

ILLUSIONS OF INCLUSION: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF NEWCOMER
EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the discursive, social and institutional positioning of newcomer students in New Brunswick schools, as unveiled by qualitative interviews with two New Brunswick teachers, one English as Additional Language tutor, and one educational support worker. Drawing from institutional ethnography, critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism, it argues that newcomer students and support workers are marginally positioned and makes recommendations for policy and practice.

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Chapter 1

A Personal Journey

In my journey through public schooling I never considered how educational experiences might have been affected by issues of class, ‘race’, culture, language, gender, dis/ability, sexual identity, or any other socially constructed category of difference. My own educational experience had been a good one, or so I had thought. I had been characterized as an “ideal student”, and assumed this to be a direct reflection of personal capability. I saw school as a neutral zone, as apolitical, and thought that any student could succeed academically with the right amount of hard work; I saw it as a fair game, so to speak. I assumed that those who did not do well were simply less capable, or were not willing to put in the hard work that academic success required. And these assumptions were validated on a regular basis by teachers, administrators, and from the advice of my family. The stories we were read, the movies we were shown, and the lessons we were taught all reflected my own family background, my values, experiences, and my identity as a “good student”. I can recall my elementary school principal saying to me, “If only every student were just like you, we would have the perfect school”.

It was not until I began to work directly in New Brunswick schools as a volunteer tutor during my undergraduate degree that I began to question assertions of justice and equity in schooling. It was here that my assumptions would be turned on their heads. As I began the difficult process of peeling back the layers of my own perspective and privileged positioning, I came to see firsthand the many shortcomings of the system, and how these shortcomings are often veiled by constructing students as

individually deficient in some form or another. Recognizing the politics of schooling, and recognizing my own experience as privileged because of my social positioning within the dominant cultural group, was not an easy task. I wanted to cling to my belief in schooling as the great equalizer, which allowed me to view my educational success as a reflection of my hard work and capabilities, rather than tied to my language, class, culture, and the color of my skin. But I could not deny the inequitable realities that were standing in front of me, nor could I ignore the questions they evoked. Critical educational theorist Joe Kincheloe (2008) discusses the importance of recognizing the political dimension of schooling, and how it is often more difficult for those who have been privileged by schooling to recognize its political nature:

Many teacher education students have trouble with this political dimension and the basic notion that schooling can be hurtful to particular students. They embrace the institution of education as “good” because in their own experience it had been good to them. Thus the recognition of these political complications of schooling is the first step for critical pedagogy-influenced educators in developing a social activist teacher persona. As teachers gain these insights, they understand that cultural, race, class, and gender forces have shaped all elements of the pedagogical act. (p. 2)

As I became increasingly conscious of the political dimensions of education while at the same time continuing my work as a tutor for “struggling” students, I began to question claims of equality and fairness. Shortly after, I started working with newcomer families in a non-profit organization. Although my job entailed some awareness initiatives and some consideration of multiculturalism in schools, it was in my everyday conversations

with parents who had gone through the immigration process in New Brunswick, along with their children, that illuminated some key issues for newcomer families. In taking on this role, there was one area of schooling within the local context that I came to see as particularly problematic, and that is how New Brunswick handles the education of newcomer students, many of whom do not speak English or French fluently. I began to tutor newcomer students who were just coming into the provincial school system, and recall one specific moment that made me question why educational support for newcomers seemed to be on the periphery of educational debate.

Josh, a newcomer student, stormed angrily into the small English classroom and slammed his books onto the desk, halting several small conversations around him. Everyone stared. “What’s wrong Josh?” asked the English teacher. He did not reply, but sat despondently at the table and stared out the window. I sat uncomfortably across from him, scrambling to find something comforting to say. “Did something happen?” pressed the teacher. After a long moment of silence, he responded fiercely, “I got sixty percent on my stupid science test!” Frustration flashed in his eyes. His teacher glanced at me knowingly. “Sixty percent is a pass, it’s not that bad” he said, unconvincingly. “Yes it is!” shouted Josh. “My brother says I should be getting nineties!” Understanding flickered on the teacher’s face, and while he continued to try to comfort him, Josh said nothing.

Josh spent the remainder of the period sighing loudly and slamming his books open and closed, his only outlet for expression. Stress exuded from his body. I had anticipated that this would happen. I had helped him review for the upcoming test the previous week, and it was more than clear that the medical terminology (which would

be difficult for any native English speaker) coupled with the sophisticated linguistics used for their descriptions, was simply far too advanced for him to master at this stage in his language acquisition. I had approached his teacher with my concerns, who informed me that he had already spoken to his science teacher about the same issue. The science teacher had replied that it was “only fair” that all of the students received the same test and were graded in the same way. “How is that fair?” I questioned. “It’s not”, he said simply.

It was the recurrence of these types of personal experiences that fuelled my interest in learning more about newcomer education in New Brunswick. In principle, it seemed to me tremendously unethical for a province to be encouraging immigration and actively recruiting international students without any evidence (from my point of view) of a serious effort to consider and address their educational needs. But to witness first-hand how this lack of educational support and programming actually affected newcomer students in their daily lives, students that I had grown personally fond of and developed one-on-one relationships with, was something that evoked strong emotions in me that far surpassed mere academic interest. For me, these experiences raised questions about how New Brunswick handles newcomer educational support and about how such support (or lack of support) positions newcomer students within the educational context. In speaking with the families and teachers of newcomer students, I realized that similar questions and concerns surrounding newcomer education in New Brunswick were surfacing among those who were directly involved.

Upon looking into some policy documents, I found that there were claims regarding the institutional support of the promotion of cultural inclusion within New

Brunswick schools. In the 2007 *Population Growth Strategy* released by the New Brunswick Population Growth Secretariat, the province explicitly recognizes the increasing diversity of its population, and discusses how it will work to support this increasing cultural diversity:

New Brunswick is an increasingly diverse province made up of many cultures. The Population Growth Secretariat will conduct a review of the Multicultural Policy and will focus on the promotion of diversity and multiculturalism in the province. Further emphasis will be placed on the importance of living in an inclusive society by ensuring educational material is available in schools across the province. Additional investments will be made in the Multicultural Grants Program in an effort to further support these activities and allow newcomers and current residents to celebrate the diversity of our province. (p. 5)

Despite this institutional commitment, upon looking further into the issue of newcomer educational support, I found that little information and New Brunswick-specific research was available. The decision to use this personal interest in New Brunswick newcomer education as a point of entry into a qualitative research project seemed an obvious choice.

This research project is a modest one. It explores newcomer educational support within one particular New Brunswick school district from the perspectives of two English teachers, one English as additional language tutor, and one settlement worker, and in turn examines how newcomer students are positioned within the educational system. It touches on issues of discursive practice, programming and prioritization, assessment, and the social and emotional contexts of newcomers' and support workers'

lives. The work is partial, subjective, and largely inadequate in addressing the questions that it poses. By no means do I wish to present it as a definitive description nor as a solution to the issues associated with newcomer education in the province. In recognition of and respect for the inherent complexity, variety, and intersectionality of newcomer student experiences and the experiences of those who work directly with newcomer students, the point of the study is not to attempt to establish a monolithic account of newcomer student experiences nor of the experiences of newcomer education workers. Rather, using the insights of critical multiculturalism and critical theory more generally, the project will use these varied accounts to trace and explore the political, ideological, social, and professional practices which may impact newcomer students and those who deliver newcomer educational and settlement services in New Brunswick.

The brief and situated accounts of those who work with newcomer students in the context of their education press for further inquiry and action in the realm of newcomer educational support. So many voices remain unheard by this research project, including those of newcomer families and newcomer students themselves. I should also note that I am well aware of the contextual and situated nature of the work. Newcomer support can vary immensely from district to district and even school to school. As one interviewee noted, “I don’t think anyone has the whole picture, the right arm doesn’t know what the left arm is doing”. The purpose is not to attempt to provide a generalizing description of newcomer education and programming in the province; nor is it to make any claims that this is the whole story. Rather it is meant to scratch the surface of what I have come to understand as a major concern in New Brunswick education, and to explore how newcomer students are educationally positioned. The

value of the research is not in presenting any definitive answer or solution, but rather is in the questions and tensions that it reveals, and in the dialogue that these questions might and should evoke. By no means do I wish to point any fingers at anyone individually; these issues are systemic and reach far beyond the work and practices of any one person, school, or district.

Some may argue that myself, as a member of the dominant group, conducting research which will deal (albeit indirectly) with the experiences of marginalized groups, is inherently problematic and perhaps even unethical. Who am I to do this work? I have continually struggled with this question throughout the development of this project. On the one hand, I feel a compelling sense of responsibility and commitment to the creation of a more equitable and culturally inclusive education system, while on the other hand, I cannot subside my feeling of discomfort. In speaking of such discomfort, particularly in reference to the issue of racialization, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) speak against a tendency towards inaction, and note that members of the dominant group must too participate in the struggle against racism and oppression:

As Whites gain consciousness of the racialization of their identity, some feel guilty about their association with a group that has perpetrated racial oppression. Such shame can be immobilizing to the extent that it interferes with the construction of a progressive white identity that is psychologically centered and capable of acting in opposition to racist activity. (p. 10)

I cannot ignore the pressing questions and concerns that have been raised throughout my various experiences in engaging in the topic of newcomer education in the New Brunswick context. Having had the opportunity to speak informally about culturally

inclusive education with teachers, community leaders, and newcomer families, all of whom have expressed a multitude of concerns, I have come to see equitable newcomer student experiences not as exclusively the responsibility of newcomers, but as a responsibility endowed to the host society that proclaims inclusive, quality education and that encourages immigration. And given that there appears to be such limited research in this area, these concerns can no longer go unaddressed. I now recognize the importance of collaboration and solidarity among all groups in the struggle for equity.

In the following chapter I begin with a discussion of current literature on newcomer education and discuss my theoretical positioning in critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism. In chapter three I provide an explanation of my methodological choices, which were at times unconventional. Chapter four outlines the various themes drawn from my analysis of the qualitative interviews. Chapter five explores these themes in further depth through a critical lens, organized into three categories: the discursive, the social, and the institutional positioning of newcomer students within New Brunswick schools. I fully acknowledge the interconnection of these categories, and have separated them solely for the purpose of clarity. I argue that within New Brunswick schools, newcomer students are marginally positioned, therefore compromising the province's promise of equity and inclusion for all students. Chapter six explores this illusion of inclusion, and discusses the implications of the research for policy and practice.

Chapter 2

Framing the Study: A Review

An exploration of newcomer education necessitates a critical consideration of the concept of multiculturalism as an aspect of how cultural inclusion is understood and approached. How multiculturalism is understood within Canadian schools and within the Canadian context as a whole will impact newcomer student experiences and positioning. As this is a critical research project, this chapter begins with a broad outline of critical theory as a theoretical framework, and follows with a discussion of the various conceptions of multiculturalism as outlined by several scholars in the field. It ends with a discussion of research on newcomer education and situates my work within this growing field.

A Critical Theoretical Framework

Critical exploration concerns the endeavor to understand the multiple, complex, and interrelated ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness. If one accepts this notion and understands schools to be politically contested spaces, then considering how power operates within them becomes a central question of critical educational research. Within contemporary society, a reconceptualised critical theory of power cannot be understood without first exploring the concepts of hegemony, ideology, and linguistic and discursive power (Kincheloe, 2008).

First conceptualized by Antonio Gramsci in 1971, hegemony refers to the ways in which dominant groups exercise power through both social and psychological attempts to garner people's consent to unequal social relations and their place within it. This is accomplished through various cultural institutions including schools, churches,

and the media (Kincheloe, 2008). Hegemony, then, results in people agreeing to and accepting dominant ideas, values, and beliefs that create, sustain, and reproduce asymmetrical power relationships (May & Sleeter, 2010). These inequitable social relations are legitimated through a process of naturalization which depicts them as natural and inevitable (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 54). May and Sleeter (2010) discuss how domination is both achieved and hidden through this complex process of naturalization wherein people may come to accept unequal power relations and their place within them by internalizing socially constructed values, beliefs, and norms:

Indeed, we come to internalize these ideas, values, and beliefs to such an extent that we see them as “normal,” or “common sense” (Boggs, 1976, p. 39).

Hegemonic narratives convince those of us who benefit from dominant institutional and cultural arrangements and those of us who are oppressed by them that these arrangements are “natural”. (p. 33)

Thus, as discussed by Kincheloe (2008), exploring the political nature of schooling involves both the recognition and exploration of hegemonic narratives which construct inequity as an inevitable rather than as socially constructed. Traditionally, critical theory’s predominant concern was with the oppressive aspects of power. However, a more evolved conception of critical theory does not position people as passive victims of domination and oppression, but recognizes them as possessing agency to interpret, negotiate and at times challenge hegemonic narratives. As May and Sleeter (2010) note:

...Hegemony, in spite of its effectiveness in legitimizing inequalities, is not a watertight process. The normalcy of unequal and inequitable socioeconomic

structures has to be constantly maintained. In response, significant numbers of people have recognized, re-recognized, and struggled to transform inequitable socioeconomic and political structures. (p. 33)

It is also important not to allow a concern with oppression to overshadow another critical aspect of power, and that is its ability to empower, and to engage the dominated to rethink their social positioning (Kincheloe, 2008). Therefore a critical exploration necessitates a consideration of both hegemonic narratives and counter-hegemonic narratives that serve to engage citizens in challenging inequities. We are endowed with both agency and limitations, thus creating complex and contested power that must not be oversimplified (Kincheloe, 2008).

The concept of hegemony cannot be separated from the notion of ideology. A more traditional notion of ideology refers to systems of beliefs; however, within a critical context, the notion is extended to encompass meaning making that maintains and supports dominant forms of power (Kincheloe, 2008). Thus hegemonic practices, as discussed above, contribute to the formation, maintenance, and reproduction of ideologies.

Ideology refers to systems of beliefs shared amongst groups of people. In a critical context, these systems of beliefs are held to be interconnected with particular political interests of group members (Kincheloe, 2008). Again, it is important not to oversimplify the conceptualization of ideology. It cannot be understood simply as an imposition of ideas and beliefs upon passive individuals, but rather as taking on a more nuanced view that recognizes the interplay of multiple and sometimes competing ideologies with individual agency and interpretation:

Researchers operating with an awareness of this hegemonic ideology understand that dominant ideological practices and discourses shape our vision of reality (Lemke, 1995, 1998). Thus, our notion of hegemonic ideology leads to a nuanced understanding of power's complicity in the constructions people make of the world and their role within it (Kincheloe, 1998, 2002). Such awareness corrects earlier delineations of ideology as a monolithic, unidirectional entity that was imposed on individuals by a secret cohort of ruling-class czars. (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 55)

People are confronted with multiple ideological frameworks throughout social life. These frameworks shape our world, and our interpretation of that world in complex, nuanced ways. Ideological frameworks are interconnected with hegemony, as they manifest a complex interplay of power, wherein attempts to garner public support of particular systems of beliefs in support of particular political interests play out. Critical researchers must therefore be aware of the particular ideological frameworks that influence their research sites and their interpretations of them.

Such ideological frameworks and hegemonic discourses are connected to another form of contemporary power, and that is linguistic and discursive power. Critical theory recognizes that language itself is not a neutral vehicle for apolitical descriptions of the world, but rather plays an integral part in its construction:

Critical pedagogists appreciate the fact that language is not a neutral and objective conduit of description of the "real world." Rather, from a critical perspective, linguistic descriptions are not simply about the world but serve to construct it. With these linguistic notions in mind, critical pedagogists begin to

study the way language in the form of discourse serves as a form of regulation and domination. Discursive practices are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant. (Kincheloe, 2008, pp. 55-56)

In alignment with critical discourse analysis, critical theory rejects the idea of language as being a neutral social tool, and demands an exploration of how power is operationalized through the vehicle of discourse. When applying such critical exploration to the concept of multiculturalism, one must alert herself to how cultural difference is spoken of, how cultures are represented and juxtapositioned against one another, and how the dimensions of power are implicit in these conversations and discourses.

How multiculturalism is conceptualized and practiced is inextricably tied to power within contemporary society. If some cultures are positioned as dominant and are normalized, by the same token, non-dominant cultures become positioned as ‘other’. This arguably creates power imbalances and inequitable positioning. Exploring newcomer student positioning necessitates a consideration of how non-dominant cultures are conceptualized, represented, and positioned within the educational system and society at large. The conceptualization of multiculturalism will arguably impact newcomer student experiences.

Having discussed critical theory and its delineation of the ideological, linguistic, and discursive forms of power brings me to question how power is present within conceptions of multiculturalism, and what a critical conception of multiculturalism

might look like. The following section explores various conceptions of multiculturalism as outlined by critical scholars, and ends with a discussion of the application of critical theory to the field of multiculturalism.

Exploring Conceptions of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism means everything and at the same time nothing. It has been used and misused so often and for so many conflicting reasons and agendas that no one...can speak of multiculturalism or multicultural education without specifically delineating what he or she means or does not mean. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 2)

Canada is continuously referred to as a multicultural nation. This identity is rarely interrogated or problematized, but the assertion begs the question of what is actually meant by the term multiculturalism. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) note, the term has been used in such a variety of contexts that its meaning has become convoluted, vague, and is continuously shifting. A consideration of how interpretations of multiculturalism might influence newcomer experiences is integral, both within the educational realm and in the community at large. Interrupting the simplicity that is commonly employed when speaking of multiculturalism, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) discuss the various ways that Western society has reacted to the growing cultural difference of the late twentieth century. They conceptualize these reactions under five forms of multiculturalism: conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, pluralist multiculturalism, left-essentialist multiculturalism, and critical multiculturalism. I should note that in attempting to capture and define multicultural approaches, the authors recognize that such categories as described below are inherently

problematic; they rarely appear in the purity that may be implied by virtue of their categorization. Rather they are meant to be used to understand better the issues at hand. They note that in the lived world, these categories often blend and blur, intersecting and sometimes contradicting one another, undermining the imposition of theoretical order.

Conservative multiculturalism, or monoculturalism, encapsulates the various neo-conservative responses to an increasingly diverse society. Underlying the conservative multiculturalist position is a belief in the superiority of White, male-centered, Western culture; thus monoculturalists see this increasing diversity as a threat to Western identity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Conservative multiculturalism views the consensus model as the functional basis for any society, thus problematizing the very notion of multiculturalism itself. This leads to an assortment of efforts towards assimilation. Systemic realities such as sexism, racism, and poverty are overlooked, thereby placing blame on individuals who are not capable of meeting Western, White, middle-class standards. Conservative multiculturalism, when adopted within the educational system, uses schooling as a vehicle for assimilation into White, Western, patriarchal culture, using academic (and ultimately economic) rewards to entice assimilation and, by the same token, using that reward system to discourage and punish difference:

In this decontextualized manner monoculturalists continue with renewed vigour their historical attempt to adjust poor and non-white students to an unjust society. Eliciting the complicity of some marginalized students, parents, and community members by the argument that assimilation will open doors of economic opportunity, conservative multiculturalists offer a devil's pact where

marginalized students sign over their cultural heritage for a chance at socio-economic mobility. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 6)

Although many might assume that the monoculturalist position has been relegated to the realm of the past histories of injustice and prejudice, remaining only in the mindsets of right-winged extremists, this view of multiculturalism remains alive and well in Canadian society today. Guised under the rhetoric of national safety and security, minority cultures and communities, particularly those who are racialized, are treated as suspect and represented as dangerous, or at the very least problematic. In an examination of popular culture and Canadian media coverage on issues surrounding multiculturalism, Phil Ryan (2010) discusses post-9/11 public conversation, both within media and within public policy and political debate. He argues that although right-winged positioning (which can easily be conceptualized within the monocultural framework) has changed how it might talk about multiculturalism, proclaiming an appreciation and concern for the diversity of Canada, their assimilationist stance remains:

Of course, we are considering a rhetoric here, not an actual policy framework. It is clear that the Conservatives have no interest in ‘the values, beliefs and traditions of new Canadians’ when those clash with Conservative policy. So-called new Canadians may oppose the government’s increasingly pronounced alignment of its foreign policy with that of the Bush administration, for example, but that particular value will not be allowed to influence policy. (p.115)

Ryan goes on to discuss the so-called ‘triumph’ of multiculturalism in political debate as ambiguous at best, wherein politicians will use the discourse of multiculturalism to

garner political support, but allow little to no influence on the dominance of White Western culture in political decisions and policymaking. Thus discussions of ‘progress’ and of racism and prejudice as a part of Canada’s history rather than of its present often cover the assimilationist perspectives and movements that continue to date, and which have arguably increased within post 9/11 Canadian society.

Liberal multiculturalism, as delineated by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), is when an emphasis is placed on the similarities between cultures, and efforts are made to focus on the shared humanity of all people of all backgrounds. While this may seem to be a step up from conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, in its failure to recognize the real impacts of these socially constructed categories, removes multiculturalism from its social and political contexts. This focus on sameness leads to a “colorblind” ideology, making difference unimportant. But in refusing to recognize difference, liberal multiculturalism also refuses to recognize the inequalities that are perpetuated on the very basis of such difference. Thus in this way, it serves largely as an “ideological camouflage” (p.12); it speaks of democratic values and equality for all, yet fails to challenge the status quo, which is arguably undemocratic: “Speaking a language of democracy and ethics but failing to ground such issues on the recognition that power is distributed unequally, liberal multiculturalism often neglects to focus on forces that undermine democratic goals” (p. 12).

Standing in stark contrast to liberal multiculturalism, left-essentialist multiculturalism, according to Kincheloe and Steinberg, is defined by its focus on racially-based identities, and emphasizes difference as it relates to racial categories. Such an approach, when applied to education, is specifically concerned with particular,

racialized identities. While it recognizes the importance and power of difference, essentialism has been criticized for its view of racial groups as possessing “specific, fixed, and often romanticized characteristics” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 40). Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), along with other critical scholars (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Kincheloe, 2008; May, 1994; May & Sleeter, 2010) argue that race as a social category cannot be seen as producing analogous experiences or identities. This positioning does not allow for an examination of the intersectionality of categories of difference and facets of identity, and how they interact to produce a variety of experiences. The left-essentialist position also excludes members of the dominant culture from participating in justice and equality-centered movements, and can therefore cause divisions that ultimately block movement toward democratic goals.

Perhaps the most recognizable form, pluralist multiculturalism focuses on the acceptance and celebration of diversity. However, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) warn that the distinction between this and other forms of multiculturalism is not as great as it may initially appear, as it continues to have decontextualizing and depoliticizing tendencies:

Slipping into the fallacy of socio-political decontextualization, pluralists often imply in such lessons that anyone can ‘make it’ by working hard. Pride in one’s heritage, unfortunately, is not a panacea for the effects of years of oppression. In this way pluralist multiculturalism promises an emancipation that it can’t deliver, as it confuses psychological affirmation with political empowerment. . . . From a critical multicultural perspective this ‘psychologization’ process, this tendency for depoliticization, haunts pluralist multiculturalism. The spectre in question

has absorbed such a generous dose of moral relativism that politically grounded action for social justice is subverted before it can begin. (p. 16)

While the pluralist form appears to be a more democratically appealing approach to multiculturalism, providing children with opportunities to learn about various cultural heritages and traditions, it is largely superficial, removing culture from its context and putting it, quite literally, on display. Bissoondath (1994), argues that despite its psychological appeal, this approach serves to reinforce the dominant culture as the natural norm by which all other cultures are measured and compared; and may reinforce stereotypes. It does nothing in the way of recognizing oppressive power dynamics, rather covering them by creating the illusion that all cultures are equally valued and accepted (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

A critical conception of multiculturalism is fundamentally different from the aforementioned frameworks in that it seeks to understand socially and politically produced categories and the ways in which they serve to produce unequal social, political, and economic positioning. A critical multicultural education thus rejects the assumption that schooling is a neutral and objective zone, and moves beyond a mere overview of diverse cultural practices to an examination of the social and political contexts of culture, and of the power distributions that can be associated with cultural difference:

...Unlike other forms of multiculturalism, the critical articulation is concerned with the contextualization of what gives rise to race, class and gender inequalities. We are concernedwith the ways power has operated historically

and contemporaneously to legitimate social categories and divisions. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 25)

A critical exploration of multiculturalism must therefore take into account hegemonic, ideological, and discursive forms of power and how they are played out in discussions, conceptions, and practices of multiculturalism. A fundamental assertion of critical multiculturalism is that racial, class, and gender oppressions are implicit in the construction of knowledge, values, and identities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

Cultural inscriptions are embedded in social sites and they culminate into powerful forces, shaping the way people understand themselves, others, and the social world in which they live. These inscriptions are not neutral, but serve to produce specific values, knowledges, and identities that reinforce the dominance and privilege of certain social categories, while at the same time justifying and naturalizing the oppression of others. In this way, the power of White supremacy is an important target of critical multiculturalism, which, unlike most other approaches to multiculturalism, reasserts Whiteness as an ethnic space, thus allowing it to be examined in the ways in which it affects (and privileges) Whiteness (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

Critical multiculturalism, like all critical theory, is primarily concerned with how domination and subordination are accomplished. Such a framework rests upon the fundamental belief in equity and social justice, yet is able to recognize difference as socially and politically produced categories which create concrete, unequal circumstances. Therefore critical multiculturalism understands and appreciates the power of difference, yet remains committed to the concept of solidarity in the attainment of social justice:

As it integrates and connects the study of race, class and gender to the nature of consciousness construction, knowledge production and modes of oppression, critical multiculturalism embraces a social vision that moves beyond the particular concerns of specific social groups. While these concerns are important and must be addressed in a critical pedagogy, we ultimately embrace the democratic politics that emphasize difference within unity. The unity among different racial, ethnic, class and gendered groups can be constructed around a well delineated notion of social justice and democratic community. Within this critical context the need for separatist, integrationist, and pluralist moments are appreciated... Concurrently, there is a need for such groups to join together in the mutual struggle for democracy and empowerment. Critical scholars seek a multiculturalism that understands the specific nature of difference but appreciates our mutual embrace of principles of equality and justice. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 33)

Again in concurrence with critical theory, another important feature of critical multiculturalism is its recognition of the intersectionality of oppression (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010). Attempts to understand oppression on the basis of one particular socially produced category without consideration of how that category intersects with the privilege or marginalization of other categories fragments and oversimplifies experiences which are influenced by a multiplicity of interrelated factors. Thus a critical multiculturalism does not limit itself to understanding race or racialized identity in isolation, but understands that they are inextricably connected to sex, gender, class, religion, (dis)ability, and any other socially constructed categorical basis for

domination/oppression. The very notion of culture, often understood in very narrow terms by other frameworks of multiculturalism, is expanded within the critical multiculturalist articulation to include any socially produced categories that serve to shape identities and to create divided, unequal experiences.

Critical multiculturalism's focus on understanding how inequalities are accomplished demands a move beyond pathological considerations of multiculturalism that attempt to address inequalities through a mere changing of attitudes. Instead it focuses on a structural analysis of how cultural dominance is produced and sustained institutionally and socially:

Why is critical multiculturalism a useful way forward? As with anti-racist education and critical race theory, rather than prioritizing culture, critical multiculturalism gives priority to structural analysis of unequal power relationships, analyzing the role of institutional inequities, including but not necessarily limited to racism. As Berlak and Moyenda (2001) argue: "central to critical multiculturalism is naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognizing and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice" (p. 92). (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10)

Critical multiculturalists argue that it is not enough to attempt to make students and classrooms more accepting of difference by trying to change attitudes; this is only a small part of resisting cultural imperialism and exclusion. It is difficult to challenge racist and imperialist attitudes when they are being produced and reinforced systemically. Efforts which fail to recognize the institutional systemic role in the creation and perpetuation of cultural imperialism (i.e., efforts which decontextualize and

individualize unjust attitudes), despite their egalitarian intent, fall prey to adopting superficial and ultimately ineffective, band-aid type solutions to inequity (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May, 1994; May & Sleeter, 2010).

Considering the various conceptions and responses to growing cultural difference raises the question of how multiculturalism is conceptualized and practiced within the Canadian context. How the notion of multiculturalism is discussed and operationalized impacts the political positioning of all those who are constructed as culturally different, and as this arguably includes newcomer students, exploring conceptions of multiculturalism in Canada becomes a relevant aspect of exploring newcomer student experiences and positioning. The following explores the concept of multiculturalism in Canada and in turn examines how it is reflected within education.

Multiculturalism in Canada

Canada is an officially multicultural nation. In 1971, a federal multicultural policy was passed which was intended to acknowledge Canada's bicultural and bilingual identity. In the 1980's, the policy was expanded to acknowledge the multi-cultural nature of Canadian society. This was followed by the passing of the Federal Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada in 1985, which led to the establishment of the Department of Canadian Heritage in the 1990's (Sensoy et al., 2010). On the surface, this institutional recognition and embrace of multiculturalism has created a perception of Canada as a welcoming community to countries all over the world, an international role model in cultural diversity:

The Constitution of Canada... recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians...; [and] the government of

Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada. (James, 2005, pp.13-14)

Several critical theorists argue that rather than challenge the dominance of Western, Christian culture over all other cultures, multicultural policy in Canada and the celebratory discourses surrounding it serve to reinforce cultural dominance and oppression (James, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). By covering the nation's many inequities and assimilationist structures with celebratory discourse, a rhetoric of acceptance, and simplified representations of culture, an illusion of equity has been constructed that inhibits a recognition of unequal power distribution along cultural lines (James, 2005; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Building on a *we* and *they* dichotomous point of view, critics of policies on multiculturalism in Canada argue that they do little to interrupt the normative cultural dominance which remains present in most if not all of Canada's major institutions, nor do they promote political, economic and social equity for all people residing in Canada (James, 2005; Ryan, 2010).

In a critical discussion of Canadian multiculturalism, James (2005) notes the ill effects of the discourse of diversity that has been created by superficial multicultural policies and programming in Canada:

...Instead of opening opportunities for full and effective participation in Canadian society, the current discourse of multiculturalism more often operates

to essentialize, homogenize and marginalize ethnic and racial minority-group Canadians, negating individual and intra-cultural differences and cultural complexities. (p. 20)

This essentialization of culture has led to perceptions of fixed, homogenous and often racialized identities that are characteristic of the essentialist form of multiculturalism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) as discussed above. This denies the fluidity and lived nature of culture and locks cultural identities, ultimately serving to impede rather than promote equal participation in Canadian society. James (2005) also notes that despite the largely superficial and inadequate nature of “cultural inclusion” in Canada, the very presence of racialized “others” within Canada in and of itself has been used to justify claims of multiculturalism, despite their marginalization in the social, political, economic, and educational realms:

Not surprisingly, and despite the contradictions, the presence of “immigrants” (read “racial and ethnic minorities who are constructed as ‘foreigners’ irrespective of their citizenship or length of time in Canada”) has helped to sustain the myth of Canada as a “multicultural society” among Canadians and in the outside world. (p.17)

From a critical theoretical perspective, while the Canadian government proclaims its belief in and support of multiculturalism, this proclamation is viewed by a range of critical scholars as largely superficial and relatively devoid of substantiation. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) note, the term ‘multiculturalism’ has been used in countless capacities, meaning many different things in many different contexts.

Consequently, the term has become a politically convenient one: its message appealing yet its definition indecisive, therefore making practical implications unclear and elusive.

As alluded to above, idealistic views of Canada as a cultural mosaic can be seen as misleading. Canada is wrought with a history of colonization, assimilation, and cultural imperialism (Ashworth, 1992). And despite conversations of acceptance and progress, racism and cultural imperialism remain very much a part of present-day Canada. As Ashworth (1992), a Canadian scholar in the field of newcomer education notes: “As much as Canadians would like to believe that they are tolerant and appreciative of other cultures, the reality is that below the surface, just as in other countries, lie both individual and institutionalized racism” (p. 43). Not only do newcomers confront the enormous task of integrating into a completely new community, culture and way of life, often with limited knowledge of the language, but the challenges associated with this integration commonly intersect with issues and experiences of racism.

In a Canadian based study, Li (2001) examined the link between Chinese immigrant parents’ expectations and the educational outcomes of their children. Li found that the educational expectations of Chinese immigrant parents may “depend not only on their cultural and educational background, but also on the attitudes of the host society towards newcomers and visible minority groups” (p. 480). Parents interviewed in the study expressed an overt perception of Canada’s labor market as being racially preferenced which in turn caused them to push their children towards specific career paths, thus having a significant impact on their educational expectations. One parent

described her lack of support for her daughter's decision to become a lawyer specifically as a result of discrimination in Canadian society:

I do not support my daughter to become a lawyer. In Canada, although multiculturalism is written into the government policy, you can feel racial discrimination every day, everywhere. It's very common. Minority groups, especially visible minority groups are in a very disadvantaged situation....I advise my daughter not to choose lawyer as a career because lawyer represents justice, but how can you argue with the dominant society if they believe that the "truth" is on the side of the white majority, not the side of the visible minority? It will be very difficult for my daughter to pursue such a career. If she wants to become a doctor or a computer expert, that will be easier. (p. 486)

Not only did parents participating in the study feel that their children should follow specific career paths as a result of their minority status, but they also felt that in order for their children to attain workplace opportunities equal to those of the dominant group, they needed to do better than mainstream students in school:

As a minority group, we are in a disadvantaged situation. I often tell them that if all candidates are at the same level, for sure the employer will choose blue-eyes first. The opportunity won't be given to them. To deal with this, they should be better, no, much better than the whites, then the employer may consider choosing them instead of blue eyes. My children knew this since they were very young. (p. 486)

Li's (2001) findings suggest that this push for academic excellence among immigrant families may not only be the result of cultural difference, as I have often heard it

explained within educational contexts, but rather can be understood as a response to racial discrimination in Canadian society.

In an earlier study on racism in Canada, Li (1982) also found that Chinese immigrants face discrimination in Canadian employment, despite their education, and have to work harder than European immigrants to be accepted. Numerous other research studies have shown that racialized Canadians experience discrimination and prejudicial attitudes in all facets of society. Miedema and Nason-Clark (1989) discuss the multiple impediments to integration and full participation faced by racialized women in the Maritimes; Kunz, Milan and Schetagne (2000) point to differences along racial lines in Canadian education, employment, and income; and Lai and Huffey (2010) discuss experiences of racialized discrimination in Canadian rural communities. Prejudicial attitudes influence and are influenced by Canada's economic, political, and social spheres, making racism and racialization a lived reality for Canadians who do not fit into normative (i.e., White) standards (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). Newcomers, who are often racialized or othered on the basis of linguistic or cultural difference, discuss feelings of otherness, isolation, and marginalization in Canada's economic and social realms (Ighodaro, 2005; James et. al, 2005; Li, 2001; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Within a New Brunswick-specific educational context, Varma-Joshi, Baker, and Tanaka (2004) discuss significant perceptions of discrimination and otherness on behalf of racialized students within New Brunswick schools. Critical scholars argue that the inequity faced by those who are 'othered', and particularly those who are racialized, within Western society is covered and constructed as individual deficiency (Kincheloe, 2008; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Marginalization and oppression along racial and cultural lines are

further covered under celebratory discourses of diversity and superficial claims of acceptance, which create the appearance of cultural equity, hiding the privilege of the dominant cultural group over all others (James, 2005; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sensoy et al., 2010).

This all brings the idealistic representation of Canada as a utopian cultural mosaic under serious question and, given its relation to newcomer experiences, leads us to consider the positioning of newcomer students in schools. How might the Canadian school system be influenced by and participate in specific perceptions and practices surrounding multiculturalism in Canada? How might this be influencing the educational experiences and positioning of newcomer students?

Newcomer Students and Education

If a society is encouraging immigration, it is the ethical and moral responsibility of that society to create welcoming environments wherein the principles of equity and social justice are respected and strived for. As Canada promotes itself as a multicultural nation and actively recruits newcomers, it becomes necessary to explore the ways in which it is providing support for newcomers to settle comfortably and participate equally in all facets of Canadian society. How newcomer student needs are accommodated by schools in Canada becomes a central question when considering the issue of support. And, as schools are a primary social and cultural site through which people learn about others and themselves, it is necessary to explore how newcomer students are positioned within this key social institution. A critical examination of possible structural impediments which might face newcomer students upon entering the public school systems in Canada, coupled with an exploration of the discursive and

pedagogical practices which construct them as different and ‘other’, suggest that newcomers may be confronted with multiple systemic disadvantages in schools.

Apple (1999) argues that race must be understood as a central political and historical construction that permeates everyday relations, conceptions, and social practice. Discussing current educational reform in several Western school systems, he argues that despite all intentions involved in educational reform efforts, ‘race’ as a social construction, continues to play an integral role in educational experiences:

...Conscious originating motives do not guarantee at all how arguments and policies will be employed, what their multiple and determinate functions and effects will be, whose interests they will ultimately serve, and what identifiable patterns of differential benefits will emerge, given existing and unequal relations of economic, cultural, and social capital and given unequal strategies of converting one form of capital to another in our societies. (p. 11)

Apple (1999) argues that attempts towards equitable school experiences must not adopt a ‘color-blind’ approach, wherein ‘race’ is deemed unimportant. Rather, such attempts should understand race as a powerful social construction that must be brought to the forefront of educational reform:

Not only is it not possible to be color-blind; as they go on to say, ‘opposing race requires that we notice race, not ignore it’. Only by noticing race can we challengeit, ‘with its ever-more-absurd reduction of human experience to an essence attributed to all without regard for historical or social context’. By placing race squarely in front of us, ‘we can challenge the state, the institutions of civil society, and ourselves as individuals to combat the legacy of inequality

and injustice inherited from the past' and continually reproduced in the present.

(Apple, 1999, p. 9, citing Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 159)

Apple's (1999) argument suggests that racialized students continue to be marginally positioned within Western school systems. Schick and St. Denis (2005) concur that color-blind ideologies contribute to rather than combat the reproduction of inequity along racial and cultural lines. By ignoring difference, such approaches work to conceal rather than challenge the very powerful effects of these socially constructed differences. Because color-blind approaches pervade schools and schooling practice in Canada, the effects of 'race' in the lives of students who are racialized are muted, left unchallenged by the absence of acknowledgement and dialogue that color-blindness evokes.

In addition to the potential oppression that racialized students may continue to face within contemporary Western schools, Au, (2009) argues that the increased standardization of schools may have significant impacts on students from non-dominant cultures. He argues that as standardization requires a target learning identity, curricular content and outcomes tend to reflect the learning identity and perspective of the culturally dominant students. Standardization, he argues, is the antithesis of multi-perspective classrooms wherein multiple knowledges and ways of learning are explored and respected. This, he argues, negatively affects students from non-dominant cultures. Cummins (2006) argues that despite the cultural difference present within Canadian classrooms, many Canadian schools do not value the previous knowledge and experiences that newcomer students bring with them. Rather than seeing their native language as a vehicle for learning new languages, he argues that schools tend to conceptualize newcomer students' native language as a roadblock to learning English

rather than exploring innovative ways of incorporating native languages into English language acquisition (Cummins, 2006). And given the linguistic and cultural dominance embedded within the assessment structure, this may contribute to the marginal educational positioning of students who do not speak English (or French) as a first language. Iannacci (2006) concurs that Canadian schools are failing to conceptualize more inclusive classrooms to reflect the cultural and linguistic difference contained within them. Due to the dominance of the English language within Canadian schools, he argues that newcomer students are denied the opportunity to contribute to their classrooms and are continuously positioned as recipients of help. This, Iannacci (2006) contends, alienates newcomer students from their own education, and may contribute to perceptions of otherness and inferiority.

A failure to recognize and address such systemic barriers could bring into question the national promise of quality education for all children, and undermine its proclaimed culturally inclusive identity. In order to move beyond theoretical abstraction and vagueness, it is perhaps at this point useful to engage in a brief discussion of how everyday schooling practices are culturally imprinted. Much like in advertising, students are continuously exposed to messages, both subtle and overt, from which notions of what is 'normal' and 'natural' are constructed. From the onset, young children are taught culturally dominant values through schooling (Kincheloe, 2008). They are told stories that contain particular cultural perspectives and lessons to be learned. Critical educational theorists Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that Canadian students are taught interpretations of history and present day that remain unquestioned or unchallenged by competing perspectives; which holidays are important (those of the

dominant culture) and those that are not (those of the non-dominant cultures); what forms of knowledge are legitimate (those that are validated by the school system), and come to see other forms as less valuable; and which languages are important to learn and which languages are okay to forget. As they get older, young people's conceptions of what is normal and by the same token, what is not, will grow stronger. And, inevitably, they will learn whether or not their own experiences, views, identities, and culture fall within the narrow normative framework: "To varying degrees, students and teachers learn to dis/identify with the history, images, and language of schooling. These discourses inform them of the extent to which they do or do not belong in this particular public institution" (p. 297-298). Thus while those whose values and identities are reflected and reaffirmed through schooling are placed in a position of advantage, those who are deemed different, whose experiences, values, and cultural knowledge do not fit the mould, experience marginalization and a sense of otherness (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). The imprints of cultural dominance on curriculum and pedagogy serve to alienate those students who do not fit the cultural norm (Kincheloe, 2008). An exploration of such cultural imperialism as it appears in Canadian schools represents a vast departure from the Canadian rhetoric of celebrating and supporting diversity.

To begin, it is helpful to briefly discuss how newcomer education was approached in its infancy in Canada. Upon the creation of an accessible public school system proceeding confederation, (and I problematize the term 'accessible', as several discriminatory policies prohibited access for certain, often racialized, groups) schools were viewed as playing a key role in the creation of "good, useful, patriotic citizens and workers for the growing industries" (James & Wood, 2005, p. 95). In discussing the

creation of public schooling in Canada, James and Wood (2005) note that the notion of schools as a key site for the socialization of future generations was immediately recognized, and curriculum was developed with both academic and social intent. Although several provinces had adopted a sectarian approach to public schooling, they argue that most proponents of the public system were men closely linked to the Church. These men believed that schooling should be grounded in Christian values in order to produce such good, loyal, useful citizens and to strengthen the moral foundations of the newly formed country. As such, although in policy some school systems were deemed sectarian, the influence of Christianity in schooling practices is undeniable, and schools inevitably taught Christian values (James & Wood, 2005). As industry grew and immigration increased, education became viewed as a solution to the potential problems caused by immigrants. This view of immigrants as a “problem” to be addressed led to the enactment of numerous educational policies aimed at assimilation into the dominant culture (James & Wood, 2005, p. 95).

In discussing the history of newcomer education in Canada, Ashworth (1992) discusses how in the years that followed the inception of public schooling, students who were culturally and linguistically different were forced to conform to the dominant culture (and languages) in order to succeed academically. During the first half of the twentieth century, she argues that not much had changed, and little existed in the way of formal structuring for the education of newcomer students, despite the fact that many did not speak either of Canada’s official languages. Although they may or may not have faced the overt discrimination characteristic of earlier years, Ashworth (1992) holds that newcomer students continued to be marginalized within the Canadian school system,

and assimilationist efforts prevailed. Little time or money was spent on newcomer students, and, just as in years prior, emphasis was placed on stripping them of their culture and absorbing them into dominant norms, values, behaviours, and language (Ashworth, 1992, p. 36).

Looking back to past days of public schooling, many Canadians may agree that such assimilationist tendencies were undemocratic and unreflective of today's perception of multiculturalism. And although how newcomers are 'integrated' into Canadian schools seems strikingly different today, assimilationist tendencies and systemic marginalization continue to operate (Ashworth, 1992; Cummins, 2006; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Several qualitative studies on newcomer education and English language learners within Canadian schools have revealed that despite a rhetorical shift in how multiculturalism is framed by Canadian educational policy, deficiency discourses and assimilative practices continue to marginalize students from non-dominant cultures, particularly those who have limited familiarity with Canada's two official languages:

...In their study of ESL learners, June Beynon, Linda LaRocque, Roumianallieva and Diane Dagenais...found that the learners were defined in terms of their lack of English language proficiency, with little to no recognition of, or respect for, the knowledge they bring to their schooling and education. According to these educators, this conceptualization of learners in a school context, structured by inequality, racism, ethnicism, and discrimination, has resulted in their invisibility, marginalization, stigmatization and alienation, as well as in distorted educational practices whereby cultural loss gets equated with success in schools. (James, 2005, pp. 18-19)

This notion of invisibility and alienation has been referred to in several other qualitative studies on Canadian newcomer educational experiences. In an Alberta-based study on newcomer children's experiences in school conducted in 2000, Kirova-Petrova (2000) notes that newcomer children faced feelings of isolation and otherness that permeated their entire schooling experience:

Perhaps loneliness is experienced most painfully not when we are alone, but when we are in the presence of others, as these accounts reveal. The children felt separated, disliked, unwanted, cut off from the shared world of others. Their desire to belong to the communal world of their classmates on the one hand and the impossibility of reaching this desire on the other hand created a vacuum not only between them and their peers, but most of all inside themselves. (para. 46)

A 10-year-old newcomer student participating in Kirova-Petrova's (2000) study shares a story about one of his first experiences within the Canadian school system, revealing a strong sense of alienation and loneliness:

They were playing hockey outside and I was there too, but I wasn't really playing because nobody ever passed to me. I was sitting there with a hockey stick in my hands. It didn't really matter if I was there or not...I mean for them. I think that nobody wanted to do anything with me because I was different. And I think that nobody liked me. They thought I couldn't do anything; that's why they never passed me the puck. They just bugged me because I could not speak properly. I tried to ignore them. I wanted to go home. (para. 51)

Upon examining qualitative research on newcomer educational experiences, one will find stories similar to that of Au told over and over again: voices of newcomer students

expressing experiences of loneliness, isolation, inferiority, and a sense of otherness (Kirova-Petrova, 2000; Przybylo, 2003; Silver, 1999).

In conducting interviews with several adolescent newcomer students in Canada, Przybylo (2003) found that the lack of social support services for newcomer students proved a serious oversight of the emotional impact of immigration on children and adolescents. The adolescent students with whom she spoke expressed serious emotional needs that were not met upon first arriving into Canada and entering the public school system, as well as the need to voice their experiences to teachers and to non-immigrant peers in order to improve empathy, support, and understanding. In another Canadian qualitative study on newcomer experiences in school, Silver (1999) found that ESL students were extremely dependent on their classmates and that in almost every aspect of school life were positioned as recipients of assistance. He noted that for many ESL students, this dependency resulted in a sense of inferiority, a lack of confidence, and sometimes even resentment (cited in Iannacci, 2006). He argues that they are alienated from their own education through a lack of opportunity for decision-making, participation, and meaningful contribution.

Another important concern when discussing newcomer student positioning is the way in which the public school system approaches the implementation of cultural inclusivity and intercultural respect in classrooms. This will likely play a large part in shaping the experiences of newcomer students, who often fall outside of the linguistically and culturally dominant group. Thus it becomes an important point of analysis when studying the topic of newcomer education, in that validating and representing the multitude of cultural identities within the classroom is a key principle

of educational equity. Critical researchers suggest that the current approach of many Canadian schools is largely inadequate and that the topic of culturally inclusive education is being pushed to the sidelines of educational priorities. As will be discussed, some critical scholars argue that the way in which cultural inclusion is approached within classrooms can marginally position students with non-dominant cultural identities.

In the realm of education, the institutionalization of multiculturalism has allowed for funding for various kinds of activities and campaigns claiming to promote intercultural awareness and acceptance, but as some critical educators note, such efforts have remained superficial in nature:

...Multiculturalism in mainstream Canadian society, including schools, has come to mean little other than a celebratory approach (Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Henry et al., 2006; Dei, 2000). Despite the federal government's institutional discourse about preserving the country's diverse ethno-racial makeup, there has yet to be an institutionalization of critical multiculturalism in school practices in the way that educators committed to anti-oppression might conceptualize multiculturalism. (Sensoy et al., 2010, p. 2)

Although multiculturalism has been adopted in various ways in Canadian schools, critical scholars describe approaches as a predominantly additive, superficial, drop-in approach to exploring culture. 'Other' cultural representations and quick, simplified lessons are easily added to the existing curricular structure. Students might engage in a cultural dance, taste a national dish, or learn about various traditions, but they are never taught to explore the notion of culture in any depth (Sensoy et al., 2010). It is a safe and

sterile approach that is of no threat to the dominance of the normative culture over all others or to the privilege that accompanies it (Bissoondath, 1994).

Some might argue that although a simplified engagement with non-dominant cultural practices may not be the most effective way of exploring multiculturalism, it is a harmless practice. But such a superficial approach can actually impede rather than promote cultural inclusion. Several critical scholars and educational researchers have criticized the monolithic perspective promoted by the Canadian school system and its damaging effects on the lives of students who fall outside of the normative culture. In a discussion of multicultural education in Canada, James and Wood (2005) contend that current policies and programs aimed at cultural inclusion are unlikely to respond to newcomer student needs. They argue that promoting an ideal of cultural equity and democracy is largely inadequate when it is done within a system that privileges English and French cultural values and languages. They hold that such an approach, which leaves dominant cultural privilege unchanged, has contributed to low achievement, alienation, disengagement, and high drop-out rates among immigrant students (James & Wood, 2005). bell hooks (1994) argues that the showcasing approach to exploring culture may serve to spotlight students as being different, objectifying them and placing them in the role of cultural “native informant” (p. 94). This could arguably reinforce their positioning as ‘other’, and promote the notion of fixed cultural identities and stereotyping characteristic of essentialist notions of culture. Sensoyet. al. (2010) argue this approach to be ‘detrimental’ to culturally different students because of its trivializing, simplifying tendencies:

A superficial attempt to simply drop information into existing curriculum regarding different cultures is detrimental to culturally diverse students. This approach trivializes the overall experiences, contributions, struggles, and voices of non-dominant group members. In this way, curriculum fails to validate the cultural identities of students and does little to challenge dominant cultural norms. (Sensoy et al., 2010, p. 5)

Not only is the superficial cultural exploration found in schools today, arguably, ineffective in challenging cultural imperialism (James & Wood, 2005; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sensoy et al., 2010) but it can also be harmful to those students who are deemed ‘different’ against Western cultural norms.

In his critical discussion of the discourse of multiculturalism in Canada, Bissoondath (1994) compares the various cultural festivals and celebrations (often used to justify claims of cultural equity) to the Disney Jungle Cruise at Walt Disney World in Florida, which cheaply mimics a boat journey through the jungle. He notes that it would be foolish to go through this journey and feel that you have experienced something real. The same can be applied to the cultural displays promoting Canada as a cultural mosaic. “Implicit in this approach is the particular notion of culture as commodity: a thing that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold, or forgotten. It represents a devaluation of culture” (p. 83). This approach is argued to be commonly articulated within schools across Canada as political pressure to be more culturally inclusive increases. Schools now commonly engage in so-called cultural activities wherein the fashion, cuisine, folklore and traditions of countries around the world are showcased to students, creating an appearance of cultural equity which covers the reality of cultural

imperialism. "...in Canada, critical educators struggle against the prevalent fairy tale of the Canadian multicultural mosaic where all the pieces of our diversity come together to create the tapestry of an inclusive utopia" (Mackey, 1999, cited in Sensoy et al., 2010).

This showcasing approach is perhaps most appealing within Canadian schools in that it is so easily accommodated by the current structure of the system. It is an easy approach, creating no real need for structural or systemic changes, while at the same time appeasing consciences and covering claims of cultural dominance in the classroom:

Whatever its name, it refers to the same response to diversity: a superficial additive study of culture and culturally rooted differences and inequities...Because the mainstream curriculum is so efficiently structured to facilitate this approach, doing anything else is an ongoing challenge. (Sensoy et al., p .2)

The authors go on to argue that the inclusion of others in this celebratory approach is viewed through a "diversity without oppression lens" (p. 4).

Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that multiculturalism as a celebratory discourse actually works to perpetuate the ill-effects of racism by rendering their cause invisible. "An emphasis on multicultural display obscures the fact that differential access to power is produced through racial formations and not through the lack of familiarity with the cultural practices of other people" (p. 307). They argue that culturally inclusive education is trivialized as a matter of simplified cultural display in the form of a curricular add-on, and hold that this does nothing to challenge the systemic production and perpetuation of racial and cultural privilege, and therefore makes no strides towards the goal of educational equity. Through such superficial approaches,

everyday educational practices that contribute to unequal educational experiences along racial and cultural lines remain unexamined and unchallenged. And those students whose values, experiences, knowledges, and cultures (which arguably includes newcomer students) are not reflected in and validated within classrooms may experience feelings of difference, alienation, and otherness.

The limited body of research on newcomer student experiences in Canada suggests that newcomers are experiencing feelings of isolation, exclusion, and marginality within Canadian schools. However, most research that is conducted on issues surrounding newcomer education and experience remains concentrated within highly diverse urban areas (Lai & Huffey, 2010). Although some of the findings of such research may be considered transferable, there is a sharp contrast in comparing the New Brunswick context with other provincial contexts or with the Canadian landscape as a whole.

One of the more obvious reasons for such contextual difference is that education is a provincial jurisdiction, and each province has individual educational models, which may be similar in some ways, but divergent in others. And not only do educational programs (along with resources and funding priorities) vary within each province, but so do immigrant settlement programs and services, thus creating different circumstances for newcomer students from province to province. This in turn suggests a need for localized research on the issue of newcomer education.

Further, although there exists some qualitative inquiry into newcomer student experiences, this research project is unique in that it is grounded in the perspectives of those who work with newcomer students, rather than the newcomer students themselves.

This allows for a more systemic analysis of newcomer student education and support, and sheds some light into the less explored perspective of newcomer student educational support workers. The following chapter will discuss how I approached my work in this area within the New Brunswick context, outlining my primary research questions, my theoretical positioning, and my methodological choices.

Chapter 3

Pushing Methodological Boundaries

In exploring newcomer education within the province, I wanted to find a research method that allowed for the recognition of the political nature of schooling; one that could align itself with the basic tenets of social justice and equity upon which critical theory is built. Both as an ontological positioning and a guide to social inquiry, institutional ethnography's grounding in everyday experience coupled with its ability to extend analysis beyond local settings, its exploratory nature, and its alignment with critical inquiry made it a good approach for this particular project. But in choosing a methodological guide, I couldn't help but feel that while I was narrowing my analytical focus, I was at the same time closing doors to potentially valuable ways of seeing the information I was to encounter. This led me to consider more imaginative ways of approaching the research process in an open and exploratory way.

In her argument for reflexive, innovative, and multi-modal research approaches, Taber (2010) notes: "...Research methodologies are constantly evolving. Researchers must continually push methodological boundaries in order to address research questions that cannot be explored with traditional methods" (p. 6). Throughout the research process, the predetermined relevancies outlined in my proposal seemed to continuously shift and at times change altogether. Therefore I decided that the most responsive way to deal with the work was to, as Taber puts it, push methodological boundaries by incorporating multiple modes of analysis. I found that the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) fit well with those of institutional ethnography, and made clearer some of the less theoreticized notions embedded within it. Each method seemed

to compliment the other in shedding new light into the complex ideological practices of power that are pervasive within contemporary society. I decided to integrate some of the basic tenets and core principles of CDA to my original institutional ethnographic outline. This served to both open up inquiry and to clarify the concept and role of discourse in the realm of newcomer education. Although IE is critical in nature, I drew some concepts from critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism to further explore elements and practices of power. The following is a brief outline of institutional ethnography as a mode of inquiry, followed by a discussion of how I applied its methodological direction with infusions of basic principles of critical theory and methods of critical discourse analysis to guide my inquiry into newcomer education in New Brunswick.

Institutional Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry

In its broadest sense, institutional ethnography (IE) focuses on the complex interactions between organizational practices, policies, and everyday experiences (Taber, 2010). Its fundamental ontological basis is that the social is concerted of people's everyday practices, thus making sense of abstractions such as power and ideology, tracing how they are produced, reproduced, and stitched together through people's actual activities (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Because the main concern of this research project was to consider the experiences of newcomer students in New Brunswick (as well as the experiences of those working with newcomer students in their educational transition) and how they are being shaped or influenced by institutional practices and policies within the province, institutional ethnography guided my analysis to focus on how the everyday practices and experiences of the participants were

connected to larger institutional processes. It also provided a guide to a kind of social cartography that seeks to uncover how power is being operationalized within this particular research context.

Dorothy E. Smith, a Canadian feminist and sociological scholar, first began to conceptualize IE in her struggles with the inherent limitations and ethical problems posed by traditional sociological inquiry. Her academic training in sociological inquiry had taught her a form of conceptual transportation; her “embodied consciousness” seemed disconnected from her “academic consciousness” (Smith, 2005, p. 12). In order to engage in the work of the academy, she was expected to remove herself from her own embodied experiences and from the embodied experiences of others into a world of conceptualizations and generalizations; a world of abstraction and categorization.

For Smith (2005), it seemed there were two modes of consciousness could not co-exist. She could not find their connection. For her, the work of traditional sociological practice was to transform and objectify subject positions, therefore subordinating the experiential to the final configurations and interpretations of academia. Thus institutional ethnography arose largely from Smith’s critique of traditional sociological practice, and therefore seeks to shift such unequal power distribution within social research, reauthorizing the experiential as valid and important knowledge, and limiting the power of the researcher as the final authority on ‘truth’ or ‘fact’ (Smith, 2005). Through its recognition of how power operates within the research focus, its rejection of the notion of objectivity, and its demand for reflexivity throughout the research process, IE becomes a strong tool for a critically grounded research project. Taking the *Everyday World as Problematic* (Smith, 1987), in other words, as something

to be explored, IE works to connect abstract conceptions such as power and oppression to everyday practices so that people can better understand how their own experiences are actually being organized, managed, or otherwise influenced through powerful outside forces, known within IE as relations of ruling (Smith, 2005). The purpose of an institutional ethnographic investigation is not to develop an understanding of personal experience and to draw from that experience what is generalizable; rather, its purpose is to use these experiences as a starting point, or problematic, to investigate institutional, social, and ideological practices that have generalizing effects (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Smith (2005) argues that institutional, social, and ideological practices that have such influence on the everyday lives of people and their work are referred to within the context of IE as “ruling relations”:

The concept of ruling relations...doesn't refer to modes of domination but to a new and distinctive mode of organizing society that comes into prominence during the latter part of the nineteenth century in Europe and North America. The ruling relations are forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places. (Smith, 2005, p. 13)

Smith (1987) traces the concept of ruling relations back to the invention of the moveable type, which allowed for a text to be replicated and viewed by multiple people in multiple places at the same time. This, she holds, transformed the way society was organized, and made it possible for multiple localized settings to be organized by central, outside bodies. Subject positions became universalized. In the context of education, an example of such universalized subject positions can be seen in the

disconnections between our conceptions of ‘students’ and ‘teachers’ and the individuals that fill them. This has, in turn, allowed for the work and experiences of teachers and students, and various other positions within the institution of education, to be defined and organized externally through a variety of connected work processes. It also made pervasive the creation, sustenance, and transformation of particular discourses and ideologies across time and space (Smith, 1987, 2005).

Thus IE asserts that within today’s climate of interconnectedness, seeking an explanation for a local problem or experience within the confines of that setting leads to a narrow and inevitably incomplete understanding, as explanations for local occurrences are never wholly local. In looking only within the setting of the experience, there is an inherent assumption of dysfunction within a particular setting, or about the people within it (Smith, 2005). In an increasingly bureaucratic and interrelated society, power is often exerted extra-locally in various forms, and IE argues that this external power on the everyday lives of people has changed considerably in contemporary society and has been largely under-theorized in the social sciences (Smith, 2005).

This exertion of power from extra-local settings and organization is evident in current educational structure and organization (Smith, 2005), where decisions and practices which directly affect local experiences often take place elsewhere. Thus in order to fully understand an experience which is in this way tied to an institution, IE asserts that one must look beyond the local to examine connected relations that serve to influence and organize that experience, but are not directly visible or obvious from within it. These connections are often accomplished through the medium of texts,

making the study of how texts are used within an institution a central component in understanding how a particular experience is institutionally influenced (Smith, 2005).

In the context of an institutional ethnographic inquiry, texts are not defined by their form (although it is recognized that their form is not insignificant), but rather are defined by their function: that is, their replicability. It is this capacity of texts to be reproduced and distributed that is the basis of extra-local governance, management, and control; it is necessary to the existence of ruling relations (Smith, 2005). Replicability “allows for the same text to be read, heard, and watched by more than one individual, at different places, and at different times” (Smith, 2005, p. 165). In the context of the institution of education, one clear example of such texts are provincial policy documents, which can be read by administrators, schools, and teachers across the province, therefore organizing/managing and connecting the work of multiple people across multiple settings. It is because they can be reproduced, distributed, and read by multiple workers in multiple places that they hold the power to shape and regulate educational work experiences across the province. Thus texts are the central vehicle for institutional social organization, and are the means by which local experiences can be coordinated extra-locally (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Yet because texts are often seen as passive, their ability to coordinate action is often overlooked or ignored (Smith, 2005). But the power of texts, once considered, cannot be understated. Texts are inextricably tied to human action, often serving to represent people in various capacities, to create ideological frameworks, to activate or block institutional action, and to coordinate, manage, and connect the work of multiple people in multiple settings (DeVault & McCoy, 2002).

The recognition of texts as active and as coordinating people's work is a central component of IE research. Recognizing an active text can range from examining physical texts being used within the setting to listening for the use of particular institutional discourses (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). In my undergraduate work, I used IE to investigate Special Education Plans (SEPs) for students deemed exceptional in New Brunswick. It was the use of the institutional language of an 'SEP' to define a student I worked with that shifted my gaze from the local setting into the institutional processes and discourses which had functioned to organize that setting and the experiences of the student. This kind of textual activation is so commonplace within the public school system that it can be difficult to recognize.

In an IE inquiry, textual activation becomes a central focus of the research, and is the means by which the researcher can move beyond the local and create a kind of map of how institutional control is accomplished across multiple sites, actions, and time. DeVault and McCoy (2002) provide the following analogy of the circulatory system to demonstrate this kind of cartography:

To use an organic metaphor, textual processes in institutional relations are like a central nervous system running through and coordinating different sites. To find out how things work and why they happen the way they do, a researcher needs to find the texts and text-based knowledge forms in operation. (p. 765)

The application of this kind of inquiry in the realm of education requires a critical exploration of everyday schooling practices, school structures, and normative, naturalized constructions. For it is within these seemingly neutral ideas and practices that power, privilege, and oppression are played out, and, as institutional ethnographers

would say, accomplished. One way to draw our inquiry from local experiences and practices into the institutional is to explore the disjuncture between everyday lived experiences and their institutional representation. In an article discussing the conceptual practices surrounding mental illness as a social category, Smith (1993) explores the anatomy of a factual account, making explicit the processes involved in the creation of “fact” or “data”:

The various agencies of social control have institutionalized procedures for assembling, processing, and testing information about the behaviour of individuals so that it can be matched against the paradigms which provide the working criteria of class-membership...A full description of the organizational practice of such agencies in these respects would be a description of one type of procedure by which a set of original and actual events is transformed into the currency of fact. (p. 12)

In discussing the use of interviews as a means of producing “facts” (i.e., as evidence of the respondent’s mental illness), Smith (1993) goes on to argue that lived experiences act as a set of resources from which the respondent draws in creating an account of what happened. Thus a major selection process is occurring, both on the part of the respondent, and subsequently, on the part of the interviewer:

Of course, the actual events were much richer, much less orderly, simply much more, than those arranged into an interview of an hour or so; and indeed, might have lent themselves to being worked up in different ways from that selected by the respondent. So radical processes of selection have gone on; a lot is left out

and what is left in is ordered to provide a coherence for the reader which was not present in the events. (p. 17)

I should at this point note that I am not unaware of the irony of this argument given my own methodological choices. However I do not construct my arguments as “fact”, but rather view them as partial and situated truths coming from particular perspectives and being reworked under my own processes of selection. I fully acknowledge the situated nature of the information and my significant influence on its final representation, and wish to make this influence explicit. That being said, Smith’s example of the production of “fact” wherein she explores the various work processes and conceptual practices that transform lived experiences into “facts”, Smith provides an interesting means of deconstructing the representation of newcomer students within the institution of education.

Exploring the Notion of Discourse: Infusing Critical Discourse Analysis into Institutional Ethnography

For Smith (2005), language is an important aspect of an IE investigation, as it is socially constitutive. She holds that language does not simply describe, but rather actively organizes people's perceptions and actions. Drawing from a number of linguistic theorists, she states:

Mead, on the other hand, focuses on how the significant symbol organizes the what-comes-next of the social act. To repeat and reemphasize a quotation from Mead (1962) that I cited early in this chapter, language does "not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance" but makes

"possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object" (78) for those active in a given social act. (p. 86)

In using her experiences as a woman and as a part of the women's movement, Smith (2005) came to understand the sometimes limiting and oppressive power of discourse, as well as the transformative power embedded in language:

There was no developed discourse in which the experiences that were spoken originally as everyday experience could be translated into a public language and become political in the ways distinctive to the women's movement. We learned in talking with other women about experiences that we had and others that we had not had. We began to name "oppression," "rape," "harassment," "sexism," "violence," and others. These were terms that did more than name. They gave shared experiences a political presence. (p. 7)

Thus not only does language operationalize power by creating boundaries of what can and cannot be spoken and conceptualized, but it is also the basis of transformation and political action. In naming the various forms of oppression, activists in the women's movement were able to construct counter-hegemonic discourses to challenge the masculinist regime that transformed their political positioning and their social worlds. Language, then, is important not only in understanding how power is accomplished, but is also important in considering how it can be challenged.

It is at this point perhaps useful to consider how critical discourse analysis might come into play in an institutional ethnographic inquiry. While institutional ethnography alerts us to the various forms of textual activation in everyday work, critical discourse

analysis can help to decode and dissect the discourses, ideologies, and power relations that are embedded within the texts.

Although discourse is considered within the institutional ethnographic paradigm, critical discourse analysis (CDA) brings this consideration and exploration of language and discourse to a deeper level. Rather than simply examining discursive practice and structures in abstract theoretical conception, CDA invokes a critical dimension to explore how discourse has real effects in people's lives. Therefore much like IE, CDA rejects abstraction and demands a grounding in the actual practices of actual people within a particular social context. In describing the theoretical position of discourse analysts, Mills (2004) describes some of the work of CDA:

These linguists have therefore been concerned with inflecting Foucault's analysis of discourse with a political concern with the effects of discourse; for example the way that people are positioned into roles through discursive structures, the way that certain people's knowledge is disqualified or is not taken seriously in contrast to authorized knowledge. (p. 133)

Although critical discourse analysis has been utilized in a variety of ways, there are several key features which tie these approaches together beneath one theoretical umbrella. First and foremost, what unites all linguistic theories is the fundamental recognition of the power of language. As previously discussed, language cannot be taken merely as a neutral means of expression, but must be understood as a powerful social system that informs the way in which people see the world around them. As an extension of this recognition, critical discourse analysts will agree to the constitutive nature of discourse (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2006). Put simply, this refers to

the notion that discourse both affects and is affected by the social context within which it occurs. Implicit in this ontology is an assumption that discourse holds a tremendous amount of power within contemporary society. While the social context contributes to the formation, maintenance, transformation, and interpretation of discourse, they are dialectically related; thus, the discursive practices found within a social context will at the same time contribute to the social realities within it:

We can only make sense of the salience of discourse in contemporary social processes by recognizing that discourse and society/culture are mutually constitutive. This entails that every instance of language use makes its own small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations. That is the power of discourse; that is why it is worth struggling over. (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2006, p.370)

This refutes the notion of language as objectively descriptive of its social world. We do not simply name things, but this naming involves a process of conceptualization and interpretation which affects the social world, and the way we see and understand that world as well as our position and role within it. Because discourse can in this way be seen as socially influential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Power relations will inevitably be embedded within discursive practices and will be reproduced, challenged, or transformed by them.

Critical discourse theorists note that in contemporary society, there is increasing recognition of the social impacts of discourse, which has led to increased focus on how to use language in order to achieve a specific social consequence:

...the increased importance of language in social life has led to a greater level of conscious intervention to control and shape language practices in accordance with economic, political, and institutional objectives. This systematic integration of “communication design” into institutional settings has been referred to as the “technologization of discourse” (Fairclough, 1992), and is a distinctive characteristic of the contemporary linguistic and discursive order. (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2006, p. 360)

Thus language and discourse are not neutral, but have real social consequences, and are politically motivated. In contemporary society, language is used in specific ways to ‘sell’ ideas and, given new information technologies, this is happening on a rapidly growing scale. Much like in marketing, specific language techniques are used to form particular conceptualizations that support/advance particular social, political, or economic interests (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2006). Thus it is of utmost importance to carefully examine discursive/linguistic practices when looking at issues of power, difference, and oppression. Critical discourse analysis can therefore offer additional insights into examining how culture is represented in everyday linguistic practices, helping to uncover how cultural imperialism is embedded within language. This in turn allows us to explore how language may contribute to unequal power relations between cultures and experiences of marginalization and otherness along cultural lines.

In deploying some relatively basic tenets of CDA into my work by posing the questions it evokes within the realm of newcomer education, I was able to not only consider how institutional influence entered into the everyday experiences of newcomer

students and those working with them in subtle yet powerful ways, but I was also able to consider the underlying messages and discourses embedded within these institutional impingements. CDA holds that there are implicit value judgments, ideological frameworks, and inequitable relations found within statements and texts that have an effect on the social world within which they occur (Mills, 2004). By exploring the discursive and ideological frameworks I gleaned from the interviews, I was able to consider how newcomer students were being discursively positioned in some instances.

I should also note that although there is a particular focus on social organization as it is accomplished through texts, institutional ethnographic research is open to various forms of analysis (Cambell & Gregor, 2002). When engaging in such exploration, many lines of inquiry will be drawn. Some IE investigations focus on explicating complex webs of social relations through the creation of a detailed organizational map, while others may focus on oppressive ideological practices that were uncovered (Cambell & Gregor, 2002). Others may trace their way through textual processes to demonstrate how a disjuncture between experiences and their representation, or a particular policy, is accomplished. Still others may choose to analyze a particularly problematic point within the institutional process (Cambell & Gregor, 2002). Although it may seem as though IE's focus is in some ways narrow, the ways in which various IE projects have unfolded and the findings they have yielded have varied significantly, and new ways of using the method are continually being constructed and negotiated (Cambell & Gregor, 2002). This speaks to IE's ability to facilitate dialectical research, wherein the relevancies of the inquiry and analysis are not predetermined, but are highlighted by the experiences and stories of the research participants.

Exploring Newcomer Education in New Brunswick: An Application

As discussed by Cambell and Gregor (2002), the researcher may collect information in two phases: an explication of the local setting, followed by an exploration of the relations of ruling occurring extra-locally but that are implicated in the local. I began my inquiry from the standpoint of those working with newcomer students during their educational transition, which included teachers, tutors, and community organization workers in the fall of 2011 through to the summer of 2012. To establish the standpoint, I spoke with two classroom teachers, one English tutor (employed by a district and working in public schools), and one settlement worker. I selected interviewees via personal connections and the snowballing technique. Each participant engaged in a semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interview. The interviews took place in a comfortable setting outside of the workplace of participants and outside of school hours, and lasted from one to three hours. I had a sense that participants were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss their work with newcomer students and felt that they enjoyed our conversations. All participants were from one New Brunswick school district. I fully acknowledge the limitations of this, as newcomer education varies significantly from district to district. In referencing the interviews and quotations of interviewees, I do not always make clear their position, as I wanted to focus on the emergent themes rather than individual narratives, although at times I do make note of their titles where I felt it was relevant. Given the potential risks associated with their participation in the project, this choice was also made to further protect their anonymity. Names and at times sexes were changed to protect participant identities as well.

Within the institution of education, given its highly structured and centrally managed nature, I presumed that institutional influence on everyday experiences would be fairly straightforward and easily traced. However, in exploring newcomer education, it was less obvious than I had initially anticipated, and vastly different from my first experience of using IE in my undergraduate work. Again, I began my work with a general sense that there were some serious concerns regarding the education of newcomer students within the province. I assumed that there would be central texts governing the process of educational integration that would draw me into a more traditional institutional ethnographic cartographic-type of analysis. But because there was very little in the way of policy concerning newcomer education directly, tracing local experiences to overarching policy proved difficult. At the time of my study, there were no direct references to newcomer education within policy at the provincial level. Although policy existed on the creation of inclusive, positive, and welcoming learning environments, again there are no direct references to students with cultural and linguistic differences. When searching through resource guides for New Brunswick educators, there was one resource document for teaching English as a “Second” Language, which was published in June of 1996. I should note that when I mentioned this document to my interviewees, none of them had heard of it. Thus the involvement of the provincial Department of Education in the education of newcomer students seemed to me to be limited. Local experiences seemed to vary immensely from school to school, and participants seemed to know very little about what was going on outside of their own settings. The plethora of information that was uncovered, and the wide-ranging practices that surrounded newcomer education with seemingly nothing tying them

together left me feeling overwhelmed and confused, at least initially. How was I to trace practices and policies throughout the institution to find some connecting strand when the variety of approaches and experiences seemed almost impossible to connect?

In reviewing the interviews, it took me some time to extend my initially narrow conception of textual activation to recognize the importance of discursive and ideological frameworks surrounding English language learners and culturally different students in their educational experiences. Although there were some physical documents relating to language instruction and acquisition that could have been seen as tying local experiences to institutional organization and control, the lack of coherent policy seemed to have a more powerful influence. And although language limitations were undoubtedly important and present within the discussions, as the research process went on, those working with newcomer students felt that they were experiencing both academic and social marginalization within the institution of education. Much of the work of those participants who were in the field of educational service delivery was oriented around minimizing this marginalization, and was characterized by a struggle towards more equitable educational experiences. Once I had a sense of the workers' perceptions of newcomer student experiences of marginalization and otherness from our conversations, I was able to narrow my research focus and, in my analysis, pose the question of how newcomer students were being discursively, socially, and institutionally positioned within the institution of education in New Brunswick. This became the analytical core and key focus of my work.

Chapter 4

Newcomer Educators and Support Workers Speak Out

Throughout the interview process, the multitude of issues discussed pointed to several complex, multifaceted, intersecting instances of marginal positioning of newcomer students. The following will outline some key stories and themes from four qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth, open-ended interviews with two classroom teachers, one English tutor, and one settlement worker, all of whom were working directly with newcomer students within one New Brunswick school district. The themes include: the power of everyday language; the navigation of structure, programming and priorities; the positioning of newcomer support workers; the trouble with grading; and the social and emotional contexts of newcomer students' lives. Again, I recognize the interconnections between these thematic divisions, but separate them solely for the purpose of clarity.

The Power of Everyday Language

The ontological basis of critical discourse analysis is that our social world and the language of our social world are dialectically related; that is, discourse both affects and is affected by its social world (Mills, 2004). If we accept this notion, then language must be seen as holding a tremendous amount of power to shape social realities. Thus language and discourse are not neutral means of description or expression, but have real social consequences.

Throughout the process of speaking with teachers and newcomer support workers within one New Brunswick school district, I came to notice a key discursive pattern in the way that newcomer students were described. When trying to distinguish between

Canadian-born students who had grown up within the Canadian educational system from newcomer students who were in the process of learning English, Canadian-born students were continuously referred to with words commutating normalcy or naturalness, which inevitably placed newcomer students as 'Other'. Canadian-born students were referred to as "regular", "mainstream", or "Canadian", constructing a discourse of membership/non-membership. When speaking of classrooms with predominantly native English speaking students, such classes were also described as "regular" or "normal" classrooms. Implied in such referencing is the conception of newcomer students as "not regular", "not normal", or "not Canadian". It seemed as though a regular/irregular binary was continuously being drawn upon. This discursive positioning of newcomer students is arguably an example of how the dominant culture becomes the natural or normative culture against which all other cultures are measured. It is so embedded in the way culture is viewed and spoken about that even those who are in principle committed to equity and social justice (including myself) engage in this discursive process of cultural naturalization pointed to by critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010). The continuous repetition of such linguistic positioning inevitably leads to a "we" and "they" dichotomy, and conceptions of membership and non-membership.

It was notable that despite their use of this language, interviewees, in several instances, seemed to recognize it and exhibited a clear discomfort with it. In one example of this, one interviewee was explaining the process of how newcomers are at first placed into more intensive English learning environments before being integrated with native English speakers for their English instruction. He referred to the native

English students as "regular", then stops himself, stating, "...that's not the right word...mainstream students". It was striking that he really struggled to find a less politically loaded term, but again had to return to a word which still asserted native English students as the naturalized norm against which all other students were measured. In saying the word "mainstream", he used air quotations with his fingers in order to signify his problematization of the term. This problematization of such terms, signified by the use of the gesture of air quotations, was engaged in several times by more than one interviewee. Thus despite an awareness of the use of such language as inherently problematic, participants struggled within the confines of their own language to find a new way of talking about newcomer students. Using air quotations to signify their discomfort and critique, as well as their inability to find a more suitable descriptor, exemplified how language can limit the way in which we speak of and relate to one another. In speaking of critical discourse analysts, Mills (2004) notes, "...they consider discourses to be principally organized around practices of exclusion. Whilst what is possible to say seems self-evident and natural, the naturalness is a result of what has been excluded, that which is almost unsayable" (p. 11). Thus critical discourse analysis recognizes how language can naturalize the power of one social group over another. By normalizing the dominant cultural group, there is a clear discourse of membership which works to exclude all cultural 'others'. And the limitations implicit within the language make it difficult to speak of those who have been excluded in ways that challenge this subordination. This difficulty is clearly reflected in participants' struggles to find a new way to speak about newcomer students.

The Navigation of Structure, Programming and Priorities

During the initial phase of the research, prior to interviewing, my immediate reaction was one of confusion. While perusing through websites and speaking informally with teachers, it seemed apparent that the lack of coherent programming and structure in the area of newcomer education was to me perhaps the most difficult aspect of the project. The interviewees seemed to relate to this confusion, and expressed a pressing need to address this perceived lack of coherence and prioritization in the realm of newcomer educational support.

As previously noted, newcomer support can vary immensely from district to district and even school to school. The lack of coherence surrounding newcomer education in the province was a theme that was reiterated continuously throughout the research. Interviewees seemed to have relatively fragmented and partial knowledge of the process as a whole, continually emphasizing how different it can be in different locales. The interviewees alluded to feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed as a result of a lack of guidance, lack of dialogue, and lack of prioritization on behalf of the province and district. In a discussion of the deficiencies of Canadian schools in providing educational support for newcomer students, Ashworth (1992) notes that there is often a lack of leadership at the department level regarding English as second language programming for newcomer students. This, she argues, is at the heart of many of the struggles expressed by students, teachers, and administrators working with Canada's newcomer students:

Too often there is no one in the district central office or in the ministry or department of education with a thorough understanding of and interest in ESL,

resulting in a lack of leadership. This failure to employ a qualified ESL specialist in the upper administration often lies at the root of complaints about organization of ESL programs. (p. 38)

These sentiments reverberated throughout my conversations with participants. One interviewee addressed this issue directly, expressing strong frustration regarding the lack of leadership at the provincial level in creating sound support programming for newcomer students. She noted that there is only one person at the provincial level who is responsible for EAL (English as additional language) programming for newcomer students, and that same person is also responsible for French immersion programming. It is perhaps necessary to point out that currently, within the province of New Brunswick, there has been a restructuring of the immersion program which has created a great deal of controversy, thus immersion is currently a highly politicized and therefore highly prioritized aspect of New Brunswick education. Exhibiting a clear perception of the secondary positioning of EAL programming in relation to French immersion programming, the interviewee stated:

All of the reforms that are happening right now in immersion....they don't even have things figured out for immersion, forget EAL....and they are responsible for all other languages...It is impossible to expect that of one individual.

Thus she felt that the demands of handling immersion programming in the province will likely overshadow the often silenced needs of newcomer students. Despite all efforts and intentions, there is only so much one person can do. In discussing the impossibility of this position, she noted that there is an extremely high turnover rate of learning specialists:

Nobody has actually held on...because it's been an 'and EAL' and everything else job, with all of the tensions and pressures of being the immersion person doing it too...there's been such a high turnover rate for...learning specialists for the Department of Education, that every so many years, it's somebody new.

The interviewee continued to discuss the lack of provincial leadership as a failure of the provincial Department of Education. Making clear her feeling of the impact that such leadership might have on newcomer support programming in schools, she stated:

...It's really disorganized....and I don't understand why, why isn't there somebody...to be in charge of that, and to have a budget, and things will start happening, and it won't all be organized and it won't be all great but I mean they can start with that one thing...and stop [treating] it as an add-on or an afterthought.

The excerpt reveals the interviewee's perception of the government's failure to recognize the importance of newcomer student support. She discusses how this marginal positioning is also present at the district level: "There [are] people at district level who are also, you know, French and EAL, or Language Arts and EAL...it's always *and* EAL". She speaks directly about how her own work as a teacher is affected by the lack of provincial and district guidance for newcomer services:

It almost feels like it's incumbent on teachers...to take this on, but the more you take on, the more you take on...the more you feel responsible, and then the more you do...it snowballs... tremendously.

Throughout the interview, the participant continually alluded to the conditions of teachers' work, i.e., how they are extremely busy and at times overwhelmed simply from

their daily responsibilities in the classroom. This statement suggests that although teachers are often overwhelmed by the enormity of their daily tasks, because they care about their students and feel responsible for them, they continue to take on the extra work. This work (i.e., advocating for newcomer students, adapting and, at times, developing curriculum, one-on-one help, etc.), is not necessarily mandated by the district or school. Rather, some teachers seem to recognize its importance in the educational experiences of newcomer students and they make the conscious choice to add it to their existing workloads.

Another interviewee who worked exclusively with newcomer students also noted the lack of provincial and district involvement in the educational support of newcomer students. When asked directly if she thought that the province had devoted a fair amount of time, research, and resources into newcomer education in the province, her response was: “Definitely not”. She continued:

The District itself never offers us any of their own resources...and if they do exist, we are definitely not told about them...There’s a lot of district and provincially...generated stuff for other teachers, but not for us...if there is, none of us know about it.

This lack of interaction and guidance from the Department and the district seemed to directly affect one interviewee’s daily work. Although it is the responsibility of teachers to address the needs of all of their students, teaching students with limited language skills can present unique challenges that they may not be equipped for, both in terms of time constraints as well as in terms of familiarity, guidance and resources. When asked directly about provincial guidance in her work with newcomer students, one teacher

recalled when she had been shown a particular English language acquisition model meant to serve as a resource guide to newcomer education, and commented:

I was critical because they were saying, this is the way to go, now do it, you teachers are now responsible for that, and everyone will follow suit...and everybody's on board, and in the meantime, um, we don't even have relief time as teachers to just dialogue about regular stuff or to make a phone call to talk to parents, or email, or catch up on... anything we have to be doing...so if you're telling me I'm going to do this model, which involves mentoring and observation of teachers and other contacts doing it, and a discussion and feedback sessions and rehashing....well, where is my point seven five that you're going to give me on my job allocation or my teaching time, like how is this going to get done? It's not, you know, it's just not feasible. You're bringing in this person who is selling us a horse and pony show to get us to teach a certain way ...[but] with what time?

While such programming may suggest a recognition of the need for increased educational resources and support for EAL (English as additional language) students and teachers on behalf of the district, the interviewee criticizes this particular effort. Any programming that is not accompanied with an acknowledgement of the need for additional time, staff, and resources for its implementation is at serious risk of inefficacy given the current workload of classroom teachers and the limited EAL structure and staff.

Interviewees went beyond criticism of the current structure of EAL programming and newcomer student support to discuss issues of curriculum more generally. One

interviewee pointed to the inadequacy of the current curriculum in reflecting the cultural difference that is a part of the New Brunswick classroom. He talked about how we need to address issues in the curriculum if we are to provide newcomer students with equitable learning conditions: “I guess what we need to do here is more work in terms of cultural awareness on behalf of the mainstream community because I truly believe that our...vision has to be with the curriculum also”. Noting cultural inclusion as key in creating more equitable schools and communities, the interviewee argued that efforts need to go deeper than they have, reaching curricular materials and teaching practices. He argued that the current curriculum is not promoting true cultural inclusion, and he critiqued the superficial nature of some of the so-called culturally inclusive activities:

Oh, we [are] celebrating culture because we are eating Chinese food. We are not a picture that you can hang in the corner and [say] we are celebrating culture.

We are not a picture...we are human beings.

From this the interviewee continued his critique by questioning the way in which the issue of racism is approached within the school system. He noted how the focus of anti-discrimination efforts are almost always on remembering specific racial incidents, and asked the question how schools are going to address these issues in their everyday activities. For him, anti-racist efforts (which are arguably tied to newcomer student experiences, as newcomer students are often racialized) need to include important moments in history such as these, but, he argued, they also need to stretch beyond discussions of tragic moments in history:

Why do we have to talk about March twenty-first, for example...it was a massacre...and the United Nations gave us a day to celebrate, to [fight]

discrimination and racism around the world...Alright, yes, but how are we going to address these issues in schools? How are we going to address that with the kindergarten students through to high school...everyday?

Another interviewee, who had gone through the New Brunswick public school system, concurred with this position. When discussing the issue of anti-racist efforts within New Brunswick schools, she stated: “I have seen anti-racism in New Brunswick schools, and it is all about what you can’t do and what you can’t say”. Another interviewee argued the importance of beginning an inclusive and respectful way of teaching from the onset of a child’s education, as they are the future, and if we start to teach respect at an early age, we will foster a more accepting and respectful community. Schools, he argued, are a powerful tool in working towards this: “[They] are going to be the Prime Minister, [they] are going to be the teachers of tomorrow...what impact will this have? Schools...are very important for this”. These conversations suggest that if we are to truly become an inclusive and equitable educational system, we must not only look at EAL programming, but also consider how current curriculum and teaching practices influence all students’ perceptions of cultural difference.

Given the seeming lack of prioritization of newcomer student support on behalf of the province, one interviewee questioned the ethics of the situation. Alluding to feelings of injustice on behalf of newcomer students and those struggling against systemic constraints to provide them with equitable educational experiences, she stated:

It shouldn’t be left to individuals...it makes me so mad, really, because we’ve short-changed the kids, because we don’t have...I mean, it’s not just the language...but we’ve been left on our own as schools to figure all of it

out....So, then it's grass roots, you know, everyone is....struggling, and trying to do what they can to help people.

The interviewee felt that the lack of prioritization and coherent structure for newcomer education evokes questions of ethics on behalf of the government for recruiting newcomer students with seemingly little consideration of the support they will receive upon entering the provincial school system:

Some students were here because....it was like the second stop, meaning in Canada even, you know, mom and dad came here...and, you know, they had already been to another part of Canada, they had been through another EAL model, or system, and then they had gotten here, with us, and I always felt like, oh pity them, they've come from Manitoba....or Toronto, where maybe their needs were met, potentially, or not, but I always had that thought, they're probably going to have more...you know...like why did you come here? You should have stayed, there were probably more supports in place out there.

The excerpt poignantly reveals the interviewee's perceptions about the inadequacy of the current structure of newcomer education. From her perspective, this lack of prioritization and adequate investment in newcomer education poses an ethical dilemma in that it directly affects the well-being of newcomer students, placing them in an inequitable educational position. This marginal educational positioning was not only reflected in the district and Department's lack of leadership and prioritization in the realm of newcomer student support, but was also reflected in how newcomer educational support workers are currently positioned within the institution.

The Positioning of Newcomer Support Workers

Although not all New Brunswick schools function in the same way, the basic idea of the English language acquisition program for newcomer students is for them to work with an English tutor employed by the district, usually in small group settings, for a small portion of the school day. I had the opportunity to speak directly with one of these EAL tutors within the district where my research took place. I learned how this particular educational position is perceived as less significant compared to its “regular” classroom teacher counterpart. According to this interviewee, the marginalization of EAL tutors occurs at both the systemic/policy level and is reinforced socially.

Perhaps the most obvious evidence of this is that EAL tutors are paid significantly less than other teachers. EAL tutors in the particular New Brunswick district wherein my research occurred, work on a contract basis, often part-time, without benefits or any promise of job security. In a discussion of the social aspects of the position, the interviewee noted feeling an overt sense of exclusion among her colleagues. She recalled one particular moment during her interview for the tutor position wherein she was asked, “Why don’t you try for a real teaching position?” She noted that at the time she thought it was strange that he would ask this question, but soon found that it would be a recurring theme. The same question was posed by several other classroom teachers throughout the course of her work:

The more and more time that went on, from people within the district and within schools, I was constantly asked, “Why don’t you want a real teaching job?” That says something, you know? Like why isn’t this position valued? ...It’s obviously not valued from an institutional standpoint.

She felt that the inherent assumption within this question is that this particular position was less significant than that of a classroom teacher. Giving an example of this institutional devalorization of the position that she mentioned, the interviewee noted that EAL tutors, at least in this particular district, were not officially informed of, or included in, professional development sessions, and rarely received regular information letters. Some tutors were not given adequate space within schools to do their work, and struggled to find free rooms to teach their students. In addition to feelings of institutional marginalization, the participant also expressed a clear sense of social marginalization associated with her position:

In the district I feel like the position is devalued, not just institutionally, like our pay and all that, but I feel like it's devalued on a more, like, um, peer-to-peer level, on a more social level. Which some I guess would argue is a reflection of maybe, the policies that surround it, or vice versa...there would have to be a relationship there.

The interviewee recalled one particular incident wherein she attended a professional development seminar, and how she and her colleague were made to feel excluded and irrelevant during the event. She talked about how she was not provided with the list of seminars, but had to actively seek it out, whereas other teachers were given a copy in their mailbox. At each professional development session, there are usually resource books given to all attendees to coincide with the presentations. She recounted that when she went to get one, she found that the tutors had been left out of the equation: "We weren't included in the numbers, and there wasn't one for us. They would say to us.... 'sorry, you can't take one of those, you can't keep one'". She noted that although she

had not been personally bothered by the incident, she was acutely aware of feeling like an outsider at these sessions. And although this had not been bothersome to her, another EAL tutor expressed to her that she had felt the experience to be quite humiliating and alienating.

Another interviewee who worked as a classroom teacher commented on the devalorization of EAL tutors within her district. She noted that the space wherein tutors are working with newcomer students reflects a position of marginalization. While some tutors are given a small room within the school, others are not given a designated space to work. Yet those working directly with newcomer students expressed a clear appreciation for and valorization of the work and role of EAL tutors in the education of newcomer students. One interviewee stated: “[EAL tutors] are the meat and potatoes of what’s getting these kids to read and write; they are the individual support that these kids need....and they are working under staircases, or in the lunchroom”. To her, this reflected a lack of appreciation for the work and value of EAL tutors in shaping the educational experiences of newcomer students.

Throughout the interview process it became apparent that much of the support for newcomer students that was occurring was not mandated or required by the province or in some cases even by the district. Rather, it was based in the empathy and convictions of individual teachers and tutors who were struggling along with the students in a system that made little to no room for such support. The system of support seems to be built upon their efforts and countless hours of unpaid and unrecognized work. One participant talked about how she was completely overworked and really didn’t have the time to address her newcomer student needs in the way that she would have liked to, but

talked about how she, along with some other teachers working with newcomer students, would push themselves to take on the extra work simply because they felt that the students were being left to “sink or swim”. She often appealed to her own personal ethical conviction and concern for the children as the basis upon which she made the daily decision to do more than what was being asked of her. In speaking of her students’ struggle, she said:

If you had a kid that was limping across your classroom, and didn’t have a crutch, like, what are you going to do? You know, you’re going to go to that child, and you’re going to help them.....it’s the same idea, some of us will just put that onto our plates, because....you have to.

The powerful imagery of the excerpt suggests strong feelings about how newcomer students are positioned within the school system. Being careful not to individualize the issue and imply that other teachers may not be as caring or compassionate, she noted that had she been in a different circumstance, her priorities could have easily been different, and she may not have been able to devote this time to her newcomer students. She seemed keenly aware that the issue was not about the personal ethics of a teacher, but was a systemic issue:

I don’t blame any one person that’s involved in [it], because it’s not, it’s not their fault, I’m not holding any one person accountable for anything at all, It’s...I think we have a collective responsibility.

Having said this, she continued to say that some teachers, despite good and genuine intentions, were really struggling to accommodate their newcomer students in “regular” classrooms. Noting that while some teachers with whom she worked had found ways to

adapt their teaching, others “just didn’t know how they were going to modify whatever they were doing”. In speaking about their daily work, several interviewees commented on the intersection of their work with the work of other teachers, and the issue of addressing newcomer student needs in all classroom settings came into view as a prominent theme.

While the convictions of individual teachers and settlement workers may be sustaining newcomer support to a certain extent, the interviews suggested that there still exists a lack of understanding and preparedness in the area of newcomer education that sometimes pervades the work of even the most well-intentioned and good hearted teachers. One interviewee discussed how although a newcomer student will often spend a great deal of time outside of the EAL classroom, taking courses alongside native English speakers, some classroom teachers had on several occasions expressed the feeling that children who do not speak English fluently do not belong: “Others would approach me and say things like, ‘Umm, I’ve got Jimmy in my class, and he can’t read, like...what’s he doing in my room?’” She went on to say that simply because she taught them English as an Additional Language, many teachers seemed to feel as though the responsibility of teaching children who were learning English fell entirely on her and not on “regular” classroom teachers, despite their presence within the classroom (many students who are still learning English spend the majority of the day in “mainstream” classrooms). She continued:

Some teachers ran up to me very frustrated and flustered, and others came to me simply for support...and I went to a lot of them, um, because, who is going to be the advocate for that child, right?

Thus again, although this responsibility of guiding other teachers was not, “officially”, her responsibility, she took it on regardless because she felt as though someone needed to advocate for the students.

Despite feelings of confusion and frustration with the limited leadership and prioritization of newcomer education, one interviewee discussed how this lack of guidance creates a tension within the realm of newcomer support. Although she noted several serious issues to be addressed, she discussed how there is a freedom that comes from this structural “looseness”. On the one hand, she noted, some teachers, tutors, and support workers are left feeling lost and overwhelmed. Yet at the same time, because they are not bogged down with constraining pedagogical surveillance and consuming reporting requirements, as in other areas of schooling, they are free to explore pedagogical practices and strategies with their students. In discussing this tension, she said:

Well, here’s the thing. I find it liberating a little bit, because, I get to do whatever I want with these kids really...every year I feel like I’ve transformed my approach to the way I teach these kids, because of this looseness....this year I really find that it’s so individualistic, what I’m doing. I feel like...I don’t do like crazy planning anymore, because when I used to do that it would kind of disintegrate...it just wouldn’t work. Because they all need such strangely different things.

She noted that because of her personality and background, this lack of structure worked well for her. But she cautions that while this was liberating for her, it may be frustrating for someone who had a more traditional education in and perspective on teaching:

But if I were just coming at this from a perspective of a new teacher, and tried to approach it in the same way that I would approach a regular classroom, it might be a real constant frustration...Other teachers, you know, they at least have a general...idea about outcomes to meet, and the resources that are good to use.

Another teacher commented on how the current structure, despite creating some frustration, at times empowered her as an educator:

Through our sort of disorganized mess of a system that we have, because our local decisions [are] right down to the teacher, I was empowered in certain circumstances, I guess....you could do good, you could render justice in some contexts.

Although this capability to make local decisions was at times empowering, she noted that within the current system, English as Additional Language teachers, as well as mainstream teachers who have newcomer students in their classroom, are left to find their own resources, and often struggle with the challenges posed by facilitating students from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It seemed to me that it was this very struggle, and these moments of empowerment that were found within the interviewees' daily work that characterized newcomer student support in this district. It was the unmandated efforts, the unpaid hours, and the seemingly relentless commitment to their students that to a large extent sustained newcomer education. But despite all of such efforts, newcomer student support workers faced systemic constraints that impeded their struggles towards equitable educational experiences for newcomer students. A prominent constraint discussed by interviewees was the issue of assessment. The very structure upon which the public schooling system is built is seemingly ill-equipped to

accommodate the unique educational needs of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and often seems to work against those who are trying to provide equitable learning conditions. This is reflected in the interviewees' discussions of their work in formally assessing newcomer students within the current institution.

The Trouble with Grading

Within the current educational structure in New Brunswick, the academic "success" of a student is measured by the issuing of grades. Whatever their form, be it letters or numbers or categorizations, it seems to me that it is generally assumed that these grades are a fair and objective measure of the student's academic capabilities and work ethic. This system relies on the assumption that schools are neutral, apolitical spaces that transcend their historical and cultural position and provide each student with equitable learning conditions despite their backgrounds. This feigned neutrality precludes the possibility of exploring the complex nature of interpretation or the political dimensions of knowledge production that are the basis of education (Kincheloe, 2008). It also reinforces the idea that children learn and develop in the same way and at the same pace in accordance with their age, a concept that has been strongly criticized (Egan, 2002). If they do not learn and develop according to this predetermined timeline, they are deemed deficient (Oaks, Stuart Wells, & Jones, 1997). The inefficacy of grading as a fair measure of academic capability and work ethic is highlighted by the situation of newcomer students and their teachers, as discussed by one interviewee.

In speaking of her work with newcomer students, a high school English teacher talked about how she often struggled with fitting her newcomer students into the existing school structure. She discussed how the application of a grading model really

complicated the education of her newcomer students. “It’s a struggle for everyone”, she said. “The hardest thing is to keep the EAL kids in the appropriate grade level for their age”. It seemed as though the emphasis on newcomer education was to catch newcomer students up to their “appropriate” grade levels, revealing a deep tension between the ideals of developmentalism and the educational needs of students who fall outside of the normative learning identity, which arguably includes students who do not speak the dominant language fluently. One interviewee discussed how he continuously had to negotiate the tensions evoked by the age of newcomer students and their “appropriate” grade level with the work that they were doing:

The big push at the school is to get the kids out of high school at the appropriate time for their age...like if they are 17 or 18 we want them to graduate. So they will do anything they can...to get them to graduate at the right age...but I don’t think that works.

Trying to impose the traditional system of grading on newcomer students proved an extremely complex and interpretive process, wherein this teacher clearly struggled with competing concepts of fairness:

Well it’s hard, I mean you want to mark them the way any grade eleven English teacher would mark any grade eleven English assignment, but, marking EAL assignments takes at least twice as long because the language is not there, and you can be critical and teach proper English but at the same time you don’t want to defeat the kid, you know what I mean? Like you don’t want to deflate them....it’s tough...to gage how much you should do and how much you shouldn’t do in terms of actually marking an assignment.

The excerpt makes clear the interpretive nature of the process of grading. There exists no one objective formula from which a teacher can derive a grade. The teacher's perception of her students' needs, her role as a teacher, and her conception of fairness all come into play in the creation of a grade. The interviewee experienced a clear conflict in grading her newcomer students. On the one hand, she seemed to convey an inclination towards marking her newcomer students differently than her native English speaking students because to mark them in the same way seemed inherently unfair, as they were just learning English. Yet on the other hand there seemed to exist a competing notion of fairness, the notion upon which the structure of public schooling is built: that educational equity is commensurate with equal output. She continued, "You can be nice but you also have to be fair...we talk about leniency with marks, but you have to be fair and tempered in your expectations for the students in the classroom". This idea of fairness as equal output proved inherently problematic in her work with newcomer students, making the imposition of grading a difficult process wherein she felt she had to strike a balance between being fair to her newcomer students by giving some leeway, and being fair to all of her students by imposing a structured and universal set of standards while grading. The process is further complicated by her awareness of the importance of grading to her students and their families. She noted that low grades are often a result of language limitations rather than of academic capability and effort. She clearly understood that low grades often did not convey the hard work and the progress that her students had accomplished, and worried about their damaging effects on the student's self-esteem and confidence:

There's so much mark pressure, and really what does a number mean....it doesn't mean a whole lot....if I give a student a seventy, they think they've done terrible, but it doesn't mean they've done terrible, it just means that...the amount of English that they have learned is probably quite a bit, it's just that that's the level they're at because the curriculum says so.

This conversation reveals the teacher's perception of the arbitrary and ineffective nature of grading in truly representing her newcomer students' academic capabilities and work ethic. She went on to discuss how the process of grading newcomer students involves a series of complex decisions on behalf of the teacher. She explained the interpretive process of grade production as "a grey area", saying:

It takes me to three times as long, especially with a written piece, to mark....the editing and correcting and deciding how much do I want to correct here...sometimes you're just happy that they are writing at all, so do I want to sit here and correct everything, and make them think that they've done something terrible...it's a real...dilemma marking.... It's really hard to decide how...like where the bar is.

So each assignment becomes a series of difficult decisions tied to these competing notions of fairness and equity, as well as a continual negotiation between the teacher's obligations to impose curricular standards in her marking and her awareness of their inapplicability and potentially damaging effects on the education of her newcomer students.

Another interviewee addressed the same topic, and concurred that the process of grading was highly problematic when applied to newcomer students. He stated: "There

is no structure and no guidance for teachers...it's totally been left up to teachers". He made clear that this positioning was unfair to both teachers and newcomer students. With this lack of guidance from the administration as to how to address the issue of grading for students with limited English skills, he argued, grading in this case became a highly interpretive process with a wide range of inconsistencies. Despite the fact that many schools have adopted an ESL code within their grading structure which signals that the grade reflects their position as an English language learner, this code, he argues, can be interpreted in vastly different ways:

If it's a teacher that's really lenient, they can give a 95 and just put the EAL code under it...If the teacher's like you know, even if they are a really nice and sensitive person, they can think well fuck I can't give them a ninety-five...that's just ridiculous, so they give them a seventy-two or whatever, so then by putting the ESL there they think, you know, that might not be the mark that they wanted, or that mom and dad are going to be happy about, but I put ESL to show that like, that's why.

For this teacher, the ESL code does little to address the inequity evoked by the imposition of the traditional grading structure on newcomer students because of the variance in its application. While in some cases teachers view it as an allowance for appropriate accommodation, others see it as an allowance for low grades: "I think if you talked to teachers, it would vary from teacher to teacher how they do all this". Without a clear understanding of the educational needs of newcomer students, and without dialogue and guidance in this regard, the ESL code only furthers newcomer students' position of marginality by serving as a justification for inequitable conditions. Yet, as

one interviewee noted, newcomer students in many cases were not passive in this educational positioning.

Despite the challenges that newcomer students seem to face upon entering the New Brunswick school system, more than one interviewee noted the agency of newcomer students, who, as one teacher argued, at times found creative ways to resist their marginal positioning. Some students have learned creative ways of resisting their position of marginality and the inevitability of low grades because of language limitations. The interviewee talked about the strategic way of studying that some of his students had taken on. Discussing one particular student, he noted how he had learned what he needed to demonstrate in order to attain high grades, and even though a lot of the understanding was not there, he had learned a particular way of studying wherein he could pretend as though the understanding was there:

He's figured out how to kinda...work it, like, which words go with what, how to spell those words..even when he doesn't really have an understanding of the meaning of those words...and his grades have gone up! ...And he's so much happier, like...you can see it.

The teacher witnessed an obvious change in the student's self-image, and noted how much happier he had become as a result of his earning higher grades. Another interviewee noted the resilience of newcomer students despite the many challenges they were confronted with in school: "You wonder, how they make out and stuff, but I mean they're resilient, most of them will carry on and do fine".

Not only do newcomer students themselves exhibit resistance to their marginal educational positioning, but the work of those who are working with newcomer students

on a daily basis, can arguably be characterized as resistant too. Much of the work described can be characterized as being oriented around minimizing the marginality that is being systemically produced. The interviewees noted that they reconfigured their practices to better suit their individual students; reconceptualised their classroom outcomes so that students could “cope” with being immersed into Anglophone-dominant settings, and worked as advocates in general for the needs and overall wellbeing of their newcomer students. Resisting conceptions of newcomer students as a “problem”, these interviewees approached the education of their newcomer students with openness, understanding, dedication, and compassion, all of which to me, point to a resistance towards the institutional oppression of newcomer students.

This inequitable institutional positioning of newcomer students is coupled with the pressing social and emotional impacts of immigration and integration that interviewees suggested were not being addressed. Acknowledging the centrality of emotional and social well-being, interviewees noted that to fail to consider these needs within the institution of education furthers experiences of marginality and significantly impacts newcomer students’ educational experiences.

The Social and Emotional Contexts of Newcomer Students’ Lives

In my literature review, the value of social and emotional support for newcomer students seemed a prominent theme when discussing the state of various Canadian provinces’ newcomer education. The importance of increased understanding of the social and emotional contexts of newcomer students’ lives was reiterated in my conversations with interviewees. In several instances, it was discussed how an absence of such support was negatively affecting newcomer students with whom they worked,

both emotionally and academically. One EAL teacher commented on the particular vulnerabilities of newcomer youth:

Middle school kids have so much going on, hormonally, and identity-wise, there's so much going on, so they are so self-conscious...so aware of their peers, and you know, how they look to their peers, not that elementary students aren't, because they are very aware, especially when they speak, how that sounds, even kindergarten kids, but these middle school kids are so aware of that that they're just gonna be quiet, for the most part.

The interviewee continued to discuss the differences between the elementary school level and the middle and high school levels, noting that the latter may be more problematic for newcomers. In elementary school, he argued, being immersed with native English speakers seems to work better because he has generally found that:

Their inhibitions are a little lower, there's more interaction and they have playtime...they have the same teachers so there is probably more of a comfort zone there...just so many factors and I just find sometimes, in the elementary level, the kids, when they're left to their own devices, some of the kids really do well.

He acknowledged that this, of course, is not always the case, and he has had some students who have struggled in this environment. But generally speaking, he felt that because of their age and the caring atmosphere of elementary schools, among other differences, newcomer students at the elementary level tend to struggle less socially than do those coming into the province at the middle or high school level who, he argued,

were especially vulnerable to social and emotional stress in addition to the academic challenges they may face.

Another interviewee discussed this issue at length, emphasizing the centrality of the emotional and social aspects of newcomers' lives including their success in education and, ultimately, in employment. Upon working with newcomer youth extensively within the New Brunswick system, he discussed how he quickly came to see the importance of the social contexts of newcomers' school lives. He talked about how he often found that parents were so overwhelmed in dealing with their own struggles with immigration (including the stress of finding housing and employment, learning a new language and a new way of life, and often being separated from family members) that the emotional stresses of the children were at times overlooked:

Being here as a newcomer, not knowing the language, not knowing the culture, the culture shock is a huge, huge factor...like you're dealing with the stress, you're dealing with...a lot of things, and then, sometimes as an adult, we focus so much attention on ourselves, as a father or as a mom, that we [don't] pay attention to our kids. And...our kids, from kindergarten to high school, they have feelings also...and they are saying, you know, pay attention, we have needs also.

Throughout the interview, the interviewee continuously reinforced how newcomer children's emotions are commonly overlooked because of their age. He pointed to how children are often uninvolved in the decision to move from their homes and their social and school lives into a new country and culture, and often a new

language. While the children often have little say in the immigration decision-making process, he argues, their lives are significantly altered:

There is a lot, as I said, [that] our youth go through when they come into Canada...One thing, that sometimes we miss, as an adult, is consulting our child. Do you want to go to this place, for example. ...It's icy, it's cold, it's English, it's French, you are going to eat different food, the environment is different, you know, there is a lot they miss. We are picturing, in a dream, like, [Canada], it's beautiful, but when the child comes here, it is a different experience.

Although he held that schools had the potential to play a vital role in the transition process by providing valuable social and emotional support services, he argued that they were failing in terms of recognizing and responding to the emotional and social well-being of newcomer students. He argued for some kind of programming that recognizes the emotional impacts of immigration on children and youth at length:

From my point of view, I guess, it is important to have this...sort of welcoming centre, for education...Emotional and social needs...this is very key to succeed, you know, in education and in employment...it's going to be different if there is something there to help them integrate into the new society. Unfortunately, I didn't see that.

The interviewee also noted how a social support system could help to ease the students' transition into a new culture, language, new social world, and new school. The impacts of a support system that paid attention to the emotional and social well-being of newcomer youth upon entering Canada, he felt, could prove invaluable in the education of newcomer students. He discussed the existence of such support in another city within

the province, and talked about how he would like to use it as a model for a similar infrastructure within his own city or province-wide:

When a student is coming here to Canada, for example, our experience here...I think is one of the worst, because, the child is coming here on Friday..and then they're coming [to] school on Monday. So...it's not pleasant, first of all because they're tired. Secondly, you don't have a chance, an opportunity, to get to know...your teachers, to get to know the students...It's like too bad, learn how to do it. This is something that, from my point of view...it is important to have some kind of welcoming centre.

When discussing what such support might entail, he argued that the initial phase of immigration was perhaps the most problematic for newcomer youth. There was no time or program which allowed them to familiarize themselves with their schools and teachers before being immersed into school life, making the experience all the more intimidating. He also felt that upon coming into New Brunswick, there was nowhere for the newcomer youth to go that gave them a chance to socialize and make new friends. This, he held, had a serious impact on their academic performance:

As I'm working...within the schools, I'm seeing a lot of issues related to youth...they are human and they have a lot of needs, but nobody's paying attention to those needs...if we do not pay attention to their social needs, they will not pay attention to school.

Thus this interviewee voiced his perception of the interconnection between the social and emotional wellbeing of newcomer students (and youth more generally) with their academic engagement. Another interviewee also noted the centrality of the emotional

wellbeing of his newcomer students, and discussed how he has had students who he really worried about in terms of their emotional health. Speaking of one particular student he had that year, he said: “I don’t care even what English she’s really getting. Emotionally, I’m worried about her...at some points I think she was really struggling on a lot of levels...it seemed pretty clear”. Positioning the academic performance of this newcomer student as secondary to her emotional wellbeing, the interviewee reasserts the centrality of emotional health in academic performance and engagement.

The interviewee also noted increased understanding of the emotional impacts of immigration as key to providing newcomer students with better schooling experiences. Recalling one incident in particular wherein this lack of understanding on behalf of some teachers, administrators, and the institution in general had resulted in unjust sanctioning of one of the newcomer students with whom he worked:

Three or four years ago, one of my students...a newcomer student from a newcomer family...I had to deal with many cases in the schools...[and it was] something that broke my heart, and I said, if the teacher, or the principal understood the situation that this student faced, probably their answer would be different... The principal told [the student] that he could not use his cell phone, they have a policy in the schools, you don’t...have the right to use your cell phone in class. So the student, what he says was that he took his cell phone, and [just] looked at it, but the principal caught him doing that...so he called him in his office, and...he was a child [coming from] war in his country, and he was working, coming back from school at two thirty, at four o’clock he begins to work until late...he was fifteen years old, working. He has a mom and a dad, but

nobody knows that his mom is his step mom, his [biological] mom is still in Africa, a survivor at a refugee camp, and...so basically this student was working more than studying, he was doing great in his courses, and he was doing great in his work, he was very hard working. Taking away his cell phone, [because] of the policy at the school, it was something that, I bought myself, and this is the only thing that, I worked for it, and it's mine, right? The vice principal took it away, and he went to the office, he says, "You have to come with me...because our policy says you cannot have it". And there was a fight. He says, "I'm not going to move from your office until you give me back my cell phone". And he says, "I'm sorry but you have to move, this is my school, and in my school, you have to respect what the policy says. This is my school, and that's all". "I'm not gonna move until you give me back my cell phone...I never used it, and [why would] I lie to you?" Anyways, to put it short, they called the local police...they called the police [into the] school, and she came, and spoke to him, and he says, "I'm not gonna move, I'm missing my cell phone, so I have the right [for him] to give me back my cell phone"...and she tried to push him physically...obviously, a child who has been in trauma, and dealing with military in his country...don't push me, you're disrespecting me, right?...They called more police, so they had to detain him as a criminal, and [were] pushing him to the floor...it was ridiculous...he was suspended...the question is, what are [we] doing in terms of mental health for him?

This example, he felt, was an indication of the need for increased understanding of the emotional impacts of immigration on behalf of educators and administrators, and the

system as a whole. The beginning of the excerpt reveals his feeling that had the principal understood the student's circumstances, he would likely have responded to the student in a different way. Another interviewee comments on the issue of creating increased understanding of the emotional stress of immigration:

Teachers need to understand the emotional impacts of immigration on students. Loneliness, confusion, inferiority, tiredness, depression...It changes you...The first step is empathy, to begin to understand what your students might be going through.

This discussion of the need for more emotional support for newcomer students in schools reminded me of an earlier personal experience I had had when beginning my work as a volunteer EAL tutor. I was working with a sixth grade, newcomer student, and had come to understand her as a capable but shy girl, at least within the setting where we worked. She had been in Canada for only a short few months, and one particular week she asked me to help her work on a speech she would have to present in front of an entire classroom of Anglophones. She was very obviously distraught by this task, and expressed to me how scared she was to stand in front of the class and speak English. It seemed to me an unnecessarily stressful event for a student in her position, who was just learning English and had only been in the school system for such a short span of time. I had a discussion with her EAL tutor regarding the presentation, and he agreed it seemed unfair for her to be forced to do something that she was clearly uncomfortable with, but he said that all of the students in this Language Arts classroom were required to do this, and no exceptions were made. At the time, I recall feeling very

badly about the situation, and wondering why alternative accommodations couldn't be made for a student in her particular situation.

One interviewee discussed how it can become physically and emotionally exhausting to be continuously surrounded by and immersed in a language that you do not understand. Although he was able to recognize the symptoms in his students, he noted that in his experience, many teachers make inaccurate judgments about a student's character and work ethic because they do not recognize the condition or symptoms of culture shock:

The student appears to be withdrawn, and sometimes teachers will take that as they don't care, and will see them as bad students. I see it all the time. The teacher will think, well, they aren't trying...but it's not that they aren't trying...we need to understand what they are going through, it's very physical. Inaccurate perceptions such as these, he argued, at times resulted in unjust academic sanctions and/or negative conceptualizations of the students, therefore furthering their emotional and academic stress and negatively affecting their overall wellbeing. He emphasized the importance of teachers and administrators recognizing the symptoms of culture shock and understanding the highly emotional nature of immigration. Another teacher also commented on the issue of culture shock, and how she felt lost as to how to deal with this issue with their newcomer students, and felt as though she was not able to deal with it as well as she could because of time constraints. Commenting on newcomer student's mental and emotional state, she noted:

They just hadn't figured out they were here...where they were, and...it was just something...they got up, and the bell rang, those situations made me upset

because...I didn't know as a teacher how to communicate...first of all, there was so little time with the bell system, to interact, and to catch them at the end of the day...without singling them out.

The excerpt suggests that the issue goes beyond an awareness of the emotional impacts of immigration and the manifestations of culture shock, but also speaks to the need for increased guidance and understanding as to how to approach the issue; it also suggests that more time has to be invested into ensuring the emotional as well as the academic well-being of newcomer students.

Another social issue discussed during one interview was the relationship between students and teachers and other such authority figures within the institution of education. The interviewee critiqued the power dynamic that is reflected in many teacher-student relationships, and held that if teachers would approach their students with respect, the entire schooling experience could be changed for the better for many youth. He held that adolescents are often talked down to and if teachers would listen to them and treat them with the same respect as they would another adult or colleague then we would see drastic changes within the school system:

We've got to at least listen to the students, and we've got to put ourselves at the same level...If we do this, we will see big changes happening... [Teachers sometimes think] I have a lot of knowledge, these kids they don't know anything. And I say, 'yes, they do!' The situation is that they don't talk about it.

This respect that the interviewee spoke of seems to be inherently tied to the systemic change that he felt was so needed. He believed that if teachers, administrators, and other such authority figures, in the realm of education, were to truly pay attention and listen to

newcomer students and to provide them with the space to talk about what they need, newcomer students could have better schooling experiences. To him, the concept was simple: “It’s about respect, and I’m not talking about culture, but respect us as people”.

Interviewees discussed how issues of linguistic and cultural difference also intersect with issues of racism and racialization to contribute to the social marginality of newcomer students. One interviewee in particular discussed how many students are made to feel like outsiders because of their pronunciation of English or because of the color of their skin:

There is a sense of exclusion, of isolation...because we are not belonging...Even if you were born in Canada, because your skin is a different color, because you have an accent, they are always going to ask you, hey, where are you coming from?

Although this question may be posed with the best of intentions, it is a continual reassertion of the students’ difference, of their positioning as an outsider. Thus rather than feeling like a part of the school community, their lack of membership within it (based on racialization and/or linguistic difference) is reinforced.

Perhaps the most telling moment of the seriousness of the emotional and social experiences of newcomer students was when one EAL teacher talked about how his newcomer students seemed to see his classroom as a place of refuge, where they could feel more at ease, more understood. He noted a clear change in many newcomer students’ demeanor upon entering his classroom. When visiting them in the mainstream classroom setting, he noted that many were very quiet and interacted minimally. Yet

when coming into his small EAL classroom, he saw them open up and start talking and joking, laughing and smiling:

When they come to my class it's an obvious refuge...I almost felt bad teaching them, like doing work with them, because when they got there, you could just see their whole body, just relax...they seem so much happier.

The idea that newcomer students may see EAL classrooms as a place of refuge says a great deal about the atmosphere within schools at large and their perceptions of their place within it. It is therefore undeniably necessary to explore how schools may be (re)producing experiences of marginalization and otherness for students from non-dominant cultures and/or languages. Interviewees felt that the first step in such exploration and in attempting to create more equitable learning conditions for newcomer students is dialogue on the issue of newcomer education.

One participant noted that although much is left to be desired in the realm of newcomer education in New Brunswick, there have been some steps towards restructuring (at least within his school) that seem to recognize the problems that are created through the imposition of traditional education on students with limited knowledge of the dominant language:

Up until three years ago, I mean these kids were just put anywhere and everywhere, right? Like there was no programming, they were treated like any kid...like here's your new school, here is your schedule, good luck...I would say at [our school] there's a fairly large infrastructure built up around trying to help newcomer students that wasn't there three years ago...

Although this restructuring does not evade entirely the inequitable educational positioning of newcomer students, he noted that it represents an acknowledgement of the need to re-evaluate the way in which schools respond to the education of their newcomer students. And although this may be seen as a step in the right direction, the restructuring has occurred only at the school level, therefore districts and the department of education have yet to acknowledge the shortcomings of the system in addressing newcomer student needs.

The discussions with interviewees pertaining to their work and experiences with newcomer students revealed a sense of marginality on behalf of both newcomer students and those working with them in their educational transition. The way in which newcomer students are positioned discursively appears to perpetuate a sense of difference and otherness within the institution of education. The institutional label of “EAL student” may also contribute to a focus on deficiency. The interviewees’ concerns regarding programming and prioritization reveal a need for further consideration of the educational needs of newcomer students upon their transition into New Brunswick schools. The participants’ discussions pertaining to the assessment of newcomer students also suggest that the current structure inequitably positions newcomer students within the institution. The confines of current assessment practices create challenging dilemmas for teachers, and make it extremely difficult for newcomer students to attain high grades regardless of work ethic and perceived progress, which tend to be overridden by curricular outcomes designed exclusively for native English speakers.

This inequitable institutional positioning intersects with the social and emotional contexts of newcomer students' lives. The interviewees expressed a great deal of concern for the social and emotional wellbeing of their newcomer students, and discussed how New Brunswick schools could potentially contribute to increased emotional and social support. The belief that dialogue as a significant aspect of newcomer education was a prominent theme among interviewees. Although they did not all share the same perceptions of the current accommodations for dialogue in the area of newcomer education, they all agreed that the coming together of teachers, administrators, and even newcomer students and families would likely prove a very valuable and effective first step in assessing newcomer student positioning and support. One interviewee discusses how a provincial commission on newcomer education would be helpful in creating a venue for this dialogue:

We need, from a policy point of view, not just policy, but funding, a person who is full-time....maybe even a commission would be helpful, to focus on the state of EAL within the province.....because it's apples and oranges and bananas and cucumbers....it's a little bit of this and a little bit of that everywhere....I don't think anybody has the whole picture...There's no one answer to it, I think there's a lot more questions that need to be asked...I don't even know the half of what's out there... the right arm doesn't know what the left arm is doing.

In discussing her conversation with other educators involved in newcomer education and support, she noted that the need for dialogue was expressed by her colleagues as well: "A lot of people who I have talked to who...are working in the EAL realm say, like, 'Gosh, we need to get together, we need to have some kind of....we need to talk'".

When asked how often she met with colleagues to discuss her work with newcomer students, another interviewee commented:

Maybe twice a year, we could personally try to meet but...no, we meet twice a year max. [And] after our meeting the other day, that would be one complaint that I would have [about the job]...I learned a lot.

Being given the opportunity to share ideas and concerns, interviewees noted, would not only help to consider newcomer student positioning and support, but could also provide teachers and educational service providers the chance to explore different ideas and perspectives and to share innovative pedagogical directions.

The themes discussed in this chapter suggest that newcomer students in New Brunswick may be experiencing intersecting instances of marginality that are being systemically (re)produced. Using a critical multicultural lens and insights from institutional ethnography and critical pedagogy, the following chapter will explore the discursive, social, and institutional positioning of newcomer students in New Brunswick in further depth.

Chapter 5

Exploring Ruling Relations: The Discursive, Social, and Institutional Positioning of Newcomer Students

My discussions with those working directly with newcomer youth in their transition into New Brunswick schools have uncovered many complex and pressing issues that compromise equitable schooling experiences for newcomer students. Interviewees expressed concern for newcomer students' emotional and academic well-being, and criticized, at times sharply, the province's lack of action regarding the situation of newcomer students. Despite the potential role that schools could play in the provision of valuable support services, both academic and social, interviewees expressed perceptions of inadequacy at the institutional level. Newcomer students are placed in a position of disadvantage via the imposition of a system that was not created with them in mind, and a lack of exploration of alternatives at the systemic level. The absence of a consideration of the context of newcomer students' lives at the departmental level is represented by a lack of valorization for those providing the most essential of educational support for newcomer students. Discursively, students coming from non-dominant cultures and/or speaking languages other than English or French were characterized within the institution of education by their lack of dominant linguistic skills. They were also positioned as outsiders, being regularly reminded of their non-membership in Canadian schools and society at large. At the social level, the pressing emotional and social impacts of immigration in the lives of newcomer students are seemingly ignored by the educational system, creating the potential for devastating experiences of loneliness and alienation.

This chapter considers in further depth the issues uncovered through discussions with interviewees. I use my discussions with interviewees and their everyday work practices and experiences as a point of entry into inquiry to uncover how newcomer students and those who are working with them within the educational context are drawn into relations of ruling that decontextualize their experiences and place them within a position of marginality. Drawing from institutional ethnography, critical theory, and critical discourse analysis, I argue that newcomer students are discursively, socially, and institutionally marginalized within New Brunswick schools.

Language and Power: The Discursive Positioning of Newcomer Students

Critical discourse analysts argue that the discursive practices found within a social context will contribute to the social realities within it. Power relations will inevitably be embedded within discursive practices and will be (re)produced, challenged, or transformed by them (Mills, 2004; Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2006). If we are to consider this argument, then the discursive practices around both newcomer students as well as those surrounding non-dominant cultures become an important feature of newcomer student experiences.

Critical discourse analysts consider discourses to be organized around practices of exclusion. Problematizing the perceived naturalness of what is possible to say, they argue this naturalness to be a result of what has been excluded, or what is not possible to say (Mills, 2004). As discussed in chapter four, the way in which newcomer students are discursively positioned continuously reinforces their outsider placement in reference to the dominant cultural group. Discourses of membership/non-membership were apparent in multiple conversations with interviewees regarding newcomer students,

wherein Canadian born, English speaking students were continuously referred to with words commutating normalcy or naturalness. Newcomer students were referenced against this normalcy, inevitably positioning them as outsiders. Regular/irregular and normal/abnormal binaries are so engrained and naturalized that their presence goes almost unnoticed, yet once this pattern is recognized, its pervasiveness becomes apparent. Instances of this discursive pattern were present throughout the interviews, yet, as noted in chapter four, even when interviewees recognized this pattern, they struggled to navigate around it.

Dorothy Smith (2005) also considers the power of language in framing our social worlds, and the power that language has in defining the boundaries of what can and what cannot be said. In discussing the issue of language in relation to the women's movement, she notes how the act of naming carries a significant aspect of power:

As women, we came together to talk, knowing only that we had something to talk about, much to talk about; but what we would talk about was, at the outset, without a name. Betty Friedan's first chapter of her *Feminine Mystique* (1963) is titled "The Problem That Has No Name." For all the words, she tells us, that were written about us, for us, and to instruct us, our own strange sense of dissatisfaction was never named. Within the consciousness raising we practiced in various forms...the transformative step became naming our experiences and constituting thus an interindividual territory among us as subjects who could now speak our experiences; our spoken and written experiences could thus become the bases of political organization and activity. (p. 79)

It was the act of naming their experiences that allowed women to challenge their marginality. Concepts of patriarchy and oppression pushed the boundaries of hegemonic language and discourse and created a means for transformative ideological discourses to emerge, which in turn were the basis of political action. The ability to speak about their lived experiences, experiences that had previously remained nameless within the confines of language, allowed for the formation of a transformative ideological discourse that was foundational to the women's movement.

Thus, as discussed in chapter three, our language dictates not only what can be said, but, by the same token, what cannot be said. Although some participants seemed to acknowledge a discomfort with the language commutating regular/irregular binaries, they were unable to find an alternative, more equitable way to speak of newcomer students in relation to native English speakers. This provides a concrete example of how power is embedded within discursive structures. It clearly positions students born in Canada who speak English fluently as the natural norm against which all other students are measured against, highlighting the difference of those falling outside of this dominant identity, reinforcing them as other. This may seem subtle, yet if we are to accept the argument that the way in which we speak of our social world becomes a part of how we come to understand it, then this pervasive pattern inevitably contributes to an understanding of the dominant cultural identity as the normalized (and therefore more privileged and powerful) identity. Not only does this discursive pattern create an unequal power dynamic, but it can also produce experiences of exclusion and alienation for those who are positioned as outsiders.

Moments of discursive struggle during the interviews led me to consider further how language was contributing to the marginalization and/or exclusion of newcomer students. When reviewing the interview transcripts, I realized that in addition to continually being referenced against and differentiated from “regular” students, newcomer students were also constantly referred to as “ESL” (English as Second Language) or “EAL” (English as Additional Language) students. I had intrinsically felt a vague discomfort with this label at the onset of my research, but could not quite pinpoint as to where this discomfort was coming from. After considering the proponents of CDA and attempting to consider all discourse as a point of entry into the discovery of power relations, it became clearer. If, in naming people, we are not simply objectively describing them but are creating conceptualizations, then the ESL/EAL label must be examined in terms of how it contributes to our conceptualizations of the students it is meant to describe. I asked myself, what does an educator think about when she/he hears “English as a Second Language”? It does not lead us to think of the knowledge of an entire other language, but focuses our attention to a deficiency in English. The focus is not on the knowledge that students bring, but rather is placed on what they do not know.

This immediately brought me back to a conversation with one interviewee, who noted that this same conceptualization of deficiency is often evoked when hearing accents. She noted, “...It’s like when we hear someone speak with an accent, we think of them as being bad at English rather than as being multilingual, you know, as indicating the knowledge of a whole other language”. And in using this label to describe a student throughout the entire institution, the identity of the student becomes

entirely characterized by her or his linguistic limitations; the English language deficiency becomes positioned as the most salient aspect of identity. This essentializing process (re)produced through this institutional label brings to life CDA's assertion of how discursive practice is organized around processes of exclusion, and of how the act of naming can have powerful social consequences. The ESL/EAL label not only draws our attention to a language deficiency, but is also relational, meant to separate the students from "regular students"; they are referentially positioned as "other", or outside of the "mainstream". Thus feelings of otherness, isolation, and alienation on behalf of newcomer students within the school system are in part being (re)produced by their discursive positioning. The way in which our language dictates what we can and cannot say reveals powerful processes that contribute to perceptions of membership and exclusion, of who is normalized, and by the same token, who is not.

The way in which newcomer students are spoke of and defined institutionally (as EAL students) draws our attention to their difference from normalized students and to dominant language limitations, deducing newcomer student identities to deficiencies. Thus their marginal discursive positioning occurs at both the social and the institutional levels.

Bishop (2010) discusses the discursive positioning of a group of indigenous students in New Zealand, and argues that this positioning (along with the discursive positioning of other minoritized groups) is characterized by negative beliefs and assumptions on behalf of educators. He notes that when teaching occurs, progress is decided and practice is modified in accordance with the beliefs and assumptions that the teacher holds about the student (p. 66). Bishop holds that by drawing on particular

discourses to explain our experiences, we are positioning ourselves within these discourses and acting in accordance with this positioning:

Pathologizing the lived experiences of children is most often seen in deficit thinking and practices, which is a form of power that, as Foucault (1972) explain, works on and through individuals as they take up positions offered to them in discourse and as they become objects of discourse. This is because discourses provide each of us with a self-narrative that we use to talk and think about our positioning within society. (p. 68)

Bishop argues that within social interactions, struggles over what constitutes legitimate knowledge is really a struggle over whose meaning will prevail. Given the discursive positioning of teachers and students within schools, there is a clear imbalance of power, wherein teachers are positioned as the authority in legitimizing knowledges and students are positioned as less capable, less intelligent, and less knowing. This positioning is exaggerated in the case of minoritized students, wherein they are positioned as recipients of knowledge about dominant cultural norms, traits, values, and language. This suggests that the discursive positions that teachers take will be key to whether or not they can be agentic in challenging the marginality of newcomer students or act as agents in the (re)production of oppression. Bishop (2010) notes that many critical theorists argue that most educational innovations do not address the existing framework of perceptions and beliefs as a part of the change process, thereby revealing the need for a more ontological approach (p. 69). Thus to begin to challenge the discursive marginality of minoritized students, teachers must learn to examine and

challenge their own interactions within the hegemonic discourses which construct students from non-dominant cultures as deficient. As Sleeter (2005) notes:

It is true that low expectations for students of color and students from poverty communities, buttressed by taken-for-granted acceptance of the deficit ideology, has been rampant and persistent problem for a long time ... therefore, empowering teachers without addressing the deficit ideology may well aggravate the problem. (as cited in Bishop, 2010, p. 69)

Thus efforts towards educational reform will be undermined if educators cannot recognize their own engagement in the hegemonic discourses that subordinate minoritized students.

Members Only: The Social Marginality of Newcomer Students within New Brunswick Schools

If newcomer students are being placed at a discursive disadvantage, this positioning will arguably also impact students' social and emotional wellbeing. Again, how students are represented discursively is interrelated with how they may conceive of themselves, and how others may conceive of them as well. The theme of membership/non-membership is again apparent at the social level.

Discussions with interviewees revealed concern for the social and emotional wellbeing of newcomer students within the current structure. Some noted the importance of enhanced transition services on behalf of school districts to provide newcomer students with increased social opportunities and to allow them to get to know their teachers, schools and communities prior to starting school. Others argued for increased understanding on behalf of educators so that they could better accommodate

newcomer students. In most instances, interviewees alluded to perceptions of newcomer students' social and emotional struggle in their initial educational experiences.

The EAL classroom as a place of refuge for newcomer students suggests a discomfort within the schooling environment. Participants discussed how some of their newcomer students exhibited very obvious signs of self-consciousness, especially in later grades, when in the presence of native English-speaking students. One interviewee noted that some were so self-conscious about how they sounded when speaking English that they had a tendency to remain quiet in social settings wherein the majority of youth spoke English as a first language. This arguably indicates a social sanctioning of linguistic difference, and the power and privilege in the form of social capital that is associated with the English language, which appears to play a role in accessing social acceptance/membership. Even when students learn to speak the dominant language fluently, the presence of an accent represents their continued difference (and non-membership) from the dominant culture.

As one interviewee noted, students may be seen as different not only as a result of how they speak, but also because of how they look. Issues of linguistic difference also intersect with racialization. The interviewee stated:

There is a sense of exclusion, of isolation...because we are not belonging...Even if you were born in Canada, because your skin is a different color, because you have an accent, they are always going to ask you, "Hey, where are you coming from?"

The excerpt reveals that rules for social membership are not simply a matter of being born in Canada, but are linked to the dominance and privilege of native English-

speaking, White identities. Newcomer students who are racialized and who do not speak English as a first language are thereby deemed different in multiple ways, making social membership and inclusion all the more difficult as a result of these socially constructed categories of difference.

If newcomer students are experiencing loneliness and social isolation, as discussions with interviewees suggest, this will arguably impact all areas of their lives, including their academic performance. Newcomer integration is often conceived of as mainly the responsibility of the student (to learn the language and the dominant cultural norms), despite the significant role that everyone else plays in it. Privilege and oppression are two sides of the same coin; those who are marginalized cannot reach more equitable positioning if the privilege of others is maintained. As critical theorists argue, the struggle towards equity must involve all members of society, including both those who are marginalized and those who are privileged (May & Sleeter, 2010; Weil, 1998).

The interviewees noted a concern for the social positioning of newcomer students. Equitable educational experiences arguably involve more than the provision of linguistic training, but involve a consideration of the social and emotional impacts associated with the transition into a new school, culture, and language in addition to leaving behind a network of friends and family. As one interviewee noted, the emotional and social wellbeing of students is key to their academic engagement; if students are not happy, then this arguably permeates all other aspects of their lives and makes academic achievements all the more difficult:

As I'm working...within the schools, I'm seeing a lot of issues related to youth...they are human and they have a lot of needs, but nobody's paying attention to those needs...if we do not pay attention to their social needs, they will not pay attention to school.

This being said, it becomes paramount that schools, districts, and the Department of Education explore ways to better promote the social and emotional wellbeing of their newcomer students, especially if that province is actively recruiting newcomer students and families. Yet interviewees noted that although in some instances there is evidence of efforts towards this, it does not seem to be a priority at the systemic level. As the next section will discuss, the perceived inefficacy of the current structure in addressing the emotional and social contexts of newcomer students' lives is not the only way in which newcomer students are being marginally positioned by the institution.

Politics, Priorities and the Construction of "Facts": The Institutional Positioning of Newcomer Students

As uncovered in chapter four, other aspects of newcomer education reflect a position of marginality at the institutional level. There is no one person at the department level who is solely responsible for newcomer education in the province; rather the responsibility of developing and organizing newcomer student support is, as one interviewee put it, treated as “an add-on, or afterthought” to much more politicized aspects of schooling such as French immersion programming. There is no province-wide structure or leadership, leaving the impression that newcomer student support is unimportant and not a provincial priority. In some districts, EAL tutors (who were described by interviewees as the meat and potatoes of what's getting [newcomer

students] to read and write) are marginalized in multiple ways, including their position's security, remuneration, and social status in relation to their classroom teacher counterparts. Interviewees expressed a lack of guidance in working with newcomer students, and while some felt that this left them with the freedom to explore pedagogical choices, others felt overwhelmed by it, and all participants noted the need for more resources and more dialogue at the systemic level. Although the interviewees pointed out that there were a great deal of very dedicated and hard-working people involved in efforts to create more equitable learning experiences for newcomer students, the difficulties created by the absence of provincial prioritization of newcomer student needs was a predominant theme. This absence reflects a marginal political positioning of newcomer students at the systemic level. The need for increased understanding of the contexts of newcomer students' lives and for dialogue as to how to support newcomer students is undeniable, yet it appears to remain on the periphery of educational debate.

One of the more prominent themes discussed by interviewees was the difficulties associated with assessment. Institutional ethnography suggests a problematization of how "facts" are constructed within an institution, and leads us to consider the processes involved in their production in order to uncover the political elements and ideological frameworks embedded within them. If we are to take Smith's advice and problematize the institutional production of "facts", as explained in chapter three, then we must trace and explore the often naturalized, overlooked, and/or erased steps involved in such constructions. In the case of newcomer students, this final representation within the institution of education arguably takes the form of grades. Although there may be significant differences in how an interviewer assesses an interviewee in the field of

psychology and in how a teacher goes about assessing a student, the fundamental idea is nonetheless valuable and helps to make clear the highly interpretive nature of grade production. It also provides a means of deconstructing the hegemonic discourses and conceptual frameworks embedded within the process.

In speaking of their everyday experiences, interviewees made note of the difficulty they encountered in engaging in the institutional process of assessment. They all alluded to a disjuncture between their lived experiences of working with their students and the representation of those experiences through the production of grades. In exploring this disjuncture, I discuss the conceptual frameworks that are uncovered, and argue that the assessment process that is the foundation of our public education system is inherently problematic, in particular when it is applied to the situation of newcomer students.

To begin, we should situate the discussion by considering the social implications that are tied to educational assessment. Assessment is an extremely powerful institutional action. It is the process by which students' value within the institution is measured, and has a tremendous impact on students' lives. It will dictate how they will progress throughout the system, how they view themselves, and how others will view them. It will decide whether or not they will be pronounced successful, capable citizens who will move on to higher education and ultimately gainful employment, or it will deem them lazy or incapable. If the latter case occurs, options for higher education (at least in the formal sense) become limited or at times unattainable, making economic stability much more difficult. In many ways, how a student is assessed within the educational system will greatly influence their identities and impact much of the course

of their lives. Therefore, the significance of the institutional action of assessment cannot be understated.

Because the impact of grades is well recognized, the assessment process is assumed to be an objective series of tests wherein knowledge (which is in this context largely depoliticized) is measured and recorded, representing the student's positioning within the institution. The concrete, lived actualities of the students and teachers become the resource upon which the assessment process draws, pulling it out from its lived context and fitting it into the conceptual frameworks imposed by the institution. These frameworks define conceptions of intelligence and how it is to be measured, and serve to validate some forms of knowledge and delegitimize others, making it a highly politicized system wherein power is played out (Au, 2009). But despite its political nature, the assessment structure has been pronounced an objective means of measuring intelligence, knowledge, and academic capability. Critical pedagogy, however, problematizes the concept of knowledge as objective and measurable, and holds that it is never complete in and of itself, but must be understood within (not above or outside of) its historical development (Kincheloe, 2008).

Institutional ethnography also addresses the notion of objectivity within the institutional setting, recognizing that the process of objectification wherein "knowledge" or "facts" are generated involves a kind of erasure of the subjectivities (and interests) that are inherent within them (Smith, 2005, p. 43). The pronouncement of objectivity in and of itself becomes a political move by hiding the interests that it serves and subordinates. In the context of education, the process of objectification can be argued to apply to both the information that students are taught in schools as well as to the process

of assessment. An IE project, then, involves turning our attention to the actual institutional process of knowledge/fact production to discover that which is being changed or omitted in the final product of representation; a retracing of often overlooked steps, so to speak. In examining how the assessment process positioned newcomer students within the New Brunswick school system, I argue that the transformation of lived actualities into the currency of grades (re)produces privilege and marginality. I also argue that the ideology of intelligence that is inherent within the assessment process represents a hegemonic discourse that furthers this marginality at the systemic level.

In many ways, one interviewee's account of her own work in assessing her newcomer students provides us with a concrete, living example of this objectification process. As discussed in chapter four, the interviewee's story of grade production revealed a highly interpretive process that involved a great deal of decision making on her part. This particular teacher discussed the difficulty of grade production for newcomer students at great length. She noted that although the situation of students who came from different linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds is extremely difficult to fit into the narrow framework of Canadian assessment, there is a great deal of pressure to do so. This she acknowledged as the most difficult aspect of her work with newcomer students. This struggle I will take as my point of entry into discovering the institutional process in which she engaged when producing grades for newcomer students.

The interviewee's work required her to engage in the production of grades. She refers to the application of the structure of assessment onto newcomer students as a "sort of grey area". This suggests her awareness of her obligation as a teacher, but her

hesitation in doing so. What initially struck me as important was that she described grading newcomer students as “taking three times as long”. This indicates a rupture in the usual process, revealing a difference in method between grading mainstream students and grading newcomer students. I became interested in this difference, and inquired about what it was that changed the average length of time it took her to produce grades for her newcomer students. She discussed how she found the process to be particularly difficult in this instance because as a teacher she wanted to let her students know where they were in relation to their ‘grade level’ (a concept I problematize on its own), and where they needed to go. Thus she clearly conceptualized grades as a symbol of the student’s place in relation to where the education system holds they should be in accordance with their age. But because the standards for ‘grade levels’ are created with native English speakers in mind, newcomer students are often at an inherent disadvantage and will inevitably receive significantly lower grades than their English-speaking counterparts. Because she is intrinsically aware of the inherent inequity in this kind of equal application to very different situations, and the potentially discouraging and damaging effects of low grades, her inclination is to assess her newcomer students on a more individualized basis with their language limitations in mind. It would seem natural that a teacher would recognize the unique situation of newcomer students and accommodate for their difference, yet this accommodation is not unconstrained. Aside from her clear perception of her professional responsibility to apply the predetermined curricular structure, she also revealed feelings of responsibility to her mainstream students. She stated that although she does provide more lenience when grading her newcomer students, she noted that she could only accommodate so much without being

‘unfair’ to her mainstream students. This reveals a deep-seated conceptualization of equity as commensurate with equal output. And although the situation of her newcomer students makes clear the inaccuracy of this idea, it is so engrained within the fabric of our educational system that she experiences a clear conflict between her intrinsic understanding of fairness (revealed by her natural inclination towards accommodation) and her professional responsibility to apply the institutionally constructed principles of “fairness”. Thus decisions about marking that are normally dictated by curricular standards become more problematic for her during her assessment of newcomer students. Given her awareness of the weight of grades on the lives and identities of her students, these decisions become time-consuming and stressful.

The teacher’s account of her everyday work in the assessment of her newcomer students reveals the inherent subjectivities involved in a so-called objective institutional process. Despite her clear presence and influence (via a series of difficult decisions) on the final production of the grade (which can be conceptualized as a ‘fact’ within the institution of education), these interpretive processes are erased from the final product. And her obvious sense of hesitancy in the production of the grade reveals a perception of her inability to resolve the disjuncture between her everyday experiences with her students and all of the trials, triumphs, and idiosyncrasies contained within them and their final unproblematized representation. She knows that at times her students’ efforts and progress are exceptional, and that it would be impossible for them to work harder, yet this is not reflected in their grade simply because they cannot meet curricular language standards. This means that despite how hard a student works and how much they have achieved, their achievements will not be reflected in their grades until they are

commensurate with curricular standards. Thus their chances of achieving high grades are next to impossible because the structure of assessment was not made with them in mind.

The adoption of the 'ESL code' in some schools, according to one interviewee, has done little to address this unfair situation:

The ESL code is a default. But within that realm, they could bump them up, and give them a higher score, maybe, say, based on their effort...whereas another teacher might interpret it totally differently, and...they put ESL to say, you know, if they were in their first language they would be all over this, but ESL keeps them down here, so, it can mean different things.

In his discussion of the ESL code, this interviewee noted that in his experience newcomer parents often do not take this code into consideration, but take the grades to represent something very concrete and objective, so it can create a disjuncture between the student's performance at school and their parents' (as well as their own) understanding of that performance.

Thus the assumption of grades as objective 'facts' that fairly represent a student's capabilities and effort is largely inaccurate, and ignores the subjectivities that are an inherent part of it. If the process involves a series of decisions on behalf of the assessor, then her influence on the final outcome is significant, yet her presence within the process is often overlooked or understated, rendered invisible in the end product. I should at this point note that I do not say this in an effort to impose more rigid structure on the process, as any process of assessment is filled with the interpretations, understandings, values, and social positioning of those involved in its construction. I

would warn against such an interpretation of this argument, as increased regulation of the assessment process will only work to further the façade of objectivity and cover the interpretive processes inherent within it. It would also limit even further the teacher's ability to recognize her students as individuals and consider their varying backgrounds, experiences, and identities, and to infuse them into the assessment.

In his critique of increased regulation of social services in Ontario, De Montigny (2003) points to the inefficacy of increased standardization to address inadequate services:

...I argue that the daily lives of people are not standardized...Rather than pursuing policies for standardization, social workers at all levels need access to elastic and flexible material resources for people in need. A strong system fosters front-line innovative and adaptive use of multiple resources to support clients. (p. 38)

I argue that the same applies to teachers; to further standardize their everyday work lives is to undermine innovative and adaptive teaching strategies tailored to their individual students. It denies them the opportunity to explore new pedagogies, and further marginalizes those students who do not fit the learning identity for which the standardized processes were created. My critique lies with the false assertions of objectivity that are the foundation of the public school system, assertions that make impossible the task of systemic criticism, and that lay blame on individual students, in effect penalizing difference. In entering the institution of education, newcomer students are drawn into relations of ruling wherein the universalized subject positions they enter erase their individual circumstances and create inequitable learning conditions.

This particular line of analysis poses challenging questions to the province's claims of inclusive and equitable schooling. The entire structure of public education has been designed with the dominant student identity in mind, and the "knowledge" which is being assessed is an interrelation of socially constructed "facts" from particular, dominant subject positions. Culturally valued behaviours and beliefs are privileged through the currency of grades, while non-dominant student identities are marginalized by virtue of their inapplicability within the narrow confines of the system. Thus to impose this kind of structure upon those students for whom it was not designed places them at an inherent disadvantage that is covered and erased in their final representation. This individualizes the problem, making it appear as though the dysfunction lies with the student rather than with the system. Difference is not accommodated for, but rather punished in subtle, yet powerful, ways.

Chapter 6

Where's the Cake? Illusions of Inclusion

This particular line of analysis poses significant questions to the province's claims of inclusive and equitable schooling. The structure of public education has been designed with the dominant student identity in mind, and the "knowledge" which is being assessed is an interrelation of socially constructed "facts" from particular, dominant subject positions. Culturally valued behaviours and beliefs become an inherent part of what is being assessed (and how students are being assessed), and are therefore institutionally privileged through the currency of grades, while non-dominant student identities are marginalized by virtue of their inapplicability within the narrow confines of the system. Thus when a teacher draws a newcomer student into the institutional process of assessment, she or he imposes a paradigm of learning wherein cultural imperialism and linguistic bias are an inherent part of its inception. To impose this kind of structure upon those students for whom it was not designed, then, places them at an inherent disadvantage; a disadvantage that is covered and erased in their final representation. In this chapter I will explore how Kincheloe and Steinberg's (1997) conceptions of multiculturalism are reflected in New Brunswick schools (based on discussions with interviewees) and discuss the implications of the research project on educational policy and practice.

Imposing a universal educational framework is arguably a reflection of the monocultural or conservative multicultural approach discussed in chapter two. Systemic realities such as sexism, racism, and poverty are completely overlooked, thereby placing blame on individuals who are not able to meet Western, White, middle-class standards.

Conservative multiculturalism, when adopted within the educational system, uses schooling as a vehicle for assimilation, using academic and ultimately economic rewards to entice assimilation and, by that same token, using that reward system to discourage and punish difference. The different cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences that newcomer students may bring with them are not accounted for in their assessment, therefore in order to attain academic success, newcomer students must learn the dominant language (at the same level of fluency as their native English or French speaking counterparts) as well as the dominant and arguably monocultural perspective that is being taught as “knowledge”. This can easily be argued as a form of assimilation, as until newcomer students can speak the dominant language and reproduce the culturally dominant knowledge that is tested within schools, they will be academically sanctioned for their difference through the vehicle of grades. Difference is not accounted for, but rather punished in seemingly subtle, yet powerful, ways that systemically marginalize non-dominant student identities, which arguably includes newcomer students.

Much like Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) discussed, the conceptions of multiculturalism do not appear in their theoretical neatness, but often blend and blur. Although significant elements of the conservative multicultural approach are present within the New Brunswick school system’s current approach to newcomer education (made especially clear by the structure of assessment), there are also elements of the liberal and pluralist approaches. In several instances, interviewees acknowledged the superficial, additive nature of attempts towards cultural inclusion. One participant made this point quite poignantly when he stated: “We are not a picture that you can hang in

the corner and [say] we are celebrating culture. We are not a picture. . . . we are human beings.” His discussion of the token cultural displays he often witnessed in New Brunswick schools revealed manifestations of the pluralist approach. These efforts often involve attempts to instill a pride in students’ cultural heritage by celebrating cultural heroes, food, traditions, histories, etc. However psychologically appealing this approach may seem, it depoliticizes cultural difference and thereby does little to challenge the dominance and oppression that occurs along cultural lines. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) note:

Pride in one’s heritage, unfortunately, is not a panacea for the effects of years of oppression. In this way pluralist multiculturalism promises an emancipation that it can’t deliver, as it confuses psychological affirmation with political empowerment. (p. 16)

Cultural celebrations such as those mentioned by participants are used to legitimize claims of cultural celebration and inclusion within the Canadian context. But however psychologically appealing these may be, they do little to challenge the naturalness of the dominant culture as the inevitable norm against which all other cultures are measured against.

Ryan (2010) discusses how the Canadian government will claim to embrace cultural inclusivity and engage in the rhetoric of celebration of diversity and equality, but holds that this is a largely superficial position. He argues that while politicians may use the rhetoric of cultural celebration to garner political support, any alternative cultural values that may challenge the dominance of White, Western, Christian culture will not be embraced to any practical end. This is reflected in government claims of

supporting cultural diversity. New Brunswick's Multiculturalism Policy (Government of New Brunswick, 1986) states:

New Brunswick's policy on multiculturalism pertains to all New Brunswickers. Its purpose is to work for equal treatment for all citizens of all cultures. It represents a commitment to equality in matters of human rights, in matters of cultural expression and in access to and participation in New Brunswick society. (para. 1)

It can be argued that this commitment to equality and participation is inextricably tied to education. Yet the only evidence of efforts in this regard is a commitment to: "ensuring educational material is available in schools across the province" (Government of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 5). This again reflects an additive approach to cultural inclusion in New Brunswick schools. Providing schools with educational materials (what these materials may actually entail is left to the imagination of the reader) does not explore or challenge the dominance of mainstream culture that pervades education.

Several Canadian scholars (Dei, 1996; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sensoy et al., 2010) have argued that this approach can actually impede cultural equity and inclusivity, and reaffirm cultural dominance by positioning mainstream culture as the unexamined norm against which all other cultures are measured. Sensoy et al. (2010) state "...the effects of this approach are that ethnic group contributions to the 'main story' of the curriculum remain situational, brief, and secondary" (p. 4). This could arguably create a *we* and *them* dichotomy, and produce experiences of otherness for those who fall outside of the dominant culture. And those who fall outside of the

dominant culture will likely include newcomer students, who for the most part are culturally, and often times linguistically, different from the mainstream. Much like the situation described by Ryan (2010), while cultural difference can influence schooling to a point (allowing for celebratory, token days of cultural exhibitions which present fixed, simplified, and trivialized versions of ‘culture’), significant changes that may challenge the dominance of other cultures are not permitted. Therefore the additive approach, as argued by several critical educational theorists, does not serve to challenge the dominance of one culture over all others, but rather serves to hide it by creating an illusion of inclusion.

Elements of the liberal multicultural approach were also present in my conversations with newcomer educators. Liberal multiculturalism, as delineated by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), is when an emphasis is placed on the similarities between cultures, and efforts are made to focus on the shared humanity of all people of all backgrounds. Again, while the message is psychologically appealing, the approach fails to challenge inequity by denying an exploration of the privilege and oppression that is associated with different cultures. Perhaps most reflective of this approach was the notion of fairness as equal output that was encountered throughout my own individual experiences and throughout the interviews: “You can be nice but you also have to be fair”. This teacher’s negotiation between his personal inclination to treat his newcomer students differently than his Anglophone students in assessment and the notion of fairness as equal output that is entrenched within the assessment structure created a tension in his everyday work. Thus the liberal multiculturalist approach in this context, which essentially ignores difference, does not promote inclusion, but actually works to

marginalize those who are different by failing to recognize their unique educational positioning. This naturalized idea of fairness, then, assumes not only that all students are equal, but that all circumstances and experiences are equal, thereby failing to recognize the consequences of socially constructed categories of difference. Much like the pluralist approach, despite its appeal, by decontextualizing and depoliticizing schooling, this approach renders unequal student positioning invisible, and oppresses those students who are politically marginalized. Fairness as equal output denies the challenge of unequal circumstances for minoritized students.

Despite the apparent dominance of the liberal and pluralist approaches to multiculturalism in New Brunswick schools, and the entrenchment of the monocultural perspective in the foundations of public schooling, most interviewees reflected an inclination towards a critical conception of cultural inclusion. Throughout the interviews, several interviewees alluded to the need for a more critical approach to culturally inclusive classrooms. Acknowledging the superficiality of many of the current efforts, this interviewee noted how an examination of everyday teaching practices and curricular materials could significantly change how non-dominant cultures and ultimately non-dominant students are conceived of and supported within the education system. In speaking of discrimination, he questioned: “How are we going to address that with the kindergarten students through to high school...everyday?” In addition to their recognition of the superficiality of the current efforts towards cultural inclusion that they had encountered, the interviewees also alluded to notions of teacher as researcher, pointing to the need for teachers to really learn about their students individually in order to truly include them in their classrooms.

Research Implications

Throughout the course of this project, I have continuously felt torn in my attempt to represent this work. On the one hand, I want the work to evoke a much needed critical dialogue in the realm of newcomer education in the province. On the other hand, my own imprints and influence are heavily present throughout; it has been framed by my own relevancies, interests, passions, and personal values. And although I have attempted to be fair in my representations, this personal re-working, selecting, and framing that are an inherent part of the research process is not without serious implications. But while we must recognize the limitations and subjectivities of our work, we must not allow such reflexivity to give way to paralysis. The following section will use the interviews to shed some light into some potential policy implications, exploring some alternatives that may contribute to a more equitable educational positioning for New Brunswick's newcomer students. I would warn against reading it as a prescription; it is not end-all policy solution. Rather it is an exploration of possibilities meant to spark further consideration of how newcomer education is currently being approached, and how New Brunswick educators might begin to challenge some of the educational constraints that newcomer students may currently be facing.

A consideration of the intersectionality of the institutional, social, and discursive positioning of newcomer students reveals how schools can (re)produce experiences of otherness, oppression and inequity for those students who do not fit the dominant student identity. This arguably includes newcomer students, who are often linguistically, culturally, and/or racially 'different' from the dominant student culture.

Despite the constraints described by interviewees, the province continues to actively recruit newcomers with the promise of quality, culturally inclusive education. But the ethics of these recruitment efforts prove questionable if New Brunswick's schooling structure promotes the dominance and privilege of one culture (and language) over all others. One participant summed up the ethics of this issue quite poignantly:

It's like you're invited to a birthday party, and you expect music and dancing and cake...But then you get here and there is no music, there is no dancing, there is no cake.

At the institutional level, the pressing concerns expressed by interviewees have remained silenced, pushed to the sidelines of educational debate. Hidden by talk of acceptance and cultural celebration, the marginalization of difference within New Brunswick schools seems to remain largely unquestioned and unchallenged systemically.

One interviewee, who was directly involved in the transitional aspects of newcomer education, argued for increased transitional services. He felt that the way in which newcomers were initially introduced to their new schools in his district was largely inadequate, and did not provide any opportunities for the students to become familiarized with their environment prior to being immersed in it. This, he felt, was key to providing more positive educational experiences. Discussing the idea of a welcoming centre, he pointed to the need to explore the practices in other districts wherein such support structures exist, arguing that these structures should be used as a model in his own district and even province-wide.

Another prominent theme was the issue of providing teachers with more time and support to better accommodate newcomer students. If the structure of schooling does not provide teachers with the adequate time, leadership, and support to attend to their newcomer students, then we cannot ensure equitable education for students for whom English (or French) is not a first language. Participants felt that even if teachers were better prepared in their education programs to accommodate different cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds, currently, within their district, there was simply not adequate time and resources to give newcomer students the support that participants felt was needed by many of their newcomer students.

Regarding the issue of assessment, the current way in which newcomer students are being assessed seems highly problematic. It does not appear to accommodate for linguistic difference, and makes academic success almost impossible for students who do not speak English fluently, and does not, as one interviewee noted, capture the hard work and progress of many newcomer students. Although interviewees did not offer specific alternative suggestions, assessment seems to be an important aspect of newcomer education that has not been considered in enough depth at the institutional level.

The interviewees also recognized a lack of valorization of the work of EAL tutors in their district. Although they could not speak of the circumstances in other districts, they acknowledged the value of the position and noted that this value needs to be recognized by the District and Department.

Although there are serious systemic issues to be addressed, as critical educational theorists argue, educators do have the potential to be agents of change for

the students in their classrooms. As critical theory insists, people are not passive agents incapable of changing their social world. Despite the seemingly marginal positioning of newcomer education at the institutional level, the interviews revealed a great deal of resistance to this marginality. Although they may be systemically constrained, in recognizing the need for increased educational accommodation for their newcomer students, several teachers and educational support workers have taken steps to minimize the marginal educational positioning of their newcomer students. The interviewees took extra time and care in working with their students, getting to know and understand their unique circumstances and needs, and adapting their pedagogy accordingly. They took the time to speak with like-minded educators, coming together to form school committees and teams devoted to teaching English as an additional language. Some interviewees noted that students themselves had developed strategies to resist this marginality, with many demonstrating incredible spirit and agency. Nevertheless, most interviewees expressed concern for the overall wellbeing of their newcomer students. Although the majority of their efforts were centered on academics, several participants felt that many of their newcomer students not only faced difficulty in the academic aspects of their transition, but also suffered from emotional and social stress. This suggests that efforts towards inclusion and equity within New Brunswick schools must consider not only the academic engagement of newcomer students, but the pressing social and emotional contexts of their lives as well. And if the emotional impacts of immigration are to be recognized systemically, it is important to provide educators and administrators with guidance and resources to help them provide meaningful emotional support. Kirova-Petrova (2003) aptly poses a critical question: “Is it appropriate for

teachers to expect linguistically diverse students to be involved and motivated learners while they feel like complete strangers in the school environment?” (para. 4). Creating compassionate and supportive environments for culturally and linguistically different students is key to positive schooling experiences and academic engagement.

Educators must also consider their own discursive practices and the ways in which they may be (re)producing marginality. The way in which multiculturalism is conceptualized must move beyond the superficial to address how non-dominant cultures are marginally represented and positioned. Through schooling, all students can learn a critical multicultural literacy wherein multiple cultural perspectives, knowledges, and pedagogies are explored and respected.

Lastly, my interviews with those working with newcomer students suggest a pressing need for increased dialogue on the issue of newcomer education. Having the opportunity to come together and share ideas and experiences seemed to be of great value to them in their work. Not only is dialogue key for identifying issues and exploring new ideas, but it is an important first step in making newcomer education an institutional priority. As Smith (2005) notes in her discussion of the women's movement, dialogue is key to resisting marginality and oppression, as it is the basis of transformative ideological discourses that are the foundation of political action. Only when it is brought in from the peripheries of educational debate will the marginal positioning of newcomer students be recognized and challenged.

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