However, such claims fail to make sense when one considers the types of immediate practical tasks and bureaucratic responsibilities that educators face in their role as classroom teacher. The need to “forge dreams…with others” appears irrelevant when half of my class won’t listen, I have a new student every day and there is little to no curriculum on which to base my lessons. However, because I believed strongly in critical pedagogy and desired to put its theory into practice, I continued to grapple with the challenge of translating theory into practice on a consistent basis.

It is within this context that I began to struggle with implementing key ideas in the literature of critical pedagogy such as “empowerment”, “student voice,” “dialogue,” and even the term “critical” itself, a feeling I expressed at one point in my reflections:

It’s hard reconciling broad notions of education with the reality of it, which is what I’m going through – the concrete stuff, the day-to-day, textbook teacher-learner-classroom-
desk kind of thing – it’s amazing how quickly you fall into that kind of way of thinking, that way if viewing education in very narrow terms. (T1, S2)

I knew that “students need to be introduced to a language of empowerment and radical ethics that permits them to think about how community life should be constructed around a project of possibility” (Giroux, 1988a, p. 166), but in the absence of any explanation about what radical ethics is or what, exactly, a project of possibility looks like, I was at a loss to decipher the message behind the claims of critical pedagogy theory. The following two entries are examples of my inability to determine what, exactly, my role was in relation to the concept of “possibility”:

Part of the problem in my own class is, how do I make possibility, possible? I have to clarify what I mean by possible – by possibility. It’s not so much me doing it, but how do I make my class – how do I create the conditions for my class to (pause)...regard, take notice, recognize possibility? Or, multiple readings? And not only that, but the benefits – the importance of that, and how we may do that already, just not recognize it. (T1, S2)

I’m just returning to my class and I’m thinking, ‘what is made possible through this lesson plan?’ Well, actually, it’s not so much what I make possible but it’s more like, y’know, them being able to make possibility for themselves. (T1, S2)

The struggle I felt to simultaneously define “possibility” and teach in a way that reflected the goal of possibility reflects the larger problem of how “the language of ‘emancipatory authority’ and ‘transformative intellectual’, indeed the language of critical pedagogy in general...codes and mystifies” (Gore, 1993, p. 109). As Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009) explain, it is under these conditions that “the theoretical language ultimately functions to create new forms of
oppression. Hence, rather than liberating those who have historically found themselves at the margins of classical intellectual discourse, the language reinscribes power and privilege” (p. 15).

The lack of practical support

It was under these conditions that I began to perceive a huge gap between what my goals as a critical pedagogue had been when I first started teaching at RSS and what I was actually able to achieve. I felt this discrepancy at an early stage in my teaching, a fact reflected in the following entries:

My grand idea of coming back [to the classroom] and education being entirely different because I had thought about it differently just didn’t ring true...It’s hard to acknowledge this when you have such an ideal set up and you realize that you can’t achieve it or that it would be a lot harder than you thought. (T1, S1)

My unconscious reproduction of the myth that teachers are self-made was reflected in my belief that it was my responsibility to bridge the gap that existed between theory and practice. It is implied within the literature of critical pedagogy that teachers are responsible for understanding the theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy and translating these abstractions into practice in an uncomplicated and straightforward manner. However, as discussed, the discourse of critical pedagogy is very abstract and very little has been written about the ways in which educators may practically apply the tenets of critical pedagogy at the classroom level.

Although the literature to which I was exposed had discussed the contributions of critical pedagogy to creating a more just and equitable world, I had not encountered nor could I find much written about how critical pedagogues should apply its far-reaching goals in context of
their daily classroom teaching. As a result, in my efforts to become critical pedagogy’s “transformative intellectual” and implement the theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy, I struggled to understand how concepts like “liberation”, “justice” and “democracy” translate into lesson plans and assignments. The limitations this posed for my goal of emancipating my students were expressed in the following reflection:

I have this vision in my head, of where I want to be. And theory has put me there...but all I see now, in the current context [at RSS] sometimes, is how far away that seems and how so much would need to happen in order for me to have conversations [with students] like the ones I want to have. (T1, S1)

Thus, in the absence of any clear illustration of how the abstract theoretical notions of critical pedagogy might be translated into practice, I was left with broad analyses of such concepts as “power, language, culture, and history” (Giroux and McLaren, 1986, p. 229), but no clear direction on how to proceed once the bell rang. Like Ellsworth (1989) who sought to implement a critical pedagogy in the teaching of a graduate course, I felt that as I began to live out and interpret the consequences of how discourses of ‘critical reflection,’ ‘empowerment,’ ‘student voice,’ and ‘dialogue’ had influenced my conceptualization of the goals of the course and my ability to make sense of my experiences in the class, I found myself struggling...to recognize, name, and come to grips with crucial issues of classroom practice that critical pedagogy cannot or will not address. (p. 303)

The principal reason behind the lack of resources on how to implement critical pedagogy is explained by Gore (1993):
The reluctance to articulate specific practices often emerges out of a concerted attempt to avoid prescriptive dogmatism by providing space for the democratic processes argued for in the discourse of critical pedagogy. In this way, there is tremendous concern for, and awareness of, the potential inconsistencies between the pedagogy argued for and the pedagogy of the argument. (p. 107)

Thus, in order for critical pedagogy to stay true to its tenet that teaching cannot be reduced to or described in purely technical terms, it cannot offer its subscribers prescriptive practices void of a specific context. To do so would be to violate its own tenets of democratic pedagogy and undermine concepts central to its foundation, such as the use of generative themes. Thus, under these circumstances, “it appears that the goals of empowerment and transformation are considered of such importance that specific pedagogical practices are not addressed, are left for the teachers to discern” (Gore, 1993, p. 107).

The failure of critical pedagogy to articulate theoretical tenets in the form of teaching practices was a huge source of frustration and stress for me at RSS. A lack of stories to illustrate the theory of critical pedagogy made it difficult for me to imagine what this theory would look like in practice. As grand and as “right” as the directives in critical pedagogy sounded and felt to me, it did not change the fact that I still needed to actually practice them if I was going to achieve my goal of teaching for critical consciousness. As Williamson (1988) notes, such abstractions are easy to write about at a distance from actual, diverse, unconfident, recalcitrant kids; but, the question which confronts the teacher…is how to teach these things, literally how to get them across, how to make them makes sense to actual, living individuals. (p. 90)
For these reasons, I am in agreement with Gore (1993) that

this strand of the discourse which expresses such optimism about what teachers might do, and which claims to function as a critical pedagogy for schools (and other institutions), seems limited by the extent to which it refuses to grapple with the details of pedagogical practice (content or process) with which teachers are expected to grapple. (p. 111)

I am not suggesting that the value of pedagogy can or should be measured exclusively in terms of its ease of its practical application. As Knabb (1997) notes:

to theorize is simply to try to understand what we are doing. We are all theorists whenever we honestly discuss what has happened, distinguish between the significant and the irrelevant, see through fallacious explanations, recognize what worked and what didn’t, consider how something might be done better next time. (p. 16)

However, “theory without particulars is empty, but particulars without theory are blind” (Knabb, 1997, pp. 16-17). It is in this way that “this particular strand of critical pedagogy risks deluding itself insofar as it considers its proclamations to be sufficient guidance” (Gore, 1993, p. 111).

The task of becoming a critical pedagogue then, depended largely on my ability to accomplish this goal regardless of the lack of support in the literature on critical pedagogy. Implicit within this literature then, is the belief that it is the role of the theorists “to outline the political project for teachers, while the role of teachers, as transformative intellectuals, is to conceptualize and implement the pedagogical strategies of practices” (Gore, 1993, p. 110). Just as I had overcome the hardships the resulted from a lack of resources in the my first two years of
teaching, by offering no support in the form of concrete strategies for these next steps, the implicit message for me was that critical pedagogues are self-made by assuming responsibility to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Under these circumstances, my failure to turn my class into a group of critical, conscious thinkers rested squarely on my shoulders. I reacted to this in three ways; in the section that follows, I will describe and analyze each of these responses.

Blaming myself

The first way I responded to not being able to re-create my ideal image of a critical classroom was to blame myself and view my actions as evidence that I had failed as a critical pedagogue. The lack of direction in the literature on how to implement the goals of critical pedagogy led me to believe that it was my responsibility to translate the abstractions of the literature into practice. In my mind at the time, I believed that I would “become” a critical pedagogue once I made the correct moral choice to follow its precepts, achieved its idealistic goals, and effectively understand and translate into practice its theoretical abstractions. Consequently, when this picture failed to develop, I immediately blamed myself. Though I have referenced this reflection earlier in my analysis, I feel it is applicable in the context of the present discussion:

Sometimes, I just feel like I let them down [the class] down or that (pause), that I’m fucking up, that I’m not doing everything that I should be doing – that I might actually be mis-educating these students. That’s the pressure I feel. (T1, S2)

A similar feeling is echoed in a later entry when, in discussing how I feel after some classes, I recall, that “I go away and I think, ‘I handled it all wrong’ or ‘I shouldn’t have done this’, or ‘I shouldn’t have done that’” (T3, S2). In hindsight, I believe that it was the discourse of agency
implied and explicitly stated within the literature of critical pedagogy that discouraged me from considering the impact that external forces might have on my efforts to create a critical classroom and prevented me from moving beyond a pattern of self-blame and personal disappointment.

Jennifer Gore (1993) explains further: “To structure the relations of the teacher to critical pedagogy and social empowerment in this way, is to create conditions wherein the teacher will be blamed in those instances when the goals of critical pedagogy are not met” (p. 108). However, in reality “every pedagogy is influenced by the complex social relations among teachers, students, school culture, and the larger social world” (Britzman, 2003, p. 232) and one’s personal experience in any context cannot be understood in meaningful terms when it is divorced from the larger social context(s) within which it occurs. In this way, “individualizing the social basis of teaching dissolves the social context and dismisses the social meanings that constitute experience as lived” (p. 236).

Thus, the discourse of agency presented in the literature of critical pedagogy “cloak[s] the social relationships and the context of school structure” (Britzman, 2003, p. 232), and, in so doing, supports the myth that teachers are self-made “by exaggerating personal autonomy” (p. 232) and encouraging critical pedagogues to blame themselves when they fail to achieve their goal of teaching for a critical consciousness.

*Rejecting “theory”*

My initial response of blaming myself for not creating this kind of classroom quickly gave way to my second response – blaming “theory” and everything associated with it. I had already wrestled unsuccessfully with many of the concepts in critical pedagogy and had
difficulty translating these theoretical concepts into practice. Eventually, I came to believe that
the abstract language of critical pedagogy was unrealistic for the secondary classroom use and
was, in fact, working as a barrier to my ability to connect with and help the students. The
abstractions of “theory” could not offer any “real” solutions to my problems with classroom
management or how to structure a lesson; “theory” could not give me more time for planning or
marking, and it could not explain why certain students resisted my efforts to “liberate” them and
“raise” their consciousness. I began to experience this very early in my teaching at RSS as
evidenced by a reflection I made about a conversation I had with my partner:

I remember telling Ekta, on several occasions, that all this theory and all this bullshit at
Queen’s feels like just that – it feels like bullshit. And I know it’s not – I believe in
it...but, you could sit back in a chair, like I’ve done, and think about these things
theoretically and I think that work is important, but when it comes to – when push comes
to shove – which I certainly did on Monday [referring to my standoff with Jared], all of
this stuff [theory] just seems like empty words, like, I dunno, like (pause) I don’t wanna
say a waste of time, but I know it isn’t helping me, that’s for sure. (T1, S1)

The more time that I spent with and learned about my students at RSS, the more they
began to trust me with certain personal details of their life. It was at this time that I began to get
frustrated with the fact that theory did not address the most important and pressing emotional
needs of my students. I felt like many of these students were struggling with issues that were
completely unconnected to abstract concepts like “possibility” or “empowerment”. Below is one
example in which I express my frustration with this limitation of theory:
I was thinking today when a student like, Jessica, and her terrible situation and all of those bad things, and another student’s brother has cancer, and, like you just begin to think [about theory as] all this shit, y’know? Unless it can care, unless it can love or unless it can help you learn how to hug or love your students or care about them more, then all of this just falls to the wayside and just seems to become useless talk because it seems so removed from the reality of it all. (T3, S1)

Getting to know and connecting with my students became more important to me the longer I taught at RSS. However, “theory” did not appear concerned about the relationships I had with my students and was focused more on the goal of raising their consciousness. Thus, over time, I came to view “theory” and its nebulous language as getting in the way of otherwise meaningful connections with my students. This feeling was reflected in the following entry:

This last year in the Master’s program was just amazing for me coming to terms with, or realizing a new philosophy, a new approach to education, and new language to talk about what I feel. But this new language – you go into the schools with this language and (pause) with this way of approaching things... [and] talking about something, but because the kids aren’t there either, there’s like this huge divide, this huge, I dunno, this huge gap between us that wasn’t there before when I didn’t always second guess everything I always did or how I said it or what I was saying or what I wasn’t saying and the voices I include and the voices I didn’t include and who was dominating a conversation and what were the power relations at any given moment – it’s just so overwhelming. (T1, S1)

Moreover, nothing on the theory of critical pedagogy seemed to account for the day-to-day challenges and bureaucratic responsibilities associated with my teaching position at RSS.
Just as a beginning teacher, I often felt overworked and was constantly frustrated by the tight deadlines associated with creating lesson plans, marking assignments, and creating exams. I found the literature of critical pedagogy relatively silent on these challenges and the cumulative impact of these pressures on my efforts to raise the consciousness of my students. In fact, the lack of time to get everything done was the subject of my very first recorded entry on the tapes: “There are a lot of important things that happened over the past couple of days that I haven’t been recording quite simply because I’ve been too stressed or because I don’t have enough time” (T1, S1). This feeling contributed to the widening gap between theory and practice in my mind at the time and further encouraged me to disparage “theory” on additional grounds.

It is interesting that in each of the above reflections, my anger was aimed at a general idea of “theory” and not, as one might expect, at critical pedagogy. I believe this was because I held critical pedagogy in such high esteem that to disparage it in any way would be to recant the foundations upon which my pedagogical beliefs were based at the time, pedagogical beliefs that, in very insidious ways, allowed me to continue to be a “saviour” to my students. In other words, to reject critical pedagogy theory en masse would mean rejecting the goal of “saving” my students by raising their consciousnesses. And while, I was more aware than ever by this point that critical pedagogy did not easily translate into practice, I was unwilling or unable to abandon the goal that placed me at the centre of my students’ learning and was based on the integrity of my intentions. Understood in this way, my disappointment in theory stemmed from not being able to fulfill my goal of “emancipating” my students, a goal based on critical pedagogy’s discourse of agency and its implied message that teachers are self-made.
Valorizing past experience

The final way in which I responded to being unable to effectively implement the directives of critical pedagogy was by reverting to idealized memories and my past experience as a beginning teacher. The contradictions contained within my reflections on this reversion and the conceptions of experience and identity upon which they are based are important to discuss as they point to the ways in which critical pedagogy both encouraged and discouraged my unconscious practice of cultural myths. In the section that follows, I will describe the movement toward the “world” of practice, the possible reasons for this movement, and the consequences for my goal of teaching for and from a critical consciousness.

Same world, different planets

As discussed in the previous section, when the abstractions of critical pedagogy proved too difficult to put into practice and my image of the ideal critical classroom at RSS failed to develop, I blamed a general idea of “theory” for getting in the way of my goal to raise the consciousness of my students. “Theory”, as I viewed it at this time, was anything having to do with “thinking” and it was, in every respect, the antithesis of practice. Whereas theory was idealistic, created in isolation, and happened in the “ivory tower” of the university, practice was useful, created with students, and happened in the “trenches” of the classroom. My rejection of theory helped fuel my deeply-entrenched belief that there was just something more “real” about the lessons one learned from experience. Though I did not realize it at the time, this belief was a product of the myth that teachers are self-made, in large part, through their experiences in the classroom, a point to which I will return later in this section. Thus, my movement away from the thinking “world” of theory was marked by a clear movement toward (or return to) the emotional
“world” of practice in which how one felt and what one “knew” on a deeply personal level became the primary means through which one made sense of classroom experience.

Because these were questions of belief, how I felt about and made sense of my experiences was necessarily a reflection of who I was as a teacher, that is, to speak about what I believed was to also speak about who I was. The reflections that follow illustrate this idea and point not only my feelings about theory and practice, but to feelings about my identity as a teacher, as well:

- I feel like I am living in two different worlds right now and it’s hard to always see the connection between them. (T2, S2)

- I feel like I’m caught between so many different sides of me – me as an old teacher, me as a new teacher. (T2, S2)

- I just don’t know who I am as a teacher anymore (pause)...I don’t know who I am as a teacher. (T1, S1)

- It’s a struggle between who I was as a teacher and who I am now. (T1, S1)

The connection between my identity as a teacher and my distinction between theory and practice was also reflected in references I made to my work as a Teaching Assistant in a first-year Education class at Queen’s. Far from helping me ground my experiences at RSS in a larger theoretical framework (something I initially thought might be possible as a TA), my experiences at the university had the effect of reinforcing my feelings about the theory/practice divide. At one point, I describe this feeling in relatively straightforward terms:
I am on my way to TA at Queen’s right now and it just seems like – sometimes it’s just such a – it’s a half-hour drive, but it seems light years from what I doing out here [at RSS] on a daily basis. (T1, S1)

Another example in which I expressed my identity in binary and dichotomous language was in distinguishing between my work as a graduate student and my work as a teacher at RSS:

I feel like I have to choose sometimes between being a scholar or being a teacher and I don’t like doing this either/or shit. But it’s hard because, in order to be a scholar, you need to be pushing the limits of your thinking and you need to be challenging and critiquing and interrogating, and as a teacher, your focus isn’t necessarily on cultural studies, y’know? (T2, S1).

In each of these examples, it is clear how, in equating my previous life as a teacher with the world of experience and my present life as a critical pedagogue with the world of theory, I understood the complex work I was doing in a variety of diverse settings in overly simplistic and binary terms. Given critical pedagogy’s reliance on binary constructions of the world (oppressed vs. liberated, etc.), it should perhaps come as little surprise that I would conceptualize my identity as a critical pedagogue in a similarly dichotomous fashion and may help to explain why, in rejecting the world of theory, I took up what appeared to me to be its opposite with such vigour.

Looking to the past

The valorization of past practice took many forms, though I returned to it most often as a reference point to which I would compare the lack of success I felt as a critical pedagogue.
In many ways, I believe now part of the reason I returned to memories from my past practice was because I desperately wanted to feel some modicum of success in my efforts as a critical pedagogue – a sense that my actions were making a difference. Where, as a beginning teacher, I felt very confident in my pedagogy and my sense of who I was as a teacher, as a critical pedagogue, I no longer knew what I was doing, how well I was doing it or even who I was as a teacher. Even when my introduction to critical pedagogy and Britzman’s work (1986, 2003) caused me to doubt the kind of difference I had made, it did not “undo” the memories I had in my time as a beginning teacher and I still came to associate “good” teaching with feeling “good” about one’s teaching. Thus, even though my specific pedagogy had changed, my desire to feel like I was making a difference had not. The frustration that came from not being able to feel good about my efforts as a critical pedagogue were reflected in the following entry:

What would have been [considered] a good day before is not a good day now; if anything, sometimes it feels like a bad day. That’s the gap I think I feel between loving what I used to be like as a teacher and knowing that person and feeling strong about it and having my head on straight and I knew who I was and knew what I liked and I would know what worked, I even knew what I would be doing on the weekends – that all comes from that place. And now, because, I’ve been exposed to different authors and different readings and different thinkings about education, this [my old ways of understanding] doesn’t work anymore. The old things I used to love, I don’t love. The old things that used to make sense don’t make sense. The things that used to feel good, don’t feel good. I don’t know what the fuck I’m going to do because I didn’t come into teaching to not love it. I don’t know. (T1, S2)
Another example of this was reflected in my desire for the confidence and sense of certainty. There was a sense of certainty and of closure that came with giving a great lesson in the past – a feeling that “I did it”. But the constant pressure from the broad goals of critical pedagogy and the lack of practical support available to me in the literature meant that I never felt like I had done a good job or reached a final goal that was set for me in the literature. As a result, I always doubted myself and often left RSS wondering if had done a “good” job on any given day:

To be honest, I love teaching so much – I don’t want to say that it’s uncritical teaching that I love, but I love it in the way that I know it can be done, where I don’t have to second guess everything that I do. (T2, S2)

The long-term impact of this self-blame and self-doubt was reflected in the increasingly negative view I held of myself and my efforts as a teacher:

Now more than ever, I feel like a shitty teacher. I feel like someone who doesn’t know what they’re doing and the hard part for me now is that I don’t [can’t] see a way out. I wish I could say, ‘Ah! There’s the way, and I see it now, and I can do that thing I need to do’, but I don’t know if I can...I don’t see a way out. (T2, S2)

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that I felt “part of me wants to go back to my old ways of teaching because those ways – I felt good about who I was and those moments and good about what I did, y’know, I felt – I believed in something then” (T1, S1). This reflection stands in stark contrast to a later entry in which I describe the certainty I was used to feeling as a teacher and the good feelings that came with it.
I know exactly who I am when I’m going to teach. I know exactly what makes me happy, exactly what makes me upset, exactly what I’m going to do this weekend and what I’m going to care about – I know exactly who I am when I’m a teacher and I just teach and I just am and I just survive and it works and feels good and you have these moments and that’s enough to keep you going. Everything makes sense, everything ‘clicks’ when I teach and I like who I am and I’m someone I’m proud of and I feel like a person of principle and I’m really lucky to feel that way – a person of principle. (T1, S2)

The consequences of reflecting critically on one’s past experiences as an educator have been noted by Brookfield (1995). He explains that it is when they are faced with crises of belief that “teachers look back to their belief that unambiguous solutions could always be found to difficult problems as a golden era of innocence” (p. 239). Under these conditions, “teachers…are tempted to return to tried and trusted assumptions, on the grounds that even if these didn’t always work or make sense, at least they were familiar and comfortable” (p. 242).

What I did not realize at the time was that in reverting to my past practice, what I was, in fact reverting to, was the myth of “the natural teacher”. As explained by Britzman (2003), “this natural teacher somehow possesses talent, intuition, and common sense” (p. 230) and is a living example of the fact that one can never really learn to be a good teacher. The natural teacher is either born to teach or has a uniquely individual “teaching style” that sets them apart from other “bad” teachers. The cornerstone of either root is experience: If the natural teacher is born, experience simply confirms what birth bestowed; if they create themselves through teaching style, it is a style made possible only through the knowledge resulting from decades of service. My experiences as a beginning teacher seemed to confirm this myth and my identity as a “natural” teacher. Thus, in reverting to the safety of my past experience, I was, in many ways,
reverting to the myth of myself as a naturally good teacher, the kind of teacher who had a gift that couldn’t be explained and, thus, couldn’t be critiqued. The danger of this, as explained by Britzman, is that “the valorization of these qualities diminishes reflection on how we come to know and on what it is we draw upon and shut out in the practice of pedagogy” (p. 230). Such reflection is crucial for teachers to intervene in the discourses that prevent them from achieving the change they desire as teachers.

A view of identity

In hindsight, I believe that the frustration I experienced from not being able to align my identity completely with the world of “practice” or with the world of “theory” was less a reflection of my understanding of theory or of practice and more a reflection of my belief that educators could or should embody a non-contradictory and essentialized teaching identity.11 Looking back on my experiences at RSS, I think that the pressure I felt to choose between being a critical pedagogue and being a “regular” teacher was a consequence of my belief that an essentialized teaching identity was possible and desirable. I had not learned to live with the conceptual ground beneath my feet constantly moving; instead, I thought that one’s identity as a teacher had to be built upon fixed and firm ground, and that constructing this identity was the sole responsibility of the teacher.

A view of experience

Although I did not realize it at the time, closely connected to this view of identity was a view of experience that contained many deeply-embedded assumptions about what, exactly,

11 I have already discussed the impossibility of an essentialized and non-contradictory teaching identity in section two of this chapter in regard to the challenges I faced as a critical pedagogue to manage classroom behaviour.
experience was and how meanings were made from personal experience. I took for granted the idea that experience “spoke” for itself and I did not see that my past experiences as a teacher, in fact, represented a combination of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses in which experience was naturalized as already containing certain essential meanings and understandings (Britzman, 2003, p. 215). In this way, my reversion into past practice was less about valorizing moments from my past and more about privileging experience as the vehicle through which my experiences as a teacher can be understood. Yet, as Britzman notes, “the propensity for experience...never guarantees access to a particular meaning, competency, truth, or a particular form of conduct” (p. 218). In fact, privileging experience as a form of unmediated knowledge is problematic because when “experience is viewed as already possessing a dynamic power, it is approached as if it was delineated space” (p. 214). Under these circumstances, “the power of experience supplants the struggle to know” (p. 214) and teachers are unable to ask the questions that lead to the kind of reflection necessary to intervene in and act upon the causes of their frustrations.

**Closing Remarks**

This chapter has shown how the myth that teachers are self-made was reinforced by the discourse of agency implied and expressly stated in the literature on critical pedagogy. The pressure for teachers to choose critical pedagogy and to take ownership for its far-reaching goals was compounded by a lack of practical support for how to translate its abstract language into daily, classroom practice. Thus, when my image of the ideal critical classroom failed to develop at RSS, I had only myself to blame. Separating theory and practice into discrete concepts was an attempt on my part to regain some sense of control over my pedagogy and experience the positive feelings that came from knowing that I was making a difference in the lives of my
students as a result of my actions. In this way, the act of reverting to past practice may also be read as an attempt to live out the myth that teachers are-self made, but on terms with which I was familiar and had experienced success. Thus, in my effort to teach for and from a critical consciousness at RSS, the myth that teachers are self-made acted as both a source of discomfort and as a source of relief, commonly linked by a set of assumptions about identity and the nature of lived experience.

Britzman (2003) notes that the myth that teachers are self-made “provides the final brush strokes on the portrait of the teacher as rugged individual” (p. 232). In the conclusion to my thesis, I will explore this picture in greater detail by describing the connection between cultural myths about teaching and my goal as a critical pedagogue at RSS to educate for and from a critical consciousness.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to conclude the major points of my research and to address some of the potential consequences and challenges facing teachers who wish to educate for and from a critical consciousness. I will begin the first section of this chapter with a brief review of my reasons for wanting to practice critical pedagogy at RSS and what, exactly, I expected would happen as a result of this implementation. I will then focus on the practical and philosophical challenges I faced in my teaching at RSS and how these challenges prevented me from achieving the goals and expectations I had for myself and for the students in my class. Specifically, I will discuss how my desire to create a democratic and participatory learning environment was undermined by conceptions of power and knowledge embedded within the literature of critical pedagogy. Despite my intention to radically alter my approach to teaching, critical pedagogy’s treatment of power and knowledge had the effect of encouraging me to continue to imagine my role as a teacher in largely traditional and mythologized terms. The presence of three myths in particular will be discussed: the myth that everything depends on the teacher, the myth of the teacher-as-expert and the myth that teachers are self-made. Taken together, these myths function to sustain a cultural image of the teacher as a rugged individual, capable of overcoming any personal, social, or bureaucratic obstacle in the effort to save their students. I will explore the myth of the rugged individual in greater detail in this chapter in the context of my efforts as a critical pedagogue to save my students by raising their consciousness.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I will discuss what I feel are some important considerations for teachers wishing to educate for and from a critical consciousness. I will examine the important role that critical self-reflection plays in practicing pedagogy critically and
some potential sources of hope for teachers who engage in the difficult work of critical self-reflection.

**Unfulfilled Expectations**

For the longest time, I believed that my introduction to critical pedagogy marked a significant turn in my development as a teacher. The concept of critical pedagogy seemed to offer hope in the face of critical theory’s disparaging view of the traditional model of schooling in which students’ minds were “filled” with teachers’ knowledge. In contrast to this transmission-style of pedagogy which I had unknowingly practiced for so long, I believed that as a critical pedagogue, I could begin to *actually* make a difference in the lives of my students by raising their consciousness and helping them benefit from the lessons I had learned in the Master’s program.

However, in reflecting on my experiences at RSS, it is clear to me that I did not interrogate the hidden assumptions or taken-for-granted claims of critical pedagogy. In fact, as my analysis has demonstrated, my effort to “*really* make a difference” in the lives of my students with critical pedagogy actually resulted in the reproduction of certain dominant myths and discourses about teaching and learning. It is precisely because the desire to make a positive contribution to students’ lives assumes a genuine and benevolent form that the potentially oppressive aspects of pedagogy – however “radical” – are hidden and obscured. Britzman (2003) speaks to this phenomenon when she writes:

> These dynamics of cultural reproduction are made insidious by its involuntary nature…Teachers do not set out to collude with authoritarian pedagogy. Nor do they
Such was the case with my efforts to help my students through the implementation of critical pedagogy. Yet, despite my belief that my introduction to the work of such authors as Freire, Giroux, and McLaren marked a profound shift in the way I would be as a teacher, as the preceding analysis has shown, I continued to unconsciously adhere to certain cultural myths about what it meant to be a teacher and what “good” teachers “should” and “shouldn’t” do.

Thus, while my introduction to critical pedagogy challenged many of my deeply-held beliefs about the purposes of schooling, and its political and ideological components, it did little to unsettle the normalizing fictions upon which many of my ideas about teaching were based. In fact, in many ways, critical pedagogy reinforced tacit assumptions I had unconsciously made about what it meant to be a “good” teacher and the naturalness of my desire to “make a difference” in the lives of my students. In hindsight, I believe that this was one of the reasons that I was attracted to critical pedagogy in the first place, namely, because it “plugged into” existing ways of seeing and understanding my identity as a teacher and allowed me to continue to position myself as a saviour to my students.

**Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Myths**

Two clear ways in which critical pedagogy and cultural myths about teaching intersected in the context of my experience at RSS was around issues of power and knowledge. As Tobin and McRobbie (1996) have noted, cultural myths about teaching are “built on a foundation of beliefs that knowledge exists separately as a discipline that is separate from knowers and that the teacher should have control over the enacted curriculum” (pp. 238-239). The literature of critical
pedagogy seemed to reinforce this idea by encouraging me to adopt an authoritarian relationship to knowledge in the effort to help liberate my students. At the time, I believed that if students were simply exposed to the “right” information (i.e. the same information I was exposed to in the Master’s of Education program), then their consciousnesses would be raised and their liberation would follow. Yet undermining this approach were problematic assumptions about whose knowledge counted in the classroom and who was in control of what was and what was not being learned. In fact, as my analysis has shown, I was still firmly in control of the class and determined not only what we would learn but how much, how often, and for how long. By all accounts, there was little difference between the paternalistic relationship I had with my students as a beginning teacher and the paternalistic relationship I adopted as a critical pedagogue.

In no other area did this paternalism manifest itself more clearly than in my desire to “save” my students from their presumed ignorance and it was in the context of this goal that critical pedagogy and cultural myths intersected in powerful and problematic ways. Despite my desire to create a democratic learning environment in which students would no longer depend on me or my knowledge as the teacher, the tenets of critical pedagogy and certain cultural myths about teaching encouraged me to continue to imagine myself in the role of a hero to my students. Moreover, the pressure I felt to position myself at the centre of my students’ learning was compounded by the bureaucratic and practical challenges I faced at RSS. As the classroom teacher, I was expected to manage student behaviour, prepare and deliver lessons, and assess and evaluate students’ work. While I did not enjoy all of these tasks equally, when possible, I approached them as opportunities to raise the consciousness of my students by weaving a socially-conscientious curriculum into class lessons and assignments.
As previously mentioned, common to all of my efforts at RSS was a strong desire to make a real difference in my students’ lives. While I never explicitly stated that I wanted to be a “saviour” to the students in my class, because I did not understand the reasons behind the choices I made as a teacher, I continually positioned myself in the role of a teacher-saviour. At the heart of this idea – and in many ways, at the heart of all of Britzman’s (1986, 2003) myths – is the myth of the rugged individualism. In the section that follows, I will describe this myth and explore its connection to my research.

The Myth of the Rugged Individual

Britzman (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of the myth of rugged individualism and places the concept in a larger social and historical context when she writes:

The discourse of the rugged individual represents a familiar and admired legend in the dominant culture, a lesson, so to say, in the possibility of overcoming any inherited circumstance through sheer ingenuity and individual effort. Typically, this lesson rehearses economic success in the individual’s ability to rise from ‘rags to riches,’ and promotes racelessness and genderlessness in the individual’s choice to be viewed as unencumbered by social categories. For the rugged individual, any context – be it history, race, class, gender, or physicality – is positioned as if it were a mere handicap to be individually overcome. (p. 235)

When applied to the context of classroom teaching, “cultural myths promote a view of the teacher as rugged individual, an identity that bestows valour on the lonely process of becoming a teacher” (Britzman, 2003, p. 235). When I reflect on my efforts to practice critical pedagogy at RSS, it would seem that the same idea holds true for the process of becoming a critical
pedagogue. In much the same way that I imagined my work as a beginning teacher in largely independent terms, I believed that the work I was doing as a critical pedagogue was to be done on my own and without outside help. As a result, I felt personally responsible for the success or failure of raising my students’ consciousnesses and I bore all of the struggles that I faced at RSS in a deeply private manner.

The problem is that when teaching is abstracted from the social context in which teaching and learning occur, the agency of the individual is heightened to a point where teachers focus exclusively on the impact they personally have on their class. In this way, “individualizing the social basis of teaching dissolves the social context and dismisses the social meanings that constitute experience as lived” (Britzman, 2003, p. 236). The result is that when teachers (or, in my case, critical pedagogues) endeavour to “make a difference”, it is implied that they are to do so on their own and not in concert with other students, teachers, parents or administrators. This was certainly the case in my effort to raise the consciousness of my students at RSS where I took sole responsibility for conceiving of and pursuing this goal.

A consequence of the individualization of teaching that inheres in the myth of rugged individualism is that teachers may return to their own educational biography as a roadmap to see how closely their current experiences measure up against this. As explained by Britzman (2003), “the value of individualism, inhering in each myth, requires an over-reliance on the self, which in actuality mandates an overdependence on one’s institutional biography, since this part of one’s biography is most familiar to the school context” (p. 236). When teachers conceive of their work in purely individualistic terms and divorce teaching from the social context in which it occurs, “the compulsion is to reproduce rather than transform their institutional biography” (p. 236). Britzman’s observation would explain why I continued to practice transmission-style pedagogy
at RSS despite my earlier rejection of this approach. The rugged individualism to which I was unconsciously clinging normalized the belief that, as the individual responsible for liberating (i.e. saving) students, I needed to be in control of the learning in the class. Thus, it may be concluded that “a significant social outcome of the individualization of teaching is the reproduction of school structure through pedagogy” (pp. 236-237) regardless of one’s specific pedagogical approach.

It would seem, then, that the myth of rugged individualism that informed my efforts as a beginning teacher also informed my efforts and my desires as a critical pedagogue. My earlier teaching and my later, “critical” approach were both grounded in discursive practices that positioned me as a hero to my students. In this way, the myth of rugged individualism can be connected to critical pedagogy’s goal of student empowerment by encouraging teachers to imagine and to position themselves as saviours to their students.

In the sections that follow, I will briefly outline what I feel are some important considerations for teachers who wish to educate for and from a critical consciousness and what it means for me to move forward in a teaching life in the light of my research and reflections.

The Importance of Critical Self-Reflection

“People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does” (Foucault, 1983, p. 187)

Prior to my introduction to critical pedagogy, I was guided in my teaching by a sense of doing what seemed ‘natural’ to me at the time; I tried to do what I believed “good” teachers did. But my introduction to critical pedagogy disrupted the normalizing fictions upon which my
beliefs were based and encouraged me to re-view many of my taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature and the purposes of schooling. The promise of liberation offered up in the literature of critical pedagogy seemed so in line with own desires, that I failed to even consider the possibility that critical pedagogy might, itself, contain tacit assumptions about schooling and education. Because the work of authors in this field was critical of the status quo, I simply assumed that it was “outside” the realm of ideological influence or power dynamics. Although I felt more aware of the political nature of teaching and the larger systems which were – and always had – informed my teaching, I was still somehow under the unspoken impression that individuals could choose to think and act in ways wholly independent of the system. Thus, without realizing it, I was working from the position that liberation from oppressive functions of the system was a matter of choice – one that, presumably, students could make once a critical pedagogue taught them about their oppression.

Yet, as Brookfield (1995) observes, critical pedagogy, “like all ideological constructs, is always partial and evolving and must be subjected to constant critical scrutiny” (p. 211). For these reasons, “the ‘emancipatory authority’ of critical pedagogy, exercised in the pursuit of justice and emancipation, may be dangerous (like any other discourse) to the extent that it sees itself as not requiring further justification or critique” (Gore, 1993, p. 103). Teachers who wish to educate for and from a critical consciousness must remember to commit themselves constantly to re-viewing the political and ideological aspects of their chosen pedagogy.

Despite my beliefs to the contrary, teachers cannot “escape” the political dimension of teaching, nor can they ever be “outside” the system or teach unproblematically against it. As Freire (1993) notes, “every pedagogical project is political and filled with ideology…the education worker, as such, is a politician, regardless of whether he or she is aware of it or not”
As the following reflection suggests, I appeared to begin to appreciate this more near the end of my time at RSS:

I have to be careful. I talk about other teachers not knowing what they’re doing, and I assume the whole time that I do know what I’m doing. No, I mean, one must always be on guard. I used to think that a person is least on guard when they weren’t thinking about what they were doing; now, I think that they’re the least on guard when they think they’ve thought about what they’ve done. (T4, S1)

I echo this same feeling in a later entry when I state that “I think that it is important to note that I am going through the motions of questioning or identifying the ideological roots behind everyday practices and beliefs...this is an ongoing process, it never ends” (T4, S2).

Of course, re-viewing and scrutinizing one’s beliefs is not an easy task. As Brookfield (1995) notes, “realizing that our teaching actions might be grounded in uncritically assimilated and unchecked assumptions that turn out to be distorted or oppressive is sometimes humiliating, always humbling” (p. 228). I will never forget how painful and debilitating it felt to lose faith in practically everything I held dear about teaching. I expressed this feeling at an early point in my teaching at RSS in the context of a discussion about the insignificance of certain gifts and expressions of care from past students:

I have a whole wall of cards from students and letters and I have a yearbook full of signatures [and] all these comments, telling me how great a teacher I was. And when I think about teaching from a critical place, then it just all turns to shit. It doesn’t mean a fucking thing. What am I holding up there? My yearbook of signatures – what am I saying? That, ‘hey – my students liked me!’’ I mean, I know it’s more than that,
because they learned about – they told me they learned about life...I knew, and I knew
because I believed it to be true – I don’t want to look back and say I was mistaken. I
don’t think that’s fair to say that I was “wrong” all these years. I mean, I guess, but it
wasn’t like I was wrong in the sense that I knew what I was doing was wrong. I believed
it to be true. And everything that I’ve been taught – even in teachers’ college – lead me
to believe that these were the marks of a good teacher. (T2, S2)

I continue to speak about the sense of loss that accompanied my introduction to critical pedagogy
at a later point in the same entry:

I don’t want to discount those moments, I don’t want to say they weren’t worth anything.
But, why don’t I want to say that? Is it because I have too much to lose? The best years
of my life, now turn out to not be the best years…When I look back on these great
moments that I thought I had in the classroom and [realize] they’re not great at all. I
really thought I was a good teacher. And before I started making these tapes and before I
started teaching at Riverside, I would’ve said I am a good teacher. But I don’t know
what I’m doing any more. I don’t know if what I’m doing is helping these students...All I
know is that now more than ever, I feel like a shitty teacher. I feel like someone who
doesn’t know what they’re doing and the hard part for me now is that I don’t [can’t] see a
way out. I wish I could say, ‘Ah! There’s the way, and I see it now, and I can do that
thing I need to do”, but I don’t know if I can...I don’t see a way out. (T2, S2)

Compounding my frustrations at this time was my belief that I was completely alone in feeling
this way. It was not until I came across a piece of writing by Foucault (1972) that I considered
the possibility that the depression I felt was something that other people may have experienced,
as well. His observation is an excellent description of the deeply personal level on which individuals experience the work of critical self-reflection and is worth quoting at length:

I know how irritating it can be to treat discourses in terms not of the gentle, silent, intimate consciousness that is expressed in them, but of an obscure set of anonymous rules. How unpleasant it is to reveal the limitations and necessities of a practice where one is used to seeing, in all its pure transparency, the expression of genius and freedom. How provocative it is to treat as a set of transformations this history of discourses which, until now, has been animated by the reassuring metaphors of life or the intentional continuity of the lived. How unbearable it is, in view of how much of himself everyone wishes to put, thinks he is putting of ‘himself’ into his own discourse, when he speaks, how unbearable it is to cut up, analyse, combine, rearrange all these texts that have now returned from silence, without ever the transfigured face of the author appearing…Must I suppose that in my discourse I can have no survival? And that in speaking I am not banishing my death, but actually establishing it; or rather that I am abolishing all interiority in that exterior that is so indifferent to my life, and so neutral, that it makes no distinction between my life and my death?...

I understand the unease of such people. They have probably found it difficult enough to recognize that their history, their economics, their social practices, the language (langue) that they speak, the mythology of their ancestors, even the stories that they were told in their childhood, are governed by rules that are not all given to their consciousness; they can hardly agree to being dispossessed in addition [to have also have taken away] of that discourse in which they wish to be able to say immediately and directly what they think, believe, or imagine; they prefer to deny that discourse is a
complex, differentiated practice, governed by analysable rules and transformations, rather than be deprived of that tender, consoling certainty of being able to change, if not the world, if not life, at least their ‘meaning’, simply with a fresh word that can come only from themselves, and remain for ever closed to the source” (pp. 210-211).

Even as I read this now, I identify so intimately with what Foucault is saying. It feels as if he was alongside me the whole time, bearing witness to those quicksand moments when I discovered that there was nothing sacrosanct about anything I had believed about what it meant to be a teacher.

What is left for the teacher who loves to teach and wishes to positively influence a student’s life? How – and even is – it possible to educate for and from critical consciousness in light of the knowledge that oppressive discourses and myths work through and around us in our teaching, often without our knowledge? Certainly, these questions do not have any easy answers, and it is beyond the scope of this work to address each one. However, when I consider my own efforts to move forward in a teaching life in light of this knowledge, I find myself drawn to disruptive discourses that challenge my notions of what is possible in teaching and encourage me to move beyond binary constructions of the world by acknowledging the dialectic condition of teaching in which I am constantly immersed.

**Challenging Discourses**

I believe that my effort to teach for and from a critical consciousness must involve moving beyond binary discourses that encourage me to make sense of the world and my teaching in overly simplistic ways. Instead, I must move in the direction of discourses that allow me to imagine my role as a teacher in dialectical ways. For Greene (1995),
To speak of a dialectic is to speak of forces in contest: the factors that hold us in place, that stand in the way of our growing, and the factors that provoke us to act on our desires, to break through the obstacles, to become different, to be. (p. 112)

The decision to teach from within a dialectical perspective is both empowering and unsettling; it is, as Greene (1995) notes, “a life lived in tension and a kind of ardour, with the dialectical struggle never quite resolved. Indeed, we would not need to be wide-awake to our lives if it could be resolved (p. 112). Moreover, the movement toward a dialectic understanding of teaching pushes us beyond dichotomous renderings of the world embedded within critical pedagogy discourse and cultural myths about teaching. As my analysis has shown, engaging in binary ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling do little to alter the ideological landscape of pedagogy or erase the fundamentally political nature of language, even when we believe that we possess the “right” worldview. As Lather, (1991) explains, when pedagogy is re-viewed in this way, it becomes

a site not for working through more effective transmission strategies but for helping us learn to analyze the discourses available to us, which ones we are invested in, how we are inscribed by the dominant, how we are outside of, other than the dominant, consciously/unconsciously, always partially, contradictorily. (p. 143, author’s italics)

It is difficult to accept the idea that dominant discourses work through us without our consent or knowledge and more enticing to deny the political aspects of our pedagogy. Yet, refusing to acknowledge the ideological and mythical qualities of our beliefs about teaching actually prevents us from intervening in our lives and improving our conditions in meaningful and lasting ways. As Britzman (2003) notes, it is only after accepting the dialectical conditions that frame
the conditions of our teaching, that teachers can begin to act in ways that reflect their goals and desires:

When we can consider what it is that conditions conversations, we can move away from the normative view that language is merely neutral and descriptive to the dialogical view of language as ideological and conscriptive. This understanding can help us begin to identify the kinds of discourses that are made available, and decide whether a discourse can provide the practices we desire. (p. 237)

In this way, moving “forward” in a teaching life is as much about looking to the past as it is about looking to the future as teachers must constantly re-visit the discursive formations of their language and beliefs about what it means to be a teacher.

Thus, to teach for and from a critical consciousness is about more than simply being aware of the presence of potentially oppressive cultural myths or the political and ideological dimensions of pedagogy. Instead, it is about reconstituting our understanding of and relationship to knowledge, power, and experience and how contradictions between our desires and our efforts can emerge. Only after we are willing to re-view how we structure lived experience and are positioned within and by the discourses available to us, can we begin to move away from constrictive and oppressive formations of pedagogy. I feel Ellsworth (1989) speaks to the hope generated by such a movement when she writes:

This reformation of pedagogy and knowledge removes the critical pedagogue from two key discursive positions s/he has constructed for her/himself – namely, origin of what can be known and origin of what should be done. What remains for me is the challenge of
constructing classroom practices that engage with the discursive and material spaces that such a removal opens up. (p. 323)

As Britzman (2003) rightfully notes, “while the normative discourse is powerfully convincing, it is not immutable” (pp. 237-238).

And yet, as limiting as they may be, moving beyond the dominant discourses of education and re-viewing time-honoured practices and beliefs can be difficult for many teachers. Casting doubt on the authenticity of popular narratives in education can be a direct challenge to one’s sense of purpose and identity as a teacher. Central to the task of re-viewing one’s beliefs and experiences as a teacher, then, is the ability on the part of teachers “to tolerate disruptions of the taken-for-granted” (Green, 1988, p. 17). As Green (1995) notes,

> Without that ability, most of us, along with our students, would remain submerged in the habitual. We and they would scarcely notice, much less question, what has appeared perfectly ‘natural’ throughout our life histories. We and they would, therefore, be almost incapable of reflective critique. (p. 100)

It is in the effort to assist teachers and students in critically reflecting on past experience that, like Simon (1992), I wonder “how one might construct the present representations of the world beyond immediate experience so as to dialectically engage that experience and enable the articulation of new human possibilities” (p. 139). How can I teach in a way that allows my students to ‘step back’ from the obviousness of everyday life “so that fixed and final frameworks remain inconceivable” (Greene, 1995, pp. 196-197)? Part of the answer, I believe, lies in the practice of problematizing everyday beliefs and practices in ways that invite questioning by refusing the commonsense premises upon which such beliefs and practices are based. One
particularly powerful example has been the practice of my thesis supervisor to pose the questions “Why this? Why here? Why now?” to expose the history and tacit assumptions contained within the activities of teaching.\textsuperscript{12} By creating a space for seeing differently, this approach effectively invites students to re-view taken-for-granted assumptions about their lives and view the everyday world as problematic (Smith, 1987).

\textbf{Beginnings and Endings}

When I consider how much the stereotypical images of teachers in literature and in film have inspired me in the past, and how much of my own experiences are based on these canonical re-presentations, I am hesitant to discard \textit{en masse} the meanings I have come to attach to these images and memories in spite of my awareness of their potentially oppressive tendencies. Greene’s (1995) observation effectively captures my feeling:

\begin{quote}
I am drawn to affirm the timelessness of what I have come to love over the years, of what I choose to think of as the very sources of myself. Allowing myself to be carried along by the great conversations initiated by others (and, indeed, maintained by others), I would not have to disrupt. I would not have to begin anything; I would need only to be swept along by what the great ones have said and remain partially submerged in them. (p. 109).
\end{quote}

However, as Green goes on to note, the effort to move past this pull is reflected in the unpredictable future borne of new beginnings:

\begin{quote}
But then I think of how much beginnings have to do with freedom, how much disruption has to do with consciousness and the awareness of possibility that has so much to do with
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Personal correspondence.
teaching other human beings. And I think that if I and other teachers truly want to provoke our students to break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, we ourselves have to experience breaks with what has been established in our own lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again. (p. 109).

Greene’s observation is, for me, a powerful source of hope in the effort to maintain a positive outlook in the face of sometimes painful critical self-reflection. As I move forward in a teaching life and continue my effort to educate for and from a critical consciousness, I imagine that I will return to the strong sense of possibility and wonder generated by the uncertainty that comes from new beginnings. It is a feeling that I hope never leaves my side.
Works Cited


Appendix A

“Take the Power Back”

By Rage Against the Machine

Bring that shit in! Uggh!

Yeah, the movement's in motion with mass militant poetry
Now check this out...uggh!

In the right light, study becomes insight
But the system that dissed us
Teaches us to read and right

So called facts are fraud
They want us to allege and pledge
And bow down to their God
Lost the culture, the culture lost
Spun our minds and through time
Ignorance has taken over
Yo, we gotta take the power back!
Bam! Here's the plan
Motherfuck Uncle Sam
Step back, I know who I am
Raise up your ear, I'll drop the style and clear
It's the beats and the lyrics they fear
The rage is relentless
We need a movement with a quickness
You are the witness of change
And to counteract
We gotta take the power back

Yeah, we gotta take the power back
Come on, come on!
We gotta take the power back

The present curriculum
I put my fist in 'em
Eurocentric every last one of 'em
See right through the red, white and blue disguise
With lecture I puncture the structure of lies
Installed in our minds and attempting
To hold us back
We've got to take it back
Holes in our spirit causin' tears and fears
One-sided stories for years and years and years
I'm inferior? Who's inferior?
Yeah, we need to check the interior
Of the system that cares about only one culture
And that is why
We gotta take the power back

Yeah, we gotta take the power back
Come on, come on!
We gotta take the power back

Hey yo check, we're gonna have to break it, break it,
break it down
Awww shit!

Uggh!

And like this...uggh!

Come on, yeah! Bring it back the other way!

The teacher stands in front of the class
But the lesson plan he can't recall
The student's eyes don't perceive the lies
Bouning off every fucking wall
His composure is well kept
I guess he fears playing the fool
The complacent students sit and listen to some of that
Bullshit that he learned in school

Europe ain't my rope to swing on
Can't learn a thing from it
Yet we hang from it
Gotta get it, gotta get it together then
Like the motherfuckin' weathermen
To expose and close the doors on those who try
To strangle and mangle the truth
'Cause the circle of hatred continues unless we react
We gotta take the power back

Yeah, we gotta take the power back
Come on, come on!
We gotta take the power back
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies
No more lies

Uggh!

Yeah!

Take it back y'all
Take it back, a-take it back
A-take it back y'all, come on!
Take it back y'all
Take it back, a-take it back
A-take it back y'all, come on!

Uggh!

Yeah!
Appendix B

Controversial Issues through Film and Media

The following is a list of controversial topics which might be explored through film and media this year. Please circle those topics that you think might be interesting to explore. We will be studying some of these, so it is in your best interest to circle the ones you think look good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cloning</th>
<th>Youth Punishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Control</td>
<td>Affirmative Action, or Employment Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Death Penalty</td>
<td>Ageism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>Ableism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right of Government</td>
<td>Euthanasia, or assisted suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalization of Marijuana</td>
<td>Eating Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decriminalization of Marijuana</td>
<td>School Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright Laws</td>
<td>Capital Punishment, or the death penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>Cigarette Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal Punishment</td>
<td>Grade 10 Literacy Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right to Hunt</td>
<td>Religious Tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genetic Engineering</td>
<td>Monocropping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>Offshore Oil Drilling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Globalization</td>
<td>Oil Drilling on Wildlife Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Evolution</td>
<td>U.S. Foreign Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe-Injection Sites (for Drug Abusers)</td>
<td>Same-sex marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatism in Quebec</td>
<td>Genetically-modified foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workfare</td>
<td>Alcohol Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Surveillance</td>
<td>Representations of Women in Media (film, music videos, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave Reparations</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Nations Treaty Rights</th>
<th>Gangs in America</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>Softwood Lumber Dispute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
<td>Speed Limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity vs. Individuality</td>
<td>Salaries of Athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rights/Responsibilities of Smokers</td>
<td>Drugs in Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td>Alcohol Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rise of Corporations</td>
<td>Binge Drinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>School Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Media</td>
<td>Social Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicinal Marijuana</td>
<td>Racism/Stereotypes in the Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Crime</td>
<td>Inhalant Drug Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Latch-key” Kids</td>
<td>“Shipbreaking” in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Uniforms</td>
<td>The War in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangster Rap Lyrics</td>
<td>Third World Debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the space provided, please add some topics that you think could have been included in the list above

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
Now, please list some films or other media (televisions shows, books, music groups and songs) that you believe deals with controversial issues. In the space provided, write down: (1) the film or media title, (2) the type of media that it is, and (3) the issue that it deals with. Try to include the producer, author, of singer’s name as well. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of Media</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Burning</td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes (2Pac Shakur)</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Life in an Inner City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling for Columbine</td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Gun Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster</td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Youth Crime/Prison</td>
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