TROUBLING DISCOURSES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Reading Knowledge, Reflection, and Inclusion Through Excessive Moments

by

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Abstract

While sorting through my experiences as a student teacher, my research question has shifted from “How can teacher education be improved?” to “How is teacher education represented?” I am interested in the juxtaposition of these two inquiries, and use them not to suggest pedagogical rules, but to draw attention to the kinds of spaces such a juxtaposition opens up. The shift in my research question is influenced by the discursive turn—the movement from social justice theories to poststructuralist theories, from theories based on experience to theories based on discourse. Questions of representation are the focus not only of poststructuralist theories but also of psychoanalytic theories, or theories of the unconscious, and both theories acknowledge that representations of reality are excessive: they contain more and less than that which they represent (Orner et al., 2005). The concept of excess enables me to make sense of moments in my teacher education program that could not be contained by dominant educational discourses of knowledge, reflection, and inclusion. The excessiveness of a teaching strategy called the Six Thinking Hats troubles the theory/practice binary in discourses of knowledge. The excessiveness of an assignment about philosophies of teaching, and a class discussion in response to the film Submission trouble the enlightenment/ignorance binary in discourses of reflection. And, the excessiveness of my attempt to question curricular content troubles the normal/exceptional binary in discourses of inclusion. I use excessive moments from my teacher education program to question existing discourses, and to suggest that we need to change the stories we tell ourselves about education (King, 2003). Our current educational discourses perpetuate histories of violence that we have inherited, and I suggest that social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories will enable us to more effectively heal from these inherited histories.
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Chapter One

Introduction: Beginning with Stories

“[O]nce a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King, 2003, p. 10).

“The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories” (Estés, 1995, p. 15).

Thomas King (2003) says that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). Hearing King’s expansion on this idea in his CBC Massey Lectures series in November, 2003, was a life-changing moment. Having grown up in fundamentalist, evangelical, Protestant communities and aligning myself with these views for twenty years, King’s stories forced me to consider the ways in which Christian stories have impacted not only communities of faith, but have impacted the world in which we live by making other stories impossible and unimaginable.

King’s stories challenged the colonialist stories I had believed: that the Christian God was the only way to the divine and that this story needed to be told to as many people as possible. Feminist stories challenged the patriarchal stories I had believed: that women in our society are equal to men, even if they need to try a little harder to prove that they are worthy of being considered men’s equals. Queer stories challenged the heteronormative stories I had believed: that some expressions of gender and sexuality are “right” and others are “wrong.” As I became aware of histories of violence we have all inherited through the influence of colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, many of the stories that I had told and had been told became inadequate for making sense of the realities around me. On the surface the stories I had treasured appeared ethical, valuable, and just. Yet, precisely because of their benign surface, these stories seemed to create a
startling amount of damage since they left no room for the reality that things might be otherwise, or that they might be drastically different from the realities they engendered. While the loss of each of these stories has influenced my research, the main body of this thesis will explore the loss of educational stories. Stories from my experiences as a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) student prompted a loss of belief in the story that education is possible—that teaching and learning lead to new knowledge, and that teaching and learning are knowable and controllable processes.

Statement of Problematic

I began research about teacher education to find out how teacher education programs could be improved, and the closest I have come to answering this question is through King’s assertion that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2003, p. 2). In other words, if current understandings of and approaches to teacher education seem unsatisfactory to me, perhaps I need to examine the discourses or stories that are used in education, particularly in teacher education, to see whether changing some of these stories might lead to different outcomes. Wondering whether education promises something that it cannot deliver, my research question has shifted from “How can teacher education be improved?” to “How is teacher education represented?”

Purpose: Transforming our Educational Discourses

The excessiveness of my experiences of teacher education as a B.Ed. student left me feeling as though there was something missing or completely mistaken in the stories we tell ourselves about education. I did not seem to be able to fit some of my experiences

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1 While these ideas had been circulating in my head for months after reading various feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic theories, I found Pitt and Britzman’s (2003) articulation of these ideas to be a helpful way of not only summarizing the kinds of questions I was asking about teacher education, but also of situating these questions within a larger debate about representation that came about as a result of the discursive turn.
into the stories that I knew and had been taught about education. As a result, I have searched for new stories, and for new educational discourses. I have written this thesis in order to challenge and transform some of our existing educational discourses about knowledge, reflection, and inclusion, which are based on the binary discourses of theory/practice, enlightenment/ignorance, and normality/exceptionality.

Britzman (1991) distinguishes between stories, or what we tell, and discourses, or how we tell those stories. I am interested both in what it is that we tell ourselves about education and in how we tell stories about education. This distinction between stories (or experiences) and discourses was foundational to the discursive turn of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The “discursive turn” is a phrase used to describe a shift from using experience to make knowledge and meaning, to questioning the discourses used to make knowledge and meaning. Rather than understanding experience and discourse as two distinct and incompatible sources of knowledge and meaning—as was common during the discursive turn—Kathleen Canning (2006) draws on both experience and discourse as rich sources of information.

Likewise, my analysis of teacher education draws on both experiences and discourses. Throughout this thesis, I refer to three theories: social justice theories that rely on experience as a source of knowledge; poststructuralist theories that rely on discourse as a source of knowledge, and psychoanalytic theories that rely on the unconscious as a source of knowledge. While the first two theories are directly related to the discursive turn, psychoanalytic theories also take up poststructuralist concerns of representation—the ways that available discourses influence the meanings we make from our experiences. However, where poststructuralist theories often talk about discourses in relation to power,
psychoanalytic theories refer to discourses influenced by the unconscious, such as desire, repression, projection, and ignorance.

The impact of the discursive turn on my research can be seen in the questions I have asked. My research question has shifted from a question of experience (“How can teacher education be improved?”) to a question of discourse (“How is teacher education represented?”). Ultimately, I explore the dynamic between these two inquiries, inspired by Pitt and Britzman’s (2003) question, “How does one distinguish between obstacles to teaching and learning and obstacles to representing teaching and learning?” (p. 759). I pursue this question not in order to bring closure to, or suggest rules for, how one should theorize or practice pedagogy, but to draw attention to the kinds of pedagogical spaces this question opens up. Applying questions of representation to education acknowledges that a crisis arises between “presentation and representation” (Pitt & Britzman, p. 759), and that this crisis leaves its mark in difficult knowledge (Pitt & Britzman, 2003), excessiveness (Fiske, 1991), excessive moments (Orner, Miller & Ellsworth, 2005), and paradoxes and impossibilities (Ellsworth, 1997). While I will use each of these concepts in my analysis, for simplicity and clarity I will mainly rely on the concept of “excess” to indicate the spaces, conflicts, and tensions between experience and expression, presentation and representation: the moments when teaching, learning, researching, and writing seem to break down and refuse representation. Ultimately, I am interested in drawing attention to the ways in which educational research and pedagogy, as representational practices, often “attempt to produce and ‘contain’ excess meaning” (Orner et al., p. 112). The excessive moments from my experiences as a B.Ed. student suggest that there is something missing in educational discourses of knowledge, reflection, and inclusion, in part due to the binary frameworks that justify such
discourses—theory/practice, enlightenment/ignorance, and normal/exceptional. I identify
the values underlying our current educational discourses, arguing that they are not
universal or absolute, but context-dependent, and therefore, capable of being changed. I
extend this argument, claiming that social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic
theories may open up spaces which dominant educational discourses have shut down.

Rationale: Healing from Histories of Violence

The reason I am interested in educational discourses, in our understandings and
representations of education, is because I believe that without a critical examination of
these discourses, histories of violence will be perpetuated. My use of the phrase “histories
of violence” is inspired by Eduardo Durán’s (2006) book Healing the soul wound: 
Counseling with American Indians and other native peoples. In his book, Durán states,

In essence, we have all internalized much of the personal and collective wounding
of our culture. Our culture has been affected by a long history of violence against
other cultures, which continues to the present. The wounding that is sustained by
the collective culture has an impact on the psyches of the individuals in the
society. (Duran, 2006, p. 20)

I find the phrase “histories of violence” useful for summarizing the violent histories that
we have all inherited through colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity,3 and other forms
of oppression. Each of these histories of violence has subjugated a certain group of
people: colonialism has subjugated racialized people through racism, patriarchy has
subjugated women through sexism, and heteronormativity has subjugated queer people
through homophobia. However, I use the terms “colonialism,” “patriarchy,” and
“heteronormativity” for two reasons: first, these terms allow for the fact that racialized

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3 “The term ‘queer’…suggest[s] how many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture. ‘Homophobia’ is a misleading term…because it suggests that the stigma and oppression directed against this entire range of people can be explained simply as a phobic reaction to same-sex love” (Warner, 1999, p. 38).
people can internalize racist oppression, women can internalize sexist oppression, and queer people can internalize homophobic oppression (Duran, 2006; hooks, 2002). Yet, terms such as racism, sexism, and homophobia imply that only a perpetrator or oppressor is capable of participating in these forms of oppression. Secondly, there is a need to acknowledge that it is not merely the oppressed who suffer from racism, sexism, and homophobia, but also the oppressor: “It is important to note that decolonizing does not apply only to Native People or other people of color who have been colonized.

…Colonization processes affect human beings at a deep soul level” (Duran, 2006, p. 14). Similarly, Robert Lovelace, a retired Algonquin chief, also notes that all Canadians, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, suffer from colonialism (Kirkby & Smyth, 2007). I summarize the impacts of colonization, patriarchy, heteronormativity and other forms of oppression as histories of violence because these “other” oppressions (such as ableism and classism) are equally detrimental, and yet are often forgotten or minimized under the label “et cetera.” The phrase “histories of violence” is also a way of acknowledging that we cannot understand our lives if we only look through the lens of race or gender or class; we need to analyse oppression through the “interlocking systems of domination” (hooks, 2002).

Method: Excessive Moments

The theories which have been the most useful in understanding my concerns with teacher education are those which do not attempt to resolve, once and for all, the tensions between theory and practice, enlightenment and ignorance, and normality and exceptionality, but those which point to the limits of educational discourses and to the

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4 Although critiques of ableism are an important part of chapter six, as far as I know, there is not yet a term that describes the broader implications of ableism. I suggest in chapter six that the concept “normal” (also embedded in the term “heteronormativity”) hides the values implicated in ableism.
inherent impossibilities of education (Ellsworth, 1997; Britzman, 1998; Pitt, 2003, Orner et al., 2005). Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) was the first researcher I came across who talks extensively about the space between teaching and learning, or between delivery and response. Drawing on film theory, she discusses the “mode of address” (p. 1)—the way in which every message delivered (whether by a film or by a teacher) has an intended audience for which the message is geared. Yet, while recent trends in film tend to make this mode of address more visible, educational discourses and practices often perpetuate the idea that there is no mediation between the message delivered and the message received. In fact, the expectation (enforced by such methods as standardized tests) is that the student will unproblematically accept and reproduce what is taught. Ellsworth argues that this model of education denies an unavoidable and essential aspect involved in teaching and learning—the invisible, unconscious, and unpredictable space between the teacher and the student. While teachers might attempt to preempt or minimize these unknowable spaces, Ellsworth argues that it is impossible to “ever close down the fear, fantasy, desire, pleasure, and horror that bubble up in the social and historical space between address and response, curriculum and student” (p. 41).

I encountered a similar recognition of unknowable spaces in the work of Orner et al. (2005), who represent such moments as “excess” or “excessive,” terms which I have found useful for describing experiences that could not be contained by dominant educational discourses. It was only after reading these authors that I considered the possibility that excessive moments in my teacher education program could be seen as valuable sources of insight rather than as evidence of “bad” teaching or learning. And, as I began to work with ideas of excess, I realized that several feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic theorists were working from a similar framework, even if they described it
in different terms. Where Orner et al. and Felman (1993) refer to excessive moments, 
Ellsworth (1997) talks about impossibility and paradox; Lewis (1993) refers to times 
without a word; Britzman (1998) discusses conflict and desire; Butler (1990) relies on the 
idea of subversive acts; and Pitt (2003) talks of a knot at the centre of education, and 
draws on Winnicott’s (1965) metaphor of hide and seek. Each of these concepts has been 
helpful for me; however, I prefer to use the phrase “excessive moments” as a way of 
referring to and connecting what each of these authors point to—moments (whether 
within or external to the schooling process) which are impossible or difficult to represent 
given the available or dominant discourses.

Excessive moments from my B.Ed. year are used as a way of initiating dialogue 
about, as well as questioning, some foundational educational discourses—discourses of 
knowledge, reflection, and inclusion. The discussions that follow are made possible 
through an inclusion of that which is often excluded from educational pedagogy, research, 
and writing (Orner et al., 2005); therefore, I invite the reader to pay attention to my 
inclusion of the excessive. At the same time, I acknowledge that my representations of 
teacher education in the following pages are not a final or stable text, but are mediated by 
the experiences, identities, and knowledge that each reader brings to it. Consequently, I 
also encourage the reader to participate in the creative process of making meaning from 
what I have written. As Orner et al. suggest, every representation simultaneously refers to 
more and less than what it intends to represent, and as such, I expect that any reading of 
this text will trigger excessive moments, just as my own readings of teacher education 
have.
Outline of Remaining Chapters

I use the discursive turn as a way of organizing the literature review in Chapter Two, pointing out that many of the current debates found in research across a range of disciplines is connected to the discursive turn. In the first part of the chapter, I outline the discursive turn—the shift from social justice theories to poststructuralist theories, and then discuss the more recent shift from poststructuralist to psychoanalytic theories. Underlying social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories are three main knowledge frameworks: the experiential, the discursive, and the unconscious. In the second part of this chapter, I challenge my initial linear, abstract representation of the discursive turn. Instead, I read through many of the works that were influential in my personal and research journeys in the past several years, noting how the “older” social justice theories have been just as important and useful to me as the more recent psychoanalytic theories. This re-writing is an attempt to highlight the ways in which social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories can be applied simultaneously in ways that allow for personal and collective healing from histories of violence.

While I have already introduced the methods that have informed my analysis of teacher education, the processes of reading, writing, and researching are discussed in greater detail in the third chapter. Here I practice an autobiographical reading, identifying resistance and hesitations in my representations of teacher education. This chapter is embedded with the most common question I was asked as a graduate student: “What is your research about?” My responses to these questions suggest that representations of reading, writing, and research are never complete or final, but are always shifting. I question what it is that we mean by research, and disrupt dominant notions of research.
Using psychoanalytic theory, I point out that the purpose and direction of my research are often unknown even to me, and that I write in order to learn what my research is about.

In Chapter Four I look at stories of knowledge through educational discourses of theory and practice. Initially asking, ‘What do student teachers want?’ I move away from this question, worrying that this question might lead to less theoretically-informed practice. Turning to an excessive moment in one of my B.Ed. courses that presented the Six Thinking Hats teaching strategy, I argue that we need to analyse the theories that inform teaching strategies and practices, since they may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of colonialist mentalities. Reading this excessive moment through social justice theories, I highlight some of the uses and limitations of applying social justice theories in educational contexts. Turning to poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, I re-read the same excessive moment through these theories, wondering if I might have unconsciously both participated in and resisted dominant understandings of theory and practice. I conclude by turning the question of desire back to teachers: instead of asking “What do student teachers want?” I suggest that we ask “What do teachers want?” In the chapters that follow, I suggest that teachers want learning (Chapter Five) and teaching (Chapter Six) to be processes that are not difficult and that do not trouble the knowledge we already have.

In Chapter Five, I refer to the educational tool of reflective practice, which is often intended as a strategy for encouraging student teachers to be involved in the process of knowledge creation. However, I argue that reflection, whether in written or verbal form,

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5 Although several teacher education programs in Ontario refer to Bachelor of Education students as “teacher candidates,” I have argued in an earlier paper (Smyth, 2007) that the term “student teacher” maintains the complex identities that must be negotiated, as one is both a student in university courses and a teacher in school placements. From a theoretical standpoint, the term “student teacher” is preferred because it deconstructs binary discourses by acknowledging that a person can be neither a teacher, nor a student, and yet both simultaneously (Helstein, 2005).
often merely confirms pre-existing knowledge. I rely upon two excessive moments from
my B.Ed. program: in the first example, I discuss the impact of an assignment called
Finding the Centre, where student teachers were asked to reflect on their personal
philosophy of teaching. In the second example, I discuss a class viewing of the film
Submission and the ensuing dialogue about our reflections on the film. Reading these two
excessive moments through educational discourses of reflection, I argue that reflection
contributes to authoritative discourses, where the contexts, cultures and values that
influence knowledge are rendered invisible. I connect this to colonialist attitudes that
render unfamiliar knowledge as “other;” by claiming familiar knowledge as rational,
individual, and changing, unfamiliar knowledge is presented as irrational, communal or
traditional, and static. I suggest that creating a binary between discourses of
enlightenment and ignorance does not acknowledge the fact that learning can perpetuate
ignorance, if ignorance is understood as a form of resisting knowledge that is
uncomfortable or that we want to keep unconscious. Re-reading one of the excessive
moments, I am forced to consider my own ignorance: my resistance to and my delayed
acknowledgment of the impact of patriarchal discourses.

In the sixth chapter, I suggest that teachers want teaching to be a process that is
not difficult. In this chapter, I begin with an excessive moment from one of my B.Ed.
courses, where I tried, unsuccessfully, to challenge the values that were embedded in
educational discourses of normality and exceptionality. I begin by discussing the text
Madness and Civilization, in which Foucault (1973) argues that European societies during
the classical period relied on value systems to exclude certain groups of people, including
the poor, the “mad,” and criminals. I then turn to six normative frameworks—the social,
statistical, medical, natural, traditional, and moral—and point out that these frameworks
are based on changing, contextual values rather than absolute, universal references for their existence. (I suggest that statistical norms might be an exception, but also argue that value systems return when applying statistical norms in educational contexts). I connect the role of values to the educational concepts “normal” and “exceptional,” arguing that “exceptional” is not a euphemism for those who are differently abled, but for specific values, values that are contextual and that should be changed. I suggest that the values underlying educational discourses of normality and exceptionality exclude in spite of their claim to include, returning to Foucault to make parallels to similar processes of exclusion in other times and places. Reading a teacher educator’s and student teachers’ rejection of psychoanalytic theory, I get curious about the fact that teachers reject the very theories that can sustain the unpredictable, excessive, and uncomfortable in education. I conclude by arguing that psychoanalytic theories of education can lead to more inclusive educational environments than discourses of inclusion.

The final chapter of this thesis brings together the ideas discussed throughout, summarizing the unique contributions of social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories. I argue that not only do we need each of these theories to inform our educational discourses, we also need researchers to be explicit about the histories that have influenced these theories, particularly the shift from social justice theories to poststructuralist theories in the discursive turn. I suggest that especially for younger generations who were not around to experience the realities that led to social justice and poststructuralist theories, more recent educational research and discourses will remain decontextualized and, therefore, be absent of much of their power and insight.
Chapter Two

Literature Review: How the Discursive Turn Relates to Teacher Education

“Throughout the second half of the twentieth century a paradigm shift has been underway in epistemology, a movement from an absolutist, subject-centered conception of truth to a conception of truth as situated, perspectival, and discursive. It is my contention, first, that feminism was and continues to be at the forefront of this paradigm shift and, second, that feminist standpoint theory has contributed an important dimension to that shift within feminist theory” (Hekman, 2004, p. 233).

“Early emphasis on women’s coming to voice via the process of consciousness-raising and claiming individual ‘voice’ inadvertently laid the foundation for the type of conceptual ambiguity between individual and group as categories of analysis. Contemporary feminist theorizing, especially the emergence of postmodern social theory’s theme of deconstructing the subject, aggravates this long-standing commitment to bringing individual women to voice as emblematic of the collective struggle of women for ‘voice’” (Collins, 2004, p. 252).

Part One: A Literature Review of The Discursive Turn

To examine discourses in teacher education, I have relied on various theories—critical race, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic—as well as several disciplines—sociology, cultural studies (including film/media studies), education, philosophy, and history. Conducting interdisciplinary research can be incredibly rewarding in terms of gaining alternative perspectives or approaches; there are certain questions I would never have thought to ask about teacher education had I merely stayed within the realm of educational research. However, trying to make a coherent summary of such diverse literature is difficult. Even when researchers from different theoretical or disciplinary backgrounds address a similar issue, the language and approach which they use can vary widely, making easy comparisons impossible. Since I cannot do justice in reviewing the literature from any one—let alone all—of the perspectives outlined above, I have chosen a central theme—the discursive turn—through which to discuss the literature that has been most relevant for my work.
I begin by outlining a historical analysis of the discursive turn, and then introduce various works that represent some of the debates about experience and discourse that were foundational to the discursive turn. I refer to three theories and knowledge sources: social justice theories that rely on the notion of experience, poststructuralist theories that rely on the notion of discourses, and psychoanalytic theories that rely on the notion of the unconscious. In the second half of this chapter, I move the discussion away from the abstract language of the discursive turn and describe how the three knowledge claims (experience, discourse, and the unconscious) and theories (social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic) have impacted my relations with the stories around me. This re-reading is an attempt to situate the impact of the discursive turn in the contexts and power dynamics that influence when and how knowledge becomes meaningful.

*The discursive turn.* The discursive turn is alternatively known as the linguistic turn, the cultural turn, or the crisis of representation, and has been associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism. During the crisis brought about by the discursive turn in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the fluidity of discourses, representation, meaning, and perception began to challenge the stability of experience, identity, reality, and truth. The discursive turn is a useful framework for summarizing, in a common language, the ideas that many theorists, from a wide range of disciplines, explore. Since historians have written extensively about the discursive turn, I use their work to explain this cultural shift. Reading about the history of the discursive turn allows me to draw connections among the texts I read and my experiences, to better understand how authors are speaking to each other.

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6 Discursive turn (Corson, 2001; Fay, 1998); linguistic turn (Eley, 2005; Canning, 2006; Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Fay, 1998); cultural turn (Chaney, 1994); crisis of representation (Britzman, 1997; Pitt & Britzman, 2003).

other from different places and times, and to situate my own experiences and discourses in these conversations.

In the field of history, the impact of the discursive turn⁸ is evident in the recognition that language, discourse, symbols, and memory influence the construction of stories about the past. Eley (2005) and Canning (2006) talk about shifting trends in historical research: from social history in the 1960s and ’70s, to cultural history, which began in the 1980s and climaxed in the 1990s. The emphasis on experience is characteristic of social history and was replaced by cultural history’s emphasis on discourse, or the languages and symbols that define and create reality. In other words, social historians relied on the experiences of marginalized groups as the source of knowledge whereas cultural historians questioned the discourses used to represent such experiences. Where social historians might have asked “what is the experience of the other?” cultural historians were more likely to ask “how do we represent the experience of the other?” While the distinctions between “social history” and “cultural history” make it easier to understand the issues at stake in the discursive turn, I also appreciate Eley and Canning’s deconstruction of this distinction, noting that it is overly simplistic, and that historians should move beyond thinking and writing in ways that favour social history and experiences, or cultural history and discourses.

Eley (2005) argues that the turn to cultural history was strongly influenced by feminist critiques of the limitations of class analysis. Canning (2006) also argues that unlike many historians who associate Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan with the discursive turn, she views feminist history as its main impetus. When historians of women began

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⁸ The “linguistic turn” seems to be the phrase most historians choose, since it refers specifically to the impact of the discursive turn in the field of history. However, to avoid associating the discursive turn with only one academic discipline, I use the more widely applicable term “discursive turn.”
using the term “gender” in the early 1980s, it “signified the social or cultural relation between the sexes” (Canning, 2006, p. 4). As discourse increasingly became the lens of analysis, gender “widened to include the symbolic system or signifier of relations of power in which men and women are positioned differently” (p. 4). The influence of gender history on women’s history is still visible in that it challenged the essentialism of the term “woman,” a process that is now being applied to “gender” itself by “scholarship on sexuality, Queer Studies, on race, ethnicity, and hybridity” (p. 61).

Both Eley (2005) and Canning (2006) point to feminist research as initiating the discursive turn in the field of history, and both cite Joan Scott’s (1986) _Gender: A useful category of historical analysis_ as an influential essay. While Scott does not refer specifically to the discursive turn in this essay, her historiography of the different ways “gender” has been understood and applied recognizes the tensions involved during the discursive turn. She notes that

> the use of the word gender has emerged at a moment of great epistemological turmoil...from an emphasis on cause to one on meaning...between those who assert the transparency of facts and those who insist that all reality is construed or constructed, between those who defend and those who question the idea that ‘man’ is the rational master of his own destiny. (p. 1066)

Scott identifies here some of the main debates that arose during the discursive turn about human agency, meaning, and reality. I will return to Scott, but introduce these debates since they are a backdrop against which the theories outlined in this chapter are set.

Canning (2006) and Valverde (2000) note the limitations of Scott’s analysis as “having a stifling and silencing effect” (Valverde, p. 75) and as not offering a workable notion of women’s experience (Canning). My own hesitation with Scott’s analysis is her use of categories, particularly in her description of psychoanalytic theory. Here she contrasts “French poststructuralist and Anglo-American object-relations theorists,”
identifying Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan as key figures in the former, and Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan as influential in the latter (1986, p. 1057). She includes a footnote to identify the important “differences in interpretation and approach between Chodorow and British object-relations theorists who follow the work of D. W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein” (Scott, 1986, pp. 1062-3). However, she stops short of defining what these important differences are; her reasoning for dismissing British object-relations theorists is that they haven’t been as influential in defining American feminist approaches. Is it possible that interpretations of Winnicott and Klein might complicate Scott’s analysis, offering a potential site of tension between theory and history, or experience and language? Pitt’s (2003) and Britzman’s (2003) work⁹ rely on Winnicott and Klein, and perhaps there we might find the tension for which Scott is advocating: “conceptual language that at once sets boundaries and contains the possibility for negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination” (p. 1067). While Scott’s analysis may rest on problematic categories, like Canning, I appreciate her critique of experience as a form of knowledge, and I will return to Scott’s analysis later in this chapter. However, since Scott critiques experience as it applies to gender, I will first turn to feminist standpoint theory, a theory that relies heavily on notions of women’s experience and on women’s social locations.

Feminist standpoint theory considers women’s personal and communal experiences to be a valid source of knowledge (Lewis, 1993), and recognizes that knowledge is contextual rather than absolute (Gamble, 2000). Since all knowledge is situated or located in specific contexts, the only way we can know is through our location—our historical, geographical, temporal, social, and cultural contexts. Therefore,

⁹ These works will be discussed in more detail later.
our experiences of the same events will be as diverse as our positions in these contexts:
standpoint theorists argue that “all knowledge claims are socially situated” (Harding, 2004, p. 11), that women’s experiences of the world are important sources of knowledge (Smith, 2004), and that “there is no single feminist vision” (Haraway, 2004, p. 93).

Valuing contextual knowledge over absolute knowledge is discomforting for those who equate contextual knowledge with relativism. For example, Walby (2000) argues for a return to more comfortable ways of knowing, “for the power of argument, of reasoned debate, rather than reducing differences in intellectual and political projects to social location” (p. 189). She argues that there must be some criteria for assessment so that differences are not “elevated into a principle of feminist analysis,” but are “analysed pragmatically” (p. 200). For Walby, this pragmatic analysis takes the form of argumentation and communication as outlined by Habermas, “which, when done in good faith, between people equally situated with regard to the relevant resources, can lead to improvements in knowledge” (Walby, pp. 193-4). However, hooks (1984) and Cochran-Smith (2000) suggest that people are never situated entirely equally in relation to relevant resources. Similarly, Narayan (2004) argues that Habermas’ “ideal speech situation” is unable to account for the ways in which race, class, and gender impact ways of knowing and communicating (p. 217).

Although I do not agree with Walby (2000) that dialogue between people can ever be void of power imbalances, her ultimate concern seems to be an inability to resign herself to “the defeatism and isolationism of forever partial and situated knowledges” (p. 194). However, even standpoint theorists, who embrace situated knowledges, share this concern of eternal defeat and isolation. Harding (2004) wonders which women’s experiences and social positions are considered worthy of informing feminist theory;
whether it will be “only the women privileged to speak and write from the dominant universities, research institutions, and national and international institutions and agencies” (p. 7). Smith (2004) points out that experience as a source of knowledge should not be confused with “the self-indulgence of inner exploration” (p. 29). In other words, she makes a distinction between “subjectivist” reflections on one’s individual consciousness or experiences, and sociological analyses of the “concrete conditions and practices upon which [our experiences] depend” (p. 29). And, Haraway (2004) argues for “a doctrine and practice of objectivity” since relativism and absolutism “are both ‘god tricks’ promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully” (p.89). A feminist understanding of objectivity means precisely an acceptance that knowledge is contextual: “only partial perspective promises objective vision. …In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, p. 87). Generally, standpoint feminists believe that critical dialogue about women’s experiences and oppression is an effective means of challenging oppressive power structures. Social justice theorists also argue that critical awareness of one’s identity is an essential precursor to social transformation.

*Social justice theories: What do our experiences mean?* Before describing theories of social justice, I offer a word of critique about the way that I have categorized them. In a sense, I have used the term “social justice theories” because I could not find a more fitting description of theories that rely on experience—particularly the experiences of marginalized groups—as the source both for knowledge and for political change. Part of the difficulty in distinguishing between what I will refer to as social justice theories and poststructuralist theories is that while many authors are comfortable with defining poststructuralist theories, they do not give a term for the theories that existed prior to the discursive turn. Pitt (2003) is one author who refers to but does not define those theories
that I group under the heading of social justice, and yet her distinction between pre- and post-discursive turn theories is useful. In describing the relationship between these two theories, she notes that they are both interested in questions of interpretation in the “bestowal of meaning on events, experience, or texts” (p. 4). However, where many social justice and identity-based theories claim that “meaning is made from experience, and interpretation is tied to and expressed by identity,” poststructuralist theories note that “meaning is made from discourses of power and knowledge, and interpretation locates the traces power/knowledge leaves in texts, utterances, and institutional arrangements and practices” (Pitt, p. 5).

Paulo Freire’s (1993) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* was a benchmark text in defining possibilities for the liberation of the oppressed. Since then, his binary division between the oppressor and the oppressed has been revised to allow for the possibility that people can hold multiple identities, both as an oppressor and as one who is oppressed. Those who fit any or all of the identities of white, male, heterosexual, Christian, able, owning or middle class, and middle-aged adult, are considered oppressors (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, p. 20). Theories of social justice often rely on the idea, outlined by Freire, that in order for the oppressed to be liberated, they must become aware of their oppression:

> When men [*sic*] lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, …they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (pp. 94-5)

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10 It is possible, as Narayan (2004) notes, that even people who fit within categories that would identify them as ‘oppressed,’ might take up the ideologies and practices of the oppressor, consciously or unconsciously, to benefit from the privileges of the oppressor.
The consciousness raising efforts of the second wave feminist movement relied on this idea that increased awareness would enable more productive political action (hooks, 2000).

*Poststructuralist theories: What meaning do discourses give to experience?* The quotations at the beginning of this chapter are both written by feminist standpoint theorists, and yet, while Hekman (2004) aligns herself with the feminists who have contributed to the discursive turn, Collins (2004) argues that poststructuralist theories have added to the confusion about the meanings of individual and collective women’s voices. Collins is concerned about theorists who use deconstructionist or poststructuralist arguments to defend their individual discursive representations, forgetting the ways in which such discursive representations are situated in group dynamics of power. I will take up Collins’ point later in this chapter, but for now, I will discuss the work of theorists who align themselves with poststructuralist theories.

I return first to Scott’s (1986) critique of experience in order to make a clearer connection to how these theories relate to the discursive turn. For Scott, the problem with theories that rely solely on identity differences is that they make historical analyses difficult, if not impossible.

A theory that rests on the single variable of physical difference poses problems for historians: it assumes a consistent or inherent meaning for the human body—outside social or cultural construction—and thus the ahistoricity of gender itself. History becomes, in a sense, epiphenomenal, providing endless variations on the unchanging theme of a fixed gender identity. (p. 1059)

Scott’s emphasis on the role of language and discourse may be interpreted as a rejection of experience altogether. However, she argues that a theory that does not acknowledge the discursive role of gender is problematic, since
Without meaning, there is no experience; without processes of signification, there is no meaning (which is not to say that language is everything, but a theory that does not take it into account misses the powerful roles that symbols, metaphors, and concepts play in the definition of human personality and human history). (p. 1063)

Arguing for a Derridian deconstruction of the gender binary, Scott states that “we need…a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference” (p. 1065). Although Scott’s critique is directed at the methods employed by feminist historians, she acknowledges that there have always been feminist theorists working towards deconstructing gender binaries and reversing the hierarchical arrangement of gender. In Scott’s work we begin to see the effects of the discursive turn on understandings of gender, “from a notion of gender identity as existing prior to language, to the idea of gender identity being discursively constituted” (Weatherall, 2002, p. 122).

Judith Butler (1990) offers a discursive analysis of sex and gender in her book *Gender trouble*. Applying Foucault’s understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power, Butler writes a genealogical critique of gender, arguing that identity does not exist prior to discourse but is created through institutions and discourses. She critiques feminist theorists who assume that there is a subject, namely “woman,” who requires political representation, arguing instead that “the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation” (1990, p. 2). Unlike those who connect gender to a person’s biological sex, Butler argues that there is no real or true male or female: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 33). Returning to how power is produced, Butler is interested in “subversive acts,” since “power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed” (p. 124). She
wonders, “Which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized?” (p. 31). Joan Scott (1986) also notes the inability to adequately represent gender, since “‘man’ and ‘woman’ are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions” (p. 1074).

Psychoanalytic theories: What does the unconscious do to meaning? Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) is also interested in possibilities that disrupt conventional discourses. Discourses in education often carry the assumption that gaps between “what a curriculum ‘says’ and what a student gets—or understands” (p. 41) can be eliminated, or that they should at least be minimized. Ellsworth argues that this necessitates a denial of difference, and wonders what might happen if educators shifted their focus from trying to achieve “full and complete understanding” to “the productiveness of our continuously remodeled ignore-ances, lacks of fit, and limitations of knowing” (p. 53).

Ellsworth contrasts the goals and outcomes of communicative and analytic dialogue, preferring the latter as a more realistic alternative to the conventional use of communicative dialogue in educational contexts. Communicative dialogue recognizes only two participants in a conversation: the speaker (teacher) and the audience (students). In this way, it is assumed that a message spoken (the curriculum) should be the same message received, and any breakdown in communication is considered a failure of the teacher to deliver the message effectively, or of the student to understand and appropriately respond to the message. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Ellsworth points out that in dialogue, “there is always a third participant—namely, those constraints
within the culture as a whole and arising from the splitness of my own psyche” (1997, p. 124). Unlike communicative dialogue which assumes complete understanding is possible, analytic dialogue assumes discontinuities, and our role as educators is “to not foreclose these discontinuities or to resolve them into ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’” (p. 125). What we can learn from, however, is the processes by which we come to ‘know:’ the ways in which we interpret and make sense of our experiences.

Ellsworth’s work begins to lead towards the idea of excessiveness. Ellsworth (1997) and Orner et al. (2005) are interested in exploring the unpredictable moments in education—the impossibility of identifying exactly when learning happens or how it happens, or who it is that does the learning or the teaching at any given time. Yet research and pedagogy, as representational practices, often “attempt to produce and ‘contain’ excess meaning” (Orner et al., p. 112). Attempts to represent “the real” always contain more and less than they intend: “what becomes contained by an educational discourse and what becomes excess or excessive to it is no accident. Excess is a symptom of histories of repression and of the interests associated with those histories” (Orner et al., p. 111). To those who might argue that the crisis of representation is too relativist and does not allow for meaningful political action, Butler argues that “In the absence of the possibility of a complete and adequate master text about the world, or knowing of the world, the production of partial texts ‘can be one way of reconfiguring what will count as the world’” (as cited in Orner et al., p. 129, emphasis added).

Incorporating psychoanalytic theories into this research has been something I simultaneously desired and resisted from an early point in my research. How could I refer to psychoanalytic theory without an in-depth analysis of the abundant and complex works of major psychoanalysts, or even just of Sigmund Freud? Once again, the challenge of
interdisciplinary research seemed too daunting to be possible. However, Pitt (2003) makes the point that although she draws on ideas from multiple disciplines, it is “not the doctrines of psychoanalysis or of literary criticism” (p. 3) that her work explores. Instead, she points out, it is the “residual effects of my learning and unlearning from critical and feminist educational studies and from psychoanalytic theories of learning and subjectivity” (p. 3). In other words, as Felman (1987) has noted, it is possible to imply, rather than apply, psychoanalytic theories since psychoanalysis is “a process, not a set of doctrines” (p. 11). The “residual effects” of my learning and unlearning will be explored in the remaining chapters, but for now I will situate Alice Pitt’s and Deborah Britzman’s psychoanalytic approaches within the context of the discursive turn.

Applying psychoanalytic understandings of the unconscious to the discursive turn’s concern with experience and discourse offers a unique approach that I did not find in the work of any other theorists. Where other theorists have been interested in the “crisis of representation that is outside,” in the world of observable words and actions, psychoanalysis adds another dimension: “the crisis of representation that is inside,” in the world of the unconscious (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756). How can we narrate our experiences when the ways we represent those experiences are informed not only by our conscious knowledge, but by the dynamics between our conscious and unconscious knowledge? Since the unconscious both desires and resists knowledge, “representation is a compromise, an attempt to ward off crisis, because constructions are made from an argument between the wish for coherence and the anxiety over what coherence excludes” (Pitt & Britzman, p. 759). The meaning that we make from our experience is delayed because “the force of an event is felt before it can be understood, and a current event may take its force and revisions from an earlier scene” (Pitt & Britzman, p. 758). As such,
there is a dilemma when it comes to distinguishing between past and present events:

“Where does one situate the event that is experience? In the past that is narrated or in the presence of its interpretation?” (Pitt & Britzman, p. 759). Pitt and Britzman do not resolve this, but say that the tension between the two is the space of difficult knowledge: “What makes recollections of our educational history a form of difficult knowledge is that obstacles to learning become entangled with obstacles to representing learning” (p. 759).

Part Two: A Literature Review Situated in The Discursive Turn

The first part of this chapter provides the reader with an overview of the discursive turn, situating my reading of and writing about the three main theories discussed in this thesis: social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic. While in many ways researching and writing about the discursive turn allowed me to understand some of the undercurrents in academic literature that I had sensed but not fully grasped, there were several things that troubled me about a literature review of the discursive turn. First of all, I found it difficult to reduce theories into the categories “experiential” or “discursive;” some theorists simultaneously referred to experience and to discourse. As an example, the diverse perspectives of feminist standpoint theorists make it difficult to judge whether this theory rejects or embraces the insights brought about by the discursive turn; each theorist takes up the issues at stake in different, and sometimes conflicting ways. Second, I found it very difficult to write about the discursive turn as an event experienced and constructed by people; in the first part of this chapter, my voice is maintained as a distanced and objective narrator, an approach that I critique throughout this thesis. My concern is that the majority of the research I found that discussed the discursive turn was by white, male authors. As a consequence, some of the works by people of colour and by women that had had the most significant impact on my thinking
was absent from this initial literature review. What follows is an attempt to situate my learning in the works that have been most influential to me, and to return the discursive turn to its origins in feminist theory and in the critiques of white, middle-class feminism by racialized, “Third World,” and queer women (Eley, 2005; Canning, 2006).

To begin, I must acknowledge Collins’ (2004) influence in this last-minute re-writing. I initially read her work as an attempt to determine where I could situate feminist standpoint theory in the discursive turn. Erasing my privilege and removing feminist standpoint theory, among other theories, from the people who struggled to create these knowledges, I was obscuring the connections between power and knowledge:

Extracting any claims about knowledge from the power relations in which they are embedded violates the basic premise of standpoint theory because such theory exists primarily to explicate these power relations. Thus, attempts to take the knowledge while leaving the power behind inadvertently operate within the terrain of privileged knowledge. (Collins, 2004, p. 253)

The influence of the discursive turn is still visible in this revised literature review: through my engagement with stories, discourses, texts, language, narratives, autobiographies, meaning-making, and representation. I encourage the reader to be mindful of the ways in which the authors below, and my readings of them, are situated in relation to experience, discourse, and the unconscious, or to social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories. When and how are each of these used to make and challenge truth claims, to make and challenge judgments?

Inspired by Thomas King (2003), I begin with creation stories. Creation stories might not seem to have much to do with teacher education, but, as King notes, “contained within creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist” (p. 10). Since education is also about relationships and about understanding the world in which we exist, creation stories
might not be such a bad place to start. I was raised on one creation story, a Christian story complete with God, angels, man, woman, animals, and the devil (the order being an important part of the story). For many years, this story served me well: it gave me an absolute framework from which I could judge everything. In a world where there are many questions, I had solid answers and was very confident in those answers.

There were many circumstances that made me question whether this creation story, and the religious beliefs built upon it, might not be as true or as good as I had believed. Perhaps the most influential text, or story, that challenged my belief in Christian creation stories was Thomas King’s (2003) book *The truth about stories*, which I first heard on CBC radio as part of the Massey Lecture series. Contrasting the Christian creation story with his telling of a Native creation story, King makes a connection between the stories we tell and the world we live in. He notes that although Christian and Native creation stories might seem to have a lot in common since they explain the origin of the world and of people,

> a storyteller would tell you that these two stories are quite different, for whether you read the Bible as sacred text or secular metaphor, the elements in Genesis create a particular universe governed by a series of hierarchies—God, man, animals, plants—that celebrate law, order, and good government, while in our Native story, the universe is governed by a series of co-operations—Charm, the Twins, animals, humans—that celebrate equality and balance. (pp. 23-4)

The Christian creation story of the Bible—with its authoritative tone, its all-knowing, all-powerful God, its emphasis on hierarchies and order, its lack of room for error, and its ensuing punishment for wrong behaviour—is juxtaposed with King’s narration of a Native creation story—with its oral telling that leaves room for change, its deity that makes mistakes and seeks help, its emphasis on harmony and co-operation, its use of humour to soften imperfections, and its room for second chances. He urges us to consider
the comparative prevalence of the former creation story in North America, and how the values and qualities in this story are visible in our relations with the world around us:

Perhaps this is why we delight in telling stories about heroes battling the odds and the elements, rather than about the magic of seasonal change. Why we relish stories that lionize individuals who start at the bottom and fight their way to the top, rather than stories that frame these forms of competition as varying degrees of insanity. Why we tell our children that life is hard, when we could just as easily tell them that it is sweet.

Is it our nature? Do the stories we tell reflect the world as it truly is, or did we simply start off with the wrong story? (2003, p. 26)

If, as King argues, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are,” (p. 2) perhaps we need to examine the stories we tell and consider whether or not we are happy with whom and what they engender.

King’s stories, became, in a sense, a replacement for the Christian stories I had heard and believed for over 20 years. Why is it that King’s stories had such a strong impact on me? Why did they provide a catalyst for some drastic changes that not even I could have predicted? Perhaps part of the reason is that I needed to believe that we create our reality through the stories we tell, that truth is not governed by an abstract, unseen being, but is chosen by people. If people have the agency to change the truths they believe or the stories they tell, then they also have the agency—and the responsibility—to change the realities in which they live. Many Christians that I knew explained away injustices and human imperfections as an inevitable reality of this life and deferred hopes for a better life to the next world. But to me, it did not make sense that a religion that claimed love and grace as its main principles had ongoing histories of immense violence: the stories of God-sanctioned wars in the Bible, the colonization and genocide of countless
peoples and cultures around the world historically and even today,\textsuperscript{11} and my own experience and witnessing of abuse in the Christian communities in which I was raised.

Prior to hearing King’s stories, I had had several opportunities to get to know people in a couple of Native communities in northern Ontario. My experiences in these communities and the impact of King’s stories inspired me to learn more from Native people. I felt that until I could spend an extended amount of time living with and learning from Native people, I would not be able to replace the kind of community I was craving after leaving the Christian community that had been such a foundational part of my life.

Before I had the chance to fulfill this dream of replacing my lost Christian faith with the holistic and respectful worldviews of Native spirituality, I encountered Duran’s (2006) book *Healing the soul wound*, which suggested that my attitude towards Native people was a stereotype, and that while it may have been a positive stereotype, it was no less harmful than negative stereotypes.

Using the concept of transference—the process of projecting unconscious wishes and desires onto a person(s) or thing(s)—Duran identifies some of the detrimental effects of the projection, or stereotype, of special spiritual and/or healing qualities onto Native people:

If people are not able to live up to the identity that has been projected on them, this may cause alienation and in more serious instances may be the underlying cause of emotional or psychological splitting. Also, the inability to live up to projected fantasies may cause people to regress to a safer psychological state, which may help them live up to the fantasy in their own individual life-world. As a result of struggling to reach a nonexistent ideal, the individual may begin to feel an emptiness that can be manifested as a loss of self, or depersonalization. On one hand, we have the fantasy of the ideal image, and on the other there is reality, and it becomes increasingly difficult to harmonize ideal and real as a single personality. (2003, p. 30)

\textsuperscript{11} King, 2003; Welch, 1985.
Duran notes that the concept of transference can be traced both to Western psychologists such as Freud and Jung, and it can also be understood by Native people as a spiritual transference where “energy actually is transferred from one being to another” (p. 29). Duran’s argument has inspired me to continue searching for stories that can replace the Christian ones I had rejected, and to do so in ways that will not contribute to further oppression.

In my search for stories to replace Christian creation stories, I found the story “Bluebeard” in Estés’ (1995) book, *Women who run with the wolves*. In this story, a young woman is told by her husband Bluebeard that she has the freedom to do whatever she likes in his absence except to open the door which fits the smallest key on the keychain he leaves with her. But the woman ignores the warning, opens the door, and finds an abundance of skulls, skeletons, and blood; we later find out these belong to Bluebeard’s former wives who also opened the door. I was struck by the parallels of “Bluebeard” to the biblical story of Eve, who eats fruit from the only tree from which she was forbidden to eat. In the Christian tradition, this story is used to explain humankind’s separation from intimacy with the divine, and the termination of peaceful relationships with all living things. And so, I was unprepared for the conclusion of “Bluebeard,” which I thought would include an admonishment towards the young woman. Instead, Estés’ telling of the story reveals the intuitive curiosity of the woman as a life-saving force:

The key represents permission to know the deepest, darkest secrets of the psyche, in this case the something that mindlessly degrades and destroys a woman’s potential. …Bluebeard forbids the young woman to use the one key that would bring her to consciousness. To forbid a woman to use the key to conscious self knowledge strips away her intuitive nature, her natural instinct for curiosity that leads her to discover “what lies underneath” and beyond the obvious. Without this knowing, the woman is without proper protection. If she attempts to obey Bluebeard’s command not to use the key, she chooses death for her spirit. By
choosing to open the door to the ghastly secret room, she chooses life. (Estés, 1995, pp. 50-51)

The impact of reading Estés’ story was a healing replacement for the Christian story of Eve. Estés notes that stories, if told by people who have been trained in the ways of storytelling, are capable of healing: “Stories are medicine. …The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories” (Estés, 1995, p. 15). The story of Bluebeard was like a medicine to the unconscious oppression of the story of Eve in my life. Consider the contrasting messages of these stories: in the Christian story, women’s desire for insight, for knowledge of good and evil, results in her banishment from paradise, but in the story of Bluebeard, women are celebrated for rejecting lies that keep their deepest wisdom hidden. However, the messages or meanings of stories are not given or inevitable: the reader brings their own interpretation to any text. For me, the story of Bluebeard, particularly in contrast to the story of Eve, was interpreted through a gendered lens. Consider two additional gendered interpretations of this story, one that makes possible and supports my interpretation (Estés), and one that has influenced dominant discourses, particularly in the field of psychology (Freud and Bettelheim):

Some psychological thinkers, including Freud and Bettelheim, have interpreted episodes such as those found in the Bluebeard tale as psychological punishments for women’s sexual curiosity. Early in the formation of classical psychology women’s curiosity was given quite a negative connotation, whereas men with the same attribute were called investigative. Women were called nosy, whereas men were called inquiring. In reality, the trivialization of women’s curiosity so that it seems like nothing more than irksome snooping denies women’s insight, hunches, intuitions. It denies all her senses. It attempts to attack her most fundamental powers: differentiation and determination. (Estés, 1995, p. 51)

There are, in effect, countless interpretations of any story, inevitably bound up in dominant or available discourses, and in a person’s experience in the world.
The suggestion that stories do not contain absolute truths, but merely ways of making sense of the world around us is considered by some to lead towards an endless relativism. If every “truth” is, in fact, merely a “story” influenced by ideologies, experiences, and discourses, do we not render ourselves incapable of making judgments? However, as many authors have argued (King, 2003; Welch, 1985; Estés, 1995; Ellsworth, 1997), we are responsible not only for the stories that we tell, but also for the interpretations, or judgments, we make from those stories. The stories themselves often contain the “truths” that enable us to make judgments; while each person’s interpretation of a story may vary, the stories and the ways they are told also allow for certain readings and interpretations, while excluding others. So, what happens when, as Estés argues,

Most old collections of fairy tales and mythos existent today have been scoured clean of the scatological, the sexual, the perverse (as in warnings against), the pre-Christian, the feminine, the Goddesses, the initiatory, the medicines for various psychological malaises, and the directions for spiritual raptures. (p. 16)

What effect does the elimination, or suppression, of these elements from our fairy tales, our myths, and our stories, have on our lives? Returning once again to the impact of Christian symbolism and mythology, Estés notes that,

Over the course of time, old pagan symbols were overlaid with Christian ones, so that an old healer in a tale became an evil witch, a spirit became an angel, an initiation veil or caul became a handkerchief, or a child named Beautiful (the customary name for a child born during Solstice festival) was renamed Schmerzenreich, Sorrowful. Sexual elements were omitted. Helping creatures and animals were often changed into demons and bogeys. (p. 15)

What did pagan stories make possible and impossible? What have Christian stories made possible and impossible? What happens when stories get elevated to a level of absolute truth governed by a divine authority? Stories, fairy tales, and myths have their roots in oral tellings that are bound to change with each teller; they leave room for imagination, for shifting formats, and for messages that are suited to the moment and to the audience
(King, 2003; Estés, 1995). In contrast, the collection of Christian stories in a sacred text and endowed with the authority of being the word of God himself leaves little room for questioning, or for alternative stories—who can argue with God?

It must be noted that not all Christians or Christian communities interpret the Bible as the literal word of God; typically those that do are referred to as “fundamentalist.” While each of the Christian communities in which I grew up were fundamentalist, there continue to be Christians who read biblical texts in alternative ways. Looking in particular at Christians in El Salvador, Welch (1985) notes that their interest lies not so much in the question of God’s existence, but in the relationship between the “God of liberation” and the “gods of capitalism and the national security state,” which are gods because “they function as absolutes, as the premise of analysis and social structures, and are not subject to evaluation themselves” (p. 7). In other words, “the question of truth was a question of practice: forces were identified as ‘gods’ in terms of their function in people’s lives, not in terms of their correspondence to something about the divine nature in itself” (pp. 7-8). As a specific example of how language informs the relationship between truth and practice, Welch refers to the phrase “liberating God.” She suggests that in contrast to many theologians who interpret biblical texts literally, there is another way of interpreting this language—emphasizing that the referent of the phrase ‘liberating God’ is not primarily God but liberation. That is, the language here is true not because it corresponds with something in the divine nature but because it leads to actual liberation in history. The truth of God-language and of all theological claims is measured not by their correspondence to something eternal but by the fulfillment of its claims in history, by the actual creation of communities of peace, justice, and equality. (p. 7)

My experiences in Christian communities have included many examples of people working towards peace, justice, and equality; they have also included many experiences of exclusion, abuse, and silencing. Part of this silencing is the inability to listen to,
acknowledge, and respond to the challenge that perhaps Christian stories need to be changed, or read and interpreted in alternative ways. The result of assuming that there is one correct way of interpreting biblical texts is, as Welch argues, “unabashed theological imperialism. The male experience of sin and redemption is identified as the human experience of sin and redemption; Western Christianity is exported to other nations and cultures as the definitive disclosure of the divine-human relationship” (Welch, 1985, p. 59).

It is not only Christian communities that have perpetrated colonialist attitudes; educational communities have also maintained colonialist mindsets. In a conversation with a professor, we wonder why it is that we intend to, but rarely do, read more works by people of colour, especially since our research is motivated by issues of justice and equality. I want to blame the whiteness of the canon, the whiteness of the knowledge that I have been taught. But the book I finally begin reading the week of our discussion is one that has been recommended to me many times since the beginning of my master’s degree: Patricia Williams’ *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. I am scared to consider what it means that a black woman’s work becomes appealing to me only after multiple positive recommendations, the most recent recommendation coming from another black woman. How do I choose which authors I will read and which authors I will reject? How has my process of selection been both conscious and unconscious? At one point I was pleasantly surprised to realize that I had unintentionally been reading works by a majority of women, a drastic change from my undergraduate degree where assigned readings for most courses were authored predominantly by men. I attributed my enjoyment of graduate studies to the fact that I was finally reading works that were mainly written by women. But I wonder how many times I have unconsciously selected whiteness, or
possibly rejected “otherness,” by reading works in which I found myself—or parts of myself—mirrored.

Trying to sort through Judith Butler’s (1990) idea that there are no stable or original identities, but only identities that are constructed through discourses, I wonder how this might apply to the identity of the authors that I read. My assumptions about the stability of identity have often been challenged as I read. Female identity is troubled when I discover that an author is queer; whiteness is troubled when an author identifies herself as Jewish and does not know how to respond when people assume that she knows only the experience of white privilege and not of the racialized “other.”

I get up for a bathroom break, bringing with me a book that makes me happy just reading the title, with its first word, in bold, large letters demanding attention even from a peripheral glance—*BENT on writing: Contemporary queer tales*. Queer literature is a newly found favourite genre, and includes my first introduction to erotica and pornography that allows me to imagine myself as a female sexual *subject*, rather than as a sexual object. Just as I am editing my attempts to come to terms with Butler a year ago, I happen to read two short excerpts about a queer woman whose life and feminist politics are turned upside down when her girlfriend transitions to a man:

> After years of studying and thinking about sex and gender I was damn pissed to discover that I had learned almost nothing to prepare me for transsexuality. Instead, when gender became a massive struggle for the one I loved, and not simply an academic parlour game, social-constructionist feminist and queer theory turned out to be totally out of touch and stunningly incapable of accounting for biology, personality and spirituality. (Gallant, 2002, p. 9)

Ironically, Gallant notes, straight people seem to be better at understanding her and her boyfriend’s understandings and expressions of femininity and masculinity than queer people who claim to be comfortable with multiple expressions of gender. Gallant’s
narrative seems to shatter some fundamental part of Butler’s theory in her insistence that her “partner’s transsexual experience has demonstrated to me the clear link between biology and personality” (Gallant, 2002, p. 9). There is also something that shatters, or perhaps opens up in me as I read, and although I cannot identify or explain it, I am quite certain that this reading has triggered something that will return to me at a later time, at a time when I may have forgotten what I read just now.

Thoughts about the instability of identity are on my mind before I open Williams’ (1991) book. Yet I still hold on to the belief that I am about to read a book by a black woman, aided by the picture of Williams on the front cover. In the first chapter, Williams’ thoughts seem connected to the ways that I simultaneously reject and desire racialized authors, and to the ways that I simultaneously see and don’t see race:

A man with whom I used to work once told me that I made too much of my race. “After all,” he said, “I don’t even think of you as black.” Yet sometime later, when another black woman became engaged in an ultimately unsuccessful tenure battle, he confided to me that he wished the school could find more blacks like me. I felt myself slip in and out of shadow, as I became nonblack for purposes of inclusion and black for purposes of exclusion; I felt the boundaries of my very body manipulated, casually inscribed by definitional demarcations that did not refer to me. (pp. 9-10)

As I continue reading, my assumptions about stable identity are once again revealed. Williams writes about finding the contract of sale for her great-great-grandmother, who is bought by a wealthy white slave owner at eleven, and by thirteen has an eight-month-old child. Williams also writes about her Great-Aunt Mary:

who, back in the 1920’s, decided that her lot in life would be better if she pretended to be a white woman. She left home, moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and married into one of the state’s wealthiest families. While the marriage lasted, she sent her decidedly black daughter by a previous marriage to live with her sister, my Great-Aunt Sophie. (p. 22)
Williams tries to imagine what it would have been like to be her great-great-grandmother, a woman who was “so disliked and isolated from even her own children that the stories they purveyed were of her laziness” (p. 18). I wonder what it means to be black and white, what it means for certain parts of your racial identity to be erased, either by a colleague, a great-aunt, or an assuming, white reader.

I think of my own mixed racial heritage, and how I have erased parts of my racial identity. I am not suggesting that I, like Williams, experience racism. While there may be some underlying similarities among the stories in her text and mine, there are also important differences that cannot be denied. 12 My ancestors are Dutch, British/Irish, and Canadian, and I usually represent them in that order. I often hide? forget? the British and Canadian aspects of my heritage, telling people instead that “I am Dutch.” My last name indicates the partiality of my representation, yet when a customer once asked me at work—after reading my name tag—if I was Irish, I replied with great confidence and sincerity that I was Dutch. It wasn’t until after the customer left that I realized she was right and I was wrong. I knew about my Irish heritage: what caused the momentary memory loss to make me believe I was telling her the truth? Perhaps the forgetting of my British heritage is because these ancestors were Irish and Cockney, oppressed groups within an oppressive nation; perhaps it is because I have more Dutch “blood;” perhaps it is because I “look” more Dutch than Irish or English. Perhaps the forgetting of my Canadian heritage removes me from the marginalization my mother experienced when, as a first generation Canadian, she was sent home from her first day of Kindergarten with a

12 I live in a society and a world where whiteness is valued and rewarded, and, being a white person, I benefit from this racialized form of privilege. Even if I happen to feel marginalized in any way because of my racial heritage, this cannot be considered racism because systemic, institutionalized injustices towards non-racialized people like myself do not exist.
13 My Irish ancestry dates prior to Ireland’s independence from Britain in 1949.
14 “Cockney” refers to working-class people from the east end of London, England.
sign that said, “Speak English at home.” Perhaps the forgetting of my Canadian heritage allows me to ignore my implication in the ongoing colonization of First Nations people in this land.

Editing my thoughts on Williams’ book brings issues of race to the foreground; the same is true anytime I read or re-read *Alchemy of race and rights* or attend meetings for an anti-racist coalition on campus. Whereas I can forget about race, there are others who cannot, and cannot afford to, miss the implications of race, whether at a personal or institutional level. I finally find the space to include ideas about racial ancestry that have intrigued me, but which were absent from this chapter until now. Duran (2006) and Estés (1995) are both healers trained in psychoanalysis whose practice is influenced by their respect for the roots of psychology in the study of the soul. These authors identify the need for healers to identify, or to be asked about, their ancestry.

In the tradition of storytellers which Estés inherited, the keepers of story or *cantadora* are selected at a young age by storytellers of previous generations. When stories are used as medicine, storytellers undergo many years of training: “we are trained carefully to know what to do and when, but most especially we are trained in what not to do. This, perhaps more than anything, separates stories as entertainment—a worthy form in and of itself—from stories as medicine” (Estés, 1995, p. 506). Since the lineage and training of storytellers is such an important aspect of becoming a storyteller, Estés notes, one of the first questions we ask when we meet a teller/healer is, ‘*Quienes son tus familiares? Quienes son tus padres?*’ ‘Who are your people?’ In other words, from what family line of healers do you come? …It means literally, from whose spiritual lines do you come? (p. 507)

The connections among healing, ancestry, stories, and spirituality are also identified by Duran (2006). He urges his students—a majority of whom are white, Euro-
Americans—to return to creation stories: to “find their tribe, the name of their tribal God, and their tribal creation story” (pp. 44-5). The purpose of this assignment is to enable students to connect with their ancestors, their histories, the stories that had created them, in order to centre themselves. Duran begins with the assumption that counselors cannot heal alienated patients if they are alienated themselves. Whereas psychologists and counselors are usually taught a client-centred model of therapy, Duran challenges this notion by arguing that there should be therapist-centred treatment: “If the patient is centered, then he does not need to be seen for treatment. …In therapist-centered treatment, the therapist understands his spiritual identity and has provided a space in which patients can relate to the entities causing them distress” (p. 45).

Although Duran’s (2006) critique is located in the field of medicine, the field of education has a similar model, known as “student-centred teaching.” I am interested in what a teacher-centred model might do to education. While I had originally planned to teach immediately after completing my master’s degree, reading about healing and trauma and counselling has made me aware that I have a lot of centering to do. Healing, particularly from traumatic pasts, is an ongoing process that will never be complete, but I would like to develop more awareness of my ancestry and spiritual centre before I begin teaching. Part of this process will involve, as Duran suggests, finding my creation story, my tribe, and my tribal God. Earlier in this chapter I identified the creation story that has been particularly influential in my life. However, as Duran tells his students, unless they are Jewish they cannot use the creation story in the Bible, “because it was not their story” (p. 45). Where does this leave me, a person with mixed heritage, from whom I inherited the biblical creation story on both sides of my family? Duran offers some insight for this journey: “When students complained of their inability to find their roots because they felt
that they were ‘Heinz 57’ or a mixture of cultures, I referred them to their dreams and asked them to be mindful of synchronistic events” (p. 45). While I am still processing many of my dreams and have not yet found in them clues to my creation story, it intrigues me that during the journey of healing I began over a year ago, my dreams have been more prominent and meaningful than ever before.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have referred to three main theories in relation to the discursive turn: social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories. Each of these theories offer unique and important insights. Social justice theories have been crucial for identifying problematic power structures and the ways in which people’s identities impact their experiences in the world. Poststructuralist theories have been crucial for identifying problematic discourses and the ways in which our language and stories impact the meanings that people can make from their experiences in the world. Psychoanalytic theories have been crucial for identifying the problems with excluding the internal world—the invisible, unconscious, and spiritual aspects—in our critiques of injustice and attempts to make change. Both poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories recognize the importance of discourse and representation. However, where poststructuralist theories are interested in the discourses used to represent or contain the external world, the relationships between people and power, psychoanalytic theories explore the discourses used to represent or contain the internal world, the relationships between the conscious and unconscious, and the mind and soul.

Historical analyses of theories and ideas often imply that older theories are outdated and no longer useful if they have been challenged by more recent theories. Many theorists, including some social justice theorists, have taken up the arguments of the
discursive turn by incorporating discursive elements into experiential knowledge claims. And psychoanalytic theories suggest a more recent shift from discursive knowledge claims to knowledge incorporating discussions of the unconscious. As such, it might be assumed that psychoanalytic theories are the more fashionable or current of the three theories, implying that the other theories should be replaced. However, as my interweaving of the three knowledge claims of experience, discourse, and the unconscious suggests, each of the three main theories examined in this thesis—social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic—are critical. Each theory plays an essential role in healing from histories of violence and abuse and from the ongoing injustices that arise from these histories.

What concerns me is that as research shifts from experiential and identity-based knowledge towards discursive knowledge, as happened during the discursive turn, and as there is a more recent shift from the importance of discursive knowledge to unconscious knowledge, some of the histories of former knowledge frameworks will be lost. As an example, Warner (1999) argues that radical queer politics are perceived as outdated and unnecessary by younger generations of queer people. He argues that this is largely due to historical amnesia, as younger generations of queer people are unaware of the histories they have inherited:

“since the most painfully instructed generation has been decimated by death, the queer culture of the present faces more than the usual shortfall in memory. Now younger queers are told all too often that a principled defense of nonnormative sex is just a relic of bygone ‘liberation.’” (p. 52)

Similarly, Williams (1991) notes that in order to work towards healing, we need to remember the histories of violence that have led us to work towards change. And yet,
while remembering histories of racism and colonialism is important, the purpose is to remember, not to place blame:

Thus, generalized notions of innocence and guilt have little place in the struggle for transcendence; there is no blame among the living for the dimensions of this historic crime, this national tragedy. There is, however, responsibility for never forgetting another’s history. (p. 61)

Marie McCarthy (2003) also points out that educators have not acknowledged or taken up the insights of the discursive turn in ways that transform educational research and practice. She argues that a neglect of history and of the ways in which poststructuralism has influenced historical research leads to a collective amnesia: “when the past is forgotten, its power over the present is hidden from view” (p. 130), making it seem as though things must remain the way that they presently are. Like McCarthy, I see a limited awareness of the discursive turn in educational discourses, and I point to discourses of inclusion as an example. Although discourses of normality and exceptionality claim to take up the interests of groups marginalized by (dis)ability or “different” abilities, the values embedded in such discourses perpetuate exclusion. I think a greater awareness both of the experiences of marginalized groups, advocated through social justice theories, and a greater awareness of the ways in which discourses shape people’s experiences in the world, advocated through poststructuralist theories, will be necessary before the field of education is ready to begin considering the role of the unconscious, or the insights of psychoanalytic theories. In the case of research that is both situated in and influenced by the histories of experiential, discursive, and even unconscious knowledge frameworks, I would argue that it is essential for these histories to be clearly articulated. Researchers must indicate and refer to, as much as possible, the experiences, discourses, and theories that have influenced their current research, particularly for the younger generations of
researchers who may not be familiar with the histories that have informed older generations of academics.
Chapter Three

Methodology: Reading Autobiographically

“My effort is, in other words, not to ‘resist’ the text from the outside but rather to seek to trace within each text its own resistance to itself. …[T]his literary excess, this self-transgression of the text (which is, I argue, precisely what makes it a work of art: a work that no agenda can contain) might be at first invisible, inaudible, because it exceeds both the control and the deliberate intention of the writer’s consciousness” (Felman, 1993, p. 6).

“Grappling with questions posed by a psychoanalytic theory of learning means...acknowledging difficulties in constructing narratives of learning that are up to the task of representing the significance one makes from encounters with knowledge and with those who represent knowledge” (Pitt, 2003, p. 3).

Who Defines What Counts As “Research?”

“What is your thesis about?”

“It is a discursive analysis of teacher education. It is about trying to make sense of my experiences as a student teacher.”

“What does ‘discursive’ mean?”

It took me most of my first year as a graduate student to figure out the meaning of “discursive.” I was not sure I could define “discursive” even after I took a discursive research course. I summarize discursive research as a philosophical approach, where the “data” I analyse are not numbers, objects, or people, but the ideas and values embedded in our cultural discourses.

Turning to the dictionary, my friends and I find a definition of “discursive,” which includes the word “rambling.” I laugh at the irony, knowing that some will view my writing as no more than rambling, and because I have wondered this about my writing many times. Why is it that discursive research has such negative connotations? My
supervisor reminds me that the majority of books in her office would not count as "research" to most people. Who defines what counts as research?

I have the freedom, thanks to my supervisor, to read whatever interests me at any given time, and consequently, when someone asks me whether I am reading for school or for fun, I answer “both.” Regardless of how personal the books I read are, they always connect in some way to my research. Even my readings of queer pornography have surprised me for their insights shared in much of the “academic” literature I read. However, the excessiveness of my readings of pornographic literature is an example of the limitations of what counts as “real” learning or research. And while I try to move away from such distinctions as “academic” and “personal” research, I still find myself associating certain books with “doing research.” Occasionally I need to take breaks from reading books that I enjoy because of this association, so that I can make my words my own rather than trying to make them sound as “intelligent” as someone who has more experience and credibility in the academic world. Yet these “breaks” from “research” often feel as though I have done “no work” rather than a different kind of work, and perhaps a more genuine kind of work because it comes from myself. As Estés (1995) points out, we need to find our own stories:

Look to your people, your life. It is not by accident that this advice is the same among great healers and great writers as well. Look to the real that you yourself live. The kinds of tales found there can never come from books. (p. 511)

I came to my graduate studies assuming, and often being confirmed in the idea, that “research” involved going out looking for answers to a question, and “writing” involved articulating the question, the process of discovery, and the conclusions one had made. However, the solution to my questions—or, more accurately, the real questions I wanted to explore—often came to me only at the very last minute, a day before a proposal
or a draft was due. I often delay writing because I cannot settle on the question(s) I want to ask, let alone how I will go about finding answers to those questions. In contrast, several psychoanalytic theorists talk about the fact that writing is a process of learning and discovery—we don’t write what we know; we write in order to know. “Working on an essay before the topic is known is not an uncommon experience for me,” writes Pitt (2003), and it involves “pages and pages of beginnings that seem to defer endlessly the difficult task of thinking an idea through to some commitment” (p. 1). It is not only research questions that are delayed in their arrival; the theories used to explore these questions are also elusive. As Felman (1993) indicates,

> At the outset of the writing process…my current feminist positions were not a given. They were neither altogether conscious nor truly owned by me with their full critical potential: I arrived at them through reading, acquired them in writing. (pp. 12-13)

Likewise, the very methodologies one will use are not so much chosen as discovered: “I did not know, however, at the outset, that such a methodology was to become the focus of my attempt; I practiced it intuitively, without at first articulating its significance” (Felman, p. 9).

What, then, is the methodology that I use in writing this thesis? How did I come to write in the way that I did? My approach was practiced, like Felman’s (1993), with intuition. This chapter could not be written until I had written the remainder of my thesis—indeed, this chapter was absent in the first draft of the thesis, because I had still not fully settled on what it was that I was trying to write, let alone how I thought I could most effectively write. The methodology that comes closest to describing how I have written this thesis is what Felman describes as autobiographical reading:

> Reading autobiographically…is a question of experiencing this feminine resistance as a joint effect of interaction among literature, autobiography and
theory, insofar as all three modes resist, precisely, one another. It is engaging in a paradoxical attempt of reading literature and one’s own life with the tools—and through the resources—of theory but, at the same time, reading literature and one’s own life as, precisely, a resistance to theory. (p. 133)

While Felman’s methodology looks at the feminine resistance to readings of literature, autobiography, and theory, my methodology describes my resistance in readings of education, autobiography, and theory. This feminine resistance, and its visibility, is something that the “founding mothers” of autobiography, as Felman puts it, have taught us, and which has often been overlooked or undervalued. Resistance can be found in hesitations in the text, and “These hesitations are not simply overcome, erased, forgotten; they are inscribed, recorded, written permanently into the text. …theory…hesitates to become autobiography” and “autobiography …hesitates to become theory…the hesitation itself…is both autobiographical and theoretical” (Felman, p. 134). In other words, it is by rendering one’s resistance to and hesitations over knowledge visible, rather than attempting to hide them through tones of authority, that marks the methodology of autobiographical reading. The significance of rendering certain knowledge visible and other knowledge invisible, and the difference between autobiographical readings and personal reflection are described in more detail in the fifth chapter. By making the resistance and hesitations in my writing and reading processes visible, I show how “the three R’s”—which I shift from reading, writing, and ’rithmetic to reading, writing, and research—are not just inevitable foundations of learning, but are political processes of making meaning. What I gain from reading, writing, and researching texts of education, autobiography, and theory is not inevitable, but is influenced by a myriad of social, political, and historical contexts, many of which I am only partly aware. Likewise, the
meanings that each reader brings to and makes from this text are not inevitable. Each of us is responsible for the meanings that are made in and from the texts in this thesis.

*Reading Autobiographically: The Subjectivity of the Researcher*

“What is your thesis about?”

“I am not sure what it is about. Maybe I will know once I have submitted my first draft. I don’t even know if I will know what this thesis is about even after it is ‘finished.’”

I spend some time with a young, professional musician who has made a name for herself; she tells me that she is having difficulty composing without dismissing it immediately, haunted by her own judgments and the voices of critics and audiences. We talk about the difficulty of creative work, of making a living by exploring and articulating the depths of our selves. We share stories about suffering from insomnia and all the methods we have tried to minimize sleepless nights: counseling, sleeping pills, yoga, and lifestyle changes. Writing for three hours a day for three months became my initial sedative, providing an outlet for the thoughts that otherwise kept me awake until the wee hours of the morning. This was my supervisor’s recommendation for writing my thesis, but the only way I could reach the three-hour target was by writing whatever was on my mind, without judging its thesis-worthiness. I have two collections of writing, one that I call my “thesis,” and the other monthly collection that I am still writing that, for lack of a better word, I call my “journal,” despite the fact that it is different from the writing in my “real,” handwritten journals. I have made attempts to incorporate both of these written works, but as I mentioned earlier, there are certain representations of learning that are too excessive to be included in this text.

I was taught as an undergraduate student to write in ways that removed all references to the personal through “formal,” third-person language, and the use of an
“objective” voice. Learning to write in a feminist way, incorporating both the personal and the political, is like learning how to write all over again, and yet it gives me permission to write in ways that are truer to myself. Feminist writing certainly does not mean abandoning theoretical content or reducing the amount of research conducted prior to writing, but it means that I can write about topics in which I am personally invested, and in ways that make my investments visible. Rather than pretending or assuming that I can provide an objective analysis of a given topic, I indicate the parts of myself that influence my choice of a topic, my approach to analyzing that topic, and my conclusions about the topic or question under study.

Psychoanalytic theory suggests that we can never fully know our selves, and therefore, there are parts of myself that are hidden not only to my reader, but to me as well. As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates, there are aspects of every text that exceed the author’s intent and control. This thesis represents some of my personal and educational journeys, but, as with any representation, there are inevitable excesses and incomplete ideas. Felman (1993) argues that one of the reasons for this excessiveness is that in our attempts to bring the personal into our texts, we may inadvertently be taking up voices that are not our own:

Reading autobiographically is, however, an activity and a performance far more complex than the mere project—and the mere stylistic trend—of ‘getting personal.’ … ‘Getting personal’ does not guarantee that the story we narrate is wholly ours or that it is narrated in our own voice. (pp. 13-14)

I find it incredibly difficult to write my own thoughts; after reading someone else’s ideas, it makes my own seem inadequate in comparison. I tend to write out all my favourite quotes from a book or an article, and then piece them together to form paragraphs, or come up with themes that allow the quotes from several authors to be incorporated into
one chapter. I am so critical of my own writing that I generally reserve it for computers, which have the saving grace of the “delete” button, or for my journal where all of my too-vulnerable and not-yet-worked-out thoughts go, or for scraps of paper and random computer files that I always intend to sort through but to which I rarely return. This is the longest piece of writing I have ever made public, but it is only a drop in a bucket of much more writing. And even my entire collections of writing are a small portion of the many thoughts, conversations, and interactions that I have had with my selves, with those around me, and with those who feel near to me through their writing even though I have never met them. This thesis is an ongoing project, and what you are reading here is just a glimpse of that project.

In spite of the fact that my narrations will always remain partial, it is important for me, as much as possible, to identify where, when, why, how, and with whom I write. Writing is deceiving—it makes it appear as though there is a beginning, a middle, and an ending; a question, a climax, a conclusion; a suggestion for what needs to be done; an insight to store away for a day when there’s time to think. Describing the writing process is an attempt to situate the words in this thesis, to remind the reader that writing is not just a collection of words on a page, but is created by people, in particular times and places.

Estés (1995) talks about the importance of having a creative space that is completely solitary and uninterrupted. I think about all the acknowledgements in books I have read that thank someone for providing a place that allows the author to get away from interruptions. I wonder what that would be like, and wonder whether creative expression and an environment conducive to such expression are luxuries for only a few. I have rejected the need to have the “perfect” writing spot because I know that I have
access to much more than most people in the world. I have “a room of my own”\textsuperscript{15} so do I really need more than that? Towards the end of my writing, I unexpectedly get a generous offer to stay at a gorgeous house in the woods, on a lake, for three solitary, splendid weeks. My writing moves to a completely different level— I am more productive, I am more capable of writing my own words and less reliant on the words of others. For the first time, I realize the significance of having uninterrupted space that is conducive to writing.

\textit{Building Three Theories}

“What is your thesis about?”

“It’s a discursive analysis of teacher education that incorporates feminist, psychoanalytic, and queer theories.”

Did she just say “queer?” Eyebrows rise. Subtly, almost imperceptibly. I sense surprise, followed by understanding. Now you know. And, as the band \textit{Lesbians On Ecstasy} so cleverly turns this phrase around, now “we know you know.”\textsuperscript{16} What is it that you/we/I know? Do you have to be queer to study queer theory? Do you have to be queer to admit that you are making use of queer theories without feeling awkward, and without feeling the need to explain your sexuality?

During the process of writing this thesis, I encountered three main theories, which I outlined in the previous chapter: social justice theories, poststructuralist theories, and psychoanalytic theories. However, the encountering of these theories was not quite as tidy as I portray in my literature review. It took me a long time to figure out the connections between feminist theory, poststructuralist theory, and the discursive turn, and to learn that

\textsuperscript{15} This is a phrase borrowed from Virginia Woolf’s (1957) book \textit{A room of one’s own.}

\textsuperscript{16} “We Know You Know” (2007) is the most recent album released by the band \textit{Lesbians On Ecstasy.}
feminist theory—particularly critiques of feminist theories by women who were not white, straight, or middle class—in many ways initiated the discursive turn. It took me a long time to realize that poststructuralist theories and psychoanalytic theories were both interested in the idea of “excess,” in the idea that representations of our experiences always contain more and less than the experiences themselves. And it took me a long time to realize that a lot of queer theorists were also talking about excessiveness, even if they used different words to describe it. Many writers seemed to take for granted that the reader would understand the phrase “discursive turn” that they did not explain it for those younger generations of academics, like myself, who were not around—at least not in academia—for those debates. And, perhaps the absence of explanation indicated their desire not to relive those debates, or their own unresolved thoughts about the debates.

In her book *After-Education*, Britzman (2003) tells the following Jewish joke:

*A person had spent a long time stranded on a desert island. Finally, rescuers arrived and found the person but also noticed that this person had spent time building three synagogues. The rescuers asked, “But aren’t you alone on this island?” “Yes, of course!” the person exclaimed. “So, why are there three synagogues?” “Well,” the person responded, pointing to each building in turn: “This one I usually go to, this one I sometimes go to, and this one I would never step foot in.”* (p. 134)

Britzman uses this joke to suggest that “it takes three theories to make one theory” (p. 134). In other words, we need to have theories that we reject just as much as we need to have theories that we hold dear to us. I wanted to read each story of excess from my B.Ed. year through the lens of the three theories I encountered: social justice, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories. While this approach seemed to work for the fourth chapter, for the most part, I found that it was difficult to make such neat distinctions in my writing, and worried that it would lead either the reader or myself to choose one theory as the most convincing, valuable, or meaningful. To a certain extent, it
has been difficult for me not to pick a preferred theory. I am incredibly comfortable with social justice theories: I have spent many years learning them, applying them, and seeing not only their limits, but the ways in which they can lead to transformation.

Poststructuralist theories have always intrigued me and yet have always seemed to me to be a little beyond my grasp; I incorporate them as much as possible into my thinking and my writing, but I am not always certain that I do so effectively. When I try to defend poststructuralist ideas, people assume I am a relativist, and I have a difficult time explaining that I still believe in judgments of value, but that the place of my values has shifted drastically. To those in the fundamentalist communities in which I was raised, my values have moved outside of the screen of their radar, and without the ability to place them, they are judged as relativist. To be fair, I am not always certain of the place of my values myself, and having spent many foundational years seeing through the lens of absolutism, poststructuralism often feels relativist to me as well.

I have kept psychoanalytic theories, on the other hand, at a very safe distance until recently; psychoanalysis has always been my third synagogue, the one I would never set foot in, but felt quite comfortable critiquing and dismissing. And yet, a strange thing has happened as I have accidentally stumbled across the threshold of psychoanalytic theories: while I have attempted to maintain my resistance to them, they have resisted that resistance, and have startled the social justice and poststructuralist theories that have been so important to me. Eve Sedgwick (1997) “invites us into theories that we might never step foot in, but once there, we may learn something that startles the theories that we always use and the theories that we sometimes use” (Britzman, 2003, p. 134).

It has startled me to realize that poststructuralist theories and psychoanalytic theories have so much in common. It has also startled me to find that psychoanalytic
theories seem to hold potential in ways that I found social justice theories—as much as I still value them—very limiting. My more recent research and writing has been focused almost solely on immersing myself in psychoanalytic theory, trying to make up for lost time, and intrigued by the exciting new possibilities it continues to open up. I wonder if the reader will sense this new-found delight, and to what extent it might appear to diminish theories that have been equally important to me at earlier points in my research and writing.

“What is your thesis about?”

“It is about meaning and representation.”

“It is about moments of excess.”

“It is about stories.”
Chapter Four

Narratives of Knowledge: Troubling Discourses of Theory and Practice

“Belief in the truth of Experience is as much an ideological production as belief in the experience of Truth” (Fuss, 1989, p. 114).

“[E]xperience is never the stable, transparent, or knowable phenomenon we hope it will be” (Britzman, 1991, p. 118).

What Do Student Teachers Want?

I began graduate research immediately following my teacher education year because I was concerned about the limited theoretical knowledge taught in my program. My initial research idea began with a question about knowledge: my plan was to interview student teachers to see if they wanted more theoretical knowledge or more practical knowledge from their teacher education program. However, I moved away from qualitative, interview-based research because I was concerned that my own desire for theoretical knowledge would either be projected onto those I interviewed, or, even worse, that it would be absent in those I interviewed, thereby invalidating my desire for more theoretical knowledge in teacher education programs. Likewise, my thesis supervisor encouraged me to consider not what other student teachers wanted from their teacher education degree, but what I wanted and felt was missing from mine. Perhaps she knew, as Britzman (1991) notes, that many student teachers “want and expect to receive practical things, automatic and generic methods for immediate classroom application” (p. 48). For this reason, I shifted the question of theory and practice from desire (what do student teachers want?) to theory (what do researchers think about teacher education?)—I did not want to inadvertently make space for teacher education programs to become even less theoretical than I had found my program to be. However, although I rejected the
question of desire, it returned to me uninvited and unfamiliar. My encounter with psychoanalytic theories has displaced the question of desire from the conscious to the unconscious. I stumbled across Felman’s (1993) work, a feminist interpretation of Freud’s question, “What do woman want?” After turning this question around to show that Freud was really asking, “What do men want from women?,” Felman reclaims this question as a woman, wondering herself what it is that women want.17 However, both the meaning of, and the solution to, Felman’s question are delayed: “This point has, moreover, resisted me for a long time … Once reclaimed, the question, ‘What does a woman want?’ has turned out to resist closure, to inhibit my own writing, and to delay the completion of this book” (Felman, 1993, pp. 9-10). Like Felman, the point of my research—this question of desire—has been reclaimed, but not without resistance, inhibitions, and delays. I will outline for the reader how I attempted to follow the question of what student teachers want through my rejection of it and through its unexpected return. I will follow the question of what student teachers want through social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories, using an excessive moment from one of my B.Ed. courses as a narrative that unites them. Before doing so, however, I provide historical and pedagogical critiques of what it means to allow student teachers’ desires to impact curricular content.

Contextualizing Debates About Theory and Practice

In the research and practice of teacher education, there are prominent debates regarding the purposes of, and places for, theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. The outcome of these debates can be seen in the structure of teacher education programs.

17 Taking into consideration critiques of feminists who use the term “woman” to represent all women, Felman clarifies: “I am speaking not for women, but to women. My utterance is meant as a speech act, not as a constative representation” (1993, p. 14).
Is there an emphasis on learning in university education courses, or on teaching in school placements? How many hours are dedicated to courses, how many hours are dedicated to placements, and where do these hours fit in the program’s schedule? Do courses themselves emphasize theoretical knowledge or practical knowledge? There is a wide diversity in the ways that teacher education programs are structured across Canada: programs vary in length from eight months to a four-year undergraduate degree. Additionally, the content of teacher education courses varies from one teacher education program to another. This variety is highlighted not in order to suggest that it would be possible to make each Canadian teacher education program identical, but to identify the fact that the content and structure of teacher education programs are connected to debates about what it means to learn how to teach. The purpose of theoretical and practical knowledge is one of many such debates. Although situated in an American context, Britzman’s book *Practice makes practice* (1991) offers an excellent critique of the disconnect between theoretical knowledge learned in university courses and practical knowledge learned in teaching placements. Using Britzman’s arguments, I will be critiquing theoretical and practical knowledge in teacher education programs. My focus will be specifically on knowledge learned in university education courses, rather than on knowledge learned in teaching placements.

As a student teacher, I was frustrated by courses that emphasized practical knowledge that could be immediately applied in the classroom and minimized the importance of theoretical knowledge. Yet some of my peers seemed bored by courses which emphasized theory, wondering how seemingly abstract theories could be put into practice in the classroom. Regardless of whether student teachers preferred theoretical or practical knowledge, there was a genuine concern that courses were not adequately
preparing us for diverse careers in education, and yet our inexperience made it difficult at
times to articulate what we felt was missing, or how we thought things could have been
improved. One example of the vaguely articulated, but forcefully felt concerns was
expressed by a student teacher in a course for which I was a teaching assistant. The
student teacher concluded her year-end presentation with criticisms of her program, and
stated that student teachers need to fight for better education. The whole class erupted
into applause at this point, and I was reminded of similar views expressed among my
peers in the same program a year earlier.

The Troubles of Student Teachers’ Desires

While there appears to be consensus about the desire for better teacher education
programs—from my experience, from the experience of student teachers around me, and
from interviews of student teachers (Britzman, 1991; Segall, 2001, 2002)—there is less
consensus about what it is that will make teacher education programs “better.” In teacher
education programs, should we start with courses or placements? Should we emphasize
theory or practice? Should we find out what student teachers want and then appeal to
those wants? Or should we find out what student teachers need in order to be effective
teachers? Who is it that determines what student teachers want or need? If expected
outcomes of teacher preparation are as numerous and diverse as the student teachers who
enroll in education programs, can—or should—professors and administrators even
attempt to respond to these expectations? Even if we could determine what student
teachers want, several theorists point out the problems with basing the content of teacher
education on student teachers’ desires. Although the research below is taken from
American contexts, there are many parallels to my experiences and research of teacher
education in Canada.
Before the twentieth century, teacher education was divided between “normal schools,” where the purpose was to train teachers, and departments of education at universities, where the focus was on educational research (Lagemann, 2005). According to Lagemann, the focus of education research shifted in the early twentieth century as scholars responded to the demands of education students; education textbooks increasingly emphasized current issues rather than historical context. Lagemann’s description of this process parallels the attitudes of some peers in my B.Ed. year:

The history of education was not popular with master’s students, who represented the largest segment of the student body at Teachers College.18 To them, the history of education lacked value because, however ‘scientific,’ it was not useful: it did not help them learn how to face the very real challenges of the classroom, and it was too detached from their professional concerns. (p. 12)

Lagemann argues that as scholars responded to the preference for practical relevance, research related to the history of education became irrelevant to historians outside the field of education and was rarely published in non-educational journals. By the mid-twentieth century, historians and educators began critiquing this ghettoization; Bernard Bailyn argued that the history of education should not refer merely to schooling, but should explore, as he put it, “the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations” (as cited in Lagemann, p. 14). Lagemann’s research confirmed my hesitancy about asking student teachers what they want from teacher education. If student teachers confuse education with schooling, they will want to know how schooling works and how they will work in schools as teachers, rather than what it means to share inherited cultural practices with younger generations.

18 Lagemann is referring specifically to educational history research at Columbia University in the early twentieth century, when “scientific” research was equated with “good” research, since it was factual and objective rather than opinionated and subjective.
Britzman (1991) also refers to the cultural, or social, aspect of education, although she makes an important distinction between social *transformation* and social *reproduction*, which she identifies as the two main purposes of education. The relationships, or lack thereof, among knowledge, experience, and meaning are deeply embedded in these two conceptions of education. We need contextual and experiential knowledge to be able to make meaning, to explore what it *means* to teach, and, therefore, to make social transformation possible. When knowledge is fragmented from experience, we lose the ability to make meaning from circumstances. Yet, it is often decontextualized knowledge, which appears stable and objective, that is valued most: “Indeed, knowledge severed from time and place takes on a fixed appearance, valued precisely because it does not change” (Britzman, 1991, p. 36).

There are several ways in which schooling, or social reproduction models of education, decontextualize knowledge. Subject content is separated from an early age in school into discrete units, where clocks and subjects determine when and what a student can learn. Each subject is created through particular theories and practices that differentiate one subject from another, yet teachers rarely share the “disciplines” that inform each discipline. Therefore, students are alienated from learning and knowing because knowledge is fragmented from itself and from students’ relationship to it: “This form of fragmentation separates knowledge from experience and experience from knower. Here, knowledge concerns all the ideas, discourses, and possibilities that enable one to reflect upon the meanings of experience” (Britzman, 1991, p. 35). Students are often resentful of the separation of knowledge, experience, and meaning; I was one of several student teachers in my program who complained about the amount of “busy-

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19 Thanks to Magda Lewis for the turn of phrase that connects the verb to the noun “discipline.”
work” we were assigned that seemed strictly for the purpose of giving us something to do rather than for making knowledge meaningful. There is an assumption that since student teachers have been in schools all their lives, they know something about what it means to teach. But, as Britzman argues, education often becomes a process of social reproduction because circumstances—what student teachers learned in school—are devoid of the meaning that comes from contextual and experiential knowledge.

The goal of incorporating student teachers’ desires into the classroom may stem from a confusion between the truth that students bring prior knowledge to their learning, and the false idea that students know what it is that they need to learn. But, if student teachers are given the responsibility of constructing pedagogical content when they have never actually learned about pedagogy, Britzman (1986) argues that this merely repeats unexamined myths in teaching: myths that “everything depends on the teacher,” that “the teacher is the expert,” and that “teachers are self-made” (pp. 449-451). Student teachers bring to their teacher education programs histories of their own schooling experiences, complete with images of what a teacher is and does, and assumptions that the real test of their knowledge and ability will be played out in teaching placements. Teaching, as observed through the eyes of students, is often assumed to be an individual accomplishment. Hidden from students are the ways in which knowledge is constructed, determined, and delivered in response to multiple contexts and power relations: “What becomes fragmented is not just our conceptions of knowledge but our relationships—both possible and given—to it. We lose our ability to theorize about the consequences of social activity and our own power to effect and understand its effects” (Britzman, 1991, p. 36). Even when student teachers are told that they have the authority to be co-constructors of knowledge, “typically they had no decisions of their own to make. Their participation was
reduced to spectators who received the presentations of others” (Britzman, 1991, p. 48). As a result, student teachers often do not see the value in theory; instead, “They bring to their teacher education a search for recipes and, often, a dominant concern with methods of classroom discipline, because they are quite familiar with the teacher’s role as social controller” (Britzman, 1991, p. 48). While Britzman notes that many student teachers want practical knowledge more than theoretical knowledge, she considers the fragmentation of knowledge to be responsible for this desire, a fragmentation that occurs when education is understood as social reproduction.

In a similar way, Segall (2001, 2002) determines that student teachers’ lack of interest in theory is related to fragmentation: the separation of theoretical knowledge from practical knowledge. Reading teacher education as a text through his interviews with student teachers, Segall (2001) determines that it is not the emphasis on theory that student teachers find most frustrating, but the separation between theory and practice:

a separation whereby theory learned at the university, while intended to infuse future practice in that ‘elsewhere’ of the practicum, was not used to examine (and thus learn from) the here-and-now practices of university-based teacher education itself. (p. 228)

The student teachers Segall interviews note that there is a separation between what they are taught to teach, and how they are actually being taught. Yet several factors make it difficult for them to express this disconnect to professors: their awareness of how little time there is to direct the conversation away from the professor’s agenda; the expectation that learning (engrained from a young age) may involve questioning content but not the teaching process itself; and the tendency, even consciously, to fall into the trap of saying or writing what a professor expects to hear. Even in courses that invite critical questions about education, the irony is that these questions can only be directed externally:
“instructors and their teaching are granted an extraterritorial status in a program focused on learning about teaching” (p. 231). As one student points out, in his course titled “Social education as reading and writing texts,” what they are encouraged to examine as texts is all about things out there, removed from us in the classroom. We haven’t really looked at textualizing or problematizing what’s happening now, in our own classroom … We didn’t talk about the class. We didn’t talk about what we were doing in the class as a text. (p. 232)

Segall frames this separation between theory and practice in the work of Giroux, who talks about the difference between a “pedagogy of theory” and a “pedagogy of theorizing” (Giroux, 1996). The former involves learning about existing pedagogical theories, while the latter involves learning from those theories by applying them in the immediate educational context. Instead of learning how theories might inform one’s practice in a future practicum or long-term teaching placement, a pedagogy of theorizing examines how these theories impact what and how one is learning now—and, just as importantly, what and how one is not learning now. Re-interpreting student teachers’ comments in light of this, Segall argues that the desire for more practical knowledge is understandable if one is being taught from a “pedagogy of theory” model: “When what one already knows gets validated, all that remains … is to learn how to ‘do’ it, how to do what our teachers did to us” (2001, p. 233).

If, as Segall notes, “theory is always already present in practice (and vice versa)” (2001, p. 234), the emphasis should not be on linking these two as much as making explicit their existing connection. In teacher education programs, this involves asking some difficult questions. Professors will need to invite critique of their teaching practices, and student teachers will need to honestly critique their professors’ practices despite the
fear of possible implications. If teacher education involves asking questions only in courses rather than of those courses, Segall argues that it contributes to a culture of silence, absent of discourse, disagreement, and difference. According to Segall, viewing teacher education as a text to be read or interpreted is one method of exploring the vital relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge. By drawing on an excessive moment from one of my B.Ed. courses, I will attempt to read my experience of teacher education as a text, first using social justice theories, and then using poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories.

*Excessive Moments: Six Thinking Hats*

In one B.Ed. course our white instructor, Mr. Matheson, put a great amount of time and energy into giving us a collection of resources that we could use in our classrooms. These resources included activities, teaching strategies, movies, texts, and documents, to name just a few. While many student teachers seemed to appreciate the practicality of these resources, perhaps envisioning how they could be implemented in their future classrooms, I found myself resisting them, for reasons I will discuss momentarily. I essentially withdrew from this course, refusing to participate in class discussions, and reading books that were unrelated to the class despite my assigned seat in the front and centre of the classroom.

One of the teaching tools Mr. Matheson presented to us involved a teaching strategy developed by Edward de Bono (1985) called the *Six Thinking Hats*. Students are split into six groups and each group is assigned a different coloured hat to aid in thinking about a topic or part of a lesson. Those with the white hat look at the facts and information about that topic; red hats examine their feelings and intuition about it; yellow

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20 This is a pseudonym.
hats look at the benefits and feasibility; black hats explore cautions and difficulties; green hats discuss alternatives and creative ideas; and blue hats think about the thinking process itself. Mr. Matheson asked us to apply each of the six ways of thinking to the teaching strategy itself. In other words, we were asked to think critically about the Six Thinking Hats as a teaching strategy, using the hats as tools. When we got to the green hat and the instructor asked about alternative or creative ways this teaching strategy could be applied, I raised my hand eagerly, perhaps sending Mr. Matheson into momentary shock. Despite the lack of attention I had given to him all year, my raised hand was acknowledged. I suggested that we could use this teaching strategy, but change what the colour of each hat represented; that it was possible that some students (black students for instance) might take offense that the white hat represented facts and information (potentially implying purity), while the black hat represented problems and cautions (potentially having negative connotations). Although other students in the class agreed and tried to add to this point, my instructor seemed very uncomfortable about the suggestion and closed down the discussion by moving on to another topic.

Social Justice Readings: Moving From the Personal to the Political

While my interpretation of colours might have seemed extreme (perhaps my instructor felt that way?), one only needs to think of all the frames of reference related to these colours that come to mind. We have inherited histories of colonialism and are still influenced by mindsets in which “‘White’ had an ironclad definition that was the equivalent of ‘good’ or ‘deserving’” and “‘Black’ had an ironclad definition that was the equivalent of ‘bad’ or unworthy of inclusion” (Williams, 1991, p. 110). As Williams argues, while our policies may have changed, our unconscious associations have not. And, perhaps these associations are not just unconscious, but visible and conscious. In my
own dictionary, the most negative concept associated with the word “white” is hair losing
colour and becoming white in old age. The word “black,” on the other hand, includes
many negative connotations: a lack of light, angry, threatening, disgrace, condemnation,
wicked, sinister, gloomy, depressed, dirty, and soiled (Bisset, 2000). Significantly, both
definitions also refer to skin colour and continents of origin. Even more significant are the
large majority of white student teachers graduating from Faculties of Education each
year, and the majority of white professors and instructors teaching in B.Ed. programs.

In my teaching placements, I became concerned about the amount of time needed
to adequately prepare teaching lessons that would not perpetuate inequalities. I found
textbooks and other classroom resources very limiting in the perspectives they offered,
and spent hours every evening searching online for supplementary materials that were
less problematic. When I expressed this concern to one of my teaching associates, I was
told that I should use the textbook as a Bible in my first few years of teaching—there
would not be time for this additional work if I wanted to be a “successful” teacher. This
comment itself bothered me because of the unquestioned comparison of Bibles to
teaching texts, especially considering the violent histories that uncritical readings and
applications of the Bible have engendered. This comment came back to haunt me when I
was planning a lesson a few nights later. One of the resources my associate teacher made
available to me included a fill-in-the-blank worksheet that corresponded with a reading
from a textbook for an Ancient Civilizations course. As I read through the related chapter
in the text, I came across a concluding paragraph that glossed over the cultural exchange
between Greece and Persia, creating a distinction between the “cultured” Greeks and the
“barbaric” Persians.
The impact of whitening our histories by negating and devaluing certain racialized groups struck me when, during one of my teaching placements in a history class, a black student who was signed out of class for a basketball game decided to stay when he realized that the day’s lesson included the experiences and contributions of black people in World War II. While “including” the experiences of marginalized groups in the curriculum is better than leaving them out altogether, Sleeter and Grant (2003) note that such “inclusive” or “add-on” approaches to curriculum content are problematic. On the other hand, do educators have the time to completely revise history curricula and texts that have white-washed Canada’s past, and therefore, its present? Thomas King acknowledges the impact of the stories we tell: “once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (2003, p. 10). Therefore, King argues, we need to be careful about the stories we choose to tell, and we must consider what their impact will be.

Some student teachers in my program were aware of the ongoing impact of histories of colonialism and racism (King, 2003; Duran, 2006; Williams, 1991). Yet, in one course, we shared our fears about confronting issues of racism as new teachers hoping to establish ourselves in the teaching profession. Several student teachers expressed a desire to teach in ways that would challenge racist, classist, and sexist attitudes, but noted that they would not feel comfortable to do so until they had gained more autonomy and experience as teachers, when they would not need to worry (as much) about losing their job by taking a stand against injustices. These concerns raised a question for me about the possible limits of social justice and theories: does one need to have power before one can gain the freedom to critique those in power? The purpose of social justice includes challenging existing power structures, and yet those same power
structures make it difficult to make change without first gaining power. I noticed this same dilemma in research based on theories of identity and social justice. Johnson-Bailey and Lee (2005), two feminist academics of colour, found that in attempting to share power with colleagues and students (something that white feminist instructors were able to do), their own power was undermined. While they hoped to challenge existing power structures within their institution, they felt unable to do so without first appealing to those very power structures. Since their mostly white students resisted learning from visible minority professors, Johnson-Bailey and Lee (2005) felt that their first priority had to be establishing their authority, whereas this authority was readily granted to their white colleagues, who could then work to deconstruct the power dynamics between teachers and students:

So when students perceive us as having less power and authority than they do, to what extent should we share power with them? What purpose does sharing power serve when students are privileged by the social structures and, hence, have more power than women of colour professors? If the instructors share power to resist the existing power structure, should women of colour instructors work first to establish authority? (p. 119)

How can student teachers, beginning teachers, and even some experienced professors speak to issues of social justice without first conforming to problematic power structures already in place?

There are some questions that social justice theories raised for me, but which I felt unable to address as a student teacher in ways that satisfied me. If one understands the full implications of social justice theories, the inadequacies of existing curricula seem so overwhelming that nothing short of re-writing curricular content and pedagogical approaches will suffice. Yet, which teachers have the time for such intensive projects in addition to the already demanding expectations they face? And, even if teachers manage
to find the time to make massive pedagogical revisions, would they be granted permission to make and enact such revisions? Puddicombe’s (2005) attempts to transform the secondary English curriculum using feminist insights suggests the multiple ways that schools maintain existing power structures, even if those power structures manage to be challenged temporarily. While a social justice reading of an excessive moment in my B.Ed. program has given me the opportunity to articulate some of the insights I have gained from social justice theories, such readings also leave me curious about other transformational possibilities for education. I will now read the same excessive moment of the *Six Thinking Hats* through poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories to see what possibilities such a reading might open up.

*Re-reading: What Do We Not Know We Know?*

As indicated earlier, Segall’s research of preservice teachers takes the crisis of representation into consideration, recognizing the importance of viewing teacher education as a text to be read. He challenges theories and practices that view educational environments as texts to be read without considering teacher education itself as a text that requires reading and interpretation. On the other hand, psychoanalytic theories of education suggest that it is not enough to merely read teacher education as a text; we also need to acknowledge the presence of the unconscious in our readings and representations of teacher education. In other words, what happens when “the crisis of representation that is outside meets the crisis of representation that is inside” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756)? Bringing the unconscious into my readings and representations of teacher education has been a difficult process that troubles what I know and understand about education. And yet, perhaps we need a theory of learning that accounts for its troublesome and messy aspects (Britzman, 1998). The field of psychoanalysis is one place where such a
theory can be found. Psychoanalytic theory acknowledges that there is both a desire for knowledge and a desire for ignorance, that every learning requires an unlearning, and that “bound up in the drive to know is an equally important defensive drive not to know” (Adair, 2007, p. 9). Merely acknowledging this complicated reality of learning, however, does not protect us from the urge to eliminate such uncomfortable knowledge. Questions about the unconscious begin to taunt:

What do I not know I know? What have I chosen not to know? The rationalist desire to make everything visible and logical so that it can be subsumed under reason, thus gaining validity and truth, pipes up: Is there a way to overcome our desire to remain ignorant of that which is difficult to know? How do I overcome a desire that I do not even recognize in myself? (Adair, 2007, p. 10)

These questions point to a paradox that the unconscious brings to pedagogy and research:

we cannot know the unconscious, our own or others,’ and yet our understanding of how people do and do not learn is deeper and, I would argue, more ethical when we begin with the assumption that learning is a psychic event that, like a dream, consists of both conscious and unconscious processes. (Pitt, 2003, p. 4)

Re-reading the excessive story of the Six Thinking Hats through poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, I trouble the purpose which initially informed my research: to argue that teacher education can be improved by incorporating more social justice theories. If we imagine improvement as progress towards knowledge and actions, what happens to moments when learning is difficult, when it is resisted, and when knowledge is uncertain? Poststructuralist theories are interested in the ways that memory influences representations of experience. The way we narrate our experience becomes a problem partly because memory itself is a problem. Similarly, psychoanalytic theories are curious about the unconscious, about those unknowable parts of ourselves, and how they come to affect our educational experiences.
My initial narration of the *Six Thinking Hats* does not acknowledge that it was the second time I had been taught this teaching strategy: my first encounter with it was in an undergraduate education course I took with Ms. Tilsons. My memory plays tricks on me, and refuses to claim with any certainty whether or not Ms. Tilsons incorporated a critique of the colours represented by each of the hats. Why do I not remember whether it was Ms. Tilsons or myself who first raised the concern about the racial implications of this teaching tool? What difference might it make to the story I tell? When I have told people the first narrative about the *Six Thinking Hats*, the only meanings or readings that it seemed to leave open were ones that positioned myself as an anti-racist person, or that positioned my B.Ed. program and instructors as ignorant about systemic racism. Where social justice readings of this excessive moment create categorical binaries between those working for social justice and those maintaining injustices, introducing the unknowable aspects of the unconscious and of memory complicates such readings.

Even more discomfiting to me than my inability to remember who initially critiqued the *Six Thinking Hats* strategy, or what that detail does to representations and readings, is my discovery of some notes I made in my B.Ed. course with Mr. Matheson. Although Mr. Matheson had remained in my memory as being unaware of social justice theories or of the transformative possibilities of education, I found the following words in my notebook, written during one of his lectures: “Look into teaching as a subversive activity.” Despite my disbelief upon rediscovering this note, as I flipped through the remainder of my notes from this course, they all suggested similar ideas about challenging both status quo teaching identities and uncritical curricular content. So why is

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21 This is also a pseudonym.
it that from the start I resisted learning in this class, and used the narrative of the *Six Thinking Hats* to justify this resistance both to myself and to other people?

I rethink my resistance to learning in Mr. Matheson’s course, and remember the feeling of being treated in this class, more than in any other, as though I were a high school student rather than a student teacher. As a result, I resisted learning from Mr. Matheson, participating—if rebelliously—in the dialogical process of socialization between teachers and students: “while teachers are socializing the students, the students are also socializing the teacher” (Britzman, 1986, p. 449).

Returning to Britzman’s (1991) insights on the relationship between theory and practice, we find two contrasting views of knowledge embedded in education. Is knowledge seen as stable and given, something to be delivered and received as smoothly as possible for all involved? Or is knowledge an ongoing process of creation and negotiation within given social, political and historical contexts; an unpredictable process and outcome that contains the potential for transformation? Britzman argues that the first view is characterized by a split between theory and practice, while the second view restores the connection between the two. Might I have consciously resisted learning because I expected that knowledge should be delivered and received more smoothly than it was? And might I have unconsciously restored a connection between theory and practice by participating in, as mentioned above, the process of socialization?

The discomfort of never being able to fully know or uncover the unconscious aspects of knowledge can be deeply troubling for a profession where knowledge about one’s self, one’s students, and one’s discipline are highly regarded. How do we teach if we do not know, and cannot predict, “which knowledge of what circumstance becomes interesting to the learner” (Britzman, 2003, p. 85)? How can we teach if we are not sure
about our own knowledge and learning, let alone that of our students? If we admit that
there are aspects of teaching and learning that we cannot and do not know, how can we be
entrusted to teach? There are several insights that psychoanalytic theories can bring to
such questions, each of which suggests shifting our gaze from the external to the internal.
In the first example, I refer to Britzman’s suggestion that we let go of our need to fully
understand and control teaching, and instead become curious about our learning:

Perhaps the most difficult tension is that while teachers cannot know their
teaching, they can become curious about their learning. To revise the question
‘how do I teach?’ to the question ‘what is learning for me now?’ means that the
qualities of one’s present responses to events, ideas, and other people must
become central to one’s thinking about dilemmas of teaching. (p. 85)

A similar shift from the external (what should the teacher teach?) to the internal (what is
the teacher learning?) comes from the field of counseling, which also draws on the
insights of psychoanalysis. Just as the field of education has the notion of student-
centered teaching, the field of counseling has “the notion of client-centered therapy”
(Duran, 2006, p. 45). However, as Duran points out, “If the patient is centered, then he
does not need to be seen for treatment. Instead, I believe it is critical that we discover
‘therapist-centered’ treatment” (Duran, p. 45).

I will point to a third and final example that seems relevant here in the shift from
the external to the internal, drawing on the work of Felman (1993). Applying a
psychoanalytic critique to Freud’s question, “What do women want?” Felman turns this
question back on Freud to ask, “What does Freud want? What does Freud want of
women, and with women?” (p. 99). In a similar way, perhaps we can turn our questions
about theory and practice back on ourselves; instead of asking “What do student teachers
want?” perhaps the questions that we are really asking, or that we want to ask, are “What
do teachers want? What do teachers want, from knowledge, from students, from
education?” In the next two chapters, I will suggest that teachers want education, both learning (Chapter Five) and teaching (Chapter Six), to be a smooth process, a process that does not trouble us, or our unconscious knowledge.

**Conclusion**

I have found that the stories I was told about education have not been adequate for my experiences of education. We want learning and teaching to be possible, to be effective, to be relatively free of trouble. Yet perhaps we are demanding more of education than it can sustain. Psychoanalytic theories have provided stories of education that make sense to me because they leave room for the excessive, for that which educational discourses of knowledge, reflection, and inclusion often exclude.

I began this chapter by pointing to the consequences and limitations of allowing student teachers to determine what knowledge is important for teacher education. And yet I argued, from my experience as a student teacher, that I knew—perhaps better than my instructor—what kind of knowledge was needed in my B.Ed. program. However, psychoanalytic theories of learning troubled the confidence that I had assumed, forcing me to question on what basis I had made that knowledge, and critiquing my assumption that I could make knowledge from experience without taking into consideration the ways that representations, or narratives, of experience differ from the experiences themselves. In other words, experience cannot be taken up as fact, or as unproblematic new knowledge, because poststructuralism points to the problem of narration, and psychoanalysis points to the problem of the unconscious. Yet for me, the conclusion I make is not that some theories are inadequate and should be rejected in favour of other theories. Rather, I am curious about the ways in which each theory opens up and/or shuts down possibilities. And while social justice theories to me have very obvious and
essential possibilities for creating more ethical teaching and learning environments, I am only beginning to consider the ways in which poststructuralist, and particularly psychoanalytic theories, might open up such spaces. In the next chapter, I will continue to critique the ways in which experiences are used to make knowledge, looking at the practice of reflection and how it tends to perpetuate the invisibility of some knowledge while maintaining the visibility of other knowledge, or—more accurately—the knowledge of the “other.”
Chapter Five

Narratives of Reflection: Troubling Discourses of Enlightenment and Ignorance

“Within hierarchical power relations, it seems reasonable that groups disadvantaged by systems of power might see their strength in solidarity and collective responses to their common location and subjugation. In contrast, it seems equally plausible that those privileged by these types of group placements might want to do away with notions of the group altogether, in effect obscuring the privileges they gain from group membership” (Collins, 2004, p. 252).

“Bound up in the drive to know is an equally important defensive drive not to know” (Adair, 2007, p. 9).

In the previous chapter, I was curious to know how student teachers can contribute to the processes of teaching and learning, and to what extent they can participate in theoretical and practical knowing and learning. In this chapter, I will look at how reflective practice is intended to be both a way to make connections between theoretical and practical knowledge, and a way for student teachers to participate in knowledge creation. I will argue, however, that rather than setting the stage for integrating theory and practice in a way that allows learning to occur, reflective practice as conventionally used often perpetuates what we already know, and hides the ideologies that influence our thoughts and actions. Using the concept of authoritative discourse (Britzman, 1991), I will show how some ideologies and knowledges remain invisible by maintaining the visibility of other ideologies and knowledges.

My experiences in both mandatory and elective courses in my B.Ed. program made me aware of the urgent necessity of incorporating social justice perspectives in the classroom, and simultaneously made me question whether social justice approaches were enough. While my experiences up until my B.Ed. year shifted my perspective towards

22 Britzman draws on Bakhtin (1986) for the concept “authoritative discourse.”
social justice pedagogy, I gradually grew disillusioned with its ability to transform individuals or schools, let alone society. I examine this disillusionment through an analysis of excessive moments in two B.Ed. courses: a compulsory course called *Theory and Professional Practice*, and an elective course titled *Culture, Language, and Education*. I have chosen these examples of excess because of my discomfort with them at the time that they happened, and because of their persistent presence in my recollections and representations of my year as a B.Ed. student. Since discourses of visibility and invisibility have been useful for analyzing these excessive moments, I will begin by outlining what I mean by visibility and invisibility.

*Authoritative Discourse*

The concept of “authoritative discourse” has been very useful for identifying the ways in which certain knowledge is made invisible. Britzman (1991) identifies three aspects of schooling that extract knowledge from the people, places, and contexts that created that knowledge in the first place: schedules, subjects, and curricula. Because school is arranged by the boundaries of schedules and subjects, knowledge becomes compartmentalized, limiting interconnected ways of thinking about and living in the world:

> When knowledge is severed from its socio-cultural context, all the qualities of contingency, authorship, and chronology that realize knowledge in the first place are lost. Indeed, knowledge severed from time and place takes on a fixed appearance, valued precisely because it does not change. (Britzman, p. 36)

When people refer to the “basics” of education, as Britzman notes, they are often referring to knowledge that is presumed to speak for itself, simply because it appears to have stood up to “‘the test of time’” (p. 36). What is not acknowledged, and what becomes lost, are the origins of the “basics,” and the ways in which these educational
values have been, and continue to be, contested. Similarly, the construction of curricular content often hides the process of knowledge creation from students, and even from teachers:

Yet the underlying politics of selection are typically obscured through the ways knowledge is presented and organized. That is, curricula, as a consequence of selection, organization, and interpretation, symbolize not only what is privileged as real knowledge, but shape the discursive practices that infuse this knowledge with power. (Britzman, p. 41)

The excessive moments I analyze in this chapter will show how reflective practice, as a common curricular practice in teacher education, privileges certain knowledges, simultaneously hiding how those knowledges are privileged. I will be drawing on the idea of “authoritative discourse” throughout this chapter as a way of describing what happens when people are unaware of how they use, and are used by, discourses.

The defining feature of authoritative discourse is that it positions the speaker as author. Anyone can take up authoritative discourse as if it were one’s own. The problem is that this discourse never originates from the speaker—the speaker merely borrows it without an awareness of serving as its effect. (Britzman, 1991, p. 61)

In my undergraduate courses, I remember the odd feeling of realizing how views and beliefs that I had claimed to be “my own” were connected to historical contexts. Foucault’s writings (1973; 1977; 1988) were particularly influential in understanding the contingent nature of knowledge: the ways in which truth, morality, and “common-sense” beliefs have been defined in very different, and even contradictory, ways throughout history. As Britzman points out, Foucault’s work “call[s] into question the authoritative discourses and the recipe knowledge that work to sustain the obvious” (pp. 61-2). In other words, I began to see how my beliefs and ways of thinking about the world would likely have been drastically different if I had lived in another time or place. While I had
difficulty articulating these concepts as a B.Ed. student, the questions I raised in several courses were intended to point to the situated nature of knowledge: the ways in which social, political, and historical contexts influence what we know. I was concerned because when knowledge is presented as though it comes from an individual rather than from particular socio-historical contexts, asking questions about what is taught may be interpreted as a personal confrontation, an attack of the teacher’s identity, rather than as a debate of ideas.

Although Sherene Razack (2004) does not use the language of “authoritative discourse,” she identifies the racist assumptions embedded in the idea that knowledge is individually, rather than communally and culturally, based. For example, policies and practices attempting to “protect” Muslim women from arranged and forced marriages are often disguised under feminist agendas, yet these attempts are justified through colonialist discourses. In order to grasp the complexity of her argument without its surrounding context, I quote her at length here. There is an assumption that women in the West have more freedom, autonomy and equality because they are not generally a part of extended kinship networks and are not subjected to arranged marriages as are Muslim women. The divide is between those who live as autonomous individuals and who make decisions without the influence of kin and community and those who live their lives within communities, the two sides serving to illustrate not only the unbridgeable cultural divide between the West and non-West but the non-West as a place of danger for women. Any factors that might serve to complicate this picture of autonomously acting individuals…remain outside the cultural frame. …Westerners, imagined as living autonomously and outside culture remain privileged in this formulation. (pp. 139-140)

In order for this myth of autonomy and individuality to remain stable, it relies on the creation of an other, an other who is both racialized and gendered. Drawing from the work of Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) who argues that the modern subject relies on “an illusion of autonomy and freedom” (p. 6), Razack (2004) writes:
The autonomous individual, unmarked by culture or community, has to disavow its dependence on others. The subject’s emplacement and embodiment are both emptied out by marking others as placed and embodied. Man becomes the universal norm against which woman is other and white becomes the norm against racial others. (p. 147)

In other words, Razack makes the point that discourses that create and position an “other” are necessary for maintaining the belief that where the West is governed by modern “values” predicated on rationalism and individualism, the non-West is governed by a dangerous communal mindset founded in pre-modern “culture.”

*Excessive Moments: Personal and Communal Reflections*

Offering two examples of how authoritative discourses of individualism and autonomy were played out in my B.Ed. program, I first turn to one of the assignments for the compulsory course *Theory and Professional Practice*. The assignment was titled “Finding the Centre,” and the purpose of it was to identify and articulate our personal philosophy of teaching. This assignment was based on a recognition that what teachers do is informed by their ideas of what teaching is and should be. While this assignment has the potential for examining the ways in which our ideas and beliefs are historically, culturally, and politically influenced, in reality it perpetuated the problematic discourses of authority and individualism. Student teachers were instructed to situate their teaching philosophies in the discourse of individualism rather than community—“*your* teaching philosophy”—and in the discourse of values rather than culture—“what you *care* about most as a teacher” (B.Ed. Courseware, 2004). Likewise, the process of changing views was situated in discourses of Western individualism. Unlike cultures which we render as static and unchanging, for example Aboriginal cultures,23 there was an assumption that

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23Davidson et al. (2003) discuss how Thomas King’s work challenges stereotypes of Aboriginal cultures as static.
our teaching philosophies would change—“It will change and evolve;” and once again, this change was to be examined in light of our “experience” (B.Ed. Courseware, 2004).

In my B.Ed. program, many written assignments and class discussions involved reflection—on what we had learned, on what we had taught, and even on our “personal” philosophy of education. Because the concepts by which we would articulate or critique these personal reflections on our experience were not challenged, they tended to re-articulate rather than challenge our pre-existing beliefs and assumptions, confirming Fendler’s (2003) critique that “When reflection is understood as a turning back upon the self, the danger is that reflection will reveal no more than what is already known” (p. 21).

In his research of preservice teachers, Segall (2002) also noted this problematic use of reflection: reflective journals were used to identify not whether, not even how, but where what was read and discussed in class fit into students’ views on education. The a priori assumption then, we learn from Ron, is that there necessarily was a ‘fit’ between the two and what was left for students to figure out in their journals was where (not whether) that fit existed. (p. 90)

Without a recognition that our experiences are mitigated by and represented through resistance to and/or acceptance of dominant discourses in education, our “emplacement and embodiment” as student teachers “are both emptied out.” And who is the “other” that becomes placed and embodied for us? The Program Focus courses offered in my B.Ed. program were revealing, indicating a hierarchy even among those designated as the other. Of the sixteen courses offered, four were premised on categories of difference that are created and maintained in and through educational discourses. Each of these four courses teaches about differently-abled bodies: those who are “at-risk,” those who are “exceptional,” those who are “gifted,” and the ways in which “able-ism” works. All other differences are taken up in the course Teaching For Social Justice. This is the only
Program Focus course in which student teachers can learn about how the “other” is placed and embodied through race, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, age, and ability. One might assume, based on the examples of assignments and available course offerings in this B.Ed. program, that there are certain aspects of teaching and learning which are in no way connected to one’s culture and history. I now turn to a specific example of how discourses of Western invisibility and non-Western visibility played out in one of my B.Ed. courses.

In August, 2004, the film Submission, Part I, co-written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Theo van Gogh, was released in the Netherlands. The film depicts male violence against women within the Muslim faith, and raised so much controversy that both Hirsi Ali and van Gogh received death threats; two months later, van Gogh was shot and killed (BBC News, 2004). My first introduction to Hirsi Ali and her film was in the B.Ed. course Culture, Language and Education. A few women in our class chose to leave the room while the film was playing because they had been warned that it contained some graphic scenes of violence against women. I found the film very powerful, and appreciated its brave and honest examination of how certain religious beliefs based on the Koran could be used to justify the physical and emotional abuse of women. Since I grew up in a fundamentalist Christian community in which many men abused power emotionally, spiritually, and physically, I read the film not as a critique of Islam itself, but of power structures (both religious and non-religious) that continue to oppress people—particularly women. Consequently, the conversation in our class following the film disturbed me; in a class with a large majority of women, several men monopolized the discussion, contrasting how well they treat women with the “uncivilized,” “sexist” behaviour of Islamic men.
Re-reading this event in light of Razack’s (2004) research makes visible the underlying discourses that contrast Western values with non-Western culture, creating an “other,” who is tied to pre-civilized culture. The male student teachers’ rendering of the film was made possible by discourses in which Western men can see themselves as individuals informed by reason and progressive values, whereas the actions of some Islamic men are considered indicative of all Islamic men, and of Islamic “culture” in general. While I was unable to process my reaction to both the film and its initial interpretation in order to express my discomfort with what some of my peers had said, I was thankful that a female student teacher of colour was able to express what I could not. She pointed out that the film represented only one interpretation of the Koran and not the attitudes and practices of all Muslim men. However, I am not certain to what extent we, as student teachers, could situate this woman’s response within larger racialized discourses.

Thinking about this discussion after class, what really bothered me was an emphasis on problems in non-Western cultures and the inability of some classmates to connect the film’s message to ongoing injustices in Canada. Although the specific manifestations may differ across cultures, and although these differences should not be glossed over, the underlying problems of sexism and patriarchy must be acknowledged. As Segall (2001, 2002) notes, in teacher education, questions and critiques are accepted as long as they aren’t directed towards what happens within the classroom itself. Likewise, as Canadians, we are hesitant to turn our awareness of human rights violations back on ourselves. Razack recognizes this hesitancy. Her critiques of Canadian practices parallel her discussion of racialized discourses within Norwegian policies: “Norwegians, like Canadians, are often pleased to consider themselves without a colonialist
past...Canadian involvement in British colonial projects are obscured in this national remembering as is internal colonisation of Aboriginal peoples” (2004, p. 144). Razack also returns the critical lens to Canada when she points out how arranged marriages are seen to be indicative of dangerous Muslim “culture,” whereas there is no recognition that violence against women in Canada is in any way related to a culture that allows, or dare I say encourages, such violence.

If we consider spousal homicide, for instance in a country such as Canada, we see that for the year 2001, 67 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners and 17 of these women were killed after they tried to leave their abusive partners (Status of Women Canada, 2003). We do not, in these instances refer to culture as the root cause of the problem although the violence is directed at women who refuse to stay in their marriages and relationships on account of violence. (p. 168)

Almost a year after the viewing of Submission, I came across a journal article placing responsibility for seeing Muslims as the “other” on the film’s creators Hirsi Ali and van Gogh. de Leeuw and van Wichelen (2005) argue that “Submission encourages and reactivates the Orientalist gaze and affirms the Western/Dutch fear which these stereotypical images of the Muslim ‘other’ evoke” (p. 328). This othering occurs in two main realms: gender and religion. Critiquing the sexist ways in which the film’s messages are delivered, de Leeuw and van Wichelen claim that “the sensual female voice, the explicit use of American English, and her nakedness under a transparent veil, evoke an association with quasi soft-porn images” (p. 328). In effect, this creates a paradox where “the Western form of depersonalization (as sexual and commodified objects)” is used as a

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24 I have found Thomas King’s book Truth about stories and Eduardo Duran’s book Healing the Soul Wound useful for understanding that colonization of Aboriginal people is not only a part of Canadian history, but is an ongoing, problematic reality. Both texts also suggest ways of challenging colonialist attitudes.

25 I use this language intentionally, out of frustration about the lack of recognition of how our so-called progressive North American culture perpetuates violence against women. Everywhere I go and look, I am confronted with images of women depicted as sexual objects, which, as Dawn and Kelly (2005) point out, is not necessarily a problem in itself—the problem is that these images subtly or overtly encourage violent and degrading treatment of women.
means of critiquing “the depersonalization of Muslim women (as oppressed and helpless objects)” (p. 328). Similarly, the Islamic religion is also positioned as the “other.” Verses from the Koran which emphasize a husband’s authority over his wife are written in Arabic on the actors’ bodies. By reducing the Koran to these particularly controversial verses, the film ignores “different local variations, …centuries of interpretation, …[and] the work of Islamic feminists” (p. 328). Perhaps the film itself does not encourage the critical examination Hirsi Ali intended, and instead reinforces stereotypes of non-Western women as in need of rescuing, and of Muslims as religious fundamentalists. These stereotypes are connected to the assumption that Western culture is not likely influenced by religion, an assumption which denies the past and present influence of Christian ideas, values, and beliefs. There are occasional moments when the spectre of Christianity still haunts and horrifies us, for example, when we learned, as student teachers, that we are mandated by government policy to promote Judeo-Christian values. Where are the films that connect the abuse of Canadian women, as indicated above, to Biblical texts which mandate men’s dominance and women’s silence?

26 King (2003) suggests that Christian creation stories have largely influenced North American thought and practices.
27 Section 264(1) of the Ontario Education Act says “It is the duty of a teacher and a temporary teacher … to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, purity, temperance and all other virtues” (emphasis added).
28 Ephesians 5:22-24: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (BibleResources.org). 1 Corinthians 14:33-5: “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (BibleResources.org).
29 To those who argue that I use these verses as “evidence” for oppressive behaviour by taking them out of context and ignoring the multiple ways in which these verses have been, and continue to be, interpreted by various Christian communities, I return this challenge by asking why a similar contextual and cultural critique is not granted to those religious texts, communities, and cultures we designate as “other.”
The Reflective Practitioner

My continued reflection on the experiences outlined above would be seen by many educators as evidence that I am a good student, and that I have the potential to be a good teacher. I have also convinced myself that my responses as a student teacher to problematic moments and my continued research and analysis of them are evidence that I am a good student and will make a good teacher. However, psychoanalytic theories have challenged my understanding of what reflection means, and whether reflecting can actually lead to learning, if learning is understood as coming to know something which was not already known.

Personal reflections are usually intended to provide a critical examination of one’s thoughts and practices, and consequently many B.Ed. programs try to cultivate reflective practitioners. However, our reflections on and about teaching and learning often take up authoritative discourses, solidifying rather than challenging existing beliefs and normative identities. Ellsworth (1997) and Orner et al. (2005) are interested in exploring the unpredictable moments in education—the impossibility of identifying exactly when learning happens or how it happens, or who it is that does the learning or the teaching at any given time. Yet, research and pedagogy, as representational practices, often “attempt to produce and ‘contain’ excess meaning” (Orner et al., p. 112). This representation occurs, for example, when reflection is used as an educational discourse and practice to inform and limit one’s identity as a teacher:

Because teachers and teacher educators especially are under pressure… to conform their self-representations to particular and predetermined identity frames such as ‘the reflective practitioner,’ their identities often get hardened into rigid, polarized, constitutive categories—the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ teacher, for example. (p. 219)
Orner et al. argue that even when reflection leads to greater understanding or awareness of one’s self or one’s students, it is problematic for a couple of reasons. Personal reflections often conform to teacher-stories: stories in which the teacher discovers her mistakes and learns how to improve her practice by a new-found knowledge of herself and/or her students. These “‘cheerful’ versions” (Orner et al., 2005, p. 221) do not acknowledge that it is impossible to ever really know ourselves or another:

I never ‘am’ the ‘who’ that a pedagogical address thinks I am. But then again, I never am the who that I think I am either. The point …is that pedagogy is a much messier and more inconclusive affair than the vast majority of our educational theories and practices make it out to be. (Ellsworth, 1997, p.8)

A related concern is that reflection is often assumed to lead to greater self-awareness, and as a result it “replicates rather than questions tenets of the Enlightenment ‘I’—the ‘self’ as rational, coherent, autonomous, unified, fixed and given—and therefore capable of working toward complete and conscious ‘development’ and ‘understanding’ of one’s ‘identity’” (Orner et al., p. 219).

One of the aims of poststructuralism has been to challenge the “claim that individuals are centered, autonomous, and knowable (to themselves and others),” placing emphasis instead on “the decentered, fragmented, and discourse-dependent subject” (Helstein, 2005, p. 3). Even when reflection is intended to foster critical thinking and transformative practice, it is inextricably linked to existing power relations: “Given that the notion of modern democratic governance is inseparable from self-discipline, it is impossible to draw a line between an authentic experience of reflection and what has already been socialized and disciplined” (Fendler, 2003, p. 21). Living in a product-oriented culture, reflective practice is often consciously or unconsciously understood as a means of recognizing and avoiding mistakes. As such, it limits “a kind of thinking that is
other to social utility, the logic of otherness called ‘daydreams,’ ‘fantasy,’ and ‘playing with ideas’” (Britzman, 1998, p. 32).

Re-reading, or Missed Moments in Meaning-Making

Once again, I return to the dynamic between problems in teaching and learning and problems in representing teaching and learning. If “narratives about experience must not be collapsed with experience itself” (Pitt, 2003, p. 28); if relating to knowledge is an unconscious process where we imagine the self as “cohesive and coherent” (Pitt, 2003, p. 26); if representations of learning always contain more and less than they intend (Orner et al., 2005), what do I make of the stories I have told in this chapter?

A few women in our class chose to leave the room while the film was playing because they had been warned that it contained some graphic scenes of violence against women. Although I have written and re-written, read and re-read my excessive moments in this chapter many times, this particular moment suddenly strikes me; all the meanings that are now embedded in it for me are silenced in the text. In the space between this sentence and the one that follows it in my narration, a flood of memories, emotions, and thoughts run through my head: Fourth Wave—a feminist discussion group a few women and I started; the importance of language and the impact of stories; becoming aware of intense feelings of anger; my refusal to listen to or read media representations of “the news;” the simultaneous transformative value and emotional drain of reading feminist research; the insights of queer literature. I want to walk the reader through each of these memories, each of these ideas; I want to express what is behind each of them—how they felt, what they meant to me, how they changed me and many people around me. I want to explain why and how they are related to the moment described above and the silence that follows in my narration. As a way into a discussion of these issues, I use one story to
represent them, a story from a collection by Taste This (Camilleri, et al., 1998), titled *Super Hero*. The story starts off with a familiar plot line: a woman walking home alone at night being followed by a man in a van who frightens her with persistent taunting. But the story changes to an unexpected conclusion; the woman gets into the van, lures the man into her home, ties him up and cuffs his wrists and ankles, strips him, holds a knife to him, and reprimands him for being foolish enough to talk to a stranger, for agreeing to come to a stranger’s house, for putting himself in a position where he could have been raped and killed, for ignoring all the warnings of how dangerous and fickle women can be. After forcing him to say thank-you for the fact that he was not killed or seriously harmed, the woman turns him out into the night, naked, tied, scared, and cold.

I consider some of the possible questions the reader might be wondering. Is this story true? Why would I choose this story to represent my moments of excess? What does it have to do with teacher education, with authoritative discourse, with reading and representation and meaning-making? While each reader is responsible for the meanings they make from this story, and while it is impossible for me to control the meanings that will be made, I want to leave readers with some thoughts and questions that might be useful. This story has enabled me to connect the silences in my narrative to the impact of men’s repeated silencing of women, and to the many moments which I hinted at above. What does it mean to witness men’s violence against women, a discourse that is constantly rendered visible by its possibility? What happens when we witness women violating men, or other discourses that are constantly rendered invisible by their impossibility? What do the stories we tell make possible and impossible in our lives and

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30 Taste This is a group of performing artists who collected their performances in the book *Boys like her: Transfictions*. Taste This includes Anna Camilleri, Ivan E. Coyote, Zoe Eakle, and Lyndell Montgomery.
in our world? Or, vice versa, how might the given realities, or possibilities, of our world reflect our discursive practices, or the stories we tell ourselves?  

Would, or could, asking student teachers to discuss or reflect on their experience of watching and/or not watching the film *Submission* lead to new knowledge, or simply repeat what was already known? Psychoanalytic theory acknowledges that “the force of an event is felt before it can be understood” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 758), giving significance to the fact that my learning was delayed, that the meaning I made from the moment—or rather from my narration of the moment—came much later than the event itself. Pitt (2003) argues that ignorance, or a refusal to learn, occurs when there is something that threatens our existing knowledge, when there is something unconscious that we do not want to make conscious. In projecting my delayed learning onto the “ignorance” of those around me, I refused to admit my own “ignorance,” my own refusal to learn something unconscious that I did not want to make conscious. And, as Felman (1993) points out, in a patriarchal society, it is possible that all women have unconscious knowledge that is too painful to be remembered or narrated:

Because trauma cannot be simply remembered, it cannot simply be ‘confessed’: it must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and a listener to recover something the speaking subject is not—and cannot be—in possession of. Insofar as any feminine existence is in fact a traumatized existence, feminine autobiography cannot be a confession. It can only be a testimony: to survival. And like other testimonies to survival, its struggle is to testify at once to life and to the death—the dying—the survival has entailed. (p. 16)

*Conclusion*

To close, I return to my narration once again, to the sentence which is now pregnant with meaning for me: *A few women in our class chose to leave the room while the film was playing because they had been warned that it contained some graphic scenes*  

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31 Thomas King, *Truth about stories.*
of violence against women. I return, also, to my experience as a B.Ed. student. I felt conflicted in choosing to stay in the room. I wanted to be able to participate in the discussion about the film, and thought that not watching the film would have made my potential critiques of it invalid both for myself and my peers; how can one critique something unless one is familiar with it? I was also uncertain about the emotions the film might bring to the surface, and feared crying more than I feared not crying. The film turned out to be more symbolic than graphic, and I was glad that I had decided to stay to watch it. Yet for more than two years I was convinced that what I learned from the experience of watching and discussing the film and from reflecting on those experiences had nothing to do with my own ignorance, with my own refusal to learn, with knowledge that was too painful to be made conscious.

Returning to some of the questions I have asked earlier, what is the role of the student teacher in teacher education? Do student teachers relate better to theoretical or practical knowledge? In this chapter I have wondered: If student teachers are encouraged to get involved in the processes of teaching and learning through reflecting—either in written or verbal form—on their personal/teaching experiences, will that lead to more ethical and meaningful experiences in teacher education? Considering some of the issues that I have addressed in this chapter, perhaps the roles, or the capabilities, of personal narratives and reflective practice need to be reconsidered:

If education can tolerate the play of hide and seek within the personal, the question is not whether or not we use the personal as a category for making knowledge in education. Instead, we might ask what we use the personal to do, how we account for its value, and what we choose to take up and ignore as we reflect upon our own and others’ stories. (Pitt, 2003, p. 94)

In the next chapter, I will explore in greater detail the relation of values to our understandings of ability and exceptionality. I will attempt to bring together stories of
identity, knowledge, and visibility to show how those stories play out in discourses of normality and exceptionality.
Chapter Six

Narratives of Inclusion: Challenging Discourses of Normality and Exceptionality

“[M]uch of the impetus to make education compulsory came from the need to control the socialization of the children of European immigrants in order to perpetuate the values and interests of the middle class and the knowledge base of traditional Anglo-Protestant culture” (Britzman, 1991, p. 31).

“What doubtless remained longer than leprosy, and would persist when the lazar houses had been empty for years, were the values and images attached to the figure of the leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure which was not driven off without first being inscribed in a sacred circle” (Foucault, 1973, p. 6).

In the previous chapter I looked at how authoritative discourses and discourses of the reflective practitioner made certain identities invisible and others visible. In this chapter I return once again to issues of visibility in relation to identity. How are certain identities normalized and made invisible, while others are made exceptional and visible? The Program Focus courses in my teacher education program included discourses of the “other” that were mostly defined in terms of different abilities: those “at-risk,” the “exceptional,” and the “gifted.” Referring to an excessive moment that I experienced in one such course where we learned how to teach students with exceptionalities, I question the notions of “difference,” “normal,” and “exceptional” embedded in educational discourses of normality and exceptionality. I begin with a look at histories of exclusion using Foucault’s arguments about lepers and other groups who were excluded in European countries during the classical period, from the end of the 16th century to the 18th century. Connecting the values embedded in such historical exclusions with the discourses and institutions that maintained these values, I suggest that present-day normative discourses in education are similarly imbued with value. Identifying six normative frameworks which are sometimes appealed to as objective and universal, I
argue that all normative frameworks, with the possible exclusion of statistical norms, are based on values. Norms are not absolute, objective, or unbiased: they are culturally determined and subjective, and can therefore change. I then point out how the term “normal” is decontextualized in educational discourses, making it appear as a universal, objective value rather than identifying the ways in which “normal” is given value. Definitions of “normal” are either absent from much educational writing, or are covered over in ways that hide the implications of such definitions. After reading excessive moments—rejections of psychoanalysis—through psychoanalytic theories, I argue that these theories return value to the very qualities—the excesses—that are excluded by normative educational discourses. I conclude by suggesting that in desiring education to be a place where teaching and learning occur as smoothly as possible, normative discourses deny the messy and unpredictable aspects of education. In contrast, psychoanalytic theories create space for that which troubles us in education.

*Excessive Moments: Disrupting Inclusion*

In my B.Ed. *Exceptionalities* course, it became evident to me that the focus was structured around the inclusion of “exceptional” learners. The course relied on several discourses that did not sit well with me: discourses that made distinctions between “normal” and “exceptional,” between “ability” and “disability,” and yet still attempted to “include” those who were exceptional or disabled. Early in the course I questioned the ways in which we were talking about disabilities. I tried to suggest something that might challenge our notion of ability, norms, and inclusion, informed by my undergraduate

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32 The full title of the course I took was *Critical Issues and Policies: Equity and Adapting Teaching for Exceptional Learners*. Since both the course and my critique are focused on exceptionalities, and since my point is to connect this course to broader educational discourses of exceptionalities, I shorten the course title to *Exceptionalities*. 
readings of Foucault’s (1973) *Madness and civilization*. My instructor referred me to Howard Gardner (1993), writing his *Multiple intelligences* text on the blackboard so that I could look into it. She briefly described his theories, with which I was familiar enough to know that they were not at all what I had in mind. My instructor could tell that I wasn’t satisfied by this response, and gave me the space to try to articulate my thoughts again. However, knowing that Gardner and Foucault were worlds apart, and not feeling capable of explaining Foucauldian theory on my feet without alienating myself from peers who I thought might get annoyed by my disruption, I declined the opportunity to question any further and let the instructor continue with the day’s lesson with the consequence of shutting down my openness to learning in that course. I refused to passively accept what was being taught, and spent the remainder of the term doing as little work as possible and carrying on conversations and jokes with anyone near enough to hear me.

I do not intend to suggest that my refusals to learn were effective or befitting of a student teacher. However, as theories of excessive moments have encouraged me to realize, perhaps these moments can be seen as meaningful, and even partially productive: I attempted to disrupt the possibilities that both myself and my peers would take up educational discourses that were presented as authoritative. Having the advantage now of looking back on these moments from a distance, and with the use of theories that challenge authoritative discourses in the realm of ability and exceptionalities, I offer a more nuanced critique.

*Histories of Exclusion*

Michel Foucault largely influenced my disruption of “inclusive” discourses as a B.Ed. student, discourses which seemed to hide the ways in which people with “exceptionalities” and “disabilities” were actually excluded. Therefore, I begin by
outlining the exclusion of certain groups during and after the Middle Ages, and up until the 18th century. Foucault’s analysis of madness in the classical period, between the 16th and 18th centuries, lends insight into the historically and culturally contingent nature of discourses of exclusion. These discourses are predicated on beliefs and values that may appear to be fixed and stable, rather than mediated by people and subject to change.

Foucault begins with the leper, a social outcast up until the end of the Middle Ages. Around the 16th century, with the disappearance of leprosy in the Western world, there was a shift in the subjects of social exclusion: “Poor vagabonds, criminals, and ‘deranged minds’ would take the part played by the leper” (Foucault, p. 7). Foucault notes that the number of people who were confined on the basis of these indicators is significant; they constituted roughly one per cent of the population. How is it that such a large number of people ended up in confinement houses? The disappearance of leprosy did not coincide with the disappearance of exclusion; instead, shifting values led to the exclusion of another group of people. By the end of the 16th century there was “a long series of ‘follies’ which, stigmatizing vices and faults as in the past, no longer attribute them all to pride, to lack of charity, to neglect of Christian virtues, but to a sort of great unreason for which nothing, in fact, is exactly responsible, but which involves everyone in a kind of secret complicity” (Foucault, p. 13). Conceptions of madness had shifted; madness no longer occupied the realm of the transcendent or irrational, but was condemned as a sign of idleness. Consequently, in the classical period community, any aspect of a person that was seen as limiting their social utility, or participation in labour, was enough to merit their exclusion: “This community acquired an ethical power of segregation, which permitted it to eject, as into another world, all forms of social uselessness” (Foucault, p. 13).

Foucault notes that confinement houses were alternatively called correction houses or workhouses.
58). So, although leprosy had disappeared, the institutions and practices which had been developed over centuries remained: “Between labor and idleness in the classical world ran a line of demarcation that replaced the exclusion of leprosy. The asylum was substituted for the lazar house… The old rites of excommunication were revived, but in the world of production and commerce” (Foucault, p. 57).

Foucault makes a point of identifying that the exclusion of the leper was not entirely hostile: religious rituals preceded the outcast of the leper, ensuring the leper that while they might be banished from the community, they were not banished by God. Rather, they were considered blessed for being punished for their sins in this lifetime. Similarly, the confinement houses were seen as places where the ills of idleness could be remedied through forced labour and religious instruction. Exclusion was not merely economically based; it was also infused with morality, since poverty was seen not as an indicator of limited resources or employment opportunities, but as a lack of morality and discipline. In the workhouses, schoolmasters were designated to instruct in moral and religious education in order to address the “lacking” morals of inhabitants. In 1784, John Howard wrote, “The schoolmaster must instruct the children in religion, and encourage them, at proper times, to learn and repeat portions of Scripture. He must also teach them reading, writing and accounts, and a decent behaviour to those that visit the house” (as cited in Foucault, 1973, p. 61). As I will argue in this chapter, there is a connection between education and the instilling—or questioning—of existing social norms or values. Referring back to Chapter Four, a distinction was made there between understanding education not as schooling, but as the process of cultural transmission from one generation to another, a process which can be understood either as social reproduction or as social transformation.
What significance does Foucault’s analysis of madness in the classical era have for present-day educational discourses? How are “lines of demarcation” drawn in schools? How are these lines made to appear inevitable and fixed, rather than processes of social, historical, and political contexts? In what ways do we enact a “secret complicity” in educational discourses of exceptionality? How do we appear to embrace those whom we cast out by first welcoming them into “sacred circles”? I will address these questions later in this chapter, but since educational discourses are strongly influenced by social norms or values, I will first critique some of the normative frameworks used in educational discourses. Just as lepers and poor people were outcast from society through systems of social norms or values and discourses that solidified these values either through ritual and/or education, I aim to show how present-day educational discourses have been instilled with social values. Educational discourses of normality and exceptionality rely on norms that are not always made explicit, or that are made to seem universal and objective. Before suggesting that the norms on which we base educational discourses can and should be changed, I examine what it is that we mean by the word “normal,” and point out that norms are connected to changing and context-dependent social values.

**Normative Frameworks and the Values That Maintain Them**

There are so many possible meanings associated with the word “normal” that normative discourses quickly become quite confusing or vague. Before questioning which definitions of “normal” are utilized in educational discourses, I will outline six frameworks to which Corcos (2003) and Warner (1999) appeal when talking about norms: the social, the medical, the statistical, the moral, the traditional, and the natural. Some normative frameworks are assumed to be universal and objective, or distanced
enough from social values that they gain a measure of authority and permanence. However, my point is to show how all norms are influenced by social values—they are contextually-dependent and are therefore subject to change. Statistical norms are one exception to this rule, but I argue that statistical norms are instilled with value when applied to educational discourses. I will be critiquing Corcos’ use of the term “normal,” and therefore want to critique her attempt to objectify not only medical and statistical norms, but also social norms. However, given Warner’s extensive critique of normality in his text *The trouble with normal*, I thought it useful to address how moral, traditional, and natural norms are often similarly imbued with objective, universal value. As long as norms are believed to be universal and objective, it makes it very difficult to challenge them and suggest the need for alternative norms. If, however, all normative frameworks are dependent on social values, we can begin to question our “norms” and examine whether or not such norms or social values lead to the kinds of educational and social practices we desire and believe are ethical.

*Social norms.* To begin, I will justify my use of the term “social norms,” and particularly my preference for this term over the term “evaluative norms.” An evaluative norm, as Warner (1999) writes, is “a standard, a criterion of value” (p. 56). While this definition is simple, it is also abstract, distancing people, or subjects, from their role as value-makers. Corcos (2003) makes the connection between people and values much clearer, arguing that social norms are the explicit or implicit behaviours, rules, judgments, and values of a group of people. However, despite Corcos’ recognition that social norms are subjective, she insists that they can be objectified by adding qualifiers. Thus, according to Corcos, deviations from the social norm are measured by “the quality, frequency, and duration of the behavior” (Corcos, 2003, p. 9). Although Corcos goes into
detail to explain how different groups would rate behaviours differently using these measurements, she still believes that such measurements will help to “minimize personal bias in making observations” (Corcos, 2003, p. 9). Measurements such as quality, frequency, and duration seem much more suited to a statistical normative framework (discussed below), leaving open the possibility that people will make judgments about statistical norms without knowledge of the statistical evidence by which such judgments could be made. Even if this point were clarified, and people—whether individuals or groups—were asked to measure quality, frequency, and duration according to their values, we return once again to the fact that values are socially determined, subject to change, and varying among groups, regardless of how “objective” we might like them to be.

**Statistical norms.** If we turn now to statistical norms, both Corcos and Warner dismiss this framework as inadequate for evaluating behaviour. Statistical normality is “based on the notion that human characteristics are normally distributed on a curve” (familiar to some as the Bell curve), but Corcos notes that although physical characteristics can be charted on a curve, “no compelling evidence exists to indicate that such factors as social behavior and economic status may be viewed in the same way” (Corcos, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, “this view of normality is inappropriate for conceptualizing behavioral exceptionality; because behavior is not normally distributed, the basic assumption cannot be realized” (Corcos, 2003, p. 7). However, even if it could be shown that certain behaviours fit within a statistical norm, this does not mean that they are desirable or valuable: “If normal just means within a common statistical range, then there is no reason to be normal or not;” statistics “say nothing about the desirability of the things themselves” (Warner, 1999, p. 54). It can be argued that statistical norms are of a
different quality than social norms. In order for statistical norms to influence educational discourses, however, they must be instilled with value, as when students’ grades are adjusted through the use of the Bell curve. Repeating the point above, statistical norms in and of themselves say nothing about the desirability of a given behaviour or normative pattern, whether within or external to a classroom. Although some might argue that “exceptional” students are those who fall on the extremes of statistical norms, it is values, and not statistical norms, that determine what we do with such information.

Medical Norms. Medical normality is defined in part by “the freedom from symptoms of disease” (Corcos, 2003, p. 5). In other words, in Corcos’ medical model, normal is equated with health (or absence of disease), and abnormality with disease. However, the subjectivity, or culturally contingent nature, of this argument is revealed in Duran’s (2006) description of Native medicine:

Healing has to do with harmony and balance of spirit. You could have the worst illness imaginable and still be healed. If you’re sitting at the center of the universe, then you are healed. On the other hand, curing has to do with the removal of symptoms or disease, sickness, and such. This is the frustration of the Western medical model, that is, that it cannot cure the inevitable, because all patients are going to die. Only difference is that they may die without healing or still out of balance. With Native/Original Peoples’ medicine, it is perfectly okay to die. But it is not okay to die out of balance with the forces that create life and death. (p. 129)

As Duran points out, Native understandings of health, healing, and wellness differ significantly from Western understandings. Although medical norms are often assumed to be, and applied as, objective and universal, they are determined by social values. Thus, medical normality appears to be a sub-category of social normality, rather than a category removed from the influence of social norms. Warner (1999) also notes how medical norms have been influenced by appeals to statistical norms and natural norms (critiqued below): “homosexuality was for so long the classic example of abnormal and pathological
sexuality. From the late nineteenth century onward, people had to work very hard to resist this medical fallacy, which was rooted in the confusion between statistical regularities and natural laws” (p. 59). Warner suggests that the confusion between statistical norms and medical norms persist even today: “in matters of sex, people mistakenly suppose that the statistical norm must reveal the standard of healthy sexuality” (p. 56).

**Natural norms.** Medical norms are sometimes justified through normative frameworks that appeal to nature, as Warner’s example of homosexuality above indicates. But, are natural norms any less value-laden than medical norms? While people might assume that natural laws or instincts dictate what is valuable or normal, there is evidence that suggests the reverse; our values and norms influence how we view and interpret nature. If nature is understood as including the non-human realm, Foucault (1973) notes that historically, humans have alternatively looked to animals as a source of values and as a justification for behaviours that are not valued:

> In the thought of the Middle Ages, the legions of animals, named once and for all by Adam, symbolically bear the values of humanity. But at the beginning of the Renaissance, the relations with animals are reversed… Animality has escaped domestication by human symbols and values; and it is animality that reveals the dark rage, the sterile madness that lie in men’s hearts. (p. 21)

Likewise, Frans de Waal (McDonald, 2005) gives a compelling critique of our usual appeal to animals as a way of justifying certain human behaviours as “natural” and others as “exceptional.” de Waal argues that we have used the behaviour of chimps and other animals to justify our violent behaviours, while considering good behaviours unique traits to our species. Yet genetically, chimps and bonobos are both 98.5% the same as humans, and their ways of responding to problems differ drastically: “chimps solve sexual problems with power; bonobos solve power problems with sex” (McDonald, 2005). Bonobos have regular 10-20 second sexual encounters with each other, and these “genital
handshakes,” as de Waal refers to them, occur between females and males, females and females, and males and males. The behaviour of bonobos challenges the belief that homosexuality and multiple sexual partners are “unnatural;” any attempt to make such a claim is based on social values rather than on natural norms. As Warner (1999) points out, “The question of what is right or healthy is something that cannot be answered simply by natural laws of the biological organism” (p. 58). If anything, nature shows an incredibly wide range of sexual behaviours; claiming that we are similar to, or different from, any given animal says more about our social values than it does about an objective “norm” for evaluating sexual behaviour.

Traditional norms. Traditional norms, like natural norms, are also connected to our values. As Foucault’s (1973) historical analysis of lepers highlights, even social practices that last for centuries are subject to change, revealing the influence of social values on normative frameworks such as the appeal to “tradition.” Referencing tradition as a normative framework for evaluating behaviour relies on the myth that “time” is the holder of meaning; this denies the reality that people are the ones who determine values, and it ignores the contested histories involved in determining traditions in the first place. While social values may influence the creation and longevity of traditions, it is unethical to reverse this process and argue that traditions should determine social values, a point that Britzman (1991) makes in her critique of the move to return to the “basics” in education:

When time supplants humanity, the ethical issue of human responsibility is abandoned. This discourse is not capable of addressing such questions as what and who determines the ‘basics,’ why such knowledge is desirable, and who benefits from the forms it can take. (p. 36)
Moral norms. So, if we cannot use statistics, health, nature, or tradition as objective, normative frameworks for evaluating behaviour, can we appeal to moral norms as an objective framework? Once again, I argue that moral norms are not universal but are determined by social values. Returning to the example of questions of sexuality, Warner (1999) points out the problem with using morality as a normative reference:

The difficulty is that moralism [imposing certain idealized practices on others] is so easily mistaken for morality. Some kinds of sexual relations are presented as though they ought to be universal. They seem innocently moral, consistent with nature and health. But what if they are not universal in fact, or if other people demonstrate a different understanding of nature and health? (p. 5).

Since normative frameworks that appeal to health and nature are connected to social values, moral norms cannot rely on health or nature to make claims of universality. Does this mean that we cannot or should not have moral norms, or that morality is too relative to be used to make value judgments? A relativist position is not the only alternative: for example, Warner (1999) argues that queer culture has its own norms, its own way of keeping people in line. I call its way of life an ethic not only because it is understood as a better kind of self-relation, but because it is the premise of the special kind of sociability that holds queer culture together. A relation to others, in these contexts, begins in an acknowledgment of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself. (p. 35)

Although queer sexuality might fall outside the social norms or values of heteronormative culture, it does not mean that queer culture is devoid of values. The point here is that each culture’s moral or ethical norms are influenced by values, and these values change from one culture to another. Values are not “good” or “moral” in and of themselves; they gain

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34 Using the terms queer culture and heteronormative culture, I do not intend to suggest that these cultures are stable, or that all the individuals who make up any given culture have the same values. However, I use these terms, as Warner does, to describe an ideal, or a value framework, recognizing that there are many queer people whose values would align more with heteronormative culture, and vice versa.
“goodness” and “morality” through collective processes that differ both among and within groups, and throughout history.

Part of the problem with the term “normal” is that it often hides the ways that our values shape what we designate as “normal,” making it appear as though some norms are objective rather than determined by the values of people in specific times and places. As I have argued, social, medical, natural, traditional, and moral normative frameworks are all influenced by values. And, while statistical norms can be objective, they can also be influenced by values, as is the case when “exceptional students,” or those who fall outside the statistical norm, are treated differently from those students who are statistically normal. I will now turn to educational discourses to show how “normal” is created through discourses of normality and exceptionality. Once again, I will show that “normal” is constructed by social values, and that the social values embedded in current educational discourses may not be the ones that are most useful or valuable.

**Defining Exceptionalities: What Values Are Embedded in Educational Discourses?**

In educational discourses, it has become common place to categorize students into two main groups: “normal” and “exceptional.” “Exceptional” students are then subdivided into the groups “gifted” and “disabled,” although the exact terms may vary among schools and provinces. Such labels are often intended to provide exceptional students with access to resources that will improve their education. There has been much debate surrounding the inclusion of exceptional learners in classrooms (Hutchinson, 2002), and I hope to contribute to these debates by questioning the normative frameworks that fuel them. As I have indicated above, normative frameworks for the most part imply value judgments. The relationship between judgment and normality is visible in the origins of the word:
normal means certified, approved, as meeting a set of normative standards. ... In French the association remains strong, and when one speaks of normalization, one refers to the whole process of training, testing, and authorizing people as full members of society. The deep sense of judgment and higher authority in the idea of normal may owe something to this sense of the term. (Warner, 1999, p. 56)

Warner suggests that the sense of judgment evoked by the word “normal” may be part of the reason why people want to be normal: they want to measure up to a standard, to belong as acceptable members of society. While I will not contest the necessity for judging at this point, it is important to consider who judges whom. Within the context of education, what power do teachers, administrators, and policy-makers have over the students (and even the teachers) they deem “normal” or “exceptional?” We must consider the power dynamics that arise as a result of differences in social position—differences in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and age—between the person(s) judging and the person(s) being judged.

What is often absent from educational discourses, I will argue, is the normalization processes involved in authorizing people as full members of society, indicated in Warner’s text above. As Warner notes, teacher education programs used to be called “normal schools,” a term that has been rejected in favour of the less value-laden phrase “teacher education.” Yet, education involves normalization: passing social norms or values from one generation to another. If this purpose of education is explicitly recognized, it leaves open the question of which values will be passed along through education. As noted in Chapter Four, Britzman (1991) argues that there are two main purposes of education: social reproduction—the processes involved in reproducing dominant or hegemonic values through education—and social transformation—the processes involved in questioning and perhaps replacing dominant or hegemonic values through education. By examining the values embedded in dominant educational
discourses of normality and exceptionality, I hope to question these values and suggest alternative values.

In the province of Ontario, abilities that differ from the “norm” are referred to as “exceptionalities” (Hutchinson, 2002). The irony is that even those who take up discourses of exceptionality recognize its limitations: it is “difficult to distinguish these [exceptional] students from those without exceptionalities” (Hutchinson, 2002, p. 64). So, if categorizing students is a difficult process, how does it get accomplished? In order to show how normality and exceptionality are created through educational discourses, I draw on a text by Evelyne Corcos (2003) designed specifically for Canadian teacher educators: Teaching children and adolescents with behavioral difficulties: An educational approach. The language of this text is characteristic of authoritative discourse (Britzman, 1991), which presents knowledge as fixed, objective, and natural rather than as an ever-changing process influenced by social, historical, and political contexts.

Discourses of normality have become so common in education that they are often substituted for alternative ways of thinking and talking about behaviour. Corcos (2003) appears to make this error when she applies the term “exceptional behavior” to each of seven paradigms or worldviews—psychodynamic; behaviourist; humanistic; biological; sociological; cognitive; and ecological—note how each one identifies a code of normality and exceptionality. However, she glosses over the fact that “none of the paradigms actually adopts the phrase ‘exceptional behavior’” (p. 22). Warner (1999) points out that such generalized transference of normative discourses onto psychoanalytic approaches is “bad psychology, since it relies on a normative view of development that even a slight acquaintance with Freud (or with children) might have challenged” (p. 136). If discourses of normality are not associated with any of these paradigms, where do they
come from, and why do we have them at all? Is it possible that discourses of normality cover over the very things that make us uncomfortable? If normality and exceptionality are made visible, what is made invisible? Corcos’ text provides a clue: although the text relies on discourses of behavioural normality and exceptionality, the title and several paragraphs in the book revert to the term “behavioural difficulties.” Perhaps the problem is not so much whether behaviours are normal or exceptional, as whether or not they are difficult to deal with in the classroom. It makes sense that thirty identical students would be much easier to teach than thirty very unique students; that is, if teaching is understood as a process of transferring information as efficiently as possible that requires, among other things, organization and control.

How does education become imagined as a place for organization and control? Britzman (1986) argues that the compulsory nature of public education creates an inevitable power struggle between teachers and students. It is the teacher’s responsibility to enforce a form of social control “in order to get through classroom routine” (p. 444). Britzman points out that because teachers are expected to maintain control on their own, and because asking for assistance from other teachers or administrators is often perceived as a sign of incapability, it shifts the desire for control from the social realm of institutional hierarchy onto the individual teacher. One effect of the hidden institutional demands for control is that learning gets reduced to a technical activity: “When the double pressures of isolation and institutional mandates to control force teachers to equate learning with social control, the teacher’s role becomes one of merely instilling knowledge rather than engaging learners” (Britzman, p. 449). Britzman is curious about how “systemic constraints become lived as individual dilemmas” (p. 3).
If we turn to the context of teacher education, how do student teachers turn the systemic constraints of control into the individual dilemma of remaining organized? In his research of preservice teachers, Segall (2002) notes that a week before students graduated from their teacher education program, the quality that they considered most essential for being a good teacher was organization. The other qualities they listed “included (in order of ranking): being prepared, motivated, interesting, intriguing, relevant, helpful, available, in tune with students’ needs and respectful of their opinions, and willing to answer students’ questions” (p. 72). Segall expresses his concern that each of the items mentioned reduces teaching to a technical task, rather than a political and social negotiation:

While all of the above are important attributes any good teacher should strive for, one ought to question a teacher education program whose students, only a week from graduation, mention no aspect of teaching that moves beyond the delivery of content or the technical aspects of teaching. …In short, none said anything about education as a political and social endeavor for making the world more of what they themselves (and many instructors in the program) had said they wanted it to be—more democratic, equitable, inclusive, and just. Instead, it all came down to the technology of teaching and the performance of governance and organization, which, by its very (political) nature leaves many other discourses beyond the limits of its imagination, exploration, and articulation. (p. 72)

Discourses of organization and management are so embedded in educational discourses that, as Segall argues, one cannot even begin to participate in teacher education without first being organized. There are many similarities between the list of qualities that make a “good” teacher—according to the student teachers Segall interviewed—and the list of qualities that make a “good” or “exceptional” student. Referring to Hutchinson’s (2002) text, the qualities that are used to designate a student as “exceptional” include organizational and communication skills, information management, cognitive skills, creativity and commitment. In what ways do the qualities or characteristics of
exceptionality, become accepted as fixed indicators rather than as socially and culturally contingent values? If we return to our discussion of norms and refer back to the argument that norms are determined by values, how are the qualities listed above given value and considered indicators of giftedness? What kind of society would we have to be living in to consider the qualities above the highest values to which a student can aspire? I argue (as do Britzman and Segall) that we must be living in a society that values techniques or technicality. If we lived in a society that valued justice and equality we would see a very different list of values, including such potential values as respect for one’s self, for others, and for the world in which we live. The problem with assuming that there is a prescriptive standard of normality or exceptionality that can be applied to all students denies the many groups of people within our society who do value the kinds of qualities that lead to a more just and equal world. When “non-normative” or non-dominant ways of thinking and talking about our world are excluded from educational discourses, they limit the possibilities for teachers and students to imagine and enact alternative possibilities.

Referring to some of the underlying meanings of “exceptional,” it seems that exceptionalities in the negative sense may imply qualities that make teaching and learning difficult, and that exceptionalities in the positive sense may imply qualities that make teaching and learning smooth, efficient, and possibly predictable. In contrast, psychoanalytic theories value that which is unpredictable and difficult, suggesting that perhaps the most “normal” educational experiences are the ones that are most “exceptional.”

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35 The language of exceptionality is interesting, because it implies both those who are “better than” and “less than” average or normal. In this instance, I am referring to the first of the two.
Psychoanalytic Theory: Valuing the “Excessive”

Psychoanalytic theories of teaching and learning suggest possible ways of resisting the values embedded in normative educational discourses. In educational discourses of normality and exceptionality, it is assumed that there is an educational ideal, where teaching and learning are not difficult, and where effective teaching will reduce, and even eliminate, behaviours that might disrupt learning. In contrast, psychoanalytic theories suggest that teaching and learning are unpredictable, uncomfortable, and messy affairs. In other words, psychoanalytic models suggest that it is “normal,” or valuable, for teaching and learning to involve disruptions, excesses, and refusals to learn (Ellsworth, 1997). Some of the symptoms of excess include, as Britzman (2003) indicates, “the breakdown of knowledge, the shattering of belief, the fracturing of emotional ties, and not learning” (p. 124).

Since both poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories acknowledge the gaps between reality and our representations of reality, I will clarify the distinctions between these two theories. Poststructuralist theories explore the gap that arises between experience and language or discourse, whereas psychoanalytic theories explore the gap that arises between the conscious and the unconscious. As indicated in Chapter Two, where poststructuralist theories examine “the crisis of representation that is outside,” psychoanalytic theories examine “the crisis of representation that is inside” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756). I find the term “excess” useful for referring to gaps or crises of representation, whether these gaps are analyzed through poststructuralist or psychoanalytic theories. In my reference to the uses of psychoanalytic theories in this
chapter, however, I am particularly interested in the excess that arises from internal or unconscious crises of representation and ways of making meaning.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer two psychoanalytic readings of excess: a teacher educator’s rejection of psychoanalytic theories, and student teachers’ rejections of psychoanalytic theories. Finally, I will argue that educational discourses of normality and exceptionality have attempted to cover the gap between the real and the represented, or between symbols and objects, and that this gap can be restored through psychoanalytic theories that acknowledge the excessiveness of our unconscious knowledge.

I have critiqued the values embedded in Corcos’ (2003) application of educational discourses of normality and exceptionality. Her text suggests that students with exceptionalities must be given special attention because they make teaching and learning difficult. Such a view does not acknowledge that even teacher educators and educational researchers, such as Corcos, find some knowledge difficult. Whereas normative educational discourses try to remove any difficulties involved in the processes of learning and teaching, psychoanalytic theories embrace such difficulties, acknowledging them as an inevitable aspect of education. Rejection, repression, and ignorance—the refusal to learn—are all indicative, in psychoanalytic theories, of the excess that arises when we teach and learn.

Why does Corcos deny three times—on the same page—that psychodynamic approaches to “behavioural exceptionalities” might be important or useful to educators? Reading Corcos’ rejection of psychodynamic approaches through psychoanalytic theory

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36 Corcos uses “psychodynamic” as an umbrella term which includes psychoanalysis, play therapy, transactional analysis, and hypnotherapy. I will only be framing my critique through literature that looks at the educational uses of psychoanalytic theories.
suggests that there is knowledge that Corcos fears. Yet Corcos tries to cover over this fear, this excess, by using authoritative discourse to justify her rejection of psychoanalytic theory. Rather than leaving space for the reader to determine the viability of psychodynamic approaches, Corcos makes her perspective seem authoritative rather than situated. In the first of her dismissals, her rare use of bolded text adds an air of emphatic authority: “It is most unlikely that the Psychoanalytic paradigm will have any direct significance for the educator” (p. 29, emphasis in original). Her second dismissal suggests that if we acknowledge the role of the unconscious in learning, it removes children’s responsibility for their behaviours, “a proposition that is unacceptable in the classroom” (p. 29). What Corcos fails to admit is that it is her, and not psychoanalytic theory, that removes responsibility from the child/student. In her final dismissal of the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory to educational discourses, Corcos states that, “Because it so obviously implies that educators cannot intervene to address the cause of behavioral problems with the idea of directly solving them, this paradigm is not attractive to educators” (p. 29). What about those teachers who do not think that it is possible to directly solve behavioural problems, or who recognize behavioural “problems” as expected challenges rather than as problems to be eliminated? If we refer again to Britzman’s (1986) argument, “solving” behavioural problems becomes the individual teacher’s task, removing this requirement from its origins in institutional demands for control, and implying that ineffective teachers are those who cannot control or solve behavioural problems. Corcos acknowledges that repression, one of the unconscious defense mechanisms outlined just a few pages earlier in her description of psychoanalytic approaches, occurs when someone “forgets thoughts that are threatening or anxiety-provoking” (Corcos, 2003, p. 15). Is Corcos afraid of engaging with, or encouraging other
educators to engage with, psychoanalytic theories? It is not just students who are capable of repression; teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers may also use repression to avoid knowledge and texts that they fear. As Britzman (2003) notes,

Teacher educators are not immune from such defenses: they may regularly dismiss texts and ideas that seem abstract or too theoretical or controversial for their students. While such decisions may seem justified by pointing out the need for practicality, convenience, or adherence to program design, psychoanalytic views suggest more is at stake in teaching than what one imagines as institutional mandates and students’ supposed needs. (p. 75)

Britzman is sympathetic to the fears and repressive tendencies that arise when considering what psychoanalytic theory means for education:

to suggest that education can make one nervous, that it has psychical consequences, and that not only will one’s students refuse to learn but so too teachers will defend themselves against new knowledge—to suggest all of this and still try to learn something about and from psychoanalysis is quite a pedagogical feat. (Britzman, 2003, p. 72)

Those who engage with psychoanalytic theories recognize the implications and the difficulties involved in such an engagement, and yet it appears that such an engagement is worth the effort. As I will argue, psychoanalytic theories might open up ways of thinking about education that do not require us to relegate some students to the status of “exceptional,” inviting them into our “sacred circles” through educational discourses, only to expel them by projecting the impossibilities and excesses of teaching and learning onto them.

As a teacher educator, Britzman (2003) noticed that many of her student teachers resisted the idea that psychoanalytic theory might have something to teach them. I was surprised by the similarities between Britzman’s description of student teachers’ resistance and my own resistance to learning from psychoanalytic theory. I accidentally stumbled across psychoanalytic theory at an early point in my research and found that it
allowed me to make sense of my B.Ed. experiences in ways that were more meaningful to me than the possibilities presented by other educational discourses. Yet, in spite of encountering psychoanalytic theories several occasions, I still found myself resisting what the implications of such theories might be for my own research. Fearing that I could never do justice to psychoanalysis without a more solid background in it, I tried to stay away from it altogether. However, as I would later learn, the knowledge that we refuse has a tendency to return and bother us:

Anna Freud...encourages teachers to study what students—and what they themselves—dismiss, throw away, ignore, lose, and forget. And yet this discarded content also carries with it a kernel of revenge—it threatens to return angrily to bother the one who is discarding it. (Britzman, 2003, p. 79)

Although I now value the educational possibilities that psychoanalytic theories open up, I still find these theories the most difficult to learn from and apply in the context of my research. Perhaps this is because, as Pitt notes, psychoanalysis “relies upon the surprise of discovery in each and every instance of practice. …Practice and theory engender each other but also subvert each other” (Pitt, 2003, p. 9). While many of the other theories I encountered helped me to represent what I already knew—even if I couldn’t articulate it—from my B.Ed. experiences, psychoanalytic theories have surprised me, opening up new, and often uncomfortable, representations of those experiences.

*Restoring the Excessive to Educational Discourses*

Applying psychoanalytic theories to educational discourses can lead to knowledge that we don’t want to face or learn, as indicated above in the resistance of teacher educators and student teachers. Perhaps there are also aspects of normative discourses that we do not want to acknowledge in our readings and representations of these discourses. Returning to my confusion as a B.Ed. student with the distinction between
exceptionalities that a student either possesses or becomes, I argue in favour of the psychoanalytic restoration of the collapse between reality and representation that happens through normative discourses in education.

One of the texts that I read in my B.Ed. program was Hutchinson’s (2002) *Inclusion of exceptional learners in Canadian schools*. I made a few notes from my reading of this text, one of which indicated my discomfort with the fact that normative discourses associate some qualities with a person’s very identity, while other qualities are considered possessions. For example, according to Hutchinson, we need to distinguish between students who are gifted and students who have disabilities. I found this distinction curious, and began writing this chapter with the hope of understanding what Hutchinson’s distinction might mean, and why I felt uncomfortable with it. What struck me was that normative discourses did not seem to be the only place where I found this distinction between being and having. Segall (2002) notes that such a distinction is also present in organizational discourses:

Organization was thus not only a discursive practice that affected how one thinks about what is being studied; it also became a way of *being* in a program that provided a framework from which to begin one’s thinking about what is studied. In other words, one needed to be organized in order to even begin thinking about what it was one ought to have organized. Organization was therefore not merely an epistemological and/or pedagogical aspect of this program but also an ontological one. (p. 71)

Significantly, Warner (1999) identifies a similar distinction in the realm of sex, where sexual shame is viewed differently than sexual stigma: the first occurs when a person temporarily, and possibly remorsefully, acts in sexual ways that are deemed unacceptable. In contrast, sexual stigma is attached to those whose sexuality regularly, whether intentionally or not, lies outside the boundaries of the acceptable and normal:
The shame of a true pervert—stigma—is less delible; it is a social identity that befalls one like fate, …it may have nothing to do with acts one has committed. It attaches not to doing, but to being; not to conduct, but to status. (p. 28)

In other words, sexual shame is temporary and is associated with doing, whereas sexual stigma is permanent and is attached to identity. Why is it that some qualities remain in the realm of having/knowing/doing, while others are extended to the realm of being/identity? More importantly, what meanings are made from these distinctions? Perhaps psychoanalytic theory can offer a clue.

Britzman (2003) argues that “without an understanding of the difference between symbolization and the object, the conceptual distinction between reality and phantasy" (Britzman, 2003, p. 114). For those psychoanalytic theorists who understand education to be “the play between reality and phantasy” (Britzman, 2003, p. 9), the collapse of reality and phantasy implies the collapse of education. If “normal” and “exceptional” are symbols or words used to represent certain educational and/or sexual values, what happens when we assume that these symbols become the objects themselves? Referring to the work of Hannah Segal (1997), Britzman notes that when symbolization cannot be thought, the symbol no longer represents the object; instead, it becomes the object. When this occurs, perceptions of the world become more and more literal and aggressive, and the capacity for thinkers to think is attacked. (Britzman, 2003, p. 114)

My encounters with discourses that confuse symbols and objects highlights how this confusion creates a more aggressive and less thoughtful reality. My initial discomfort with the distinction between students who are gifted and students who have disabilities stemmed from my experience as a child, where I was grouped among the former, and my

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37 Britzman distinguishes her use of the term “phantasy” from the more familiar term “fantasy:" “The term phantasy refers to unconscious processes and is therefore distinguished from such flights of imagination as daydreams, fantasy play, and games of ‘let’s pretend’ (2003, p. 172).
sister was grouped among the latter. To me, there was something deceiving, something violent about such labels, and although I dismissed them as irrelevant, they seemed to impact both my sister and myself into adulthood. Yet I have felt limited in my capacity to think through the discourses that structure the distinction between abilities that are attached to identity and (dis)abilities that are attached to possession. Perhaps this lost capacity to think through normative discourses was one of the unconscious reasons for my refusal to learn in my B.Ed. exceptionalities course.

Returning to Foucault’s point that lepers were drawn into a sacred circle before being expelled from the community, how might this process also be happening in and through discourses of normality and exceptionality? Perhaps it is through discourses of normality and exceptionality that we project all the uncomfortable and impossible aspects of learning onto the “other” who is labeled as “exceptional” in the negative sense (i.e. lacking in certain “good” qualities):

- discussions of knowledge actually signal a loss of faith when they are arranged tightly in the actions of taxonomies, behavioural objectives, measurable outcomes, and instructional goals. …What is missed then…is the breakdown of knowledge, the shattering of belief, the fracturing of emotional ties, and not learning. These affective states are then relegated to the outside, or projected onto that which disrupts and then this discarded content threatens to return and so ruin the group. (Britzman, 2003, p. 124)

I read Britzman’s words and it is as though I am reading myself as a student teacher: I remember how knowledge seemed to have broken down past the point of return, how my belief in education was shattered, how I felt emotionally distant from my instructors and the students I taught in placements, and how I felt as though I had not learned in my B.Ed. program. My previous experiences in education had always made me feel included, likely because I was grouped within the “sacred circle” of the “normal” and the positively “exceptional.” Yet, in my B.Ed. program I had a much more lonely educational
experience than ever before—I felt very much on the outside, and yet I felt quite sure that I did not want to be on the inside. I could sense that my shattered beliefs and not learning were a threat to some instructors, and I simultaneously felt empowered by that and afraid that I would be punished, either directly (through verbal reproaches) or indirectly (through grades). I wonder if educational discourses of normality and exceptionality finally became unbearable for me because for the first time I felt as though I were the “exceptional” student, excluded from the sacred circle of teaching and learning. There were certain classes in which I refused to learn, and in my refusal to learn, I felt personally responsible for the excessiveness of teaching and learning, the breakdowns in meaning and knowledge, the impossibilities of education. While I had rejected psychoanalytic theories, they returned to me and allowed me to make meaning from my B.Ed. experiences in a way that challenged the educational myth that the teacher (or student teacher) is responsible for everything that goes on in the classroom (Britzman, 1991). Normative educational discourses may have the effect of shutting down excessive moments by rendering refusals to learn and breakdowns in knowledge as behavioural “difficulties” or “exceptionalities.” In contrast, reading, writing, and re-reading and re-writing excessive moments through psychoanalytic theories opens up possibilities for imagining education as a space where the excessive is welcomed, even when it is surprising, uncomfortable, or frightening.

Conclusion: Stepping Into Psychoanalysis

Discourses of normality and exceptionality project the breakdown of knowledge and the troubles of learning onto those who fall outside of the “normal,” and outside of the “gifted,” or desirable, spectrum of “exceptional.” But one question that remains unanswered for me is why we project troubled knowledge and learning onto certain
students, whether we do so consciously or unconsciously. As educators, perhaps we make a choice, a choice “between the empirical child made from the science of observation, behaviorism, and experimental and cognitive psychology and the libidinal child who dreams yet still desires knowledge” (Britzman, 2003, p. 53). My familiarity with the empirical child and my unfamiliarity with the libidinal child suggest that I, and the educators I have learned from, have chosen the former. What does this choice of the empirical child mean? What impact does such a choice have? As Britzman argues, in education,

The field’s dominant tendency is to choose the empirical child over the dream, the child the adult can know and control. But in so doing, education has reduced the child to a trope of developmental stages, cognitive needs, multiple intelligences, and behavioral objectives. And these wishes defend against a primary anxiety of adults: what if the dream of learning is other to the structures of education? (p. 53)

Discourses of normality and exceptionality, as I have argued in this chapter, defend notions of developmental stages, cognitive needs, multiple intelligences, and behavioural objectives. And perhaps there is not so much a need to entirely reject discourses of normality and exceptionality as there is a need to recognize the limits of the concepts and values on which such discourses are based. Perhaps discourses of normality and exceptionality suggest more about the unconscious desires of educators and administrators to make learning as smooth and as easy as possible, when in fact the needs of education, teaching, and learning continually suggest otherwise.

I began this chapter with an excessive moment from my B.Ed. year that I could not resolve: a moment when I refused to learn because I sensed that I was being taught subjective knowledge about norms and inclusion as though it were objective knowledge. Hoping that a better understanding of Foucault’s work would provide some insight, I turned to his analysis of excluded groups through the Middle Ages and the classical
period in Europe, finding an interesting connection between the cultural values of this era and place, and the discourses and institutions—such as education—that maintained such values. Finding that educational discourses of normality and exceptionality were embedded with norms that were not often made explicit, I showed how normative frameworks, with the possible exception of statistical norms, are based on social values or social norms, and that these values are not stable or absolute, but are dependent on historical, political, and temporal context. Turning then to normative educational discourses, I showed that the negative implications of the term “exceptional” referred to behaviours that made teaching and learning difficult, whereas the positive implications of the term “exceptional” referred to technical aspects such as organization and control that seemed to simplify teaching and learning. In other words, normative discourses revealed that dominant values desire education to be as free of troubles and difficulties as possible. In contrast, psychoanalytic theories incorporated values that could tolerate education, even in the moments when teaching and learning were uncomfortable and messy affairs.

Once the connection between education and values is returned, we can ask whether we want teaching and learning to be predicated on the values embedded in educational discourses of normality and exceptionality, or whether we want teaching and learning to be based on the values embedded in psychoanalytic theories. I argue that the values of normative discourses exclude some people, even while claiming to draw them into the sacred, “inclusive” discourses of education, and that the values of psychoanalytic theories create space for those excessive moments and people who are otherwise excluded through normative discourses. I return again to Britzman’s idea that we need three theories in order to have one theory, and to her invitation to see how stepping into unfamiliar theories startles the theories that are more comfortable to us. The implications
of normative discourses and psychoanalytic theories have given me the courage to step foot into psychoanalysis, despite my initial rejection of it. I hope to have challenged the reader to reconsider why some educators, and perhaps they themselves, never step foot into psychoanalysis.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Healing From Histories of Violence

I began research about teacher education in order to argue that B.Ed. programs need to be improved for future student teachers. While my initial critiques were directed at my experiences and the meanings I made from specific programs, instructors, and curricula, I began to realize that any critique would have to be situated in broader contexts and discourses. My teacher education program could not be reduced to one instructor, a few courses, or a particular university, since each of these exists within certain political, historical, and cultural contexts which need to be analyzed alongside the daily activities through which they are articulated. As such, educational discourses offered an ideal framework from which the personal, institutional, and cultural contexts of teacher education could be examined.

In the literature I reviewed, three main knowledge sources were used to defend arguments: experience, discourse, and the unconscious. Sometimes these sources were seen as overlapping and other times they were seen as contradictory. It wasn’t until I started viewing these different ways of knowing through the discursive turn that I began to see authors that previously seemed disconnected as speaking to, or against, each other. Situating these arguments within the discursive turn also helped me to appreciate my own desire to simultaneously refer to, and attempt to understand and value, experience, discourse, and the unconscious as valid ways of knowing.

Social justice theories—those which rely on experience and identity as the source of knowledge—have made me aware of the histories of violence and abuse we have all inherited. They have identified that our identity-based social positions—through
race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class—influence our relationships to power and to other people. They have given me the ability to recognize and name harmful experiences. They have enabled me to connect with other people who understand what it means to live in a society where there is systematic oppression, not isolated incidents perpetrated by “bad” people. They have helped me to understand how I am not only oppressed because of certain aspects of my identity—most visibly as a woman—but how I also participate in my own oppression as a woman, and how as a white person I participate in the oppression of racialized minorities. Without theories based on notions of identity and experience, I may not have noticed or identified the manifestations of systematic, institutionalized oppression in my B.Ed. program. I may not have noticed that teaching strategies such as the *Six Thinking Hats* perpetuated colonialist mentalities by allowing a white hat to represent facts and a black hat to represent problems and difficulties. I may not have noticed that the *Finding the Centre* assignment perpetuated colonialist mentalities by participating in authoritative discourses that made it appear as though our knowledge as student teachers was our own and not mediated by cultural values and dominant discourses. I may not have recognized the colonialist mentalities expressed by fellow students in their critique of the film *Submission*. And I may not have noticed that educational discourses of normality and exceptionality were based on values that were made to appear absolute and universal.

Poststructuralist theories have been useful for me in understanding that discourses, languages, and stories influence the possible meanings we make from our experiences. These theories helped me to realize that we can change the world around us by questioning dominant discourses and suggesting alternative discourses. In other words, the fact that there continue to be inequalities and injustices is due in part to the fact that
we have discourses that allow such inequalities to persist. By revealing the values embedded in binary discourses that are foundational in education—such as theory/practice, enlightenment/ignorance, and normal/exceptional—I have argued that our current educational discourses and practices are not inevitable or absolute, but can and should be changed. Without poststructuralist theories, I would not have been able to connect my personal experiences, or seemingly isolated injustices in my B.Ed. program, to the larger educational and societal discourses that not only enable, but perpetuate, such injustices.

Psychoanalytic theories have helped me to acknowledge that unconscious and spiritual aspects influence the ways we live in the world. They have helped me to realize that it is impossible to make change in the world without also recognizing the need for personal, internal change. The external world—the visible, experiential, and discursive—cannot be separated from the internal world—the invisible, unconscious, and spiritual; injustices in either the external or internal realm inevitably affect the other realm. Therefore, any transformative or healing efforts must also address both the external and internal worlds. Without psychoanalytic theories, I would not have been able to work towards healing in my own life, and therefore, extend what I learned from personal healing to the collective healing required for injustices perpetuated at educational and broader societal levels. Psychoanalytic theories enabled me to extend my critique of my B.Ed. program and educational discourses to my own responsibility in perpetuating injustices. There were problematic stories about teaching, learning, and education that I had held on to and did not realize how they were impacting my role as a student teacher. I believed that teacher education—and education more broadly—should live up to my expectations: that teaching and learning should ideally be smooth processes that would
decrease ignorance. Instead, both psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories acknowledged the excessiveness of teaching and learning: the ways in which knowledge breaks down, the ways in which we refuse learning things that trouble us, and the impossibility of educational discourses ever fully containing everything we expect from them.

I have situated the arguments in this thesis within the discursive turn, so that my new-found interests in psychoanalytic theories are situated in the histories and theories that have led me—as well as other theorists—to the insights that psychoanalysis brings to education. Turning to some of these insights now, how might I imagine my research impacting the way I teach if I ever become a classroom teacher? For me, the most drastic change has been letting go of my desire to make education a smooth process, ironing out the wrinkles that inevitably arise as people come together to teach and to learn. Poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories challenge the idea that excessive moments can ever be eliminated. These theories find ways of embracing and working through the things which I was told—and which I believed—could and should be shut down, hidden, avoided, or fixed. Inspired by these theories, there are aspects of my research which for me, and possibly also for the reader, seem unresolved, unfinished, and not fully understood. There is a part of me that resists this. I want to offer a neat summary of everything that I have discussed and suggest a course of action for what we should do from here. The truth is, I do not know what we should do from here. I know that it is easy enough for me to sit and theorize about leaving room for the unpredictable in education. It is entirely different to allow, and intentionally make space for, these moments when you have several or several hundred students who expect “teacherly” knowledge and actions from you.
Despite all my rational acceptance of the unpredictable, there is still that problem of the unconscious. Since I first decided I wanted to teach over ten years ago, I have had dreams\textsuperscript{38} about what I will do as a teacher to make education everything that I imagine: respectful, meaningful, political, challenging, and rewarding. Essentially, I dream of education as a process whereby the acts of teaching and learning lead teachers and students to an acceptance of previously rejected knowledge. More recently, I have started to wonder about these dreams. Are they in some way connected to my own unconscious responses to learning—my own resistances, refusals, and desires for knowledge? Why do I feel most content when I imagine myself as a teacher shutting down or “fixing” messy, excessive moments in these fictional classrooms? Don’t I now know, from my experiences, from my social location, from my representations of teaching and learning, that these excessive moments are natural, even desirable? Why do these dreams persist? The content of them might change, but the outcome is always the same—I persist until I am content, until my students are content, until we have learned our way into some ideal state where our knowledge satisfies us.

One of the other things that engaging with psychoanalytic theories has unsettled is my desire for social justice, and my fear that psychoanalytic theories, or at least my analysis of psychoanalytic theories, might suggest that social justice—whether as theory or practice—is not important. While I know that psychoanalytic theory does not suggest or promote a rejection of ethics or of social justice, in my readings of teacher education, I have often wondered if recognizing the limitations of social justice theories, or being

\textsuperscript{38} In my reference to dreams, I include daydreams which have occurred when I am fully awake, dreams which have occurred when I am completely unconscious, and Christopher Bollas’ term “psychic sleeping,” which refers “neither to a full fall into sleep, where dreams do occur, nor to the concentrated state of wakefulness, where essays get written...[but] to the kind of work the mind does that remains elusive and obscure” (as cited in Pitt, 2003, p. 1).
excited about the possibilities of psychoanalytic readings, might be interpreted to mean that I no longer see the need for, or the value in, critiquing racism, sexism, heteronormativity, or other injustices. I took up psychoanalytic theories not knowing if or how these social justice ethics would return, and it has relieved me to find that in writing, I have found an alternative, valuable ethic. Psychoanalysis recognizes our multiple selves, and the existence of a dark or shadow self (Estés, 1995; Duran, 2006), providing some relief from the need to represent ourselves as, or pretend that we are the “good” teacher or student. Perhaps if we were all a little more aware of and honest about our dark sides, there would not be the need to hide them, and consequently those dark sides would not rush to the surface unchecked; we would have more healthy ways of respecting them and dealing with them. At the same time, I think the whole point of psychoanalysis is that there will always be sides to us that are unexpected, that surprise us, and yet we are never freed from the responsibility of what we do with that which catches us by surprise.

Pitt (2003) wonders if, in describing our “histories of learning,” we can avoid both the “progressivist story, where the gaps are finally filled in, and the story of failure, where the cause of derailed progress is revealed in the workings of power relations?” (p. 11). And, in response, I wonder why we would want to avoid either of these stories, or whether there might be any alternative representations and readings that could still be ethical. I am not certain that a psychoanalytic reading of these stories will answer these questions, but I am curious to see where such a reading might lead. Pitt notes that “we can become curious about the stories as having to do with the encounter between how one represents the self to the self (and to others) and how classroom experiences organize and disorganize these representations” (p. 29). In reading stories of my experiences as a B.Ed. student, I am a student who knows, but who cannot, or will not, articulate what I know.
Perhaps I am the student of feminist theory, of social justice theory, the student “without a word,” (Lewis, 1993) who finally gives voice to those words with social justice, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theories. I am a student who wants to engage in learning and teaching, but who feels limited by situations and knowledges that appear outside of my control. I have created myself as a character in these stories about teacher education: “Just as the lesbian is a character in Wittig’s theoretical fiction, the real student, who describes her encounter with feminist knowledge, is also a character in her own story” (Pitt, p. 28). In my fiction, the stories of progress are evident in the characterization of myself as a “good” or “critical” student teacher, and the stories of failure are attributed to my program and professors particularly, and to the field of teacher education in general. But, as Pitt notes, points of resistance in learning can provide an alternative to stories of progress or failure: “Resistance, when it comes to this kind of work, has less to do with the content of intolerable ideas and more to do with permitting oneself to listen for and follow the queer and apparently nonsensical lines of thought the mind presents” (p. 14). Where are my queer and nonsensical lines of thought? Have I eliminated them by keeping them separate in my journal—the collections of writing that did not make it into this thesis? What does it mean that in spite of much time spent trying every possible method to incorporate my journal and my thesis, they essentially remain two separate works? I could never “fit” the thoughts from my “psychic sleeping” (Pitt, p. 1) into this thesis; they were too excessive, they spilled over, they left me feeling exposed and uncomfortable, they contained too many unanswered questions, and they showed no preference for the insights of academic research over the insights of conversations with friends, dreams, and queer pornography. Perhaps the excessiveness of my journal proves the limits of representing teaching and learning, or perhaps there is an unconscious
resistance that prevents me from being able to incorporate them into this work. I have permitted myself to be open to the queer and the nonsensical, but have only granted this permission to my private selves, not to my public student/teacher/researcher selves. At the same time, I doubt if I have managed to keep these two works completely separate, and I assume that there are traces of my journal/unconscious in this thesis. However, as Pitt argues, the process of “recovering unconscious and repressed material…must remain the purview of the psychoanalytic dialogue” (p. 57). Instead, the space for pedagogical research lies “between the researcher and the participant” and “between the researcher’s interpretive retelling and a community that shares an interest in the dilemmas under consideration” (Pitt, p. 57). Turning to the first of these research spaces, I take note of the transformative nature of personal narratives: “The construction of a self-narrative in analysis engages unconscious meanings and wishes, and this engagement transforms the self that narrates” (Pitt, p. 56). As I indicated in the methodology chapter, the content and purpose of this thesis have shifted so many times that I am never certain that I even know what I am trying to write. While it has been immensely difficult to make some coherent meaning of my experiences in this textual representation, my attempts to verbally represent this thesis to those who were curious about its progress and content tended to surprise and confuse me even when I might have convinced my listeners that I knew what I was talking about. Engagement with psychoanalytic theory also makes me curious about which I it is that makes and represents meaning, and all the selves that get pushed aside to think about and represent, in Pitt’s words, “the self as cohesive and coherent” (p. 26).

The second research space that Pitt identifies occurs between the researcher and a community that shares the interests outlined here; this, to a certain extent, is a research space that I cannot fully predict or control. While I would hope that this community
includes teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers, my conversations with peers suggests that there is a community of peers—regardless of their familiarity with academia or education—that is interested in the implications of my research. This community of peers has struggled with me to work towards social transformation using what we know and do not know of the complex histories we have inherited. How can we work towards racial equality given our histories and ongoing realities of colonialism? How can we work towards gender equality given our histories and ongoing realities of sexism and patriarchy? How can we work towards sexual equality given our histories and ongoing realities of heteronormativity? Can white people and people of colour avoid participating in neo-colonialism? Can men and women avoid participating in patriarchy? Can straight and queer people avoid participating in heteronormativity? Many of us are aware of our implications—our ancestors’ and our own involvement—in histories of oppression, whether as oppressors and/or as the oppressed. How do we right these wrongs? How do we prevent them from happening again? I do not have any simple answers to these questions. Johnson’s (1987) response to such questions also indicates the impossibility of universal solutions:

The one thing that’s hardest for me to do is to have to say to women who want me to tell them what to do, ‘I don’t know what to do. We each have to figure it out for ourselves, in our own lives.’ (p. 299)

My desire for personal and collective healing from histories of violence has motivated me during the past several years of research. Often times I have lost sight of this purpose: it remained absent and vague in many drafts of this thesis. There have been times and places and people that have reminded me of my purpose, and I owe so much to the communities who have sustained and focused me along the way. It is essential that I name some of these communities, since without them, this thesis would not have come
into existence, and since it is my sincere hope that through this thesis I can give back to these communities. Even as I write, I know there are people who want to read the results of my research, and while I have felt the pressure of fearing that my writing might cause more damage, either through ignorance or neglect, I am also honoured to share some of the ideas about education that I have been wrestling with for several years. I have written this thesis for QCRED, for the racialized minorities who think it is worthwhile to work alongside white people in healing from the histories of violence we have inherited through colonialism. I have written this thesis for Fourth Wave, for all the people who are on a journey of healing from the histories of violence we have inherited through patriarchy. I have written this thesis for the queer communities who for so many reasons remain nameless, for all those who have taken my hand literally and metaphorically as we work towards healing from the histories of violence we have inherited through heteronormativity. I have written this thesis for Camp Outlook, for the people who provide families to those whose families are absent or are hurting too much to be nurturing. Finally, I have written this thesis for my peers who are currently teaching, creating the kinds of healing and transformative educational environments about which I have only dreamed and written.

I conclude my thoughts here with a word of thanks. There are many stages of healing, some of which are pretty, most of which are pretty ugly. I am especially grateful to all the communities and people who stuck with me and sustained me through each of

39 Psychoanalytic theories suggest that no story can ever fully contain all that it is hoped that they contain. At the same time, I take responsibility for the effects of my writing, and hope that my readers will identify any concerns that arise from their interpretations of this text.

40 QCRED is an anti-racist coalition of students, staff, and faculty at Queen’s University. It began in the spring of 2006.

41 Fourth Wave is a feminist discussion group and speaker series that a few women, including myself, started in Kingston in the fall of 2006.
the stages I have encountered. There will be many more stages of healing, for me as an individual, for the communities I mentioned, and for this nation and this world. We have so much individual and collective healing to do. But, as so much of the research I have encountered suggests, I believe that discourses—stories, languages, narratives, and representations—powerfully influence the possibilities for healing, whether through our external selves—our visible selves, our bodies—or through our internal selves—our unconscious selves, our souls. Or, as King (2003) so succinctly says, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). I am inspired by the conversations of healing that I have participated in, overheard, and read. I am inspired to continue finding, reading, and telling stories of healing—healing in all of its stages.
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