

PERFORMATIVE IDENTITIES: REFLECTIONS OF A MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHER ON TEACHER SUBJECTIVITIES

by

Colin Steeves

BA, St. Thomas University, 2004
BEd, St. Thomas University, 2005

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Supervisors: Pam Whitty, EdD, Education
Sherry Rose, PhD, Education

Examining Board: David Wagner, PhD, Education, Chair
Helen Massfeller, PhD, Education
Melissa White, PhD, Education

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ABSTRACT

Performative identities: Reflections of a male elementary teacher on teacher subjectivities

Looking through a Foucauldian lens, this thesis critically examines a culture of performativity as defined by Butler (1988) and Ball (2003) as central to exploring how teacher subjectivities are shaped and how teachers – and the students they teach – are evaluated and made to feel evaluated under the intersection of various surveilling gazes. I author my narrative through critical reflection of “moments of breakdown or gratification” (Britzman, 2007, p. 1) from my own reconstruction of experiences – and the experiences of those characters implicated within, and “analyze cultural beliefs, practices, and the social experiences that influence our [teacher] identities” (Allen, 2015, p. 33). I share my re-written experiences with a grade one boy whose schooled identity was defined by what he lacked with print-centric literacy rather than his strengths in other modes of communication and meaning making. I illuminate the tension between binary divisions of gender normativity while working in a ‘feminized’ elementary profession. I critically examine several judging gazes – administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, and self-surveillance – as they were brought out through my own personal and professional experiences and the collective experiences shared by my teaching colleagues. I present that teachers are *defined* more than they are *empowered* to define themselves. By critically examining how colleagues, students, and myself are evaluated and our subjective identities are governed, spaces for critical discussion of the limiting effects of evaluative practices on teaching, learning, and the agency of self-authoring may be found.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis critically examines selected observations and moments of breakdown and gratification (Britzman, 2007, p. 1) from the first ten years of my teaching career for various factors that have influenced the construction of my *teacher self* – how I perceive myself and my perception of how others perceive me. Grounded in my experiences, positioned as a white middle class male, this thesis serves as a critical reflection of the continuous shaping of my teacher identity through consideration of specific forms of evaluative surveillance so deeply ingrained within the educational profession.

I draw upon my reconstructed narrative of experiences within and outside of school walls, including experiences shared with the students I teach and colleagues with whom I work, to help illustrate how one’s personal/professional/gendered self – in the professional and personal realm – is formed, and re-formed, by the constant influence and intersections of official and non-official governing practices. Premised on the desire for one to be recognized by others as ‘good,’ ‘capable,’ ‘effective,’ and ‘normal,’ the constitution of one’s self is not an entirely authentic and natural process. It is a shared and dependent social process that is neither certain, linear, nor without conflict (Britzman, 2007). Using writing as method (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005), I rethink how I have been constructed as a male teacher/student/son. Disrupting my historic linear search for a ‘correct’ path, I move to deeper understanding by “composing and revising a history of learning to live with others [while focusing] upon moments of breakdown or gratification” (Britzman, 2007, p. 1). I revisit “remnants of [my] childhood [that] slip in through the backdoor of [my] theories of teaching and learning” (Britzman, 2007, p. 2)

and learn to embrace “my uncertainty of development as a strange and even alienating resource for understanding the great conflicts that our field absorbs, creates, and lives within” (Britzman, 2007, p. 2). Questions of freedom and authenticity surface as I explore my performative acts of ‘becoming/being a teacher’ as a never-finished project, in constant flux within learning to understand myself as “subject to uncertainty” (Britzman, 2007, p. 3).

Though performativity in education has been well researched (Teo, 2013; Hennessy & McNamara, 2013; Ball, 2012, 2003; Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012; Mulcahy, 2011; Connell, 2009; Johnson, 2005; Rose, 1991; Butler, 1988), research from a critical male perspective is an emerging area of study. Written through my lens as a privileged white male, the intent of this work is to offer new beginnings for dialogue regarding the subjectivities of teacher identity.

Defining myself: An autobiographic standpoint

I begin with an autobiographic as a way to present what Arthur Frank (2000) refers to as a “standpoint.” Taking a standpoint has required a “self-consciousness about how the fate and choices in [my] life have positioned [me] in the world and with whom [I] have been positioned” and in so authoring it, I have “privilege[d] certain aspects of what [my] biography shares with others” (Frank A. W., 2000, p. 356). As Borland (1998) writes, “The performance of a personal narrative [of professional experiences] is a fundamental means by which people comprehend their own lives and present a ‘self’ to their audience” (p. 328). The goal of narrating my standpoint is not merely for the construction and presentation of myself, but carries with it dialogical intentions for others to connect and better understand my journey and the shaping of my subjectivities. It

opens opportunities for the reader to connect and interpret the story of fate through the choices I have made while also considering the experiences and experiential choices of her or his own, in a dialogue with the reader left open as a shared text.

While I was teaching first grade, one of the boys stopped beside me as he was leaving the classroom to get ready for home after one of the first days of school. He asked me why I wanted to become a teacher. Before I could respond, what I had interpreted as a smirk appeared as he audaciously added: “You must really love school to want to be in one your whole life.” His voice and his comment often return when I reflect on my teaching, bringing the same puzzled look to my face today as it did when that boy seemed to have joked with me about school.

In a sense, my journey toward being an educator and my attitudes and understandings of education began with my experiences as a student. As Britzman (2007) writes, “Growing up in education permeates our meanings of education and learning; it lends commotion to our anticipations for and judgements toward the self and our relations with others” (p. 2). The boy’s constructions of teachers choosing to be so as a result of a “love” for school was not the case for me. I was a student who was curious, inquisitive, and loved *learning*, however, my attitude toward *schooling* was quite different: I was never satisfied with the structure of school. It was not my love for school that ultimately lead me to become a teacher, but contrarily, a dislike for my schooled experience that instilled in me a desire to affect change in the system, a desire to serve the public good, and a passion for learning that drove me to work to change what happens in school for my “whole life.”

Throughout my schooling, a number of experiential influences had an impact on

the foundation from which my teacher self – and what I believe a teacher should be – would be constructed and reconstructed. An early course assignment in my Bachelor of Education program required me to reflect on my definition of the role of teacher and education. Reflection conjured up memories of the attributes of teachers I appreciated during my schooling as well as those attributes that I resented and resisted as a student. I became “suspicious of what [I had] not experienced and [...] nostalgi[c] to what [had] been missed (Britzman, 2007, p. 2). During this exercise, I was able to piece together my ‘ideal teacher’ from those teachers who allowed my input into the design of assignments and tests, who listened to my arguments against repetitive, rote practice questions, and those who created opportunities for active engagement in the content of my learning. My ideal teachers were those who established a sincere level of care for their students, teaching not only the standard curricular outcomes but, more importantly, modelling democratic and respectful human interaction. For me, the meditative exercise of constructing the ideal teacher’s identity became less about reflecting on the sort of teachers that students like best, but the kind of teachers students deserve to have. Teaching, was about disrupting those memories of traditionally schooled experiences, and I desired to become a teacher that is true to his students; I hoped to be a teacher who advocates for students, celebrates their achievements and teaches them to learn from their shortfalls, and guides them to take ownership of their learning, empowering each learner to author their own confident yet, cooperative, place in the world using critical thought to combat socio-cultural barriers.

The reflective assignment also conjured up questions about why I aspired to teach. A part of this aspiration came from a passion for learning fostered by the enriched

childhood experiences that occurred outside of school. I enjoyed theme park vacations, museum visits, theatrical performances, summer camps, competitive sports, and home libraries, afforded to me from the privilege of growing up as a white, middleclass male of two divorced, but loving parents. My family's position of privilege, belonging to the dominant class, afforded me experiences that catered to my curiosity not always satisfied in school. If there were gaps in my formal education, they were filled by informal efforts of my family. In retrospect, I often question the rather seemingly arbitrary content of school curriculum as well as the structural attitudes within the educational system as to what counts as learning and what counts as success. My reflective writing brought me to another reason for pursuing a career in teaching: a desire to affect change within an academic system that seemed rigid and conforming. My family had the socio-economic means to provide enriched learning experiences outside of school yet, there were times during my schooling that I had difficulty feeling successful. This was particularly the case during English Language Arts classes. Restricted by the limiting traditional format of top-down, 'drill and kill' instruction, my attitude toward learning, as a high school student, was shaped and subject to my performance and struggles with standardized learning and my desire for the teaching values of which I was beginning to identify.

My disengaging English language arts experience

My English marks never stood out in high school. As a slow reader, I found it difficult to finish the one to two nights' worth of assigned chapters from Bronte or scenes from Shakespeare in addition to the homework responsibilities of my other courses. In school I learned to value what I was initially successful at as determined by the scores on tests and assignments. Contrary to my English scores, I experienced scored success in

science and math. In line with my math and science success, I set my sights on university engineering programs and valued my high school language arts classes less and less. Lacking motivation to engage myself in English classes, I did not prioritize my writing and reading assignments.

Unable to keep up with the expected high school reading pace of 10 - 20 pages over two nights in addition to homework of the other subjects, I felt I was a poor reader, and the reason for this was perhaps double edged. On one side, I often arrived at class unprepared due to my inability to read at the pace required to participate in class successfully. On the other side, when I did read the assigned selections, I did so too quickly to appreciate the nuances of Elizabethan dialect or the complex development of character relationships in *Wuthering Heights*. I felt disengaged from the read-note-read-quiz-watch film formulation to how course content was delivered. I was barely able to fake my way through assignments and got by on quizzes and tests from what I remembered from class notes and discussions, not from my actual reading of the texts. Luckily, the shorter selections during poetry units, and creative writing pieces carried me through the courses, allowing me to attain final marks ranging from C+ to B+.

The constitution of my student identity regarding reading was connected to the graded score that I received on assignments and quizzes (Rose, 1991). Though my grades may have reflected average work, my scored performance in other subjects – maths and sciences – was above average. Was my engagement and performance in these subjects a effect of a belief instilled in me for the gendering of subjects? Was I, a reiteration of the norm, a boy, doing well in math and sciences? My academic identity toward English subjects and maths and sciences was constructed by my scored performances, and I

ranked myself accordingly. Lower marks for reading assignments meant I was a poor reader when contrasted with my above average grades in math and science. By ranking myself against myself, my attitudes toward these subjects were likewise shaped by percentage points: English classes were something I did just because they were required.

Producing only marginal work for courses that I was taking out of necessity for graduation, I permitted myself to become somewhat disengaged from my English literature classes. I struggled through level two English. Though I was not given choice about the content it was not necessarily the content of the courses that I was uninterested in, but the lack of opportunities for me to feel success, to feel importance, to recognize the applicable critical value of literature in everyday life. The topics and discussions that *could* have happened – e.g. gender roles in *Macbeth*; Victorian patriarchal marital values in *Wuthering Heights* – while studying these readings did not. Lacking opportunity for purposeful, active engagement with the content and successful grades that would fuel my motivation, I was disengaged.

It was during a trip to the water fountain during class time that I had wandered past a larger auditorium where a small class of students gathered around a makeshift stage at the front of the room. In their hands, they held the same copies of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as we had been reading in the level two English Literature class of which I had been taking my time returning to. In turn, the students attempted to read and outperform each other's' interpretation of various passages with great expression, giving each other constructive feedback. From the hallway, I watched what appeared to be troop of around ten professional actors rehearsing for an upcoming Shakespearean production. This was level one English, and I was intrigued.

In the weeks to follow, I would dismiss myself to the water fountain or the washroom – excuses so that I could catch a glimpse of what the level one students were doing: peer-to-peer collaboration, creating videos, posters, debating interpretation and relevancy, and enjoying an enriched and immersive approach to learning about literature. This hands-on approach was what I enjoyed about sciences: the experience of doing rather than simply read-note-regurgitate. I began to recognize from looking in on these higher level classes that the creative, student-centred pedagogy was more in line with my hands-on learning style – after all, I had excelled in more creative courses found under the English language arts umbrella, such as, writing, journalism, and media studies classes. I was interested in the possibility of enrolling in a level one class in the next semester.

I learned the meaning of ‘catch 22’ after meeting with the teacher of the level one class. I was told that because of my less-than-average marks of my level two class, I would not be accepted into the level one program. At this time, I had begun to identify that my disengagement from level two English literature was not due to a lack of ability, but a lack of engagement from how the literacy was being assessed (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). My arguments regarding my learning style and the potential that I had for engaging with literature through the hands-on experiences of the level one stream fell on deaf ears. I was given the opportunity to prove myself bringing up my marks for my current course. The catch: I was unable to attain the level of academic success required to gain entrance to course that offered the pedagogic format that I needed to succeed. I fell back into the cycle of minimalist readings, scraped by when it mattered, and dismissed the value of literature courses.

My discouraging mathematics experience

Both of my parent's careers were related to mathematics. With my father a civil engineer and my mother in federal finance, I was constantly exposed to the practical application of math. I would watch as my mother conducted her printing calculator into a rhythm of clicking and buzzing as she managed the household finances with smooth confidence. I would follow my father around the yard as he talked out his mental calculations before pulling out the rectangular carpentry pencil from behind his ear to measure and mark where the fresh pine boards would be cut for whatever home improvement project he was working on. There was a real purpose to math – it got things done!

Though my parents read to my brother and myself, and we often observed them reading for their own pleasure, I never interpreted reading as having an everyday application other than something someone chose to do in their spare time. Might this have been the root of my school-aged disconnect with reading?

Math, physics and chemistry were subjects that not only interested me greatly, but ones that I regarded as practical and necessary building blocks for an aspired career in engineering. I was challenged by the content and assignments of the courses I took, but never felt discouraged or intimidated by the workload. Though the course format was similar to that of level-two English courses – read, notes, assignment, and test – the sciences often had hands on experiments that gave everyday worldly applications to the theories and numbers discussed in class. Still, I was by no means an honour roll student when it came to completing my homework assignments to the best of my ability; however, I took math and science courses more seriously with the understanding that

performance in these subjects was connected to admittance in university engineering programs.

As a prerequisite for university applications, I was required to maintain an overall average mark above 70%. Additionally, the expectation of attaining a minimum 70% average was applied to particular courses. In the fall of my grade twelve year, I registered for a required advanced mathematics course that would, inevitably, disrupt and alter my career aspirations.

As this was the last course on my list of math requirements for engineering, I approached assignments more carefully than in other subjects or previous math classes. I had a friend in the course that took the work even more seriously than me, and proved to be a helpful study partner when applying challenging concepts and preparing for the test. Much of the course content stretched my mathematical aptitude to the limits, but I persevered – that is to say, until I was met with a certain trigonometry concept that I found exceptionally difficult.

To combat my struggle with grasping this concept, my friend – who was excelling in the course – tutored me and I responded well to the peer-to-peer collaborative studying, but this was not enough. I received extra help and practice from the teacher during noon hours, and even attained a tutor who was in the engineering program in which I planned to be enrolled. Assignments for other courses (e.g. level two English readings) were pushed to the side and most of my focus was given to learning this concept well enough to replicate it on a test; it was, after all, my performance in math that held more weight for my post high school education and career goals. Unfortunately, this extra work only helped me to achieve a mark just below the required 70% on a midterm

that assigned great value to the very topic I struggled to learn. As far as the requirements for engineering admittance were concerned, my performance at the midway point of the course was substandard.

My marks improved in the second half of the course due to the fact that the particular stifling concept was out of the way. Because of my perseverance and motivation for acceptance into engineering, I was able to regain the confidence I had once held in math. This momentum came to a screeching halt as the class prepared to review for the final exam.

On the list of concepts to review was that which had given me great difficulty earlier in the semester. I decided that the time spent covering this concept over the entirety of the course was minimal and would likewise be represented minimally on the final exam amongst what I perceived were larger concepts. With concern for how this concept could affect my final exam mark, I created a plan for studying around the concept in preparation for the formative assessment. I had worked out the percentage of course time spent on each concept and projected a relationship for the value per-concept on the final exam – this exercise, alone, evident of my confidence with the practical use of numbers. After my calculations, I had determined that it would be more beneficial to focus my study time on those outcomes I could master rather than spending valuable study time on a concept that I had previously been unable to grasp despite great efforts.

On exam day, as the tests were passed around, we were informed that different exams were printed on different coloured paper: green and blue. It was explained that this was to eliminate cheating and likewise, students with the same coloured test could not sit adjacent to one another. This made sense to me given the anxiety that I, as well as my

peers, felt for taking such an important exam. Admittedly, if I thought there was a chance that I could have gotten away with cheating, I would have. Because of the constructed perception that, given the opportunity, students would cheat during tests (Cizek, 2003; Skidmore & Aagaard, 2003), the bi-coloured exams with different questions were distributed and students alternated their seating as per the teacher's request. However, not explained was the fact that each coloured test also placed more attention on slightly different concepts. For the students with a blue exam placed on their desk, my strategically projected value-per-concept formulation proved to be quite accurate. Unfortunately for me, a green exam was placed on my desk and was centred on one concept: *the* concept that had haunted me in the first term. My future was determined by a crude bi-coloured exam lottery that denied me opportunity to prove my capabilities and understandings of other outcomes. Whether I did not give the correct answers or was not given the correct test, and denied the opportunity to retake the alternate exam, my fate of failure was sealed in green. In the end, I was able to pass the course but, I did so without a sufficient grade to gain acceptance into the engineering program.

My engaging university experience

My white middle-class male position of privilege is significant to my story in that my academic performance in high school, though somewhat restrictive for entrance in to certain programs, did not close all doors of opportunity, but merely narrowed them slightly. If anything, the narrowing of this doorway took my focus off engineering and broadened my consideration for other career disciplines.

As a white male coming from a position of middle-class privilege, I had an advantage of strong familial support and was afforded the opportunity to explore other

career pathways and further education. My mother worked for the Federal government and my father was a professional engineer, the latter of whose interests and career certainly had a strong influence on my out-of-school learning experiences related to science and engineering. Their presence and support – despite their eventual divorce – for my brother and myself throughout our childhood and educational lives provided a presumed safety net. Though always present and supportive, my parents did not directly interfere in my decisions as I readied to make the transition from high school to university education; however, there were occasions where my father teased about going to an Arts school and my mother warned about jobs flipping burgers if I did not take my education seriously. Despite their reiterations of enacting dominant economic discourses and instilling a subtle pressure for setting high career and, ultimately, earning aspirations, I knew that if I was not successful in my educational or career choices, they were in a position to provide the support necessary to help me find another direction.

My options seemed somewhat limitless; however, the scope of what *I* considered as reasonable alternative options to my previous engineering goals *were* limited. Possible career pathways were narrowed by certain socio-economic and gender expectations. Ironically, the supportive structure of my family's middle class position may have restricted me from looking for possibilities outside expectations to become a professional and earn a salary greater than, if not equal to, my parents. Career options that fell within a framework of masculine expectations further had a filtering effect.

In my senior year of high school as the calendar pages flipped day by day closer to my June graduation, I considered career options historically and socially gendered as masculine from technical trades, to firefighter, to sound engineer, to military service.

When it became evident to me, the salary and benefits that I could earn as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), I began to seek out the requirements to apply. Favour was given to those applicants who completed a Bachelor's degree and a local university – St. Thomas University – offered a criminology program. Though I was not entirely certain about pursuing a career in the RCMP, it was *something* that fit the unspoken gendered and monetary standards of my privileged position. Attending a university in my hometown was also attractive as it was less of a risk than packing my belongings along with uncertainty to a locale where a change of mind would be expensive. After all, criminology programs would require a great deal of reading and writing: areas of which my confidence was without strong foundation following the limiting experiences of grade school language arts programs.

I credit the majority of my current career pathway to the requirement of the St. Thomas University criminology program at the time of my enrolment. A prerequisite for the criminology stream was a six credit hour introduction to sociology course that was offered over the duration of my first year. This meant that I would not be able to enrol in a criminology course until my second year of university.

The introduction to sociology course impacted me greatly. Not only was I introduced to social theory and theorists; I was for the first time given an academic forum to think critically about the world, my social position, and the position of others. Reflection on socio-political inequalities and injustices gave new meaning to the punk rock lyrics that I had grown up listening to. I listened differently to these lyrics critical of government control, unequal distribution of wealth, white privilege, capitalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other systemic social injustices.

Near the end of my first year of university in April 2001, the Summit of the Americas was held in Quebec City. I watched and read as clashes between protesters and police forces at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City became violent. I began to question the integrity of my beliefs, values, and ultimately my career goals. How would I as a member of the RCMP, be able to carry out an order to hold back, intimidate, tear gas, pepper spray, and arrest activists of groups that I might otherwise be joining in protest? I was confounded. This contradiction influenced my course selection for the following year. I did not register for any criminology courses, but instead shifted my focus on majoring in sociology. Notions of joining the RCMP were abandoned and I was once again at a loss when casually questioned by friends and relatives around holiday tables, “So what will you do when you're done?”

Social conversations with others, clearly communicated that career next-steps be driven by the apparent need to generate income great enough to provide not only for myself, but included the expectation of providing for my own household. The constructed gender expectation of the ‘providing man’ or ‘head of the household’ was reinforced through casual dialogue. Regarding the experience of women, Butler (1988) writes on the distinction between sex and gender, arguing that the former is biological and meaningless while the latter “compel[s] the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project which has cultural survival at its end” (p. 522). Gender is a social construction defined by acts. In this sense, one is not a gender, but *does* and becomes gendered through the repetition of performative acts that conform to normative expectations and

“without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (Butler, 1988, p. 522). A parallel can be drawn with my experience of believing in the necessity and naturalness of “punitively regulated cultural fictions” (Butler, 1988, p.522) that when connected with monetary expectations, became a projection of not only the prowess of economic success, but at its basic form, the means to capitalistic survival. To extend Butler’s theorizing of a heterosexual contract as constructed from the biological realities of cultural survival, earning a living and providing for a family was my gendered duty “in service of reproductive interests” (Butler, 1988, p. 524). The motives behind conversations that evolve into how, exactly, I *would* earn a living were based in sincere curiosity and familial concern; however, they were coming from an unspoken place of class consciousness, checking in to ensure that I was on track to best or, at the very least, maintain my current economic status. I was subject to the biopolitics I was being brought to work on myself “under certain forms of authority, in relation truth discourses, by means of practices of the self, in the name of [my] own life or health, that of [my] family [...]” (Rabinow & Rose, 2006, p. 197). The economic necessity held a great influence over an inherent desire for integration and inclusion within Foucault’s “disciplinary society” (Rabinow & Rose, 2006, p. 198). Patriarchal expectations of becoming the primary earner of my future household were ever present in middle-class dinner conversations for my career plan and with it anxiety for choosing the correct path. I continued to consider masculine career options ranging from fire fighter to commissioned officer in the military.

At this time of career conundrum, I was dating a girl whose mother worked in the payroll section for one of New Brunswick's public school districts. When the “what-will-

you-do” conversation came up during a family dinner at their household, it was suggested that I look into teaching. Not only did her mother point out to me my history with coaching youth, summer jobs at day camps and youth recreation, part-time work at a toy store where I often facilitated crafts, science activities, and games for children on Saturdays, but she dispelled a false impression I held about the “living” that a teacher “earned”. Prior to this conversation, I held “a deeply embedded ‘habitus’ associating caring jobs [such as teaching] with low-paid, low-status jobs” (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014, p. 236). When I learned that teachers, “get paid really well,” another doorway was opened for me in recognizing that the professional status and working conditions of teachers opted as a viable career option (Laere, *et al*, 2014). Though I clearly had an interest and aptitude for working with children, it was not until I was assured the opportunity to earn a certain level of salary, pension, and health benefits that the teaching profession became an option. Now teaching became a pathway to perform in accordance with the patriarchal gendered convention as an earner/provider.

To say that I was convinced solely by my new insight of monetary benefits of pursuing a career in teaching would not be accurate, but the monetary benefits did allow me to consider teaching as an appropriate option when positioned next to previous, and more masculine, career aspirations. The earning potential as an educator was less than that of engineers, RCMP members, and military officers. Initially, I felt that I was settling short of possible trans-generational economic growth and was haunted by the adage, ‘those who can't, teach.’ Consequently, the further along I progressed in my sociology undergraduate degree, the more I learned about capitalist consumerism and commodity fetishism through a Marxist lens, the less financial prowess and earning potential became

a priority. Through a sociology course on social deviance, I gained a better understanding of the construction of gender expectations. Bringing the semester to a close, the professor challenged male students to wear a dress to the final exam as a demonstration of protest to gender normativity. In doing so with a friend and classmate, we were apparently the first to take the exam in drag in all the years that she had offered the course. I would not say that this was a turning point for me, but a memorable moment none the less that reminds me of the absurdity of constructed norms and “cultural fictions” (Butler, 1988, p.522). Gaining a better understanding of the rather artificial socio-cultural construction of gender and gender roles further distanced me from the necessity of finding masculine work.

My perturbing Bachelor of Education experience

As my final year of my undergraduate degree was nearing its end, I applied to and was accepted in the Bachelor of (Elementary) Education program at St. Thomas University (STU). My decision to apply to the elementary stream of the degree was more of a political strategy rather than that of sincere aspirations. Knowing that the number of enrolments was quite exclusive for STU and that half would be accepted in the primary program and the others in the secondary program, I recognized a male applying to the elementary stream might be an opportunity that could increase my chances for acceptance.

When I began to share with others that I was planning on applying to education programs, I experienced a common reply: “They're dying for male teachers in elementary school.” Indeed, most teachers at the elementary level were female and I recalled not having a male classroom teacher until my grade six year, but was there a push for male

teachers? I recall my aunt, who was a teacher, and a distant cousin, who was a principal, giving an educator's perspective on the need for male teachers. They confirmed the commonly held notion that a decline in the academic and behavioural performance of male students was due to a lack of male teachers and male role models (Skelton, 2009; Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014). The presumed push to train and hire male elementary teachers with the hopes forming stronger, positive connections with young male students widened the doorway for my future in education. I bought into the social myth, that male students – especially those in the younger grades - needed male teachers. With this in mind, it only made sense that to increase my chances of acceptance, I should apply to the elementary program, regardless of whether or not I wanted to teach at that level. Fearful that I be considered less masculine by my male peers in doing work typically done by women (Simpson, 2005), I maintained that acceptance in the elementary education program was merely a way in, reiterating the hegemonic devaluing of women teachers and young children's learning. A meeting with an adviser from the University's Registrar office affirmed that I would likely be able to switch to the secondary level once the programs began in the fall, which I managed to do just before classes began.

My successful switch into the secondary program was short lived as it was determined that my – as well as another female student's switch to secondary – created an imbalance of enrolment between the two programs that were supposed to be equally split. During a meeting I was notified that I would be reverted back into the primary stream to which I was initially accepted. I was told that as a male who showed interest in elementary education certainly influenced the decision of admitting me into that particular program, and failure to comply with the original acceptance into the

elementary stream would result in the loss of my spot in the program. To remain in education, I had no other choice but to accept this move, regardless of any resistant or uneasy feelings I may have had about becoming an elementary teacher. As a sort of consolation, I was promised I would be placed at the middle-school level for one of my internships. Though initially disappointed and anxious about the transfer of levels, it was this move that essentially set my course toward the beginnings of what continues to be a rewarding career at the elementary level.

Initially, reservations I had toward becoming an elementary educator were linked to the monetary benefits and conceptions of gender-roles that I held. What I had constructed as the archetypal elementary educator was based on experiences and my perceptions of any female teachers in a female dominated profession. Statistics referenced by Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl (2014) demonstrate that “the more care seems to be included in the teacher’s work, the fewer the men” (p. 281). Recalling my elementary experiences – and not having had a male teacher until my grade six year – I held the construction of elementary teachers “as an extension of mother, as a nurturing, protective, and caring person” (Weber & Mitchell, 1996, p. 310). Although I recognized the creativity and effective effort that female teachers put into the daily academics, I was uninterested in the less-spoken-of acts as caring for scraped knees, runny noses, wet pants, and teary-eyed students. I recalled my first grade teacher hugging me as a six year old when I came to her crying as I returned a large red button that I had stolen the day before. How would I be able to provide such care within the “restrictions placed in males’ interactions with children and the mistrust that these engender” (Brownhill, 2014, p. 249)? If caring for children was long considered to be naturally maternal and normal for

women (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014), would I be considered unnatural or abnormal? How would others respond to a man hugging a six year-old boy? As a male – a large male at 6'4" 215 pounds – how I would effectively provide this sort of maternal care to a construction of young emotionally innocent children (Castañeda, 2002) was intimidating as it did not seem 'natural' (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014). Though Nel Noddings (2010) recognizes that women have an evolutionary history of maternal connectedness with the cared-for, she suggests that developing “a set of dispositions to respond to legitimate needs” (p.28) of children and developing a relationship of care is not merely possible in men, but must be established. For Noddings (2010), “a carer must exercise receptive attention – to listen and watch” (p.47). To be an effective, caring teacher, I would have to learn to “read” the child, assess the needs and respond appropriately. I would need to disconnect and challenge the long-held connection between gender and care.

Anxiety for working with young learners reached beyond the socially constructed ‘motherly role’ it appeared I would have to challenge to be an effective teacher. Despite having come from a strong undergraduate experience with English literature, I lacked confidence regarding the attention and stamina required to deliver what appeared to be the monotony of supporting beginning reading, writing, and number sense strategies for children – or perhaps was it that I considered such tasks too simplistic and below my ingrained masculine desire for immediate results? I could not imagine myself leading sing-alongs for vowel sounds and basic math fact families, nor could I imagine myself physically stooping to the back straining height of tiny desks and chairs. Additionally, I had observed how my female colleagues in the Bachelor of Education. program had

interacted with children so comfortably and apparently naturally, and how children responded quite openly and automatically. Children appeared to recognize a sort of familiarity with females in teaching roles. Some children were noticeably shy, reluctant, and reserved when I tried to interact, while others were initially sillier and seemed to recognize me as a source of play rather than an academic role model. It was difficult for me to see past this juxtaposition of gendered expectations that children and I seemed to have, and as yet I had not even begun to consider the impressions of parents that would later surface.

My encouraging internship experience

The first of my two internships had me placed in a rural New Brunswick middle-high school teaching grade six, seven, and eight language arts, social studies, and health. This was a positive experience as I was able to use my dominant masculine experiences and knowledge of sports, fishing, camping, and cars to connect with some of the more seemingly uninterested male students who enacted hegemonic masculinities through behavioural reputations as challenging, disrespectful and even prone to violent outbursts directed toward teachers.

For many of the students from this community, what counted as masculinity was constructed from the observations of those male adults that they had encountered beyond their school experiences as represented in popular media and in the community. Linked with my previous masculine ideals, I held a rather generalizing perception at the time that assumed many of the fathers of students worked labour-intensive jobs at a local mill, in automotive garages, driving long-haul trucks, operating heavy machinery, or worked with other skilled trades. In the off time, these fathers drank beer, tinkered with cars, drove

four wheelers and sleds, and hunted. For these students, these were real men. Those male teachers whom they had become familiar with usually taught physical education, science, math, or industrial arts. For most, I was the first male that they had observed in the role teacher for subjects typically taught by female teachers. On two memorable occasions, students challenged the credibility of my gender and my masculine legitimacy.

It was during the launch of literature circles in a grade eight Language Arts class that my masculinity was first interrogated by students. Before my teaching responsibilities had begun, my cooperating teacher had placed the class into reading groups based on the students' interests and reading abilities. As it worked out, one of the groups was comprised of five boys labelled more behaviourally challenging, who leaned back in their chairs and doodled on their closed binders with disinterest while other groups selected their books. Did their disinterest and 'challenging behaviour' come from a place of resistance to having been devalued and viewed as incompetent in school? Was their disinterest in school further reinforced by cultural constructions that academic interest and performance is not masculine? Surely the boys had skills *they* valued and were learning outside of the Language Arts classroom. I noticed one boy drawing the logo of Browning firearms beneath a carefully sketched hunting rifle. Pointing at the emblem, I asked how the deer season was going, and I had the collective attention of the boys in the group. "*You* hunt?" one enquired cynically. When I admitted that I did not hunt, two boys exchanged 'of-course-you-don't' glances while another accusingly remarked, "You probably ain't never shot." On the defence, I shared a few stories of spending time with my friends hunting and admitted to firing at cans and bottles around their various camps. When I shared that I fished, the boys let me in a little closer, but they

persisted with questions about what kind of fish, where I fish, what sort of lures and what bait I liked to use, if I had a knife, what kind of knife, and what was the biggest fish that I had ever caught. The boys' eyes widened when I spread my hands to apart around 60 cm to represent the salmon that I caught just that summer. The boys were sceptical, but they were interested in hearing me regale them with the events and conditions that lead me to land the large fish. At one point, one of the boys asked if I spent a lot of time in the woods, and I was able to share that I love nothing more than wilderness camping. By luck, that same boy asked if I had ever been lost in the woods, providing the perfect segue to introduce *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, a novel about a city boy stranded and surviving alone in the boreal forest, as the book for their group's literature circle. At this point, the period ended with the ring of a bell, and the boys grabbed their binders and shuffled out of the room, all but one leaving their copy of *Hatchet* behind.

When class resumed the next day and groups settled down to discuss the novel excerpts read the night before, I presented the group of boys with a few pictures from my fishing excursions and one of the salmon I had previously described. In turn, the boys shared stories about their fish and ask questions, as if I were a fishing expert, about the best tricks to catch big fish. It was around this time that one of the boys became curious and pointed toward the teacher's desk. With a surprised look he asked, "Is that yours?" and I realized he was not simply pointing toward my keys that I had left by my coffee mug on the desk, but he was referring to the small Swiss-army knife that was attached to the key ring. I grabbed the keys, shoved them into my pocket and commented that I probably should not have the knife at school. The boys admitted that they too were always forgetting to leave their pocket-knives at home.

At that moment, I had noticed a shift in their attitude toward me. Through casual conversation and the oral sharing of personal narratives on our individual “huntin’, fishin’, and wheelin’” experiences, I had allowed and accepted their literacies and their vernacular for orally communicating such knowledge in a venue usually reserved for more mainstream forms of literacy (Dyson, 2005). Through the exchange of hunting, camping, and fishing stories, and the observation that I carried a pocket knife – from which point I made sure to not leave out in the open – I was able to tear down some of the presupposing walls of a soft, clean-cut city boy and legitimized myself as masculine in the boys’ regard. They had shaped *me* to their standards of masculinity and, at the same time, the boys were able to legitimize their own identities as valid and productive. Together – myself, the knife, the boys, and our interactions – we co-constructed identities for ourselves within the classroom space we shared.

The boys appreciated my willingness to care, listen and respect how they were shaping their own identities. Rather than trying to address and invasively ‘fix’ their initial disengaged, and perhaps, disrespectful behaviours, I listened, with sincere interest, to “their own ideas, values and understandings of themselves and the world” (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007, p. 42). Rather than adding to what I assumed had been their previous school experience of deficit-focused intervention (MacNaughton, *et al*, 2007), once the group of boys recognized that their voices would be heard and respected, and they did not feel an authoritative pressure from me to participate or resist. Due to my practice of learning the learner, a relational connection of listening and respect was enacted from which learning and participation were scaffolded and the boys put forth a better effort into reading *Hatchet*. On some occasions, I continued to sit and read

chapters with them – but their independence, engagement and ownership of their learning continued to grow to the point that they would often remind other classmates to, “Listen-up when Mr. Steeves is talkin’.”

The second challenge to the legitimacy of my gender that came during my rural placement occurred between periods in the hallway outside of the classroom. Since I began my internship in this setting, I had moved through the hallways pretending to not hear whispers about my appearance and behaviour – both inappropriately complimentary or not – as well as homophobic pejoratives such as “fag,” “queer,” “homo,” “light in the loafers,” etc. Actively ignoring the comments, I avoided conflict with these students, perhaps out of an uncertainty for how to handle these dominating behaviours. I was able to push past the whispers with a distorted sense of esteem in making my own generalized presumption that it was my clean cut appearance in contrast with the work boot and camouflage fashions of many other the male students that triggered such comments.

Male teachers are often observed through a homophobic lens that re-inscribes heteronormativity. It is often safer for gay, bisexual, or transgendered men to keep their sexuality closeted and wise for straight men to prove they are not gay. Male teachers are “often characterized as ‘feminine,’ ‘homosexual,’ or ‘pedophile(s)’” (Parr & Gosse, 2011, p. 382) and are careful when answering questions of moral surveillance that aim to out them as such. An educator’s private life is scrutinized with innocent sounding questions as, “are you married?” and “do you live alone?” (Martino, 2008). On one particular occasion, unfamiliar grade seven students – one female and one male – approached me. The two were curious about whether or not I was married and when I told them that I was not, they glanced at each other and hesitated briefly before beginning the second gender

inquisition. They asked if I was engaged to be married, if I had any children of my own, if I had a girlfriend, and if I was just “playing the field.” After each “no” that I answered to these questions – I had lied about not having a girlfriend out of a coy curiosity to see where they were going with this – the two looked at each other, nodding as if checking off a mental checklist that they had worked out earlier. “Why do you talk so proper all the time?” the girl asked, comparing our ‘Englishes’ and differences in our vernacular (Dyson, 2005). Without considering the value in the students’ vernacular and thereby perpetuating the discursive binary of ‘proper’ and acceptable versus ‘improper’ and unacceptable Englishes, I hastily reminded her that I was a teacher and expected to speak formal English. Finally, the girl stuttered slightly before nudging the boy with her elbow. “She wants to know if you are, you know, gay,” the boy stated abruptly, visibly embarrassed about the volume at which he had allowed his voice to attract the looks of other students now interested in my response. Feeling the gaze from several pairs of middle school-aged eyes, I paused to craft a three word answer that would send a message devoid of defensive or authoritative tone for a message that could be interpreted as an alliance or admission of the blurted question: “Does it matter?” Initially, this response took students off guard, but forced them to address the validity of what I interpreted to be a homophobic-coloured interrogation. With what appeared to be sincerity, the two shrugged their shoulders, responded that, “it doesn't matter,” wished me a good afternoon, and slipped into a nearby classroom before the bell rang. Again, like the boys in the language arts class, I reacted to ‘challenging students’ by calmly listening and it had resulted in a positive outcome, though it was not my conscious intention. If I had not cared to give the students the time to listen to their questioning, the result may

have been quite different.

In the days following this interview, I felt the hallway was noticeably different as I passed students rummaging for books in their opened lockers. Students no longer seemed to pass whispers as I walked by, or at least, they became more clandestine with how they chose to do so. I felt that the level of respect toward me had increased and credited how I chose to respond to the questions of my sexuality with affording me the ability to pass through the school with a feeling of acceptance rather than scrutiny.

During my rural middle-level internship, I had managed to rather successfully move through not only hallways, but through a sort of legitimizing gaze from students, made evident both by what was and what was no longer spoken. Though the above-described accounts did not finalize challenges for me to prove my gender and sexuality, I feel that some students were able to expand their constructs for masculinity and the possible role of males; perhaps, I too was growing in my capacity to address dominant masculine behaviours.

I was placed with a male cooperating teacher at the grade-five level for my second internship. Like myself, my cooperating teacher was a tall man who towered over the ten and eleven year-olds as he moved around rows of small desks. During the observation portion of my internship, I took note of how he interacted with the students, not adjusting or raising his voice an octave to make it sound softer as I had anticipated. My perception of teaching and care for students in elementary levels changed as I grew to understand “the physical tasks themselves do not define what care and education is, but how the tasks are performed [defines] what care and education is” (Jensen, 2011 as cited in Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014, p. 235). He was direct and sometimes blunt with

the students, which they appeared to respect, and he tossed around a dry sense of humour when appropriate that kept the students engaged. What I observed was a man, balancing his masculinity with a gentle but straightforward ethic of care for how he interacted with students, “offering practical help and understanding” (Laere, *et al.*, 2014, p. 235). My constructions of care as feminine were disrupted by my observations of how this man interacted and clearly cared for these students.

I recall the day that I was to take full control of the class when my cooperating teacher passed on some advice that greatly impacted the construction of my teacher-identity – an identity that would continue to be challenged by what Tucker (2015) refers to as “hybrid identities” linked to positions of both privilege and disadvantage in elementary schools (p. 4).

During the quiet of morning in the minutes before the school’s students began to arrive, my cooperating teacher’s pep talk spoke to the hybrid experiences of male teacher subjects. He opened by pointing out that I would be one of the few male elementary teachers and that it would be common for me to find myself as the sole male teacher on staff aside from physical education teachers. Because of this, he continued, I would be considered a role model not only for my students, but for students in other classrooms who would also look up to me. With respect to this responsibility, and with respect to the scarcity of male teachers in elementary school, he added that I would “stick out like a sore thumb,” and would need to be always conscious of how I conducted myself with and around children.

As a male teacher, he advised that I would need to establish myself as somewhat more emotionally distant when interacting with children, commenting on a seemingly

double-standard between the way in which male and female teachers were able to connect with students. He reminded me that I would be a role model for all the students of whichever school I would eventually work, and for some, the only caring male influence in students' lives. While some male teachers believe that certain levels of caring, as associated with mothering, are unprofessional (Vogt, 2002), my cooperating teacher valued, and so normalized, the role of care giver as foremost to more masculine expectations of 'schooling' children that give primary focus to academic performance and curriculum (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014). This ethic of care came from a necessary and obligatory (Noddings, 2013) place disconnected from gendered expectations (Vogt, 2002).

My cooperating teacher then delivered these memorable words: "Being a male teacher means becoming a father to a class full of kids. You need to be loving in a way that a father is." He went on to describe the fatherly traits he valued: "You need to be fun, and fair, but know when and how to 'lay down the law.' Like a father, you need to find a clear consistent balance between being playful and acting like a disciplinarian. This is your classroom, and you are in control of where you draw these lines." This advice to approach an emotional caring role 'in loco parentis' – similar to parental interactions and fatherhood – and indeed, motherhood – could be exclusionary for teachers who are not parents (Vogt, 2002) – as I was and currently am not – or may have fallen on deaf ears if I had not had for reference a loving and present father as I had; I "receive love and therefore know what it feels like to be loved" (hooks, 2001, p. xx). Though it could have had negative connotations, his analogy effectively gave me the initial push to confidently consider what it meant to be a male teacher and how I would move to define myself as

one. Inseparable from the teaching profession, it would be my responsibility as a grown-up interacting with children to give them love because, “when we love children we acknowledge by our every action that they [...] have rights – that we respect and uphold their rights” (hooks, 2001, p. 30). With a connection to social justice, I could identify with the ethic of care as necessary to the teaching and learning experience in schools. By becoming a male elementary teacher, I could “help challenge gender-stereotyped perceptions since ‘a workplace composed of both sexes contributes to widening children’s experience’ (Council of the European Union, 2011) [...] and that this, in turn, might affect their gender socialisation, which may enhance more equal gender roles in future generations (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014, p. 233). Aspirations for defining myself as a good teacher, then, became closely entwined with the need for social justice and change, just as I had challenged my own gendered constructions of masculine and feminine educators.

With my autobiographic standpoint shared to provide context for the construction of my subjectivities, in chapter two, I explore performativity as theorised by Judith Butler and Stephen Ball, as well as Michael Foucault’s work on surveillance and dividing practices – particularly how people are evaluated and ranked – to better understand the ways in which my teacher subjectivities have continued to be shaped and reshaped. My choice to use writing in narrative form will be presented as a methodological approach in chapter three as a means to better learn myself, and the construction of myself, as a shared act with others.

Research Questions

Chapters four, five, and six serve as the main body of this thesis and began their lives as papers for previous courses. During the time these papers were initially drafted, I did not consider a connecting, common theme; however, on rewriting the papers in preparation for a Master's thesis, I was able to sew a common thread to, at least, loosely tie together the once independent themes. Though the papers-come-chapters were intended to stand alone, each may serve a separate narrative on the construction of identity as related to measures of performativity in New Brunswick education. Undertones of the authenticity of self-authoring are brought forward for the subject in each of the three chapters: a boy's brilliance and confidence using marginalized modes of literacy is overshadowed by deficits constructed and applied to him for officially evaluated print literacy, giving him a limiting label for what he lacks; the pressure and risk felt by myself – a male teacher – to act according to gendered expectations in a 'feminized' profession while feeling the need to maintain a certain level of masculinity; the conscious shaping of teachers' subjectivities by official and nonofficial performance measures. From these undertones, a common connection may be made in response to three main research questions:

1. How do normative, print-centric literacy practices construct a particular male student's literate identity and how can teachers construct more engaging learning environments?
2. How are male teachers subject to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations?

3. How are teachers evaluated and made to feel evaluated under an intersection of five surveilling gazes within the schools and classrooms they work?

CHAPTER 2

Review of the literature

The constructions for what constitutes a ‘good teacher’ have shifted throughout the history of the profession (Arnon & Reichel, 2007). Standards by which teachers are determined to be measured as good and effective are reflective of historically connected socio-cultural ideals (Foucault, 1982; Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004). A teacher’s identity – how a teacher is regarded and how they regard themselves – is shaped by the subjectivities of socially and culturally constructed normative expectations (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003). We act and are acted on in the co-construction of our identity(ies). To explore this concept further, I first draw on Judith Butler’s theorizing of the constitution of the gendered self as performative acts that are continuously shaped by social and personal co-evaluations of normative expectations. I connect Butler’s work to that of Stephen Ball’s work on performativity as it explores the bureaucratic management and maintenance of the acts, which govern and regulate teaching and teachers.

Critical Theorizing: Constructing the performative self

Working with Judith Butler’s Foucault-inspired work on gendered subjectivities, I present that the constitution of my colleagues’ and my own *teacher self*, as well as my students, is “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of the belief” (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Reaching into the realm of phenomenology, Butler argues that socially conscious individuals act not alone, but in collectively shared experiences “in accord with certain sanctions and proscriptions” (Butler, p. 525) of historical, cultural conventions. The self and identity, then, is constituted with a Hegalian dual-

consciousness, one that independently acts for and of itself while the other is dependent on seeking and obtaining social confirmation (Salih, 2003). For Butler, “Self and Other are not only intimately related to each other; in fact, they are each other [and are] mutually authoring” (Salih, 2003, p. 28). The authoring of the self, then, is a simultaneous dance between the two forms of self-consciousness, together stepping to know one’s self and to know how one’s self is known as compared to socio-cultural conventions (Salih, 2003). For the purpose of my work, teacher identity is both the authoring and authored acts experienced by and on the self; it is the concern for one’s self in concern of the other. Though I may desire autonomous identity, I am always aware of the expectative, governing acts of the other.

Broader parallels may be drawn from Butler’s writing on gendered identity to come to an understanding for the constitution of identity in more general terms. Using the analogy of an actor’s stage performance, Butler writes, “Just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler, 1988, p. 526). Identity of the self is constituted by the regulatory discourse of social conventions and the “internalization of [socio-cultural] norms in an uneven process whose dynamic is shaped by prevailing social and historical relations” (McNay, 1999, p. 185). One’s self becomes the act as the act becomes an extension of one’s identity, and “these either conform to an expected [...] identity or contest that expectation in some way” (Butler, 1988, p. 527). As one expresses one’s self, one also internalizes the reactions, responses, and judgments of others.

Like any other profession, the conscious – and unconscious – performance of subject to the regulation of normative expectations is evident in the profession of education. The teacher-self is subject not only to the work of performing teaching acts, but also to the socio-historical and cultural expectations of what *counts* as teaching and what it means to be a teacher. In this fashion, the *teacher* (noun), performs *teaching* (noun) that looks like *teaching* (verb) within current normative social conventions (Vick & Martinez, 2009). Expected or ‘correct’ performing reaffirms the subjective identity of ‘teacher’ while contrary performance(s) can attract negative – and even punitive – reaction from the other; however, “the complexity and ambiguity of the norms themselves makes the task of learning rules correspondingly difficult, and the openness to ambiguity and lack of control over interpretation makes enacting them equally challenging” (Vick & Martinez, 2009, p. 184). Furthermore, these norms seem to change from teacher to teacher, school to school, and district to district depending on the cultural context.

Like Butler, Ball’s position of performative theory branches from Foucault’s work on the subject and subjectivities, noting, “ ‘a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (Foucault as cited in Ball, 2012, p. 87). The subject experiences subjection through the “control or dependence” on the other while authoring identity by a “conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucault as cited in Ball, 2012, p. 87). The “teaching subject” (Ball, 2012) is authored and authors one’s self through the governance of others as well as one’s own acts. For Ball (2012), the meaning of subjectivity is the “*process of becoming* that focuses on *what we do* rather than *what we are*” (p. 87).

Ball argues that at the root of educational regulations, standards, and reforms, neoliberal ideologies that trumpet a competitive sense of individualism greatly influence teacher subjectivities. Teachers are “represented and encouraged to think about themselves as individuals [...] ‘add value’ to themselves, improve their productivity [and] strive for excellence” (Ball, 2003, p. 217). The identity of the teacher subject is becoming more individually reliant on achievement standards, productivity targets, performance indicators, and comparative reviews.

Though Ball explores more systemic and institutionalized measures of performativity, I posit a link to Butler that, the day to day forms of evaluation come from a number of both official and non-official gazes – e.g. social and professional interactions between colleagues, parents, students, and self-gazes that might leave teachers questioning themselves and their practices. The internalization of performativity is that which defines and redefines teacher subjects. My thesis, in part, explores the “performative act[s] [...] that reproduces acceptable social [and professional] norms, codes, traditions, or conventions [that are] referenced, repeated, and executed” (Teo, 2013, p. 89) in the culture of teaching that I have experienced. In the fourth chapter, I share the story of my experiences with a grade one boy whose schooled identity was defined by what he lacked with print-centric literacy rather than his strengths in other modes of communication and meaning making. My experience with the tension between binary divisions of gender normativity while working in a ‘feminized’ elementary profession is examined in chapter five. In chapter six, I critically examine several judging gazes – administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, and self-surveillance – as they were brought out through my own personal and professional experiences and the collective

experiences shared with me by my teaching colleagues of various grade levels and present that teachers are *defined* more than they are *empowered* to define themselves. Though each of these chapters are separate events of different times and places, the experiences explored form a narrative that examines how a culture of performativity and evaluation in terms of our performances shapes our subjective and individualized identities.

To address the research questions as central and connecting themes in this thesis, I use critical theorizing to uncover the ways that data collected through evaluation and ranking processes circulate power to shape the actions, acting, and identities of students and teachers. Data documentation and “statistics here [emerge] as one of the key modalities for the production of the knowledge necessary to govern, rendering the territory to be governed into thought as a domain with its own inherent destiny and vitality” (Rose, 1991, p. 676). I draw and apply arguments from Foucault’s writings on how data collected through several surveilling gazes and examinations work formally and informally, officially and unofficially, to classify, categorize and rank humans as subjects. As a result of ranking, whether it is official through formal assessments, or unofficial through overheard whispers in the hallway, humans become subjects in a process of what Foucault referred to as “dividing practices” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777) when some are ranked in accordance with evidence of desired productivity as ‘better’ than others.

As Brookfield (2005) discusses, threaded into the web of Western ideology are capitalistic and bureaucratic notions which instrumentalize our thoughts to focus in upon short-term, “means-end thinking” (p. 71). One's sense of self and identity is constructed

in terms of individualized competitive, economic terms as related to one's vocation and/or monetary and/or academic success. As cited by Brookfield, Horkheimer (2005) writes: “Capitalism invades our psyche as 'instinctual life in all its branches is increasingly adapted to the pursuit of commercial culture” (p. 72). Capitalist ideologies make compartmentalizing time and subject matter in schools normal, and working for individual merits, evaluated on how well a student can master separate[d] skills independently. Evident in the values of Western culture, “people at all levels of the economic and social system accept [...] the system's basic reasonableness” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 73). With capitalism, success and failure are ascribed to reasons associated with the decisions and behaviours of individuals and less to do with racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, etc., systemic constraints. Those individuals who are able to rise to economic success by beating inequitable odds are celebrated examples to further reinforce this dominant ideology.

Subjects, both teachers and students, are measured and molded in terms of a variety of social conventions, norms and discourses deemed valuable at that particular time, in that particular location though individualized assessment and report cards as record of success. In this work, I hope to bring forward my re-written accounts of how dividing practices of evaluating, ranking, and labeling, can be subverted. It is possible for teachers and students to recirculate power as a disruption to hierarchical evaluative systems in the reconstitution of one's self. In an effort to appear ‘good’ and operating – behaving – within normative social or professional conventions, social subjects co-constitute themselves “in an active fashion” (Foucault as cited in Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004, p. 87). A socially constructed normative framework to which

comparative evaluations are made and continually reviewed regarding how well one conforms is examined as “rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment” (Foucault as cited in Jardine, 2010, p. 68). I attempt to avoid any attempt at identifying ‘ranks’ of the subjects of two of my chapters – colleagues and myself – as my writing focuses on the influence of gaze from evaluative systems in shaping one’s subjectivities, while in the other chapter, I work to resist the ranking of a particular student.

Chapter four: An overview

In chapter four, “Pathologizing multiliteracies in a monoliterate system,” the awareness of evaluative systems is discussed through my authoring of the reconstructed story of teaching a boy given the pseudonym, Cabot. His multimodal literate abilities for expressing himself risked being discredited and silenced by a system that focuses on printed literacy. I draw upon the work of Anne Haas Dyson (2008; 2005) to analyze the academic success of Cabot in a system where use of printed language is measured and valued over other modes. Using Gunther Kress’ (2003) inclusive definition for the multiple modes of using language to communicate, and Brian V. Street’s (2011) work on mainstream definitions for what counts as literacy, I argue that Cabot is a very effective communicator of language regardless of his so called deficits for using printed text.

Current methods, programs and resources that I have been expected to use for teaching literacy by the school district and the Province of New Brunswick are examined. The work of Millard (1997) and Dyson (2008; 2005) help me to argue that, although teachers teach students using modes that embrace different forms of literacy expression, – e.g. pictures, oral skits, videos, etc. – these modes typically are not evaluated by standardized means of evaluation; the ultimate end goal is for students to produce printed

text on paper for evaluation. Unfortunately, provincial, national, and international competitive focus on print literacy via standardized summative assessments is closing doorways for individuals like Cabot, who excel in non-print literacy. Some students become trapped outside the evaluative norm (Rose S. , 2009), and become defined by that which they lack (Street, 2011). Because standards for traditional forms of print literacy – reading and writing – have become the be-all and end-all for literacy performance standards, compared and valued as public and political currency, those students not successful within this valued print paradigm can become self-conscious of their constructed deficits, lose confidence and motivation. Despite having aptitudes for other modes of literacy, these students are unable to recognize their success in these modes within a system that devalues non-print forms of expression and communication (Cooley & Ayres, 1988), just as I had experienced with print-centric English courses in high school.

The valuing of print over other forms of communication and expression leads me to examining the “deficit-driven discourse” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 19) that exists within our public school system. In a system where print literacy is valued officially, other forms of literacy are left out, not evaluated and de-legitimized. The focus of assessment, teaching, and learning then shifts to the deficits that Cabot has been constructed as having for what he lacks in print literacy (Street, 2011). Cabot’s provincially assessable skills were so ‘behind’ that private and district diagnostic psychological assessments were undertaken so that the school district could officially provide support and accommodations. As Ball points out, school officials are “unlikely to ‘invest’ in work with children with special needs where the margins for improved

performance are limited [and the] organization will only spend money where measurable returns are likely to be achieved” (Ball, 2003, p. 223).

Critically rewriting Cabot’s experience as an example of a student constructed by deficit, I argue that the specialized assistance he eventually received in an effort to *make* him ‘normal’ risks denying him opportunity to experience enriching activities that actually *makes* him *feel* ‘normal’ (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). Perhaps it was the memories of my own experiences of feeling my interests and abilities being restricted by print literacy that compelled me to help Cabot have his literate voice heard and valued. His teachers may be able to provide Cabot a positive learning experience by celebrating his non-print abilities within the classroom, these efforts are sadly undone during provincial standardized benchmark assessments for print literacy.

As a teacher, making connections with students in order to better learn the learner is integral in finding space for students like Cabot and the boys in the Gary Paulsen reading groups from my first internship, referred to previously. A more listening-teacher fosters respectful relationships with students and forms the basis of an ethic of care that must happen between teachers and students. The concept of care as connected to constructions of gender is explored in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

Chapter five: An overview

In the fifth chapter titled, “‘I can’t picture you teaching:’ A critical reflective analysis of a male teaching in a feminized profession,” I position my written voice as coming from a masculine identity challenged by the risks (Martino, 2008; Jones, 2003) and restrictions (Brownhill, 2014) associated with being a male teaching within a ‘feminized workplace’ (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014; Skelton, 2009;

Simpson, 2005; Vogt, 2002). Working with Tracy Darrin Wood's (2012) research on the gendered perceptions of teachers regarding female teachers as nurturing and male teachers as less-so, I present my experience "as a man choosing a career working with children [and feeling] that there are a lot of eyes on [me], and that there are certain suspicions afoot that far exceed suspicions which would be on a female teacher" (Martino, 2008, p. 580). Similar gendered constructions I held during my university years regarding my masculinity and caring for young students are challenged. I share my experience with awkward looks and conversations as I feel the Foucauldian gaze from many 'others' while I aim to negotiate a hegemonic perception of doing 'women's work' and attempt to provide an ethic of care with the young children with whom I work, challenging "society's expectation that women will continue to do the lion's share of care labour" (Noddings, 2010, p. 67). In what Simpson (2005) refers to as "role strain," male teachers are expected to meet feminized behavioural norms of care (Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012) as elementary teachers while also maintaining masculine traits more normatively aligned with their sex. Male teachers navigate an androgynous balance between feminine and masculine gender normativity (Benton & Vogtle, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2000; Martino, 2008). If too masculine, male teachers risks being perceived as a less committed teacher and/or threatening to career opportunities of female colleagues (Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999; Benton & Vogtle, 1997), while to exhibit non-masculine behaviours attracts risky attention for being labeled as sexually perverse (Parr & Gosse, 2011; Smedley, 2007; Jones, 2004; 2003).

Conscious of the damaging effect a false accusation of sexual abuse has, male teachers work in a "fishbowl" (Jones, 2004, p. 53) making it easier for others to inspect

and relax suspicions. In this chapter, I address the moral surveillance that male teachers experience from students, colleagues, parents and others through conversations initiated by these ‘others’ as well as oneself about relationship status, hobbies, and athleticism in order to prove that one fits appropriately within the dominant masculine paradigm.

Chapter six: An overview

My experience with actively felt gazes of parents, colleagues, administration, and myself is the focus of the sixth chapter, “Gazing on education: Teacher subjectivities and the multiple modes of governing educators.” Webb (2006) discusses the “overwhelming amount of surveillance designed to identify ‘bad’ teachers” (p. 212). Considering the principles of Foucault’s ‘regime of truths’ for authoritative and social expectations for desired teacher behavior (Foucault, 1982), the ways in which teachers subjectivities are shaped to regulate desired teaching practices and behaviours. Systems of data-collection are used to hold teachers accountable as professional power is removed from teachers and given to those in positions of authority (Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012; Johnson, 2005). A deeply embedded steady form of surveillance in schools (Parr & Gosse, 2011) raises questions of the authenticity of those performances and practices being evaluated (Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004). The authoring of one teacher’s professional identity is not natural in its development, but a social co-construction (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003). The focus of what ‘counts’ as ideal teaching and learning becomes quantified and compared to performance standards (Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012); one is constantly compared and compares one’s self to a regime of normative standards (Vick & Martinez, 2009).

If evaluative standards are tools of cultural/political agendas (Mulcahy, 2011), then what it means to be a teacher, both professionally and socially, is manipulated by the determined markers of good performances (Ball, 2003). Ball's work on performativity speaks to Foucault's concept of the construction of a "docile and capable" (p. 220) workforce as constant judgment breeds insecurity which results in conformed productivity.

Throughout chapter six, I identify and discuss five judging gazes as they were brought out through my own personal/professional and collective re-written experiences I shared with colleagues teaching various grades. Gazes explored in this chapter paper include: administrative – e.g. school reviews; professional evaluations; provincial assessments – (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Korthagen, 2004; Lawson, 2004; Webb, 2006); parental (Hassrick & Schneider, 2009); temporal – e.g. the scheduling of the school day/week/year (Deacon, 2006; Foucault, 1977; Rose & Whitty, 2010); collegial – interactions and comparisons made between colleagues (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003; Vick & Martinez, 2009; Webb, 2006; Zembylas, 2003); and the gaze of self (Connell, 2009; Jones, 2004; Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004; Foucault, 1982). I argue that teachers are defined more than they are empowered to define themselves. Through presenting and discussing some of the conforming pressures that I have felt as a teacher and those experiences that my colleagues have shared with me, I bring forward concerns for the lack of space for critical discussion regarding the normative valuing of certain resources, teaching standards, and so-called "best practices" that are thrust upon a de-professionalized teaching profession.

CHAPTER 3

Methodological Approach

I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it (Richardson, 2000, p. 924).

For the sake of preventing repetition and disjointedness in my writing, I have chosen to weave chapter-specific methodological approaches into their relative chapters. A common point of context for most of this work is my perspective and its grounding in a critical study of my observations/experiences as teased out and exposed through writing as method. Writing as a method of inquiry is “qualitative work [that] carries its meaning in its entire text [...] [and] has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 960). The recollection and rewriting of these memories through a reconstructed personal narrative of professional experiences provide opportunities for reflexivity and to critically analyze key moments in teaching career. Through critical lenses regarding the surveillance and shaping of subjectivities, I became interested in the constitution of myself as well as my observations of how others author themselves and are authored (Salih, 2003). Reflecting on these particular breakdown or gratification moments has strengthened a “self-consciousness about how the fate and choices in [my] life have positioned [myself] in the world and with whom [I] have been positioned” (Frank, 2000, p. 356). The stories that I have selected from memory and have rewritten to form the foundational focus of each chapter are different in the nature of the experiences, yet together stand out for me as key in the inspiration of my critical awareness of socio-political forces in education.

Writing as a method

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) write that by using writing as a method, “[t]he researcher – rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape – is the ‘instrument’” (p. 960). If I am the instrument, then the narrative I author could be understood as the subject of my research that is to be interpreted, analyzed, critiqued, and discussed. In many ways, exposing and committing to writing the critical interpretations of my subjectivities, my narrative is the subject of my own research and I am writing “because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it” (Richardson, 2000, p. 924). Using writing as a method of inquiry is a valid qualitative method of learning about and connecting myself as the writer to the research (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005). Writing is an immersive exercise that “coheres with the development of ethical selves engaged in social action and social reform” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 959). For Weedon (1987, as cited in Miller, 2005), “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our sense of subjectivity is constructed” (Miller, 2005, p. 49). Memories shared are connected to my experiences of the gaze of others. Even as I write, I am conscious of this influence and subjectivity, careful to select my words – perhaps even subconsciously – that shape the sharing of my memories, my stories, and the stories of others as work that will have resonance with the reader.

Taking up a narrative-style, I attempt to remain connected to the events shared, using “personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience” (Ellis, *et al.* 2011, p. 276) as examined or interpreted or analyzed through a critical lense. Writing through

personal narrative, I bring forward anecdotal accounts of my experiences. These accounts of my recalled experiences illustrate what Richardson and St. Pierre call the “claim the author makes for the texts” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 961). I claim these shared accounts, only as my versions of events informed by memories shaped by my subjective positioning. Accounts of these re-written shared experiences with others gathered through daily interactions, observations, or conversations are used “to analyze cultural beliefs, practices, and the social experiences that influence our [teacher] identities” (Allen, 2015, p. 33). As Rhedding-Jones writes, I have my “own personal and professional blurrings of experience, knowledge, and competence [but] a return to the personal is not only a postmodern insertion into academia but also a useful and ethical way of making research and professional practice come together” (Rhedding-Jones, 2013, p. 209).

The narratives I author represent particular ways of knowing or coming to know particular experiences, “engaged in knowing/telling about the world as [I] perceive it” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Richardson (2005) suggests, “knowing the self and knowing the subject are intertwined, partial, historical knowledges” (p. 962). I strive to remain cognizant of my position of privilege and recognize that my ontological-self colours my research. Committing accounts to written pages cannot be removed of the bias of my – the writer’s – experiences, motives, and preconceptions, and I risk giving an “academic version of the truth” (Frank, 2000, p. 361) when selecting and rewriting particular events to analyse for the benefit of this thesis. Writing is an act that exposes biases and provides me with opportunities to critically reflect on these biases as they are revealed. Through the use of personal narrative, my writing “acknowledges subjectivity, emotionality and [my own] influences on the research rather than hiding from these

matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams, & Brochner, 2011, p. 274). Unable to escape bias, by writing, reflecting, and analyzing the experiences of myself, others and the other that is myself, I am made to "identify and empathize with other people" (Rhedding-Jones, 2013, p. 214) as a subject of this research. I am able to use existing literature to challenge and question my biases.

In many ways, personal narrative writing is therapeutic (Ellis, *et al.*, 2011). In this thesis, not only do I share my own pedagogical experiences for research and analysis, but I also write to better know myself, my histories, and my social positionings. As I write and reflect on these selected experiences, exposing myself provides context for analysis and I gain a better understanding that my "subjectivities are not as self-evident as [I] believed" (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006, p. 1028). Through writing, I first come to better understand myself and my position reflexively as previously made evident through my autobiographic standpoint. Second, I realize my writing will resonate differently by different readers of different positions and histories unknown to me. It is not that I claim to *know*, but I can at least claim to *want* to know better.

Sharing stories as an analytic practice "requires an appreciation of how one's life experiences have occurred within constraints and power dynamics of the wider social context (Gilbourne, Jones, & Jordan, 2014, p. 82). In the personal narrative of my backstory, I present myself as a "person-in-flux" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162), sharing my evolution to critical thought and theory, empowering me to move toward emancipation from constraints of gender normativity and perceived cultural expectations. I author my narrative – and those of the characters implicated within – as a contributory reflection of

pedagogical, systemic, and social hegemony, and my experiences negotiating the fog of complacency for the status quo.

Personal narrative writing is the craft of expressing to the reader, which moments and memories hold particular importance and meaning in the constitution of my analysis and understanding of a larger social picture (Fraser, 2004). As Frank (2000) writes, “Creating a space for absent subjects [...] and filling that space with those subjects’ presence and spoken experience is a form of ethical work”(p. 363). I am careful to ensure that specific names and locations are not identified and recollected narratives, including recounted interactions with students and colleagues are relived and examined through my writing. I attempt to “shift the focus entirely away from the [people] and to subjectivity” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 971) and write from a place of shared experience with the characters of my story, ever reminded that their struggle is intertwined with my own (Frank, 2002). In sharing the role of subject and narrator to my stories, my intent is to position myself “as witness [...] (as opposed to spectator [...]) to social injustices and structurally limiting practices such that [I may] see and act” (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006, p. 1028). As Rose (personal communication, January, 2015) writes:

Addressing issues of identity construction, subjectivity, and power relations troubles how individualized, hegemonic constructions of children and parents relegate some adults and children to the margins of education, to the margins of social participation. Welcoming others who best fit our discursive practices, we legitimize social inequities; we police social boundaries, perpetuating class divisions and power inequities, undermining our own educative efforts.

I use writing as a way to connect with the similar or opposing experiences of the reader (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005). By examining myself, the experiences that I have lived through recollected and reconstructed narratives, I hope to “contribute to the growing social narrative at work in society” (Allen, 2015, p. 33), and identify that which needs change as well as open space for changes to occur.

Using writing as a method “deepened my knowledge of my self [...and has helped me] make sense of my world, locating my particular biographical experiences in larger historical and social contexts” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966). I wrote the story of Cabot in chapter four because of my own limited schooled experiences. I wrote about the gendered experience of male teachers in chapter five because of my own insecurities for masculine expectations and doing them ‘correctly’ enough. I wrote about evaluative surveillance and gaze that pressure and shape a teacher’s self in chapter six because of my own subjectivities and constitutions of myself and my experiences. Through writing, I share these personal narratives with the hope of connecting with others whose stories might be “like and unlike” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966) my own, and that they might expose the ways in which people’s *own* selves are governed through various regulatory practices in schools.

Re-writing the written

In this work, writing as a method means curating and connecting my own accounts of personal and professional experiences of breakdown or gratification to existing broader academic discussions I found in the literature regarding the

constitution of one's self and subjectivities. It is a process that allows me to view, and critically analyze my narrative and the narratives I share through writing.

At this point in my writing, I wish to share the process that I took to author the narrative(s) of this thesis found in the previous autobiographic chapter and coming interpretive chapters four, five and six. After first writing the accounts of my experiences, I was able to see in words (re-reading) that which previously was merely conceptual and locked in memory. Releasing these thoughts and committing memories to print allowed me to return to these experiences for critical interpretation and analysis. I am able to gain a better understanding of what happened through weaving existing literature into the written narrative. With the literature further influencing my interpretations of the narrative, I attempt to offer my own academic learnings and understandings of what I witnessed and experienced, revealing that "there is always more to know" (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 963). My writing is reflective of the particular place of my knowing at the time and in conversation with others, both embodied and textual, it was committed to print and analyzed. In this manner, myself as "the interpreter has to assume the burden of meaning-making, which is no longer a neutral activity of expression that simply matches word to world" (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 969).

While teaching, I frequently advise students during writing sessions to re-read their work from a previous day, often saying, "Your 'today-brain and eyes' are different than yesterday's." As we experience and learn, we may wish to revise our writing to better reflect the position of our present self. I took my own

advice when preparing the three papers that would become the main interpretive chapters of this thesis. After re-reading these texts of a previous self, revisions were made based on additional reviewing of literature, meetings with my committee, and on new perspectives of my shifted subjectivity. My hope and intent has been to make an account of what I have learned about myself evident in the closing reflections of this thesis, but for now, I will recognize the exercise of using writing as a method has “giv[en] me desire, strength, and enough self-knowledge to narrativize other memories and experiences to give myself agency, and construct myself anew for better or for worse” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966).

CHAPTER 4

Pathologizing multiliteracies in a monoliterate system

In this chapter, I address the question, “How do normative, print-centric literacy practices construct a particular male student’s literate identity?” First, review the literature to identify socially constructed standards for developmental rates and literacy, and how normative, print-centric literacy practices are used in classrooms in response to these standards. Following this review, I share the recollected accounts and critical reflections of young boy’s literacy experiences, in a system where his schooled and personal identity were shaped by the mono-literate practices of print in contrast with multiple literacies he demonstrated successfully in class during two themed, whole-class enrichment projects. By exploring how I co-evaluated a particular student, this recollected narrative also identifies my own print-centric subjectivities and how I, along with a co-teacher, then, worked to find ways for grade one students to feel successful *and* literate.

I have never been comfortable with the term ‘normal,’ and yet, “we live in a world of norms” (Davis, 2006, p. 3). Our thoughts, behaviours, and physicalities are governed by and subject to constructed “cultural fictions” (Butler, 1988, p. 522) that we have been socialized to feel comfortable adhering to, and to be uncomfortable when we deviate from what is culturally expected. How fat we are, how tall, how fast, how smart, how rich, how much we sleep, how much we eat, what we eat, etc. is measured and ranked against curves of standardized averages as established by data sets and statistics (Davis, 2006) collected and distributed by the dominant class. Though bell-curved statistics are reflective of the trends of the majority, the line between normal and ideal

became blurred when motives for data collection shifted from assessing what people *tend* to be, to what people *could* and even *should* become. Data and statistics, then, can be shaped to represent not merely socio-cultural norms, but use to ‘identify’ performative ideals in the name of cultural progress.

Work by late nineteenth century statistician and eugenicist, Sir Francis Galton, revised previous conceptions of distributing data to include a system that ranked results within the bell-curve to show “the superiority of the desired trait” (Davis, 2006, p. 8) being monitored. By categorically ranking traits within a template for normalcy, efforts to seek, establish and define what is statistically normal left those whose plots lay outside the lines of the bell-curve identified as either ‘below’ or ‘above’ levels of normalcy.

Driven by the principles and discourses of eugenics, concerns that an increase in sub-standard populations would shift the curve in a devolution of culture – not representative of the dominant white, bourgeois values, governments and their institutions began to implement the scientific categorizing of populations in the late nineteenth century (Davis, 2006). Deviations from the idealized norm could be identified and interventions could be implemented to reform or control the increase of those whose differences from the norm were interpreted as ‘wrong,’ ‘lacking,’ or a threat to cultural progress.

Baker (2002) applies what Foucault termed – albeit in a different context – “superiority effects” (p.669) whereby “the ‘top’ of the chain of being was inscribed similarly across such nomenclatures and only some were positioned as having the right to modify others” (p. 669). With the means to define what counts as normal under privileged bias, “the production and hunt for different forms of disability, unreadiness, at-

risk-icity, and the explanation for developmental delay” (Baker, 2002, p. 673) became a system of quality control. The dividing practices of labels and classifications “were [constructed] ways of enforcing others into the subjectivities assumed associated” (Baker, 2002, p. 272) with the labels they were given. If one is labeled ‘defective,’ measures to make ‘effective’ could be put into place. In twenty-first century schools, we still see the standards of the universal child forming the basis for tracking ‘normal’ rates of development, founding curriculum, and assessments (Baker, 2002; Castañeda, 2002). Teachers, then, are the expected custodians of the standards that govern what has been constructed as normative development and ‘appropriate’ rates of learning. When ‘negative’ results are noticed from performances on provincial, national, or international standardized tests, these ‘trends’ may be spun to represent academic crises as transmitted through news and social media outlets.

Similar to the idea of the constructs of ‘normal,’ I have never been comfortable with the term ‘learning disability.’ Though I am not denying the existence of biopsychological reasons for learning blocks or delays, I worry that the term has been thrown at ‘struggling’ students to explain the difficulty they have when working to meet normative, narrow curricular outcomes (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). Just as normative expectations are cultural productions, so too are expectations for those labeled with disabilities. What one can and cannot do is framed within the commonalities of the particular label of disability. Statistics for what is considered normal for a people with disabilities provide a scientific element of expectation, while positive and negative portrayals of disabilities in nineteenth century novels (Davis, 2006), and twentieth/twenty-first century films (Livingston, 2004; Safran, 1998) further the cultural

production of stereotypes and hierarchies that focus on what one lacks rather than what one has, limits possibilities and potential. With the long-standing belief that all children develop the same way and at the same rate (Whitty, 2010), it is assumed that there is something wrong with a child who falls short within constructed expectations for a normal rate of development. Regardless of exceptionalities and demonstrations of successes outside of standardized assessment frameworks, the child is pathologized and prescribed a ‘treatment’ which may come in the form of special-educative interventions; however, if those interventions are not successful or, if it has been determined that the child has fallen too far behind, they may be denied access to further, costly resources and valuable support.

Keeping in mind notions of lack and abundance (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 1997), and their culturally constructed nature, I share the story of a former grade one student implicated in my own teaching story. Cabot, a pseudonym, is a male child whose progress in many key curricular outcomes differed from normed expectations. It was with print literacy – both reading and writing – that Cabot experienced the most difficulty. He loved listening to books read aloud, making connections to these texts, orally sharing ideas for stories he wished to write about, presenting skits, monologues, and hand-crafted models to his classmates, but despite his effort and success with these purposeful, valid, and sophisticated literacies, he would not be considered literate if asked to complete a provincial test which primarily assesses print literacy. Although literacy beyond school and school assessment is multi-modal and our current Provincial curriculum promotes multimodal learning, our provincial assessments and classroom practices favour print literacy. The academic success of ‘at-risk’ and ‘learning disabled’ students is determined

by their use of language (Dyson, 1993), often with an overemphasis on print literacy assessment.

Defining literacy

General definitions present literacy as the means by which people use language to communicate and share information (Kress, 2003). With the understanding that literacy is a complex, sociocultural use of language to make meaning of our world (Purcell-Gates, 2002), including printed text, illustrated representations, oral presentations and dialogue, debates, theatrical performances, song writing, video production, along with emailing and text messaging, are considered examples of multiple modes of literacy. An individual effective in using one or more of the aforementioned literacy modes to clearly communicate information to another *should* be considered literate; however, mainstream constructions of what counts as literacy are often limited to reading and writing evaluations.

As Millard (1997) theorizes, a focus on print literacy has had a limiting effect on the design of literacy curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical approaches, because “reading, the ability to make sense of written words on the page of a book, is considered by both parents and teachers [and decision-makers] alike to be the prime marker of the literate individual” (p. 31). This traditional understanding of literacy as the reading and writing of prose dominates world thinking, policies and practices, and influences curriculum development and assessment. Typically, provincial literacy assessments in New Brunswick have been based on traditional definitions of literacy that are primarily focused on print-literacy.

Unfortunately, narrow understandings of literacy negate the value of other modes of literacy. The act of defining what literacy and illiteracy *are* and *are not* is, thus, a political act. Those with the power to define what counts as literacy run the risk of “creating inequality for those who ‘lack’ it and advantages for those who gain it” (Street, 2011, p. 581). Policy for the development of literacy programs, teaching practices, and assessments are informed by that which the privileged class *has* and values literacy to be. The defining of illiteracy by those in positions of power, those that *are* deemed literate, imposes inequalities on those students who are defined in terms of deficits and what they lack. Those who are constructed as illiterate “feel their literacy practices are unequal to the formal literacy practices” (Street, 2011, p. 581). Just as the ways in which people communicate have evolved due to technological developments, so too understandings of literacy have broadened (Kress, 2003; Blair & Sanford, 2004). Yet, there is a disconnect between what literacy *actually* is in its current, multimodal and real-world form and the literacy of government-assessed focus and scripted teaching programs. The consequence is that social injustice is created for particular children and families.

Literacy ‘crisis’ in New Brunswick

New Brunswick is a beautiful province known for its natural resources, picturesque landscapes, pristine coastline, the world’s highest tides, and as having one of Canada’s lowest youth and adult literacy rates. The construction of a literacy crisis is fueled by news media reports that use and transmit the results of test scores. The numbers from the International Adult Literacy and Skill Survey (IALSS) study conducted in 2003 determined that New Brunswick scored the second-lowest average in the country with just less than half of the working-age population – aged 16-65 – having the minimal

literacy skills deemed necessary for coping successfully in today's workplace (Statistics Canada, 2007). Fifty-six percent of New Brunswickers were found to have low literacy skills as compared to the national average of forty-two percent. Though only print-literacy is mentioned, further studies by Statistics Canada have shown that people with low proficiency in literacy tend to have lower proficiency in other areas. Results on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that New Brunswick youth performed well below national literacy averages (Statistics Canada, 2010). These results are often the basis for concerns discussed behind staffroom walls from elementary school teachers feeling pressure from authority figures at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, district, and in school administration as standardized provincial literacy assessments fast approach. Parents, aware of New Brunswick's low literacy rates and wanting the best for their children, may further add to the sense of panic during the years their children are to be assessed by placing additional pressure on teachers to improve scores, and blaming teachers if scores do not improve.

The literacy 'crisis' is not a new phenomenon. Concerns related to 'declining' literacy performance have been at the forefront of schooling for the past one hundred fifty years (Williams, 2007). Berliner and Biddle's (1995), *The Manufactured Crisis* published twenty years ago, illustrates the use of misleading generalized data and reports from United States government departments making claims for declining national academic performance. Public outcry for governments to reform education is fueled by misrepresentations of standardized testing results in constructing the appearance of a 'crisis' over the quality of education in public schools. A similar politically manufactured

panic occurred and continues to occur north of the border. This “so-called literacy crisis in Canada originate[s] [...] in a failure to define or frame the problem appropriately” (Castell, Luke, & MacLennan, 1981) and is also built on the misrepresentation of data by governments and news media (Willinsky, 1990). Data results commonly ignore such influential factors as size and geographic, cultural, socioeconomic diversity of student populations when comparing results of Canada or the United States to smaller, less diverse nations, such as Finland, achieving higher academic performance (OECD, 2016). Referencing the work of Berliner and Biddle, Purcell-Gates (2002) argues, it is a “dubious claim that literacy levels are declining” (p. 107) when a history of stable or modest growth is ignored and we “confuse what education has accomplished with what one might want to accomplish” (Purcell-Gates, 2002, p. 107). Historic and narrow representations of data are flawed when “concepts of literacy and thus criteria for its achievement have varied significantly over time, place, and populace, so that the charge of falling standards appears as yet impossible to substantiate” (Castell, Luke, & MacLennan, 1981, p. 8).

In the political realm, academic performance, often based upon literacy assessments, may be compared competitively with other nations as a reflection of current and future economic stability, and ultimately, economic worth. As Heydon and Iannacci (2008), citing Arnove (2005), suggest, “chief among the concerns of national [and provincial] decision-makers is the international competitiveness of their economies and the products (the graduates) of their educational systems (as measured by standardized tests)” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 30). The sense of urgency to improve literacy scores has resulted in government investments in literacy resources, programs, teacher training,

and curricular and assessment development. Practices that consider literacy a standalone subject through establishing such practices as 90 minutes of uninterrupted literacy time reifies that literacy skills are of higher priority and work to improve the success of students in other subjects such as science. Though science, for example, could be recognized as a potential site of authentic literacy learning, it is often pushed out of curriculum timetables in favour of minutes dedicated to literacy. Unfortunately, the compartmentalization of instructional minutes for each subject creates confusion and hesitancy for more teachers to provide learning opportunities that cross curricular boundaries.

Pressure for better scores on provincial, national, and international standardized tests resonates through provincial and federal governments, and into classrooms and homes (Williams, 2007). The construction of the literacy crisis is maintained by “middleclass anxieties about status and privilege” (Williams, 2007, p. 178) and the particular literacy skills perceived to be used by middle and upper classes in professional work settings. Evidence that one possesses certain literacy skills acts as a sort of cultural capital when linked to the potential of economic success. By focusing on *how* language is used in professional contexts, some literacy skills have become more valuable than others. What and how well one is able to read and write serves as a marker of future earnings and status. For Street (1995), the reality of job acquisition is a more complex issue of class, gender and ethnicity rather than simply a lack of literacy. He further suggests that governments’ use of statistics on illiteracy as explanation for unemployment rates shifts the blame away from a lack of jobs produced by government and corporate outsourcing. What is typically ignored is that job-specific literacies are different from

schooled literacies, and can be learned once employed (Street, 1995). Literacy campaigns that ignore these realities and ignore the value of multi-modal literacies over-simplify the inaccurate connection of lack of print literacy with lack of success. Fear of losing the cultural capital necessary to succeed further inflates panic over the literacy ‘crisis.’ With concern that loss of socio-cultural capital means loss of class, dominant in the discourse of literacy crisis is the notion that low levels of literacy causes lower income, but considering the reverse – that low income contributes to low literacy – is rarely considered (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Responses to improve literacy performance, then, are designed to cater to middle class experiences while ignoring those of a low socioeconomic status. Though, “home language and literary experiences dramatically affect the degree of success children will achieve in school literacy learning” (Purcell-Gates, 2002, p. 108), the division in socioeconomic households is overlooked. Rather than addressing realities of the vast sociocultural and economically diverse learning populations, simplified ‘one size fits all’ approaches are applied to in-school interventions and the design of ‘best’ instructional practices. In responding to literacy as an academic ‘problem’ rather than as a social injustice, it is no wonder that national and New Brunswick literacy performances are socially constructed to be in perpetual crisis.

Middle class understandings for what counts as literacy are too often reduced to phonemic awareness, phonics, grammar conventions, and reading responses. Likewise, reports on literacy achievement are misused to support a ‘need’ to focus on this simplified version of literacy rather than literacies as complex learning processes that focus on meaning based reading (Purcell-Gates, 2002). The oversimplification of reading and writing removes the authenticity for how language is actually used in different social

contexts (Purcell-Gates, 2002; 2001; Williams, 2007). Though many schools and school districts promote and encourage classroom teachers to establish enriched, differentiated literacy learning environments, print-literacy remains, too often remains the sole focus of summative provincial literacy tests.

How literacy is taught

The profession remains caught in what some have called the ‘methods fetish’ (Bartolome, 1994), the never-ending debate over the ‘correct’ method of teaching literacy. This focus keeps us tied to the past and makes it difficult to look beyond the meanings of literacy, learning, and childhood that have shaped school literacy for so long (Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008, p. 97).

Many steps have been put in place to ensure that primary-level New Brunswick teachers establish an enriched literacy learning environment for students. Through professional learning, resources, programs, and learning specialist support, teachers have a variety of methods in their arsenal to improve print literacy scores. Though the focused intent may be to build print proficiency, differentiated approaches in doing so recognize, value, and foster multiliterate participations. Following what appears to be a ‘top-down’ and universally applied teacher-to-student instructional approaches to teaching word sounds before reading (Millard, 1997, p. 32), New Brunswick students are often taught songs and actions for letter recognition, phonemes, and spelling conventions through programs such as the *Jolly Phonics* program (Lloyd, 2000). It is common practice for New Brunswick teachers to conduct ‘running records’ (Clay, 1993) that assess students’ word accuracy and fluency when reading independently. The intent of these assessments is to allow teachers to best match students to books appropriate to their constructed

singular reading level using letter leveled books (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). It is important to note that these programs are resources *to* the curriculum and not *the* curriculum, which, as I will argue later, are often mistaken for and, in some cases, contradict each other.

More of a ‘bottom-up’ approach (Millard, 1997) of beginning with the interests, ideas, and inquiries of students is taken during ‘Writer’s Workshops’ as students are asked to draw pictures of ‘small moments’ from which personal narratives are created in a regimented writing process that recognizes the importance of sharing written pieces orally with peers (Calkins, 2003) while *Write Traits* lessons focus on six writing conventions and student self-assessment of written pieces (Spandel, 2004). Though the common outcome of these approaches is to produce clear, detailed written pieces, students are exposed to multimodal literacy exercises, often in the planning stages of their pieces, as they sketch, share, and talk through their stories.

In kindergarten, beginning writers are encouraged – through teacher modeling – to draw stories, eventually interpreting and adding sounds, symbols, words, and phrases to their pieces. Students play and experiment with the communicative process of putting thoughts on paper (Dyson A. H., 2008). Specific to this ‘emergent level’ writing, New Brunswick’s kindergarten to grade three language arts curriculum document describes expectations for kindergarten to grade one aged students as:

Beginning to develop many important concepts of print. They begin to understand that print holds meaning, that print has directionality, and that talk can be written down. They become familiar with the letters of the alphabet and start to make connections between them and spoken sounds. Although beginning emergent

writers often tell their stories through drawing, as they develop they begin to add labels and then a sentence or more to their drawings. Emergent writers are beginning to understand the process of writing and to develop some writing strategies (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 22).

In my experience and the context with which I am familiar, when communicative purpose is provided for writing, students' thoughtful pieces are eagerly shared with some grammatical conventions informally introduced. Teachers foster phonetic spelling and the incorporation of sight words as age appropriate conventions. At this age, student-written pieces are celebrated and students proudly share their stories with teachers and classmates; however, even at these beginning stages of writing, standards and expectations are set by teachers and reinforced by peers. As described in the curriculum passage above, in sharing compositions with teachers and classmates, students become aware of what is expected of them as writers and learn what it takes to be counted as literate and what may be considered merely "scribble scabble" (Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008, p. 92). When sharing, missing details are filled in orally and scribble marks, colour choices, and experimentation with symbols for letters and words are explained as "children begin to use written language [...] as a cultural tool for constructing symbolic worlds and for engaging with others" (Dyson A. H., 1993, p. 5). By the end of kindergarten, it is expected that students are able to produce illustrated pieces with letter symbols for printed words and phrases written on lines to describe the main idea of the picture.

In grade one, vocabulary growth and the conventions of how to represent printed words are expanded:

Early writers become aware of an increasing number of functions for writing. They also become more aware of audience and begin to understand the importance of revising and editing their writing to make their message clear for their audiences (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 22).

It is in grade one that we see how drawing and visual literacies are officially constructed through the curriculum document as less valued than printed text:

They come to rely less on drawing as a scaffolding for writing and are able to sustain engagement in writing for longer periods of time. They exhibit growth in the number of connections they make between sounds and letters and in the number of conventional spellings they use (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 22).

More specifically, students' writing is expected to become more 'refined' regarding spelling and grammar conventions:

Students will be expected to use some conventions of written language

- use conventional spacing between words
- use an increasing number of letters to represent sounds (most vowel and consonant sounds represented)
- use an increasing number of words spelled conventionally
- use simple sentence structures
- attempt to use punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation marks)

- use capital letters for proper names, pronoun “I”, and sentence beginnings (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 35).

When teaching grade one – and, indeed throughout other grades I have taught – I often take more of a student directed, inquiry stance (Ray, 2006) encouraging students to “attempt to use punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation marks” (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 35), exploring *how* books found and read from the classroom library were written. Lessons for the use of punctuation marks listed and not listed (e.g. commas, quotation marks, colons, hyphens, etc.) in the curriculum are prompted by the interests and curiosities of the students as piqued by observations they make while we read together and independently. Through modeled and shared writing, I encourage students to become more attentive to words choice, to add description and details, to be cognizant of and spell high-frequency words accurately, to be aware of traditional letter formation, to make use of lines when writing on lined-paper, to be aware of and use appropriate – but basic – punctuation and capitalization, and to re-read their work to ensure the flow and order of events in writing that ‘sounded right’ and made sense. The framework of ‘draw, share, write, share’ familiar from kindergarten was maintained, and the concept of writing as a communicative practice was inadvertently reinforced –the students I worked with were often disappointed when sharing time was skipped, as is common for many children when the social aspects of literacy are skipped (Dyson, 2008). For many students, writing time was an opportunity to communicate stories of self and connect socially to peers. Perhaps the official structured, teacher monitored writing and sharing times provided a classroom forum for students’

‘unofficial’ world of play to find a voice in a classroom context (Dyson, 1997). Students’ preference to talk, joke and draw during writing times are acts of meaningful literacy, as well as acts of defining self and establishing identity among their peers (Blair & Sanford, 2004) and creating spaces of peer participation (Dyson, 2008). Allowing ample multimodal opportunity for students to draw and orally share their pieces, students were able to ‘fill in the blanks’ for forgotten words and misplaced punctuation. With that respect, I “offer[ed students] tools – ways of thinking and talking – that will help them negotiate their way into future possibilities” (Dyson, 1993, p. 33). If not as writers, I was ensuring space for students’ literacies to develop in alternate modes as presenters, oral communicators, listeners, and story tellers; however, as the scope of what counts as ‘good’ writing widens to include grammar, spelling, and other conventions of print, the dichotomous act – an act shared by teachers, students, and parents – of sorting and ranking students as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ writers becomes more evident. In my experience working with students within the framework of the aforementioned grade one writing expectations, a positive outlook toward writing seemed to be maintained until writing conventions were enforced as necessary for good writing – both by teacher and peers – and the interest and confidence of those who ‘lacked’ in applying these conventions in their writing waned.

In the second grade, New Brunswick students may experience a shift in what is expected of them in their literacy. I have participated in conversations with anxious colleagues as assessment year teachers expressed how they felt the pressure from anxious parents and administrators in lieu of approaching provincial assessments, concerned that these were not only assessments of students, but also assessments of their teaching.

Perhaps with a focus on print literacy, many of the social meaning-making practices of emergent levels of writing are valued less. When learning to translate thoughts to paper, many students come to understand writing as a social act, using a multimodal mix of pictures, written words, and oral sharing to communicate personal experiences with others. Pictures and oral sharing – both to compliment and supplement text – have been found in previous grades to be acceptable and credible means of communicating with other students (Dyson, 2008). Unfortunately, written portions of provincial assessments reduce what counts as writing to printed text, and do not account for details in pictures that did not find their way to printed word, nor do they allow for oral sharing of the students’ pieces – the value of visual and oral literacy is diminished. Teachers as test givers and, then, other teachers as test evaluators, compromise their own knowledges about children and literacy learning as their complicity in test culture reiterates a narrowing of literacy.

Reading serves as yet another social and self-defining activity (Millard, 1997). In many classrooms since kindergarten, students have been read aloud to and encouraged to share and discuss what they are reading with peers, a process of which strengthens comprehension; however, during provincial assessments, students are expected to individually and silently read text and make responses in solitude, unless accommodations are requested. By formally assessing reading as an isolated and individualized experience through the removal of the complex social connections and communicative elements, “the rhetoric of the perpetual literacy crisis would ask us to look at these students and see inept, struggling readers and writers and ignore other forms of literacy they have mastered” (Williams, 2007, p. 180).

Multi-literate learning and mono-literate assessment

Instructional approaches are becoming more standardized, more fixed on narrow definitions of what children write and how their writing should be evaluated” (Dyson, 2008, p. 151).

As previously examined, governments tend to perpetuate narrow and contradicting understandings of literacy when designing assessments. With many teachers providing students the opportunity to develop in learning environments supportive of multiliteracies, assessments focused only on print-literacy creates a duality of expectations for students and educators. Though the official “curriculum guide[s] children into writing, it [leaves] them to their own devices as they [enter] into practices and [make] use of conventions other than those it had in mind (Dyson, 2008, p. 143). The blending of multimodal techniques for meaning-making such as drawing, abbreviating, oral sharing, acting, etc., are sidelined and officially “un-benchmarked” during assessment (Dyson, 2008, p. 153) as it is only the use of print-text that is assessed. If reliance to communicate is built by a student with drawing and orally explaining omitted details in her or his writing, important components of the written piece and process will go unassessed. There is a duality between how literacy is taught and how it is assessed, allowing for some students’ multiliterate aptitudes to be either left off official records or left behind normative standards.

Education has had a long history with developmental child psychology. Evolving hand in hand, educational academic authorities took steps to ensure that their work of understanding, tracking, and mapping how children learn, gained professional, if not scientific, credibility (Lagemann, 1989; Millard, 1997). In an effort to distance itself from

at-home learning where “reading and talking about books [...introduces] children to the explicit or ‘decontextualized’ prose valued in school” (Dyson, 1993, p. 30), bottom-up approaches of building from phonemes and orthographs before reading books and attempting writing differed from the at-home reading experience of some students (Millard, 1997). From this, closed, specific standards were established that provided timed, linear benchmarks for what would be considered age-appropriate and normal learning development (Whitty, 2010; Walkerdine, 2004). This has resulted in the longstanding belief and practice that all children should develop the same way and at the same rate. Those students not developing at a ‘normal’ rate run the risk of being “pathologized” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008) as “the conceptualization and practice of biomedical literacy including assessment, and the adoption of medical discourses in place of educational discourses” (Whitty, 2010, p. 284) remains prominent.

In today’s classrooms, the danger for all students to varying degrees comes when student work is compared to government sanctioned standards and levels to assess whether a child is working at, above, or below achievement standards. Fountas and Pinnell’s (2001) alphabetized levelled-book system is used in many New Brunswick classrooms as encouraged by educational districts and is intended to help teachers best match students’ singular reading ability with appropriate levelled books, but is used to compare students’ reading level to expected standards – e.g. by March, grade one students are expected to read and an F/G level. Writing is similarly compared to checklists with expectations for the use of various conventions at different points in a school year. Students – and parents – are very much aware of these reading and writing levels and, by grade one, become very cognizant of their reading and writing ability as

compared to others in the class, and programs that rank learning can override or even become misinterpreted as curriculum.

These classroom based quantitative empirical assessments emphasize print-literacy by giving graded value to print over other modes of literacy. Through the dividing practice of ranking (Foucault, 1977) against normative standards of development, this system allows for some students to become trapped outside the evaluative norm (Rose S. , 2009). Within a leveled program, summative assessments determine a student's level of literacy while ignoring the everyday multiliterate practices that students use to make meaning and communicate. Those who do not 'make the grade' for print-literacy may become self-conscious of their deficits, lose confidence, and risk falling further 'behind' (Cooley & Ayres, 1988). In cases of those with learning disabilities, students will often blame themselves for failures, yet when they are successful will not "attribute success with ability" (Cooley & Ayres, 1988, p. 175). With emphasis put on print-literacy as the singular route to becoming literate while ignoring other modes of literacy, students may also ignore or devalue the literacy assets they *do* have in other literacies while internalizing the evaluative surveillance of these programs.

A recollected narrative of Cabot and selected literacy practices

The ideal New Brunswick classroom is set up to do two very different things: provide an enriched authentic learning environment allowing students to make personal, real world connections and develop multiliterate, multimodal aptitudes transferable to her/his various worlds; and track and assess print-literacy while ignoring those other modes. Within the classroom, students who fall below print-literacy standards are able to find a voice and identity if teachers use their roles to shape learning around the student

rather than shape the student around the curriculum or ruling programs by “transgress[ing] [...] the normalized boundaries of ‘teacher’ to use power in productive ways to expand possibilities for students to remake themselves” (Rose S. , 2009, p. 5).

The following is my recollected and reinterpreted account of the relationship I shared with a grade one student, Cabot, who, although successful in many areas of literacy, was labeled by evaluative programs as falling short on many specific print centric curriculum objectives. Cabot affected and I struggled with his being labeled as struggling with reading and writing, “when his actions were positioned against the set of common skills deemed necessary within scientifically based reading research” (Spencer, 2009, p. 228) and tested via common assessments. Yet, when given the opportunity to express his social and cultural knowledge through non-print contexts, he demonstrated his competence through his multiliteracies. Through reconstructing the interactions I had with Cabot – and observing him having with his classmates – I share a joint experience that shows the collective, social practices of literacies. In doing so, I reflect on my own print centric subjectivities – an exercise that has helped me shift toward becoming more critically aware of my own teaching practices.

I begin this joint story in a team-taught grade one classroom in a rural New Brunswick school. As the two teachers, we were both fresh out of an in-service training module that we were eager to implement in our classroom. Using principles from Joseph Renzulli’s (2000) Triad Enrichment Model – a three-tiered process designed to expose students to multiple topics and ways of thinking so that they may *know* an interest leading to a self-selected area of study (Renzulli, 1985). We engaged the students in lengthy themed projects at two points in the year – once during the fall and again in the spring.

Through these whole-class enrichment projects, Cabot was immersed in a learning experience that encouraged him to find a place and gave him confidence at a time when he was becoming increasingly aware of his named deficits and increasingly disengaged from classroom activities.

In the fall, the students were excited. We had just completed a brainstorming activity with twenty-eight grade one students that invited them to think of something about fall that they were curious about. Most students immediately rushed to grab pencils, crayons, and a page of writing paper to think about, draw, and/or write a question on the fall theme. We watched as a noisy group of twenty-seven students looked out windows, flipped through books, examined the extensive fall brainstorming web we had jointly created, and shared their ideas with one another. “I’m gonna find out about why leaves change colour,” mentioned one student to another who replied, “I want to know where butterflies go in the fall.” One of the students who usually scribbled his entire page black had squiggled three long, green ovals on his paper with, “Hw DaO i MAc PiKKuLs” – How do I make pickles? – written in his best printing on a line below his picture. Twenty-seven students were busy putting pencil to paper while the twenty-eighth remained crouched on the discussion mat in front of the interactive whiteboard, his right cheek pressed on the cool linoleum, his arms spread back behind his feet, and his right eye fixed on the web.

I knelt beside him. “Anything look interesting, Cabot?” I asked him, expecting to have to repeat myself.

“Yeah. Beavers,” Cabot replied without lifting his head from the floor.

“Beavers! How interesting,” I said, “Why beavers?” Cabot’s exposed eye rotated from the interactive whiteboard and made contact with my own.

“Because I want to know about them in the fall,” he waited for my response and rolled over to his back, hugged his knees and rocked his head back and forth on floor. I reached for a piece of paper and pulled a mechanical pencil from my shirt pocket. I set the paper beside him. “Beavers,” I said, “There is so much to learn about beavers. What do they eat? Where do they live? Why do they—,” I was cut off by Cabot who had now swung around and was sitting upright.

“There’s a beaver family by my house and they build a dam. It flooded a road in the woods and people don’t like it ‘cause they can’t get their four-wheelers through.” He reached for my pencil and started to sketch as he explained, “See? There is his little stream that is by the road and the beavers build their sticks here.” He drew a few lines for the stream, the road, and some scribbles for the sticks and started to outline something round explaining further, “The water got all backed up and made this pond here. They do it every year when we start school, but this year the water’s all on the road. My dad and his friends want to knock it down. I don’t even know why the beavers did that.”

“It sounds to me like you want to find out why beavers build dams. Am I right?” I asked him.

“Do I have to write it down?” he asked back.

“Maybe just so we don’t forget it,” I coaxed, and he started to sound out and print barely recognizable letters to represent his wondering of why beavers build dams.

As co-teachers, we had done it; we had twenty-eight students on task and completing the first step of what would be a three month long communal and collaborative research project. Twenty-eight students interested in learning and what's more, they were all busy putting their thoughts to paper. Had we managed to bridge the gap between official curricular outcomes and the interests and authenticity of the students' unofficial worlds (Dyson, 2008)?

I was impressed with Cabot that day – his inquiry, his connection of the current beaver behaviour around his house and the fall, his ability to orally express and present his thoughts and observations using diagrams, and his eagerness to begin learning about beavers. I was excited for Cabot to begin.

In an earlier draft of this chapter, I was made aware of my own print centrism through my pedagogical default to return to paper and pencil. At the time, I gave little thought to my coaxing of Cabot to use pencil despite his question to confirm if he had to write. Was it recognition of Cabot's reluctance to convert his already sufficient and clearly communicated ideas and inquiries to print – by which the ultimate objective of this lesson and activity he had already achieved –that prompted me to slide the paper and pencil into his reach with the hope that he would gain confidence for writing? Did I take this action as a move toward an ultimate end goal of making these students print literate? Was it to collect proof of his progress? Was it to legitimize his expressiveness in more traditional modes? Was it a move to normalize his work in line with the work of his classmates? Was it to avoid the messy, “Why doesn't Cabot have to do it?” from observant six year olds? Perhaps it was all of these reasons. It is bothersome how easily the simple unconsidered and automatized gesture of myself as a teacher occurs, and how

many problems this carries. My intentions were to help Cabot participate in a class activity, but they carried with them the unspoken message that, “until you write it down, it doesn’t count.”

On the other hand, as a teacher in New Brunswick, I am ethically and professionally obligated to ensure the outcomes of provincial curricula are presented and assessed. In grades one to two, “Students will be expected to use writing and other forms of representation to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and learnings; and to use their imaginations” (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 32). Was I not helping Cabot use “other forms of representation” and “begin to develop, with assistance, some ways to make [his] own notes (e.g., webs, story maps, point-form notes)” (Atlantic Canadian English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p.32)? My actions reinforced print centric values on Cabot, for example, when I gestured for him to try writing his thoughts down like the rest of his classmates; however, I did value opportunities for him to express himself in other ways. Over the next weeks, teachers and students had created a space for Cabot’s non-print literacies to grow, and for him to be recognized and to recognize himself as contributing and literate member of our collective investigation into fall questions.

Over the next weeks, we watched as Cabot gathered books about beavers – both fiction and non-fiction – drew pictures of dams, lodges, and beavers, and shared with us facts that he learned from experience and read from the pictures in books, online resources, and videos about beaver dams. We were surprised that when needed, he would recognize and work to decode important terms like ‘lodge,’ ‘beaver meadow,’ and ‘coyote,’ asking teachers or classmates for help when needed. When he felt he was ready,

an Educational Assistant – who was not officially assigned to our class – volunteered to take Cabot outside to collect what he needed. In fifteen minutes, the two returned with a grocery bag full of sticks, twigs, and grass, as well as a small pail full of sand. Using an old cardboard box as a base, he painted a light blue stream and pond, and surrounded it with green and browns to represent the land. I helped him make a mixture of glue, water, and sand when he asked about the best way to make mud, and over three or four afternoons, Cabot *was* a busy beaver, meticulously laying sticks and packing mud and bits of grass, working with his hands to first build a dam then a lodge. It was a fascinating representation on its own, but we were more than impressed by the oral presentation of his project. In front of his classmates, he explained why he was interested in learning about beaver dams, why beavers build dams, where were the best places to find beaver dams, how beavers build dams, and, of course, how he built his model. He demonstrated his expertise on beaver dams by drawing from his knowledge and his multimedia research, and representing and articulating it orally and visually – as per curriculum outcomes – through the three dimensional construction of a model. Cabot excelled at this project without conventionally reading a great deal of print and by representing his knowledge in writing even less.

Cabot's ability to represent his passions despite limitations in print-literacy continued throughout the year. Following the Christmas break we launched a thematic unit on fairy tales using storybooks as the primary media to lead us through this genre. Because of the visual/textual/oral multimodality of storybooks, Cabot was successful and confident. During read-aloud times, he listened and watched carefully, confidently contributing his thoughts and connections with the stories we read. On one occasion,

following a reading of Cinderella, all twenty-seven students, two teachers, and a student intern were left speechless when Cabot's hand shot up and he shared from the back of the room, "what I don't get is that the fairy godmother put spells on things to change them to something for Cinderella but they would change back to normal at midnight...so why did everything change back except for the slippers?" The room went silent as teachers and students pondered the observation. No one could offer an answer to Cabot's profound inquiry and after a few seconds, the rare moment of silence in the class was broken by a young girl in the front row that turned to him saying, "Good question, Cabot!" Perhaps for the reason of not knowing exactly what else to do – or knowing exactly what to do: celebrate him – some of the students began to applaud Cabot's critique, and Cabot's shy smile beamed receiving the peer feedback and returning gratitude. Seizing the opportunity presented by Cabot, I invited the students to grab a piece of paper to come up with a different ending that made more sense. Cabot was one of the first to find a spot to work. By the time I made my way to him, he had already written in his neatest printing, "The clok sTRuK mi nit And evrythnG changed bck evn ThE slipper."

This was not the first time Cabot had stunned the class during the fairytale exploration. A few weeks previously, after reading various versions of Little Red Riding Hood, the students were given open-ended instructions to create a short presentation. Provided with different materials from costumes to plasticine, the students were asked to represent their favourite part of any of the versions to present to the class within a deadline of 15 minutes. The students rushed off, most working in small groups of two or three while others, like Cabot, choose to work independently. We watched the class work as they scrambled to put something together to share – Cabot wasted little time drawing

and cutting paper. We noticed that he had grabbed a few Popsicle sticks, but we were not sure how he planned to use them. Knowing his love for construction, I assumed he was building the Granny's cabin in the woods. When the time expired, and it was Cabin's turn, he set up a small finger puppet theatre that we had in the classroom on top of a desk and crouched behind it. He waited for his audience to settle. When he was satisfied that he had our attention, Cabot popped his head through the pale yellow curtains of the tiny stage and announced that his favourite part was "when the wolf tricked Red Riding Hood." His head disappeared behind the curtains and what reappeared was a drawn and cut out, red-caped girl glued to one end of a Popsicle stick held by Cabot. Wiggling it he said in a squeaky 'girl' voice, "I am just going to take this basket of goodies to my Grandma." His audience broke out in giggles. Just then, another stick-mounted figure appeared, this one grey with a triangular shape for a head and an angry looking black eye. In a gruff voice, Cabot made the wolf say, "Hey I know a shortcut. Go that way," and with a wave of the wolf-stick, he gestured a direction that lead the paper Red Riding Hood off-stage. In a direct address, the wolf takes the audience into his confidence, "I tricked her! Now I will take the *real* shortcut, eat the Grandma, and wait for the girl!" The wolf disappeared and the class was quiet for a brief moment before Cabot poked his head through the tiny stage once more saying, "Uh... the end!" As applaus erupted, I overheard one boy say to another, "I wanted him to do the whole thing!" Cabot's presentation was a complete success; by using drama as a form of representation, not only had he followed our instruction, he surpassed the curricular expectations of his teachers and more importantly to him, the expectations of his classmates, all without print

literacy deficits getting in the way. Perhaps these activities helped him in the reconstruction of a competent learning identity within the classroom collective.

By traditional print centric standards, Cabot was constructed as a non-reader, non-writer, had trouble recognizing and representing numbers from one to ten, rarely shared anything during class discussions, was uninterested in physical education time, and appeared to have no close friends. He had previously been retained at the kindergarten level for an extra year, following which he had made little academic progress according to systemic standards. To summarize his cumulative file: he was not succeeding academically according to provincial curriculum standards and age/grade benchmarks. In his file, there was documentation – e.g. Early Years Evaluation – Direct Assessment (EYE-DA); Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS); progress reports that described what Cabot could not do which seemed to be no secret to this student, as we observed through his general lack of confidence and enthusiasm for many of the dynamic learning activities we provided the class each day (Cooley & Ayres, 1988). Though there were glimpses of his formatively assessed brilliance by teachers and classmates during free choice with Lego and blocks, and recess in the sand box, it was our hope that such student-centered explorations of beavers and their dams, as well as open-ended challenges during our fairytales theme would be perfect vehicles for this boy to show what he could do. Unfortunately, despite his best effort and success with his beaver exploration, his critical analysis of the plot to Cinderella, and his thoughtful Popsicle stick puppet shows, if there existed a summative provincial assessment for grade one literacy, his talents would go unnoticed and his deficits in print-literacy would continue to be the only information about him.

Requests made during the previous summer months for an Educational Assistant (EA) to follow this student into grade one were denied because of other classrooms where students were assessed with posing safety risks and the cost of hiring another EA was not justifiable. We had three students in our class whose shared EA from the previous year was not allowed to follow the students. Learning specialists and coaches for literacy and mathematics who rotated schools throughout the district did not work with this student because his assessed literacy level was too low, and intervention was reserved for those students on the ‘cusp’ of attaining grade-level performance. The system overall was failing to provide Cabot the attention and teaching he needed, and though our ‘enrichment projects’ provided us with formative, anecdotal accounts of his interests, aptitudes, and learning, the systemic focus was weighted heavily by what he lacked in print literacy.

As teachers, we must critically examine our subjectivities that reinforce a system of constructing narrow definitions of literacy and then learn to navigate these constructions by providing cross-curricular opportunities that foster multiliteracies and celebrate multiple modes of representation across the whole year. The reflective exercise of thinking back on my schooled literacy experiences as a student demonstrated to me the limits of my then current constructions of what counts as literacy. My recollections of standing in the hallway to eavesdrop on an advanced level English class as they recited and acted their way to better understandings of Shakespeare, and wishing that I could have been allowed in that class were quite different from the experiences of Cabot; however, they are a reminder of the multiple ways in which students may participate in and expand literacy learning. And how easily students can be left out.

“It is evident that there exists a deficit-driven discourse” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 19) within the education system. By associating a cost to hiring another needed EA, essentially, “putting a dollar amount on what [our student] deserve[d]” (p. 18), and denying this student support due to a lack of room in the budget, the underlying message was that it was not worth it to invest in Cabot. Furthermore, it may seem that there is a, “rationale for abandoning children who have the least amount of privilege while diverting resources to children who already have the most” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 29), which is particularly haunting and raises questions of class-bias and equal access to support. From a family of lower socio-economic status, Cabot was denied specialist ‘intervention’ to help bridge academic ‘gaps,’ while another student in our class, deemed ‘gifted’ for her strengths with reading and writing and from a family of much higher socio-economic status was allowed to leave our class each afternoon for an accelerated literacy group mediated by an EA. Is it possible that one reason why an EA was allocated in this way might be related to socio-economic class and/or cultural capital? There could be truth in Heydon and Iannacci’s (2008) suggestion that, “middle-class children are mainly in need of help because their numbers make up the greatest proportion of the population and will make up the bulk of the future workforce” (p. 28), and that focusing limited resources on middle-class students to enrich their print literacies will yield a better return on investment than spending public money on “second-class” students (Heydon and Iannacci’s, 2008, p. 20).

Cabot’s experience with education provides a good example of a student pathologized by a system and by normative, print centric classroom practices carried out by his teachers. Through assessing students in accordance with narrow curricular

benchmarks, deficits in students are highlighted while skills or talents observed outside the normative learning objectives are less valued. Because Cabot's skills fell outside this official structure (Dyson, 2008), he is, "seen to exist with a 'lack'," and determined to be 'at-risk' rather than "seen as 'at-promise'" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 20). In fact, Cabot's provincially assessable print-based skills were so 'lacking' that his parents eventually sought a diagnosis from a child psychologist. Though he showed promise in many untested and non-prioritized areas of the curriculum, the child psychologist worked to transform his 'lacks' into definable disabilities so he could qualify to receive assistance through diagnosis. As Heydon writes, "disability can [...] be seen as the interpretation of a particular person's differences as perceived by others through a normative framework" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 22). Diagnosed with a learning disability, Cabot will likely struggle throughout his educational experience to break away from the discriminating stereotype that he is unable to make valuable contributions (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). It can be argued that perhaps his non-print contributions are currently devalued by the "cult of efficiency" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 18) – and will be judged as, "unable to be productive [...] regardless of his actual capabilities or achievements" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 24). It was after he became officially diagnosed with a learning disability that Cabot qualified for one-on-one support from an EA; unfortunately, this assistance ultimately focused on trying to build Cabot's phonetic deficiencies (Purcell-Gates, 2002) in an effort to *make* him more 'normal' while potentially denying him opportunity to experience enriching activities that makes him *feel* normal (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

Educators, including myself, must be critical and work to change normative classroom practices that focus on having students conform to the confines of print literacy while devaluing or excluding curricular outcomes for multimodal literacy representations. Otherwise, students like Cabot are at risk of becoming alienated from their own literate contributions and intellectual empowerment. Though the intent of searching for a learning disability was to gain a better understanding of how to teach Cabot print literacy, “the armory of at-risk labels, which ironically gain many poor children access to [recourses and] programs from which [he] would otherwise be excluded, also contains proliferating weapons of future educational exclusion” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 29).

Learning from Cabot

Writing and reflecting on my experiences with Cabot, I was reminded of the ways that a whole-class Triad projects worked to help students experience academic success. I also realized how I had learned professionally from these experiences to make changes in my teaching practices. Cabot’s story has taught me that when we as teachers – *myself* as a teacher – are resistant to normative and “exclusionary practices,” we can create asset-oriented learning environments where students are able to become more in tune with what they can offer to their official and unofficial worlds (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). The practice of students comparing themselves to others (Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008) and to official curricular standards (Dyson A. H., 1993), and the low self-concept that students with learning disabilities develop (Cooley & Ayres, 1988) is challenged by asset oriented learning environments. As we saw with Cabot’s motivation to attempt using print-literacy for an authentic purpose, students develop “literacies in

content knowledge” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 168) that helps them develop literacies in other areas. By using the Triad projects to shift the classroom focus away from print literacy to include more oral and visual modes of literacy, I was able to recognize how these other forms of literacy can be legitimized and validated. That is not to say that print literacy should be ignored for particular students; on the contrary, I have learned that interest-based projects create opportunities for authentic reasons to ‘use’ print while at the same time raise academic and social confidence that can extend beyond the classroom. It is curious why the Triad model tends to be associated with extra enrichment rather than part of everyday literacy practice. It is even more curious, and troubling, that the term ‘enrichment’ often seems to be associated with ‘extra’ to the curriculum.

Educators, myself as an educator, must be leaders in re-conceptualizing and reconstructing public and institutional understandings of literacy as its plural form, *literacies*. Thinking back to my own schooled experiences, I wonder how different my engagement and success with school content would have been if I were given more opportunities to learn and express myself differently than those restricted to print. Reflecting on these experiences has strengthened my understanding of the different ways and rates that students learn, and has served as a reminder of the ways that I can find inclusive spaces within my classroom for all students to find and co-construct her or his own self. Teachers must work to promote the value of multiple modes of representing and communicating, and classrooms should be constituted as places that foster children of abundance rather than venues that evaluate using discourses of lack.

CHAPTER 5

“I can’t picture you teaching:” A critical analysis of a male teaching in a “feminized” profession

As I write, I am conscious “of how writing as a method of inquiry coheres with the development of ethical selves engaged in social action and social reform” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 959). Through writing as method, I theorize that expectations for an ideal teacher can be in conflict with the performed acts of teachers as they are connected with gender and gendered expectations. This chapter addresses the research question, “How are male teachers subject to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations?” I attempt to reaffirm that the type of teacher students deserve to have are those who display qualities of an ideal person, rather than qualities associated with gender. In this chapter, I also begin to explore how my white, hetero-masculine, position of privilege affords me some allowance of risk when teaching issues of social justice and gender equality and how I have shifted to use my classroom as a venue for change.

In the opening chapter of this thesis, I reflected back on an exercise that I completed during the first days of my Bachelor of Education program. From the assignment where I was asked to identify the traits and characteristics of an ideal teacher, my understanding of what constitutes the kind of teacher students deserve to have was revealed by characteristics of care and respect for and shared with students. Re-reading my thoughts written in my autobiographic sections of chapter one, I realize now that my constructions of a teacher-ideal, the teacher I hope I am/aspire to become, is not connected with particular cultural constructions of gender. As I have shared, I have

wrestled with my subjective desires for gender binaries and continually work on myself to reform language that works to keep me connected to limiting gendered constructions. And yet, though my own understandings of ‘teacher’ and more specifically ‘elementary teacher’ is not defined by traits typically associated with gender, more specifically ‘femininity,’ gendered expectations permeate discourses that regard teaching and education. My experiences with how male teachers are subject to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations are critically explored in this chapter.

“I can’t picture you teaching”

During the winter months of the past few years, I have committed at least one evening a week to participating in a mixed-gender curling league. Following each game, in a gesture of sportsmanship, it is customary for members of the winning team to buy a round of drinks for the losing opponents. Both teams come together around a circular lounge table to socialize and communicate in a context and dialogue different from the yelled “hurry hards” and “right offs” exchanged while competing on the ice. Not long after the first few sips of our post-game beverages do eight curlers, some meeting for the first time, begin conversing about anything from memories of past club heroes, to politics, to marriage, to work. On the topic of careers, I am inevitably asked, “So, what is it that you do?” With intentional vagueness I often only share that I am a teacher, thus encouraging a sort of guessing game that I’ve come to expect, allowing for a series of questions to follow in the order of: “Oh, up at the high school, there?”; “Middle school?”; “Elementary? Oh! You’re a gym teacher?”; “Do you just teach math?”; “A grade five teacher?” The most surprised responses occurred when I taught first grade students,

opening the door for comments such as, “but you’re so tall you must look awful scary to them,” “I bet they don’t give you any trouble,” “that’s so cute,” and/or “I can’t picture you teaching elementary.”

These conversations are not new to me, but with them come a sort of awkwardness on my part, perhaps from my own sensitivities. I’ve navigated the same series of questions at parties with peers, summer BBQs with my mother and her friends, the waiting room at the doctor’s office, and meetings with sales clerks at car dealerships; there are few places where the revelation of my being an elementary educator is not greeted with some element of surprise. The intention and astonished nature behind such comments are never ill intended, but are inadvertently laced with discourses of the social construction of masculine identities and gendered normativity, as well as the gendered construction of elementary teachers.

I find the reduction of my status as an elementary teacher to “cute” insulting, though I realize the motive is not to be hurtful. The classification of cuteness seems to be related to the rarity of a 6’4” male working in a role that “has long been considered a ‘woman’s job because working with young children was associated with childcare rather than teaching” (Skelton, 2009, p. 42). It is unfortunate that my professional training, education, and aptitude for working with young children can be reduced to the ‘cute’ oddity of a man teaching primary grade levels – or does applying ‘cute’ to the thought of my vocation reduce the entire profession of early years teaching to something on par with babysitting? Conversely, the suggestion that I, “look awfully scary,” and that the students must be well behaved suggests that my size and gender carries with it the expectation of an intense authoritarian and disciplinarian, managing my classroom through intimidation

and fear rather than love and respect. This is not the teacher I ever wanted to be, nor do I believe I am. These traits typically associated with masculinity seem opposite to feminine qualities typically associated with childcare. The interactions that I share with people regarding my work have become relatively predictable, but are nevertheless troubling, evident of deeply ingrained dichotomist gendered expectations in the construction of elementary teachers and the relationships adults have with children, and the possibly marginalizing effects these have for male teachers.

The feminization of education

Teaching was not always considered to be women's work. In the early nineteenth century the majority of school teachers were men (Smedley, 2007). During this time, it was believed that men naturally made for better teachers as "the ideal of teacherliness was inscribed in men as fathers" (Smedley, 2007, p. 376). When the industrial revolution called for physically demanding factory labourers, as well as retail managers and office clerks with enticing wages and prospects for advancement attracted men as primary earners for their families. With limited waged work available for females, women were able to fill the void in schools as men left previous classroom positions; however, authoritative positions of educational theorists, policy makers, and administrators, continued to be held by men (Smedley, p. 376). It "long seemed natural for women to work in occupations similar to homemaking and child-rearing – that is, in occupations that recognize care giving" (Noddings, 2010, p. 75). Education was an extension of the patriarchal family model with females 'naturally' performing their gender role as 'carer' while paternal management roles – e.g. principal –in schooling were more stereotypically framed as male (Laere, Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014).

As, over time, schooling became compulsory more teachers were needed to educate the influx of students. By the mid-nineteenth century, Beecher (1846 as cited in Benton & Vogtle, 1997) urged women “to enlist in an army of female teachers who would start schools in the West to save untutored children from ignorance, and to create an honoured profession for women (p. 37). In the half century to follow, an influx of females attended teacher-training institutes and by the middle of the twentieth century, “80% – 90% of teachers were women” (p. 37). As of 2001, only 9% of elementary teachers in the United States were men (Wood, 2012, p. 317), while in Canada, as of 2006, teachers are represented at the elementary level with a male to female ratio of five:one (Parr & Gosse, 2011, p. 382). The transition of the teaching profession from the domination of male to female “was so complete that teaching was irrevocably feminized” (Benton & Vogtle, 1997, p. 37).

With an overwhelming majority of elementary classroom positions held by women for over 150 years, the social construction of ‘feminized traits’ have contributed to the social construction of a teacher ideal. Weber and Mitchell (1996) note Trousdale’s 1994 research regarding the representation of primary teachers in children’s books “as an extension of mother, as a nurturing, protective, and caring person” (p. 310), while the “attributes listed for a ‘good mother’ and for a ‘good teacher’ have been found to be largely identical” (Vogt, 2002, p. 253). Considered a long held experiential standard for primary teachers to be nurturing and motherly, it is a ‘common sense’ expectation that women are natural teachers of young children (Smedley, 2007), “better suited to serve as role models and teachers of moral behaviour’ and that [women] possessed ‘emotional qualities to work with youth (Wiest, 2003 as cited in Wood, 2012, p. 319).

Is the reason for reactions of surprise I receive during introductory conversations with new acquaintances due to the contrast of my perceived masculinity with that of my career as a teacher of young children? Is it so hard to believe that I do, indeed, teach, care for, and love a classroom full of students? Research by Wood (2012) exploring the perceptions of teachers regarding gender based differences determined that 50% of participating male and female teachers strongly agreed that female teachers are nurturing and sensitive as compared to only 15% for male teachers (p. 326). It is evident that the ideal role, identity, and conduct of an elementary teacher is narrowed to those traits traditionally and socially constructed as being female and not male. My work aims to trouble these constructions.

Masculinity: A critique of heteronormative constructions

A profession with feminine qualities in performance and masculine authority is an enigma for males' career choice (Benton & Vogtle, 1997, p. 38).

The identity traits of femininity and/or masculinity are not of biological development, but of the social construction and maintenance of an encompassing culture (Stets & Burke, 2000; Martino, 2008). Butler (1988), citing Beauvoir, makes the distinction for sex as a “biological facticity” and “gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity” (p. 522). Being “‘woman’ is a historical idea and not a natural fact [and] to be a woman is to have *become* a woman” (p. 522) by conforming to culturally constructed connections of the body to expected acts – a connection so strong and established it is difficult to regard sex and gender as independent from each other. Simply put, gender is as gender does, and “in ‘doing gender’ differences are shaped and gender specific patterns are created” (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014, p. 283) and

normalized; how well or ‘normal’ one’s gender acts are performed is reinforced by surveilling audits of socio-cultural context. Those who stray too far from the normative gender regime, “those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (Butler, 1988, p. 522) and made to feel awkward and ‘othered.’

The cultural fusing of sex and gender into binary constructs of woman and man is maintained in “the service of reproductive interests” ((Butler, 1988, p. 524). Traditional regimes of gender, then, fall in line with a heterosexual contract, where heterosexuality defines and is defined by the constructed binary of two genders: feminine and masculine. How well one conforms to hegemonic gender constructions is indicative of how heterosexual one is perceived to be. If the heterosexual contract be that of a reproductive – biological/survival – the hegemony of masculine/feminine, hetero-/homosexual and, normal/abnormal binaries continue to be in long cultural historic standing.

Femininity and masculinity “form a binary opposition in which we are offered two mutually exclusive meanings” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 62), the definitions of which are intimately connected through comparison; “without ‘female’, ‘male’ has no meaning” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 62) and by understanding what has been constructed to be ‘feminine’, one may understand its opposite as ‘masculine.’ The construction of ‘normal’ male and female roles is “constructed through differences that produce ‘othering’” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 64), to wit, doing that which is constructed as ‘normal’ for one can be risky if performed by the other. As Martino (2008) suggests, male “fear of the feminine and its signifying potential is at the heart of the dynamics of masculinity” (p. 577). The scarcity of male teachers in elementary classrooms suggests that the fear of a less masculine identity is present in doing ‘women’s work’ (Simpson, 2005; Skelton, 2009)

allowing “male primary teachers [to be] often characterized as ‘feminine,’ ‘homosexual,’ or ‘pedophile(s)’” (Parr & Gosse, 2011, p. 382). If it is natural for women to love children, would the binary of this ‘truth’ be that is unnatural for men to do so? This discursive practice of unfounded labeling to uphold the hegemonic ideal is primarily maintained by men who scrutinize other men for signs of femininity and homosexuality (Simpson, 2005, p. 376). Is it ‘unsafe’ for me to teach from a place of love? How much scrutiny do I risk if I appear to be too far out of line with masculine ideals while working closely with children?

If femininity is to be caring, nurturing, passive, cooperative, and domestic, then masculinity is to be aggressive, competitive, and goal oriented (Stets & Burke, 2000); thus, the socially constructed dichotomy of labour is maintained. It is masculine to pursue careers with opportunities for economic and authoritative advancement, and “statistics [from many studies] may be interpreted as demonstrating that the more care seems to be included in the teacher’s work, the fewer the men” (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014, p. 281). Certain occupations for men – and women – then are hegemonically masculine whereby the key to monetary (Simpson, 2005) and social (Frank, B., Kehler, Lovell, & Davidson, 2003) success is to exhibit masculine characteristics.

With men moving toward more “monetarily determined career goals” (Benton & Vogtle, 1997, p. 37), choosing a teaching career path with wages “typically viewed as second income for decades” (p. 38) may be unattractive to a man with hegemonic aspirations of supporting his family as the primary breadwinner. I am reminded of the story of my grandfather – a retired shop teacher – who worked unloading trucks while also teaching summer school courses at a time when teacher wages did not cover summer

months and were lower than other professional careers. Finding additional means for income was common practice for male school teachers during a time when family household earnings was primarily or solely a male responsibility (Benton & Vogtle, 1997) and for a time, teaching was not an economically feasible to support a family.

The employment gender gap that exists in education “has been predominantly explained by a deeply embedded ‘habitus’ associating caring jobs with low paid, low-status jobs and essentially female jobs” (Laere *et al.*, 2014, p. 236); furthermore, “the closer women’s work is to that long identified with mothering, the lower its worth in our society” (Noddings, 2010, p. 76). This could explain the scarcity of male teachers in early elementary teaching positions. Reflecting back to my high school and early university years, becoming a teacher was a career option only after more “masculine” options – e.g. engineering, policing, and military – were considered. Subject to the biopolitical desire to ‘better’ myself, aspiration for how and what kind of success I could pursue were defined by the paradigm of expectations for my socioeconomic, raced, and gendered positioning (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). “[T]eaching young children is not a high status profession” (Smedley, 2007, p. 375), with the prospect of earning less by working in a feminized profession rather than more competitive – and more masculine – career options. Male teachers, then, have little to gain monetarily and much to lose with regard to their masculinity (Simpson, 2005). With the risk of being labeled or self-identifying as less of a man for doing women’s work, the majority of men working in schools hold administrative positions and “positions responsible for ‘masculine’ subjects like physical education and maths, and teaching the oldest children in the school” (Skelton, 2009, p. 42). In these positions, men are able to maintain and display masculine traits of authority,

athleticism, and interest in ‘practical’ subject matter, while perhaps distancing themselves from ages of children perceived as requiring higher needs for a nurturing teacher.

Furthermore, Benton and Vogtle (1997), and Wood (2012) suggest that fast tracking men from classrooms into administrative positions contributes to the lack of male teachers in classrooms.

A call for male teachers

In recent years, western governments and society have become concerned with a lack of male teachers. Skelton (2009) argues that teaching as a feminized profession has only been “raised as a matter of concern when boys came to be regarded as being out-performed by girls” (p. 40). The feminized teaching realm then, is theorized as one reason for ‘girl friendly’ learning environments that do not offer boys equal educational opportunities (Helbig, 2012). The lack of male performance became a ‘moral panic’ when girls out performed boys academically, further maintaining the male *vs.* female binary that exists in schooling (Frank, B., Kehler, Lovell, & Davidson, 2003). Blame for the male student’s ‘decline’ in academic performance and post-secondary enrolment is cast on the assumption that female teachers are failing to connect with the learning styles and disciplinary needs of male students (Skelton, 2009). Poor attitudes held by boys toward school are attributed to arguments that women are not sufficient role models for boys (Carrington, Tymms, & Merrell, 2008), some going as far to say that “female teachers are not viewed as capable to meet the children’s needs of masculine coded values and actions” (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014, p. 281). There exists the heteronormative rejection of the feminine qualities, as particular masculine ideals are present in the considerations for the ‘type’ of male teachers needed in education. The

search and recruitment of ‘real’ men, “those who are heterosexual and who engage in manly activities which mark them as heterosexuals, activities which they can model as appropriate interests and pursuits for boys,” comes in contrast to the caring and nurturing qualities of female teachers (Frank, B. *et al*, 2003, p. 123). But are the male teachers being hired modeling the desired traits for their male students? Martino (2008) raises questions about ‘unmasculine’ male teachers not necessarily meeting the role model standards of parents and being ‘unable’ to provide a masculine coded connection with male students. When considering the needs of children, the model of male teacher that students hope for contrasts with that perceived by their parents – and governments – to be ideal, and do not appear to align with normative constructions of masculine or feminine traits. Brownhill’s (2014) critical research on the perceived qualities and characteristics of male primary teachers shows that children, regardless of genders, prefer that their male teachers be ‘authentic’ and exhibit traits more akin to what it means to be a good person, – e.g. a good listener, fair, approachable, consistent, trustworthy, etc. – rather than qualities typically associated with particular constructions of masculinity –e.g. aggressive, athletic, work oriented, authoritative (p. 251). Children are inadvertently expanding acceptance of a wider range of masculinity.

Governments in the European Union and OECD countries have initiated policies to promote the hiring of male teachers (Carrington, et al, 2008; Skelton, 2009; Helbig, 2012). Research by Carrington et al. (2008) on role modeling, and Burusic et al. (2012), Wood (2012), and Helbig (2012) on academic achievement, demonstrate that there is no empirical evidence to support improvement in boys’ academics and attitudes toward school as a result of more male teachers. Governments seem to ignore evidence that there

is no correlation between student performance and teacher gender (Skelton, 2009). With regard to serving as a better role model for boys, it was found in studies by Martin and Marsh (2005, as cited in Wood, 2012), that teacher gender has no bearing on student motivation, while Wood (2012) himself points out that students may not even recognize their teachers – male or female – as role models. Despite this research to support otherwise, the societal perception that more male teachers are required and, like superman, will save boys from the plight of failure and from feminine influence remains strong.

Masculinities under the microscope

Foucault's gaze strips us: to ourselves, we no longer seem agents of our own destiny, but cipher of a discourse ... What we touted as our freedom – we chose to do this work, after all, -- Foucault, working at a different level unmask as unfreedom (Kemmis, 1993 as cited in Lawson, 2004, p. 7).

As a man choosing a career working with children you often feel that there are a lot of eyes on you, and that there are certain suspicions afoot that far exceed any suspicions which would be on a female teacher (Martino, 2008, p. 580).

Paradoxically, the call for more male teachers in elementary schools seems to increase the social value given to male teachers; however, the call does not escape long established cultural standards that primary teachers are motherly and caring.

Contradictory perceptions exist around the social need for more male teachers at primary levels. Although empirical data in western nations does not support that male teachers positively affect male students' academic performance and attitudes toward school, the socially perceived call exists; however, because of a hegemonic perception that teaching

is women's work and more in tune with traits constructed as feminine, men are not choosing careers in elementary education despite government initiatives (Benton & Vogtle, 1997; Carrington, et al., 2008; Martino, 2008).

If male teachers are a rarity in primary levels of education, would the next interpretive step be to suggest that it is not normal for a male to be found in elementary classrooms? With men as the minority on elementary staffs, male elementary teachers may feel 'othered' (Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999; Skelton, 2009) when contesting what Foucault would refer to as a "gendered regime of truth" (Foucault, 1984 as cited in MacNaughton, 2005, p. 72). Male teachers experience a "steady form of surveillance" (Webb, 2006, p. 212) when their presence within elementary schools becomes observed by "all [who] gaze upon the system" (Lawson, 2004, p. 7). Male teachers, then, can become isolated, individualized, and surveilled within normative paradigms that define the masculine-coded expectations of how male teachers should behave and interact with students. Issues around the authentic development of male teachers' pedagogy, philosophy, and practice are brought into question as constraining gazes of official – e.g. administration, evaluations, provincial tests – and unofficial surveillers – e.g. teacher/parent/student perceptions, expectations, gender normativity – restrict men from interacting with young children in ways these male teachers believe to be most effective. It is risky, though not impossible, for male teachers to act outside of limiting structural forces, think for themselves, and develop critical autonomy outside of the prescribed normative gender expectations.

A commonly held stereotype of male teachers is that their masculinity affords them better discipline and classroom management (Smedley, 2007; Skelton, 2009; Wood,

2012). Masculine male teachers are often given more challenging students (Parr & Gosse, 2011) and their classroom management strategies go relatively unchallenged while so-called effeminate male teachers are often scrutinized by parents, colleagues, and administration (Martino, 2008).

The archetype of the caring, nurturing – feminine – teacher has been constructed as normative/desired practice at primary levels. For men to work within these feminized parameters, they experience what Simpson (2005) refers to a ‘role strain,’ where male teachers are expected to take a “holistic approach” (Brownhill, 2014, p. 256) and meet, to some extent, the feminized behavioural norms while also maintaining masculine traits more normatively aligned with their sex to prove they are not less of a man – that they are normal. Male teachers need to find and work within an androgynous balance between feminine and masculine gender normativity (Benton & Vogtle, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2000; Martino, 2008). If men are perceived as too masculine, they are considered to be less effective teachers, to have less content knowledge, to be too ‘slack’ and unorganized, and to be a threat to women teachers’ career opportunities as they are accelerated toward positions of leadership and administration (Benton & Vogtle, 1997; Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999). To exhibit non-masculine behaviours by stepping outside of the normative framework, men risk such degrading and defaming labels as wearing “a big girl’s blouse” or “kiddy fiddler” (Smedley, 2007, p. 369), the latter, which can obviously be the most damaging.

Considering the alienating comments I have experienced regarding the inability of some to picture me teaching in elementary schools, I have become sensitive, and perhaps overly so, to how I am perceived by colleagues, parents, and students. My self-

consciousness/paranoia extends beyond whether or not I am considered to be a good teacher and into whether I am perceived as a 'safe' teacher. As discussed in Parr and Gosse (2011) and Jones (2003; 2004), male teachers are always cognizant of itchy fingers ready to pull the trigger of sexual abuse accusations. Male teachers work inside a "fishbowl [...] designed so that everyone can note that nothing is going on" (Jones, 2004, p. 53); and yet, too much 'nothing' may also raise suspicions.

Parr and Gosse (2011) examined the school protocols in Ontario for addressing accusatory complaints of child abuse and sexual misconduct where the accused is assumed guilty until proven innocent. Though it is obviously necessary to have potential threats to children removed from working with children, "the Ontario College of Teachers may in fact still find a teacher guilty of professional misconduct even when the teacher has been found not guilty of the alleged offence in a provincial court of law" (p. 387). Without witnesses to testify to the innocence of the accused, it is difficult for men to shake the charges. Even when men come through investigations officially cleared of all accusation, they are stained by stigma and there is not sufficient support systems for lingering psychological, personal, social, and occupational trauma (Parr & Gosse, 2011). Men are made to feel as though they are under suspicion for choosing an atypical career path and wanting to work with children and they must take steps to ensure they are always available to be surveilled.

It is not uncommon in an elementary setting, for a student to wish to hug a teacher. In my experience, this happens often in the hallways as students greet past and present teachers following extended breaks. I am careful about where, how, and why I let students hug me: always in view of others and engaging the hug with one arm to the side

of my hip rather than straight on. Avoiding contact with students was most challenging while teaching the first grade as these children seemed to ready to physically reciprocate the care that I shared with them. After sharing that I enjoyed listening to her/him during one on one reading, students would often hug my arm before scrambling off to another activity. Expressing that I cared about what they were doing at school, they felt proud of their effort and good about themselves. I wonder how much it hurt their feelings when I brushed off their expression of reciprocity by not returning the hug and ushering them off to their next task.

There exists a double standard between male and female teachers regarding physical interactions with their students (Jones, 2004). Small children are often quite tactile and seek affection and a comforting touch from their teachers, but “self-disciplining teachers become ‘safe’ teacher subjects through avoiding touch” (p. 54). Where a female teacher may accept a child’s hug without a second thought of recourse, male teachers are more cautious and become “principles of their own subjugation” (Foucault as cited in Jones, 2004, p. 54), as feelings of anxiety and guilt prevent them from returning affection (Smedley, 2007).

So-called effeminate male teachers are “subject to intensified policy and homophobia in a way that other men are not” (Martino, 2008, p. 582). For many parents, there exists a false “association or link between pedophilia and homosexuality [and] the assumption that gay teachers are interested in recruiting young boys into homosexual lifestyles” (p. 580). Male teachers are observed from the homophobic lenses of heteronormativity. It is safer for gay men to keep their sexuality closeted and wise for straight men to prove they are not gay, amplifying heteronormativity.

Male primary teachers are “often characterized as ‘feminine,’ ‘homosexual,’ or ‘pedophile(s)’” (Parr & Gosse, 2011, p. 382) and are careful when answering questions of moral surveillance that aim to ‘out’ them as such. Personal and private life is scrutinized with innocent sounding questions as, “are you married?” and “do you live alone?” (Martino, 2008). To validate themselves as appropriately masculine, homosexual and heterosexual men may choose to “assert heterosexual masculinity to counter assumptions [...] of that which is constituted as deviant” (Smedley, 2007, p. 379). Male primary teachers may share stories of their athleticism (Martino, 2008), or convert the classroom ‘kitchen corner’ into a ‘workshop’ (Smedley, 2007). Likewise, I shared hunting and fishing stories with a group of boys during my teaching internship. Each year, I hang a Montreal Canadiens’ flag above my classroom door as proof of my interest in sports, and I display wedding pictures near my desk as proof of my heterosexual marriage. It is safer to act in gender-stereotypes and yet, in ‘doing genders’ (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014), both male and female teachers reinforce the inequalities rife within gender-order, maintaining and modeling divisiveness rather than strengthening gender equality.

Positioned as a white, masculine heterosexual male, it is relatively safe for me to transgress some norms of masculinity (Martino, 2008; Frank, B. *et al*, 2003). Apparently, I fall closer to the boundary of traditional definitions of masculinity and enjoy the reactions of surprise when people learn of my vocation; however, at the same time, I am also troubled that such presumptions still exist. And so, I write myself to position myself as a male working to deconstruct gender binaries and contribute to the reconstruction of gender as a continuum, with hope that my influence will reach beyond the boundaries of my school community. I continue to evolve my pedagogy to “productively point out new

possibilities for living within diversity using the texts of classroom life [while finding and creating spaces for] challenging discrimination and marginalization” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 70). I embrace and foster opportunities to, “Playfully show[...] children the contradictory and shifting ways in which” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 71) such constructed binaries as boy/girl colours, activities, interests, clothing, etc. are part of our daily discourses and carry with them marginalizing tones and maintain gender inequality, and accept students’ reimagining more fluid constructions of gender. Similar to ‘Steve,’ one of the subject participants of Martino’s work, I believe that I join students as an alternate example of masculinity as a means to subvert and denaturalize patriarchal, hegemonic attitudes for what it means to be a man and a male educator. I deploy my “heterosexual privilege to present [myself] as a creative, sensitive male,” who “is not afraid to cross [my] legs” and “[cry] when the kids I teach receive awards at assemblies (Martino, 2008, p. 596). I too have become braver to allow my emotions to show when reading powerful and touching parts in stories read aloud to the class, listening to poems to honour veterans on Remembrance Day, or during end of year assemblies as students are celebrated. Sharing my sensitive side with the students and letting my tears fall rather than turning my back and faking a sneeze – an old tactic of mine – has shown students that it is acceptable to cry when emotions overwhelm. On many occasions, I have noticed after reading aloud a particular happy ending in a highly emotional book to see that I was not the only one with wet cheeks in the story corner. If I demonstrate more fluidity with my masculinity in the classroom, am I the kind of male role model that some parents want for their children?

I have remained relatively secretive when issues of gay rights have come up in the classroom. Perhaps a deeply programmed heterosexist fear exists within me that in speaking about gay issues, I run the risk of myself being labeled as gay. Wayne Martino (2008) has written about the idea of “homophobic surveillance” scanning for male teacher to expose themselves as dangerous gay men, “a pervert in the classroom” (p. 581). Tyson (2006) writes that there exists a homophobic “myth that [LGBTQ+] people are sick, evil, or both and that it is therefore in their 'nature' to be an insatiable sexual predator, to molest children, and to corrupt youths by 'recruiting' them to become homosexual” (p. 320). As Sue Smedly's (2007) discusses, because teaching has been long considered as 'women's work,' the masculinity of male teachers is regularly in check as they are at risk of “being branded a big girl's blouse or a kiddy fiddler” (p.396). For these reasons, I often shut the door when the need arises to discuss homosexuality in the classroom. When enacting feminist values, I am candid as I feel my male position should model solidarity with women and genderfluid people for gender equality. In this case, students – and teacher and parents – can see that I am clearly not a woman, so modelling to boys the 'Ok-ness' of standing with and for women is clearer: I am a man who wants things to be different for women; however, my motives when teaching about LGBTQ+ rights may be less apparent. Perhaps for the risk of being thought of as gay, I am less vocal about these issues and often wait for questions to be raised by students.

I understand that for many students, “heterocentrism renders [LGBTQ+] experience invisible” (Smedley, 2007, p. 321) and I could play a larger part in exposing students to the natural normality of homosexuality and genderfluidity. I am ashamed that my relative silence does nothing to challenge the hegemony of heterocentric prejudices,

but the risk associated with sending home a math problem such as, “Sally and Jen are getting married...How many guests will be at the wedding?” appears to be too great, however there are moments in teaching when situations occur that allow for informative conversations that help in (re)constructing social attitudes.

While teaching grade one in a rural elementary school, I observed and listened in on a conversation developing during a writing time at a table of two boys and two girls.

“I don’t want to marry a boy,” I heard one of the girls say.

“You have to,” the other girl responded.

“What if she wants to marry a girl?” one of the boys suggested, raising laughter from the others at the table.

“She can’t marry a girl. Girls can’t marry girls. Boys can’t marry boys,” the second girl retorted. And from this, a rather loud argument evolved between the four six year olds, each taking turns throwing their opinion into the ring, escalating to the stalemating comment, “well my dad says boys can’t marry boys.” The first girl, frustrated, left the table and headed to the figure in the classroom that she believed held knowledge and truth about such matters: me. The entire class had stopped working and was looking at me for an answer.

I was brought back to my rural internship experience – shared previously in the introduction – and the homophobic ideologies that seemed to underline understandings of normality, and feared that the at-home ideologies of my grade one students in *this* rural setting would reflect similar beliefs. Though I risked imposing my ideologies on these children, normalizing them to meet my own expectations, I believed it necessary to

confront this discriminatory ideology that appeared to be developing. To address the girl's question, "Can boys marry boys or girls marry girls?" with the eyes of the class waiting for my ultimate judgment, I responded with, "In Canada, they can." My response was simple, but opened the door to a deluge of follow up questions from the students like: "Isn't that gay?"; "Why are people gay?"; "How do you know if you're gay?"; "What's 'being gay?'" Overwhelmed, I remember responding in a very matter-of-fact tone, "Some boys fall in love with boys, some girls fall in love with girls, and some girls and boys fall in love with each other. No one *has* to get married, but someone falls in love with someone else, shouldn't they be allowed to get married if they want?"

With this interaction, was I contesting the "gendered regimes of truth by doing the 'undefined work of freedom'" (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 72)? Had I, "[made] an issue of something that was about one or two children" (p. 67)? My principal was supportive of my approach even when a parent concerned contacted her with the concern that through my conversation I was teaching her child to be gay.

The message for male teachers is clear: feel free to teach and interact with children and the school community, as long as your behaviour fits within an appropriate masculine paradigm. With the number of influential and paradoxical surveilling factors framing normative male teacher identity, it is unclear how much of one's self a man is able to perform authentically.

I have become all too aware of the oppressive gazes from some parents, colleagues, administration, and students. As Webb (2006) discusses, there is an "overwhelming amount of surveillance designed to identify 'bad' teachers" (p. 212) while at the same time privileging those who qualify as a 'normal' elementary teacher –

does the of lack male teachers on elementary staffs make it that males are not ‘normally’ associated with teaching elementary and thus, male teachers are ‘not normal’?

I feel as though I am surveilled more than other teachers by administration and in some cases, by parents who were “just popping in to drop off an extra sweater.”

Colleagues remind me that my bulletin boards do not get changed frequently enough and that I assign too little homework – Do they think I’m lazy? On one occasion as personal photocopy quotas were expiring, staff scrutinized me – albeit jokingly – for still having thousands of print credits left on my account with comments like, “What do you do all day?” – Am I regarded as being too slack? With a perception by many female teachers that male teachers have a tendency to goof around, have less content knowledge, and are not as effective teachers as women (Wood, 2012), there exists a contradiction to that of a need for more men in the classroom to improve the academic performance of – male – students. With a lack of support free from gendered expectations, the lack of potential male cohorts in the workplace, and the microscopic environment from under which they work, it is little wonder that the gender gap in education is so wide.

“I, male teacher”

Writing this chapter challenged me to reflect on and recognize the ways in which I, a male teacher, have been and continue to be held to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations. A colleague recently shared with me a conversation she overheard between two first grade boys as they walked through the school corridor. After I had apparently passed by the two on my way to the photocopy room, one boy turned to the other and said, “That’s Mr. Steeves. I hope he doesn’t turn into a vice principal before I get to grade four so he can be my teacher.”

The other boy, nodded in agreement and added, “Yeah, or a gym teacher if [our current male physical education teacher] is the vice principal.” Was this recounted exchange an example of a sort of hierarchy of normativity for gendering of male teachers? If so, why had they ranked or reiterated the ranking of ‘classroom teacher’ below ‘gym teacher’ and ‘vice principal’? It was troubling to me that such constructions of gendered expectations for male teachers were evident in the dialogue shared between two grade one boys. Though expectations placed on me to become a school administrator could hardly be considered restrictive to my career, what does this say for my female colleagues? The socially constructed expectations of male teachers suggest a construction that female teachers are better suited for the classroom rather than administrative positions. I find this notion disturbing. Connecting the boy’s conversation to the writing of this chapter, I am able to consider the greater role I ~~might~~ must take in challenging such stereotypical social constructions. Writing this chapter has inspired me to actively challenge and work to deconstruct gender binaries.

If a need exists for more male teachers in elementary classrooms, it is not to address the ‘crisis’ of boy’s poor academic performance, nor is it to provide role models better connected with boys because, as previously noted, there is no empirical data to support these claims. It is certainly not to “defeminize schools in the service of restoring normative heterosexual masculinity to boys” (Martino, 2008, p. 600). On the contrary, it is not the feminization of education that is the problem, but that it is perceived to be problematic.

While writing my autobiographic found in the first chapter, I realized how I was subject to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations. It was

because of my own constructions of gender that I was initially resistant to prospect of teaching, and teaching in an elementary classroom. And so, writing this thesis has revealed a shift in my subjectivities from a place once settled in teaching as not masculine enough to recognizing the need for more male teachers is to employ male teachers who trouble such hegemonic masculinities and conformity of existing identities, and counter with a more varied representation of gender in the schools. Male teachers must join students and their definitions for what they value in an ideal teacher. More male teachers deconstructing homophobic and discursive practices, “may enhance more equal gender roles in future generations” (Laere, *et al*, 2014). Furthermore, “having role models of [multiple] sexes is considered to be a positive incentive for children, as it can help to challenge gender-stereotyped perceptions since ‘a workplace composed of [multiple] sexes contributes to widening children’s experience’ (Council of the European Union, 2011, p.2)” (p. 233). A male teacher’s influence on boys can be to deconstruct gendered attitudes toward learning all curricula, and co-construct learning and school as valuable and not being “boring and silly” (Benton & Vogtle, 1997, p. 38). I have certainly taught and currently teach boys and girls who have expressed a love for school. Though I consistently hear female students say that they wish to be a teacher, I have yet to have a boy tell me so; it is when a primary male student expresses that he wishes to be a teacher when he grows up that that the fading of hegemonic masculinity will become more visible. It is at this point when my presence as a male elementary teacher will not come as such a shock when shared around the curling lounge table.

CHAPTER 6

Teacher subjectivities and the intersecting forms of governing gazes

[There are] struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

During professional reflection, I often find myself asking, “Am I a good teacher?” Though I strive to be so – one would be hard-pressed to find a teacher who does not – I am becoming more challenged to conceive an ideal for the essence of good teaching. The difficulty comes from the multitude of philosophical interpretations and constructions throughout the history of teaching, rendering the ideals as diverse as the profession is old (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Britzman, 2007). In this chapter, I explore the intertwining of performativities and subjectivities in particular ways that teachers are observed and evaluated. I identify and discuss five surveilling gazes – administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, and self – and the ways in which they intersect to shape teacher identity. My bias is ever connected to the narrative I share as, through writing, I “creat[e] a particular view of reality and of the self” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 960). I am consciously and subconsciously selective of the experiences I choose to share and hope that these selected moments and interpretations are relatable to other educators. I hope they are able to connect and resonate (Tracy, 2010) with their own interpretations of my

written memories along with their own experiences to enact educational practices differently.

In this chapter I explore how teachers are evaluated and made to feel evaluated under an intersection of five surveilling gazes within the schools and classrooms they work. To do this, I first establish my understandings of the active fashion that teacher identity is co-constructed and evaluated to conform to performative cultural-historic standards. Next, I work to connect my understanding of performativity with my own experiences while teaching in a school during a year it was under an external performance review. To do this, I compile a collective of experiences from colleagues, and blend them together and mix with that of my own. In this chapter, I author a composite identity for these shared experiences and analyze this common voice as evidence of the evaluative pressure felt by teachers, myself included under administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, and self gaze.

At the root of this chapter are my own anxieties and consciousness for how I present myself and how I am perceived as a teacher. My intent is not to define examples of what teaching ought to be, but to raise questions through my writing about the evaluative practices that govern teachers and the effect this has on the co-construction of identity for teachers and what is valued in education.

Perfomative Identity

The notion of a universal/singular ideal for a good teacher may be akin to searching for a unicorn in a great mist – it does not exist. However, using Foucault's understanding for the regime of truths, it is possible to form an understanding of the pressures, struggles and anxieties of trying to become a 'good teacher' as constructed by

that which regulates the behaviours of teachers (Foucault, 1982). By investigating what Foucault (1982) referred to as “dividing practices” (p. 777), my intent is to better understand the ways that teachers are evaluated and shaped in terms of a variety of social standards and “different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 777). Teachers constitute themselves “‘in an active fashion, by the practices of the self,’ and ‘these practices [come from] patterns that...are proposed, suggested and imposed on [them] by [their] culture, [their] society and [their] social groups’” (Foucault as cited in Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004, p. 87). Teachers, then, are not “agents of our own destiny but ciphers of a discourse...What we counted as our freedom – we choose to do this work, after all – Foucault, working at a different level, unmask[s] as unfreedom” (Kemmis as cited in Lawson, 2004, p. 7). The construction of one teacher’s professional identity, image, and reputation is shaped not entirely by the will of the individual, but “fashioned through [current] social and discursive practices, rather than [...] naturally occurring reality (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003, p. 33).

Although Butler’s (as referenced in Teo, 2013) theories of identity formation focused upon gender, some commonality may be noted with that of the subjectivities of teacher identities. Teacher “identity, although shaped by regulatory practices and institutionalized discourses, is not stable” (Teo, 2013, p. 97). Teachers perform and re-perform, are evaluated and evaluate themselves. Definitions for ‘teacher’ are not stable or fixed. Teacher identity does not exist or form ‘naturally,’ but “is generated over time, space, and stylized repetitive acts found in ritualized bodily movements and gestures” (p. 97), in a ritualized space. Teachers author themselves as recognizable images of what teachers look like, ‘acting’ in terms of these image standards (Vick & Martinez, 2009).

How a teacher looks, moves, speaks, and behaves shapes and is shaped by the subjectivities of the culturally constructed image of teacher, external of and internalized by the individual as they, “come to believe and perform in the mode of the belief” (Butler, 1988, p. 250).

Teacher ideologies and expectations are in continual co-constructive change and flux. For Ball (2003), “New roles and subjectivities are produced as teachers are reworked as producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs and managers and are subject to regular appraisal and review and performance comparisons” (p. 218). Teaching is moved ‘forward’ – or at least in the direction of political visions – via comparisons to model standards of teaching. Through evaluations, teachers are reformed and “the reform technologies play their part in ‘making us up’ differently from before by providing new modes of description for what we do and new possibilities for action” (Ball, 2003, p. 218). Evaluating and giving greater value to desired ‘ideals’ and using language to describe teachers differently works to co-create – both the surveillor and the surveilled; evaluator and evaluated work to co-create what teaching ‘means.’

Though not without risks, teachers may also chose to act in ways that work against the norm. Using an analogy from the narrative of a tightrope walker, Teo (2013) identifies the tension and risk when teachers are empowered to reform and redefine themselves as innovative in how they are productive. Like a tightrope walker, teachers performing alternately to valued performative standards enter a high-risk, high-rewards scenario. A culture of ‘competitive performativity’ comes about when teachers are celebrated for their innovations and achievements thus forming new standards of comparative evaluation (Ball, 2003). If a teacher is praised and rewarded for their

success, their pedagogies and practices may be implemented by others, or hegemonically encouraged as new standards of ‘best practice.’ While opportunity for redefining can be empowering in the constitution of the self, for some, the possibility for inauthentic representations of self exist when one performs those acts known to be valued during times of audit and inspection. Questions of authenticity are raised by Ball (2003) when teachers perform for performative recognition – that they are ‘using’ desired resources and ‘doing’ that which is considered best practice. When I consider the visual aids posted in my own classroom, as well as the classrooms of my colleagues, I often wonder, “Are these posters for the students or for the optics of what a teacher ‘does’ with/to his/her students?”

A school under review

At this time, I wish to give context to my frame of mind when I initially decided to write about the intersection of five surveilling forms of evaluation. I wrote this chapter during a time when my school was undergoing an external school review – an evaluation of all facets of a school conducted every four years by a committee from New Brunswick’s Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Throughout that year, teachers, myself included, felt an added pressure and became more aware of the gaze of governing practices while preparing to perform during the week-long review. In the months prior, staff meetings promoted the sorts of teaching habits that evaluators would ‘want to see’ as they toured through our school: that weekly and daily plans were well polished, learning goals were conspicuously posted, systems of managing the data of student progress were up to date, student work was stapled to hallway bulletin boards, floors were freshly waxed and teachers’ shirts and blouses were carefully selected and

ironed. Though I was not instructed to do so, I was sure to wear a shirt and tie every day during the week of the evaluation. Anxious teachers and administrators were ever conscious in displaying the *image* of teaching that we believed evaluators wanted to see. Our intended efforts during this week were not to present a false image that misrepresented our regular teacherly practices, but for most, the known desired elements of inspection were certainly magnified and more obvious.

In the year leading up to and during the review, I had volunteered as a member of the school's internal review committee. This committee had no direct role in evaluating for the review, but instead advocated for the staff during meetings with the department's review team. My participation in this capacity had given me the opportunity to see from both sides of the looking glass. This gave me insight to the (in)authenticity of performance for the purpose of being evaluated during a time when teachers worked to make visible proofs that they were *doing* the teaching in accordance to the indicators and measures of the review.

Writing a narrative from shared experiences

As subjects of many surveilling gazes, teachers are officially and unofficially evaluated, and measured daily in terms of current social constructs for ideal norms of efficacy and professionalism, and these gazes relate to the co-shaping of subjectivities and teacher identities. Because one's professional teacher-self cannot easily be separated from the personal self (Korthagen, 2004), it may be less risky for one to stray too far from the good reputation that accompanies compliance and conformity. Feelings of pressure to conform to the use of certain professional practices, resources and language were made evident via the informal conversations we shared. "Destabiliz[ing] the

boundaries between interviewer and interviewee” (Sikes & Gale, 2006), I am empathetic with their shared experiences and take a stance with them, “contrary to the scientific image of interviewing, which is based on the concept of neutrality” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 116). With interviewing not merely being the neutral exchange of asking questions (Fontana & Frey, 2008), reflecting on spontaneous conversations that I had with my colleagues becomes a collaborative exchange “that leads to a contextually bound and mutually created story” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 116). Though these conversations took place as the scheduled week of the official review neared, they were not directly connected to the review process or my role on the school’s internal review committee; however, despite the level of trust I share with my colleagues, my position on the school’s internal review committee as well as my role on a school ‘core leadership team’ – at the time comprised of school administrators, resource specialists, and a classroom teacher each from the kindergarten to grade two and grade three to grade four levels – may have influenced caution and personal censorship in the crafting of responses and sharing of opinions. Additionally, my own bias, conscious of and motivated by the interests of writing this section at the time should also be taken into consideration as I was entangled in these conversations. Statements and comments made were not shared with other staff, nor were they shared with either review committee at the school or departmental level.

Authoring a composite identity

To protect the identity of those who shared their stories, I have authored a composite identity for colleagues whose comments and anecdotes I interpret in this chapter. Through my recollection and critical reflection of conversations with colleagues,

I identify and empathize in the authoring of those “professional blurrings of experiences” (Rhedding-Jones, 2013, p. 209), combining common themes of a “collective story” (Richardson, 1990, p. 30) from the comments of several to create the appearance of one voice and one shared experience “in an effort to craft a coherent narrative” (Cook & Dixson, 2013, p. 1246). Creating one coherent – albeit, fictitious – voice that I have given the androgynous name, “Pat,” I wish to tell the shared narrative of my colleagues and myself; their comments have influenced me and have become part of my narrative after all. Pat is the ‘good’ teacher and the ‘bad’ teacher, the teacher who leaves early *and* puts in extra hours. The focus should not be on Pat’s specific experiences, but on the commonality of teacher-experiences as connected by performativity and evaluative practices.

By identifying and exploring these Foucauldian gazes I have experienced and shared with other teachers as constructed and voiced through Pat, I forefront the problem of defining ‘good teaching’ from the expectations placed on the teacher rather than the aspirations of that teacher. Though Mulcahy (2011) suggests that official curricular standards are tools of cultural – political agendas, establishing normative rules of production, I do not intend to uncover the back-curtain motives for “who controls the field judgement” (Ball, 2003, p. 216), but instead offer the emotional and political effects experienced by teachers. The focus of my writing aims to consider the agency we teachers have in the performative authoring of our own identity(s) as shaped by our subjectivities under administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, and self-surveillance.

Administrative gaze

In my own experience and the experiences related by other teachers, the administrative gaze produced through evaluative practices as conducted by school, district, and provincial administrators is commonly discussed. Teachers are reminded of lists of district and provincially constructed expectations and competencies in the form of “concrete, observable behaviour criteria” (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79) during staff meetings. A vague, fragmented model for the role and practice of the official attributes for good and effective teaching is used to define and evaluate teachers through both scheduled and unscheduled classroom ‘walkthroughs.’ My experience with these walkthroughs has been quite positive, with various administrators occasionally offering me the opportunity to shape which elements of my pedagogy and/or classroom management I wish to have evaluated; however, this is not always the case, and I must always be prepared to ‘prove myself’ as performing in alignment with what I believed to be the points of inspection valued by administration.

The composite teacher, Pat, recalls an interaction with a previous elementary school administrator, speaking to the basis from which the evaluations are established with regard to monitoring teacher accountability. Pat shared that the administrator remembered a time when, “*teachers weren’t necessarily following anything to inform their instruction.*” Pat said the administrator described professional accountability of a teacher’s employment stating: “*There is a curriculum and we were hired to teach it. How it is taught, what is reinforced depends on the culture and vision of a school’s staff, of the teacher, and of the interest of the students, but everything needs to be in line with the goals of the district.*” An administrator’s job, then, is to ensure the curriculum is being

delivered in classrooms. Pat recalled this administrator applauding those teachers who could find opportunities and use critical judgment to, “*negotiate blurry parts of the curriculum.*” When asked about what a bad/ineffective teacher might look like, Pat suggested, “*teachers who are not meeting the standards of the school and district and those who are ignoring the curriculum altogether or using their position for nefarious purposes. The monitoring by administration ensures this is not happening.*”

Pat’s comments on the active surveillance from the administrative gaze suggests that what is observed through evaluation is not always authentic examples of a teacher’s classroom practices. There exists a fabrication of perhaps “different pedagogies conducted behind [...] closed door[s]” than that which is observed and evaluated by administration in a game of “tactics of transparency” between “who observes the performance and the ways performances are interpreted” (Webb, 2006, p. 202). Ball (2003) adds, “What is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance,” (p. 222) for what the evaluator may wish to see. With regard to his/her awareness of administrative monitoring of expectations, Pat expressed,

When I know I’m being observed I make sure my plan and teaching is more in line with what I think they are looking for if I were writing a lesson plan for the day I was being evaluated, what I have written down should show more detail and connections to curriculum outcomes than normal. I will make sure I plan to show that I use [academic resources/programs] that we have been given and are expected to use.

Though teachers may negotiate, and to some extent, manage official impressions that they “meet and exceed expectations to appear dedicated” (Webb, 2006, p. 203), they

are still conscious of official professional expectations in their daily practices. For this, “historically, teachers have been considered guileful, or deceitful, prompting surveillance systems designed to hold them accountable to external policy (Webb, 2006, p. 202). As stated by Pat, “*at any time someone could walk by or into your classroom. You don’t know who is coming down the hallway.*” Parallels can be drawn for individuals becoming what Preston and Symes refer to as a “web of texts” (as cited in Lawson, 2004, p. 7) between students and teachers in that “identity for the individual [is] encapsulated in the documentation that accompanies him or her throughout their lives (Lawson, 2004, p. 7). For Langellier, as referenced in Teo (2013), “Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded” (p. 90)

In an attempt to quash assessment-year anxieties, educators are often told that their students’ performances on provincial assessments are not used against a teacher’s professional evaluation; however, teachers internalize student performance as a reflection of self-efficacy. “*The data collected from provincial assessment are not officially connected to teachers,*” Pat explained, “*but the data is used by the district to evaluate schools and [schools] use the data to inform school improvement plans. If there is a trend of underachievement, resources are made available to support our staff.*” Though surveillance for professional support can be seen as a relatively positive end to these evaluations, it is not without the risk of being misinterpreted. This data can be further scrutinized by parents who, as I will discuss later, are large players in the defining and construction of performative expectations that govern teacher subjectivities. Parents’ anxieties that their children are ‘underperforming’ intersects with – and perhaps amplifies – the stress felt by teachers during years of provincial assessments.

Annually, teachers receive updates for school, district, and provincial assessment results, and are encouraged to use certain sanctioned commodified educational programs to focus on improving test scores, which in turn have become the mainstream evidence of academic performance. In the particular case of writing, Pat reflects, “*the provincial assessments are always in the back of my mind. They want writing to improve, so I make sure I use writing workshops. Even though I know I could teach writing to engage students better, I tend to stick to the [district selected] program because of pressure for better writing on the exams.*” Summative evaluations become the ultimate indicator of performance as test scores are valued over formative evidence of daily learning. The attempt to quantify learning to performance comparison data places focus on the ends rather than the means of the educational experience of children. Unfortunately, as I discuss in chapters one and four, conflict exists between provincial curriculum and provincial testing, particularly regarding literacy. Limiting education to a few valued outcomes while devaluing other excludes some students from experiencing success. Yet, I have experienced pressure for students to perform well on standardized tests, and like some teachers, I have felt the desire for the perceived safety of sticking with district/provincially prescribed programs and resources and/or explicitly ‘teaching to the test.’ Despite intuitive and arguably, better judgment, Pat, other teachers, and admittedly, myself, use prescribed resources for accountability purposes when addressing the dreaded question from administration and indeed, parents, “what are you doing to prepare your students for the test and/or the next grade level?”

With an official focus on evaluating academic efficacy, Pat reflected on the daily interactions between teachers and students: “*Teachers have so much impact on students;*

we have a lot of power. I feel we are not valued for that.” The ability to connect with students, to help them enjoy school, and to help them be kind, respectful people is important to Pat, as it is important for many teachers; however, it is difficult to summatively standardize traits such as enthusiasm, flexibility, empathy, respectful problem solving, positive character relations, and love of children [as measurable in terms of productivity] for evaluative purposes (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Korthagen, 2004). With the construction of an effective teacher being so closely governed by evaluated practices deemed beneficial to improving test scores, a culture of performativity in schools is valued while the cultivation of a *learning* culture is not just undervalued, but set aside.

Parental gaze

There exists opportunity for education to act as a closed door profession (Hassrick & Schneider, 2009; Webb, 2006). When teachers wish to momentarily reduce the gaze from those passing in hallways, they may simply close the classroom door. It is suggested by Hassrick and Schneider (2009) the luxury of private pedagogy is disappearing from public schools as “middle-class parents are able to ‘open’ the closed classroom door” (p. 196) through their communicative connections within the school community – e.g. other parents, teachers, administration, district officials, etc. Middle-class parents who more often have the economic and social capital to sit on parent/school committees and/or volunteer within schools during the day serve as a point of influence for middle-class values as they develop opportunities for closer relationships with teachers, administration, and school officials.

Are working-class familial values and experiences left out of decision-making processes in schools? Perhaps not explicitly so; however, as schools work with parent groups to find and raise monies to fund various school initiatives, values of the working-class are at risk of being left out. As a teacher, I have noticed a push by schools and parents to purchase technological hardware and software to aid and supplement classroom learning and update families of school happenings. Many school classrooms, including my own, find funds to subscribe students to reading and math websites. At school, all students are able to log on to their individual profiles for digital resources using school computers and/or tablets to practice targeted skills. At home, only those students whose families can afford computers or tablets, as well as access to the internet – if internet access is even available – can use online educational resources or receive notices and updates as some schools move toward becoming ‘paperless.’ Euro-centric, middle-class values leave many families out of conversations for which resources they would value most to support the education of their children. In an attempt to include those ‘without,’ I invite students to use classroom technology during recess times. Though the choice is ultimately the students’, my attempt to include students in the accessing of technologies essentially excludes them from playtime at recess. It is also troubling to consider what messages are sent about *have* and *have-not* binaries as teachers pass a few paper notices to individual students whose families do not have internet access.

The presence of a few parents in schools can have an influence on more than just the purchasing of technology. Though not always directly observed by parents, teachers are surveilled by-proxy via parent connectedness to eyes within the school and classroom

walls. With this means for information gathering, parents gain the power and influence to collaborate in positive ways with teachers and schools, or to create pressures and manipulate teachers to teach according to parental ideals, wishes, and expectations. I have been in schools that, as a result of pressure from those few involved and connected parents, expectations were officially placed on teachers by administration for more homework, less homework, weekly spelling tests, and/or monthly math quizzes. The professional judgement and autonomy over certain elements of instruction and assessment was effectively sidelined by the values of a few, but ‘loud’ parents. The influence of a parental community can be a powerful force in shaping the pedagogies of teachers.

With the direct or indirect gaze of particular parents present in schools, some teachers internalize perceived parental surveillance. Speaking generally, Pat shared, *“Parents all talk [together] and create rumblings that colour my teaching.”* For Pat, there exists a perception that his/her classroom decisions and professional expertise could be questioned and problematized by parents if what goes on in the classroom does not fit within the expectations of parents (Hassrick & Schneider, 2009). To some extent, Pat’s confidence in selecting texts for students is disturbed by the gaze of parents resulting in Pat second-guessing professional decisions. When reading books or presenting videos, Pat constantly wonders, *“is this age appropriate? Even if it might be good for [the students] to see, I may not show it to them because I don’t want to get an email from an angry parent.”* This uneasiness started early in Pat’s career when a parent’s persistent complaints about the content of a popular classroom novel, resulted in administrators advising Pat to select a different book to avoid the ‘conflict’ from escalating.

Meeting with parents can be a delicate dance of language. During parent-teacher conferences, I am ever conscious to keep conversations focused on the child of the parent in front of me. A parent may ask, “So, at recess, my Mikey tells me that a boy named Sam is very distracting in class. What can you tell me about Sam?” Would it be helpful to let the parent know that Sam does not seem to be getting enough sleep and he is likely carrying with him anxieties about his parents’ impending divorce? Ethically bound to keep Sam’s situation confidential, I have to find a way to re-center the conversation back on Mikey saying, “Yes, well, I have been encouraging Mikey to find a place to work where he feels he can focus best,” or something of the like. When it comes to meeting with Sam’s parents, I am cautious about crossing the line of advising on Sam’s learning and telling them how to parent. As a way to have the parents come to their own conclusions about Sam’s at-home experiences, I may say, “Sam seems awfully tired in class,” or, “Are there any changes in Sam’s life that might be affecting him at school?” How and what I share is shaped by the gaze of my audience. In any interaction with parents, I am careful when choosing what to say, conscious of whether or not I ‘sound’ like how a professional teacher speaks and behaves in relation to how my subjectivities have shaped my beliefs about being a teacher.

We can assume most parents want to ensure their students are successful in school and beyond, and a certain level of trust is extended to teachers as potential co-upbringers. Some parents not always teachers by profession, become critics of education using out of context snapshots of what can be observed as going on in classrooms to form impressions of teachers, their identity, and efficacy. Through social connections, they may seek professional knowledge and opinion – e.g. from a math professor; another teacher – to fill

in the holes of the unobservable and evaluate the classroom practices of teachers (Hassrick & Schneider, 2009). The commodification of education through the manufacturing of ‘educational toys,’ a plethora of parenting books that are available, social media posts from friends, and child psychology ‘experts’ featured on talk shows are a few examples that contribute to and inform the constructed perception parents have of what counts as ‘good’ learning and ‘good’ teaching. Bombarded with news-media stories of declining test scores, increases in learning disabilities, and occasional reports on negligent or abusive teachers, parent anxiety for what goes on in their children’s classrooms is of little surprise. Concerned parents acting as researchers add pressure for teachers to adjust classroom practices, comparing methodology and student academic performance to these and other resources, teachers and schools without context. Parents claiming space as educational experts and thus, evaluators of teachers has an impact on the development of teacher reputations. Frequent questioning of practices by parents can be harmful to the confidence of teachers.

Pat reflected,

Parents don’t give me problems, but I earned a good reputation over twenty-plus years. Early, in the first years of my career, I was questioned and challenged all the time, sometimes directly to me and other times straight to administration. I felt that everything I did couldn’t make some parents happy. But, I was a new face and I needed to build trust.

When I asked how a positive repertoire and trust were build, Pat explained it came from opening doorways of communication to his/her classroom, “*I had to be in communication with parents often for how their child was doing. When parents saw that*

students were happy and their academics were good, parents gave me a good reputation.” The communicative link between home and school is important not simply for the consistency of learning, but to help parents form a picture of what their child and the teacher do in the classroom all day. The use of various social media services, school and teacher websites, emails, and good old-fashioned notes and phone calls are examples of ways that I have tried connect my classroom with my students’ homes. I have found that by making an effort to show what I am doing to educate their children, by creating a means for parents to look in to our classroom, I feel I am trusted more; however, the moments I *choose* to share with parents are obviously quite selective and of particular constructions of children and learning. Like a hallway bulletin board, moments shared with home are those, which I want, and what I suspect parents want, to see. Pictures capturing the looks of amazement during science experiments, smiling faces during math games, and the variety of literacy activities carefully and intentionally dominate my communications home while updates on classroom social dynamics and behavioural issues are most often left out. Do I share the version of myself that I think the parents want to see to avoid the messiness of parent criticism? It seems that like Pat, I gain respectful acceptance from parents when I make myself more observable. Furthermore, the language Pat used to describe ‘earning’ and being ‘given’ a reputation is interesting to note as political in how the perception of a ‘good teacher’ is fabricated from the socially constructed accreditation from the normative external, regardless of questions of authenticity for what *really* goes on in classrooms.

Temporal gaze

Foucault was interested in students, factory workers, soldiers, and prisoners as subjects of schedules that “organize profitable durations” (Foucault, 1977, p. 157). As “the regulations of the great manufactories laid down the exercises that would divide up the working day” (p. 149), “one began to count in quarter hours, in minutes, [and] in seconds” (p. 150). Schooldays were likewise divided to maximize the productivity of students during times for instruction, practice, and testing (Deacon, 2006).

At school where I currently teach, the five-hour school day is sectioned into thirty minute blocks. Unmovable in these blocks are specialty subjects – e.g. French, physical education, music – and times for snack, lunch and recesses. The act of adding subjects into blocks of a weekly timetable privileges single subject instruction rather than cross-curricular integration. With more minutes of subject instruction than available minutes in a school week, there seems to be little time available to differ from the set timetable. Regulating times for what and when students learn, play, eat, and use the washroom through “the chopping of time into rigid periods is an invasion of freedom, and makes no allowances for differences in temperament and feelings” (Warner as cited in Rose & Whitty, 2010, p. 260). To negotiate regulatory temporal gazes, teachers may chose to establish more flexible classrooms cultures where students are able to eat, use the washroom, and take breaks when they feel they need to, and where impromptu learning oportunities are not dismissed simply because, “it is not time for that subject yet.” Not having enough minutes in the week to teach all required minutes of instruction per-subject should present opportunity to value and enact cross-curricular learning rather than be a matter of constraint.

When being mentored by a district literacy specialist for the ‘correct’ implementation of the “Daily Five” literacy management model, Pat recalled, “*the students worked for forty-five minute blocks with five minute breaks, and worked until,*” s/he dinged a bell on his/her desk, “*they are signalled to stop; I do not value [the procedural processes of] this program.*” Pat’s identifying of the unnaturalness and objectifying effects of time seemed “*creepy and robotic.*” Are we training students to work in timed intervals akin to productive workers in a factory?

Teachers are not merely administrative agents of time, but are also subject to its gaze. Near my classroom door I have hung a narrow pocket chart that displays the daily schedule. Above that, a clock ticks time indicating when students are to move from one subject to the next. Always conscious of the clock and provincial weekly and daily requirements for minutes of instruction in each subject, teachers find themselves racing and rushing their students to finish assigned tasks before time runs out and the transition to an unmovable subject block such as physical education or lunch recess begins. Educators become time-keepers trapped in the tradition of “moving children through time and space as efficiently as possible” (Rose & Whitty, 2010, p. 264). Like Pat, I am uncomfortable with the rigidity of timed subjects. Conscious of the seemingly unnatural ‘tyranny of time,’ I am more fluid with my blurring of the lines that separate subjects on my timetable. Except for specialty classes, lunch and recess, I am learning to allow more fluidity, crossing curricular boundaries more often, and changing activities as informed by the interest and engagement of my students – they let me know when it is time to change.

When considering curriculum, “a whole analytical pedagogy [is] formed, meticulous in its detail – it broke down the subject being taught into its simplest elements, it hierarchized each stage of development into small steps” (Foucault, 1977, p. 159) and these steps into grade levels. The development of a child has come to be standardized and normalized on a temporal continuum. The gaze of the clock, calendar, and rigid schedules aim to keep teachers and students on track and on task when delivering or learning the provincially prescribed curricula within the minutes set to do so. Ironically, maintaining educational efficiency leaves educators without the “time to think consciously about how time undermines what educators value” (Wien & Kirby Smith as cited in Rose & Whitty 2010). With so many curricular outcomes to cover and a limited school day and year for students to achieve these grade level expectations, it is perhaps safe for teachers to subscribe to standard, time-driven practices rather than running the risk of missing outcomes or teaching outcomes differently.

Foucault noted that in factories “an attempt is also made to assure the quality of time is used” (Foucault, 1977, p. 150). Similarly to factory supervision for capitalist notions of productivity, measures of success for both child and educator are related to time and efficiency; “the more activities the better for the children” (Rose & Whitty, 2010, p. 263). Hallway bulletin boards, then, become spaces for teachers to *prove* that they are effective teachers. The frequency that teachers cycle neatly produced pieces of artwork, writing, etc., onto their assigned school walls comes to be a measure of good classroom activity (Webb, 2006), and can be judged as such by parents, colleagues, administration, and students. With 21st century media, student work and classroom updates are posted on teacher web pages on a weekly basis. Teachers who infrequently

change their electronic or bulletin boards spaces risk judgement as being too slack, lazy, lacking dedication, and/or an ineffective educator. Teachers are evaluated on how well we are able to manage instructional time as well as the added non-teaching work of keeping up with updating virtual and physical spaces.

Collegial gaze

I have felt the scrutiny from some colleagues regarding my lack of posts to the school website to update parents. Rather than using the cumbersome platform of these ‘teacher pages’ to keep parents posted, for the past few years, I have opted to use “Edmodo,” a private teacher/student/parent communicative application to relay updates for what goes on in their child’s classroom. On one particular occasion during a staff meeting, a colleague publically raised the point that, “not everyone is updating their teacher page as often as others; one teacher hasn’t made one post this year. This isn’t fair to the rest of us who do, and just looks bad. Can we make it consistent how often teachers have to post updates?” I felt as though I was the guilty teacher she was referring to, and immediately felt my hackles rise in defense to argue that my lines of communication with parents, though not observable by others, were just as valid as public postings.

Using a social-media-like website called “Edmodo” allows me to establish a line of communication between the classroom and families that can only be seen by those registered in the group. Before I could retort, an administrator responded, “Some teachers are using different means to communicate with parents. What Colin is using allows him to give updates daily while other teachers use email lists and printed weekly letters to update parents.” Administrative gaze intersected with that of the collegial, and worked to justify my practice as acceptable. The initial colleague backed down, but the concern that

was initially raised was rooted in productivity, performativity, and conformativity: “If a student’s work isn’t displayed, is the teacher really teaching?” By going private with the sharing of student work, I escape the public gaze of colleagues in a similar fashion to closing the physical door of my classroom. I find there is an element of hypocrisy in my use of Edmodo as a tool to address – and pacify – the parental gazes of which, I am critical, while at the same time using it surveil and report student work and even behaviour with parents.

The power of the surveilling gaze of colleagues is ever present as teachers work with students in classrooms and move with them throughout the school. How quiet one’s classroom is, the neatness and frequency that student work is displayed, how uniformed one’s class can move through hallways, type and frequency of homework (Webb, 2006), how well students sit during assemblies, and/or behave for substitute teachers are examples of the “overwhelming amount of surveillance designed to identify bad teachers” (Webb, 2006, p. 212) used by colleagues – and indeed non-educators – use to evaluate one another.

Another moment when a teacher’s self may be subject to performative standards is in the fall when teachers receive and assess students from a previous grade level. If students do not meet the academic and/or behavioural standards of the new teacher, one may experience the judging gaze from other teachers as to the effectiveness of one’s classroom practices from the previous year. Student performance is one of the many factors to which teachers are positioned in relation to the other (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003) negating both the efforts of the previous teacher and the child’s previous year. In

reference to the gaze of colleagues Pat said, “*Our methods and practices are critiqued...not just by administration.*”

A culture of normative best practices may be formed for whole-school staff or as related to grade level clusters. “*If a teacher is not using [the group’s] lingo, or not doing the same program, there is shunning and the teacher is whispered about,*” Pat said when asked about teachers who wish to try different approaches than those commonly used among staff. Established common practices favoured by groups of teachers often become authoritative texts and, “the use of the authoritative ‘we’ is a strategy that works to align the subjectivity of the teacher to a group of teachers [as] positioned through the shared enterprise of teacher” (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003, p. 28). Via the authoritative we, the implication of normative boundaries set by the implied majority presents the potential for inside/outside or with us/against us social and professional dichotomies. While most teachers of in the school where I teach lead their students to music and physical education classes, I have sometimes watched from the end of the hallway as the students respectfully find their way to their specialty classes. I did this to foster a sense of independence in my students. They were not in danger as they walked and were respectful and responsible as they moved through the hallway. Yet, I have been reminded by different colleagues at different times that, “*We have to walk the students to and from*” these classes. Am I perceived as lazy and irresponsible? How am I talked about with other colleagues about my willingness to let students move seemingly unsupervised through the hallways? I felt pressured and obligated to lead my students down the hallway due to the anxieties I felt as a result of collegial surveillance for when and how well I follow the unwritten rules of teacher conduct in our school. As the collegial gaze

intersects with that of my self-gaze, like Pat, I wonder how I am perceived by not conforming to other common schooled practices. I do not want to be identified as a negligent or bad teacher. By particular ways of being and knowing becoming ingrained in the self, the ‘we,’ the school culture, and beyond, become a culture of inclusivity and exclusivity. When a group’s unexamined habits are unquestionably accepted as polices, alienation or acceptance may result. Dependent upon one’s position with the constructed collective, there is a choice to subscribe to the authored truth or work from the uncomfortable and risky outside.

Pat admitted enjoying the connection felt when working with colleagues of her grade level at her school: *“Working in a team can be very supportive and we do a lot of sharing; I take from them and they take from me.”* For Pat, self-doubt occurs when an educator is made to feel as though s/he is not as organized as his/her colleagues or cannot teach at the same pace: *“Sometimes I can’t keep up with the others. They finish things that we said we would do, but I get left behind because I am so disorganized.”* The gaze of time and the focus on productivity as evaluated by the authoritative “we” lead Pat to find fault in him/herself. Though Pat also proudly recognized a strong connection with happy students, teaching positive humanistic precepts, and noting steady academic development while valuing quality over quantity – *“we may not do as much, but the work we do do is really good”* – it seems that for Pat, these accomplishments are overshadowed by the teaching pace and pedagogical values of colleagues.

Pat shared a similar self-reflection and insecurity: *“I feel pressure, well, I feel bad that I don’t teach the Daily Five the way I’m supposed to.”* It is interesting that Pat’s self-correction of feeling ‘pressure’ from the other colleagues to feeling ‘bad,’ attributes a lack

of conformity more to self-blame and results in questioning his/her practices. Teaching differently than or not feeling as though one meets the standards of one's colleagues can be a blow to self-identity as "guilts, self-blame and lack of self-confidence are powerful emotions in teaching because they are part of social bonding and the basis of a teacher's [...] self-esteem" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 944).

Though the establishment of an authoritative 'we' may work to bring colleagues together, teachers may not be engaged with each other intellectually because of the tendency to focus on superficial surveillances and fabrications of normative proof (Webb, 2006). Rather, teachers may construct their identities to show that they fit within perceived school ideology, not to avoid punishment, but as a performative act to prove that they are a team player and a positively contributing member of the school community.

Self gaze

As previously discussed, Pat brought forth the idea that teachers want to develop a good reputation and be in good standing with the school community. In working to earn the acceptance and accreditation of being a good teacher, a teacher internalizes encompassing authoritative truths that shapes one's self as an ethical subject (Connell, 2009). The teacher subject is aware of how the enactment of the deemed appropriate behavior becomes comfortable as "a natural [docile] body is produced" (Foucault as cited in Jones, 2004, p. 62).

In the co-construction of a teacher's identity, teachers must learn to reflect on their subjectivities for "what is appropriate, sensible and natural [as aligned] within the socially prescribed range of behaviours" (Jones, 2004, p. 62) with a level of automaticity.

Teachers, then, self-surveil “to consider their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it – ‘to shape themselves as ethical subjects’” (Foucault as cited in Jones, 2004, p. 62). Teachers recognize when they feel ‘natural’ and when they feel ‘wrong’ or out of place, and when “the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others” (Foucault, 1982, p. 778). The construction of self and self-surveillance is an element of what Foucault referred to as “pastoral power” (Foucault, 1982). This non-ecclesiastic pastoral power produces an awareness of self and a consciousness of how one is working to fit within normative constructs while also reinforcing these norms. Shaped by their subjectivities, teachers strive – consciously or subconsciously – to author an individual identity within communicative frameworks while aiming to establish good standing and good reputation with others. In the above section which regarded collegial gaze, Pat described anxieties about being shunned or about whispered negatively. The act of authoring teacher identity is communal and performative. When a dominant, “authoritative consciousness about how to ‘be’” contrasts the beliefs of non-conventional educators, they are, through external and self-surveillance, subjectivities are instilled with a desire to conform and to “work harder at getting it right” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 32).

Authoring my Self

To be conscious of one’s self (of myself) is to be so within a normative social framework. Teachers become subjects within normative social frameworks, practicing to fit within social norms and “patterns that ... are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” (Foucault as cited in Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004, p. 87). The constitution of teacher identity can be represented by how a person acquires a nickname. In the same way, one does not simply give themselves a nick

name, but is given one because of something they said, or an act(s) they performed, a teacher's identity is constructed, positively or negatively. At a recent social function, a friend of a friend introduced herself as a mother of a primary grade student at the school I teach. She expressed to me how I am, "quite the celebrity at the school," and went on to express praise for the reputation I seem to be gaining. When I asked what she meant by that, she explained, "You seem to always do neat things. One time, you were outside with your class doing a science experiment with basketballs with the kids lined up and raising their hands. You were all having a blast. It was so cool." I recalled the experiment and explained that we were trying to create a visual for how sound travels. She went on to say that, "all the parents were talking about you and the one's whose older kids you taught loved all the hands-on projects you get them to do; they loved how you were with them and how they became more independent over the year. They all speak very highly of you."

I did not immortalize this kind review to writing as a self-serving means to 'toot my own horn.' I present it as an example of the sort of expectations that have been constructed for the sort of teacher I am, based on the acts that I have performed. In reflection, internalising this interaction from a party will undoubtedly be influential in how I will continue to teach in the future: to maintain my positive standing with the school community. Reflecting on this interaction, I have become more conscious and curious about how this knowledge of the school community's alleged constructions of my teacher self will affect my pedagogical decisions. Though the observability of that particular science experiment was purely coincidental, in the future, how often will I choose to expose such apparent desirable and "cool" classroom lessons and practices?

Will I do more poetry writing in the school garden during the primary grade levels' pick-up time? Will I conduct more mathematics measurement lessons in the hallway for the observation of colleagues, administration, and school guests? And what of the comments from others who are critical of such things as my lack of homework or spelling lists, or my resistance to use popular teaching resources? Why is it that negative feedback seems to be internalized more often? When do I give in to surveilling pressures and conform? While under the subjugating intersection of various evaluative gazes, I am able to find a point to recirculate this surveilling power to my benefit. What I make available to be observed under the intersection of the five particular gazes discussed above gives me some claim to the authoring of my teacher self. Feedback, such as that shared through formal evaluations from administration, compliments from colleagues, and happenstance words of praise from parents serve to reaffirm whether or not I am making observable the sort of teacher I wish to be.

As I write, I am continually reminded of the conversations that I have had with administrative staff, parents, and colleagues when sharing the sorts of things I do in my classroom. Aware of my own subjectivities, I am careful to shape my updates with the sort of language I suspect my surveilling audience wants to hear. If I'm speaking to an administrator, I'm sure to make it known that my activities are connected to curricula; with parents, the focus is on how their individual child worked through the activity; with colleagues, I may share the procedural aspects of how activities or projects are progressing. To some extent, in my awareness of multiple and intersecting forms of surveillance, I am empowered to author and share the sort of teacher-self I think others *want* to see based on their values as internalized while under their gaze. Teachers, then,

are free to develop individually in so far as they are developing within normative boundaries and so, the authentic and antonymous development of one's own identity becomes difficult, but not impossible.

CHAPTER 7

Closing reflections

I have organized this final chapter into several sections as separate, and connected critical reflections emerging from each of the narratives of previous interpretive chapters as constructed through my writing. After a brief critical re-visitation of these chapters – four, five, & six – as well as a reflection on how the process of writing this thesis has impacted me personally and professionally, I offer recommendations to initiate further conversations challenging hegemonic practices that unjustly shape the constructions of teachers and students. In working toward shifting teaching and learning environments to communities of professional collegiality and critical collaboration rather than contrived collegiality and pedagogical practices shaped and governed by unquestioned norms, educators can become empowered to reconstruct and reclaim their professional identities. In our reclaiming of ourselves and our professional space, we, as educators, must discuss normative practices that limit students in the co-construction of their identities; critical conversations must recognize and work to alter normed practices and co-create conditions that empower students to become agents of their own self-authoring.

As I sat in front of my computer screen, searching for a starting point to conclude my thesis, I reflected on a note Dr. Sherry Rose had written in the margin of a draft of my autobiographic introduction. Where I had written in my introductory chapter on the “great deal of reading and writing” required when completing a Bachelor of Arts in criminology, Dr. Rose commented: *“Interesting. Teaching has maximized the amount of reading and writing I do.”* Given the context of my disengagement with reading and writing during my public school years, I wonder how my 14 year-old self would react to

learning that I am not only a teacher – and not a science teacher – but, have spent the evenings of recent years reading and writing in pursuit of authoring a thesis. I probably would not believe myself!

The intent of defining my autobiographic standpoint was not an attempt to equate my schooled experience with that of Cabot's. Instead, the purpose was to offer some context through my critical reflections of my “self-consciousness about how the fate and choices in [my] life have positioned [me] in the world and with whom [I] have been positioned” (Frank, 2000, p. 356). In a way, the re-authoring of these histories of my own experiences has helped me to become more sensitive and critically aware of the different, intersecting histories of others, and how we act and interact at these points of intersection. I hope that I did not give the sense that I am regretful of my current path. On the contrary, I am quite content with the particular choices, consequences, and fates that have brought me to my current position; however, I understand completing a Master's thesis was made easier through my position of privilege. That is to say, though my path has not been without its challenges, I cannot begin to understand the experiences of those navigating their paths from different positions of race, gender, culture, sexuality and socio-economic status. I can only ensure that I am critically aware of these differences and of the barriers that others may encounter on their paths, and informatively act on this awareness.

My experiences in high school of leaving one English literature class to eavesdrop on another, and my graded failure on a crucial math exam were memories that sparked a shift in the shaping of my own subjectivities. These memories of what I felt was an injustice as a consequence of the limited ways in which I was evaluated and ranked based on limiting constructions of what was valued as learning have shaped me in the authoring

of my pedagogies. My critical reflecting in the writing of this thesis, particularly while authoring the story of Cabot, was an exercise that reaffirmed the influence teachers have on how a student's sense of self is shaped based, in this case, on the culturally normed use of deficit driven discourses (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008), constructed values of lack and abundances (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 1997), and evaluative practices of "binary division and branding" (Foucault, 1977, p. 199). As a teacher, I, and others in the profession, must be aware of deficit-based evaluative practices that identify a student's *can'ts*. I have, since beginning my journey into critical theory, shifted and continue to shift toward shaping my pedagogy to recognizing and evaluating students for what they *can* do.

Reflecting on what it means to be a student

Over the year I worked with Cabot, I was able to recognize and celebrate the diversity of students and give support and encouragement to those exhibiting skills, knowledges and dispositions towards learning outside of the normative curricula. Along with a colleague in a team-teaching opportunity, we were able to enrich lessons to allow a place for *each* student to shine. Cabot's story stands as an example of how normative, print-centric literacy practices construct a particular male student's literate identity and how his teachers made an effort to not evaluate or label a particular student by that which he lacked in print literacy. In New Brunswick's current curricula, there is plenty of space to critically explore the behaviour of beavers, question the plot to fairy tales, or produce puppet shows and picture stories, but teachers may, as I experienced, wrestle with dominant expectations to prioritize print centric skills especially if a student lacks skills with conventional print-literacy. The daily professional reflections and dialogue through

team teaching gave my co-teacher and I, the confidence and professional assurance we needed to support each other as we identified and explored the fluid spaces of curricula that, until that year, seemed ridged and limiting. Working with Cabot expanded the (re)constructions and evolution of our own pedagogies, strengthened our use of formative rather than summative evaluations, and pushed us to find places for other students to succeed and be celebrated. At present, we are seeing a shift in New Brunswick's department of Education and Early Childhood Development as they work toward putting a greater emphasis on oral literacies. I am hopeful that, from this, public constructions of being literate will also shift away from narrowing, print-centric definitions.

Though teachers are trusted by authoritative figures – including parents – to provide the differentiated, student centered, positive learning environments that students deserve, “a very large constituency [of parents, decision-makers, and even teachers] believe in standardized measures” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1997, p. 96) to assess and audit specific skills. When faced with the pressure to improve standardized test scores, teachers may revert to teaching for the test rather than teaching for the student. A great social injustice is thus perpetuated in the narrowing of what counts as learning – particularly for skills related to print-literacy – marginalizing those students and families who lack rather than identifying and developing skills they have as equally valuable in the larger scope of citizenship and community. Perhaps rather than treating children as investments, streaming students to follow certain pathways in order to capitalize on the best return once they enter the workforce, and using test scores to compare competitively with other economies, the entire structure of the education system and, additionally, how we generally value people, should be re-examined.

Reflecting on what it means to be a male teacher

The recommendation to re-examine how people are valued in education is continued as I critically reflect on the following: If male teachers are subject to socio-cultural constructions and evaluations of gendered expectations, then to be successful working in ‘feminized’ occupations, do I, as a male teacher, need to exhibit feminine qualities or does a male need to silence qualities typically normed as female? I posit that this question has a yes and no answer, creating a gender contradiction in the teaching profession: yes if you are female; yes and no if you are a male. Negotiating the gendered constructions of teacher to care for and love the students they teach can be a challenging for male teachers.

In my experience, working as a male primary educator comes with a certain amount of risk. As discussed previously, male teachers must endure varying degrees of scrutiny from various external observers while also wrestling with their subjectivities shaped by an internalization of hegemonic discourses for particular masculinities. The system of surveillance to govern personal and professional co-constructions of self in accordance to adherence to the social imposition of ideal male traits is found to be restrictive and annoying by many male teachers (Skelton, 2009). It is at times frustrating to operate between the fluid boundaries of masculinity and femininity as this androgyny can be limiting on the authoring of one’s pedagogy (Martino, 2008).

If constructed attributes of a ‘good teacher’ continue to be widely accepted as similar to those of ‘good mother,’ is it impossible for male primary teachers to be ‘good’ and effective at their jobs? Perhaps not if we pay closer attention to such research as Brownhill’s (2014) that shows teacher attributes valued by children are those which

define a good, fair person, attributes from which male teachers may work to establish relationships practicing an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013). If expectations for male teachers are to bring relatable masculinities in the name of engaging boys academically, rescuing them from the disconnect of feminized learning environments, are ‘less-masculine’ teachers failing our students? I certainly experienced some resistance from parents when it was revealed one spring that I would be making the switch from teaching grades 3-5 to grade one the following school year. This resistance was an encounter voiced by a few parents during year-end celebrations at the school. “We know you are great with the older kids,” I recall one of the parents of one of my future students saying, “but, will you be able to *care* for the little ones?” Though I had not built a reputation as being a strict disciplinarian, did my gendered-sex define my capacity to care? It was apparent that the idea of a male teaching at the primary level was difficult for some parents. Nonetheless, my response assured the parents that I would be dedicated to the emotional, social, and academic wellbeing of their children.

Noddings (2013) suggests that “caring is *not* synonymous with caregiving. It is a way of encountering others” (p. 80). Rather than performing a more traditional understanding of care as a skill possessed by the carer to be used to define and then act on the needs of the cared-for, I recommend all teachers enter into a more mutually constructed ‘ethic of care’ relationship with students (Noddings, 2013; Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014). Ethic of care presents itself as a moral responsibility that extends beyond boundaries of gendered discourses of care (Vogt, 2002). It is a relational obligation to not merely demonstrate right or wrong, but to share in the modelling of how to be just and fair, and how to treat and care for one another *with* each other. As I have experienced,

parents became more comfortable with my moving to teach their primary aged students once they were assured that the time I spend each year to foster a connection with my students allows for a mutually caring relationship to exist and forms an ethical bond to care for one another.

The feeling of being under a microscope is maintained by long held constructed binaries of male and female: what a male is/is not, a female is/is not. Is this not thus extended to the construction of male and female teacher? Are those traits for male teachers defined by what is not female teacher behavior? If female primary teacher is constructed as ‘normal’ for caring and motherly traits, would a male teacher, then, not be ‘abnormal’? Would ‘normal’ traits for a male teacher be out of place in a primary classroom? And what of a male whose pedagogy and classroom demeanor falls more closely with that of a female primary teacher? Definitions of what a good teacher should and should not be are constructed and governed with a sub-text routed in “the male/female binary holds gender inequity in place by insisting on differences within it” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 66). As we see from research such as Brownhill’s (2014), attributes of good teachers that children prefer are those not typically constructed as either male or female. As MacNaughton cites Davis (1989):

If the dualism were rejected and people were free to position themselves as a person in terms of their interests and abilities quite independently of the set of their genitals they happen to have, and were free to dress and move through the world without being obliged to mark themselves as male or female, then there would still be many people who would recognizably be what we now think of as female or, and there would be many who were not (p. 66).

In education, teachers are expected to conform – and perform – to a rather limited set of ideals that differ according to the intersecting of grade level, gender, race, class, sexuality and social context. Long held understandings and expectations of these binaries constructs male and female teachers as opposite; however, ignored is the fluid middle-ground of that which both is and is not, at the same time. It is from this space, the gender continuum that exists between the binary opposites, that teachers, regardless of gender, must deconstruct traditional/oppositional archetypes and find, claim, and construct new androgynous definitions for what it means to be a ‘good’ teacher. It is from this space that the diversity in each teacher and their pedagogies can be appreciated for what they contribute to the whole of a child’s educational experience, the whole of which is greater than the sum of its parts. Critical teachers of these middle-ground classrooms should become more cognizant of our own discourses, as well as discourses of students, and create opportunities to lead in the co-deconstruction of discursive, heteronormative texts hidden in math problems, fairy tale read-alouds, and recess playtime.

Reflecting on what it means to be a good teacher

It is possible to form an understanding of ‘good teacher’ as being constructed by the intersections of the multiplicity of gazes that regulate the behaviours of teachers (Foucault, 1982) within the schools and classrooms they work. In terms of normative constructions for “best practices” – would the binary of “best practice” be “worst practice?” – the methodical push for data-driven accountability creates an audit-culture where power is removed from teacher-professionals and given to auditors and policy makers, “casting doubt on teachers’ competence and worth” (Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012, p. 117). A steady form of multiple and intersecting surveillances (Parr & Gosse,

2011) is ingrained in the culture of the education profession, leading some teachers to present a, perhaps, inauthentic form of the observed self (Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004). The construction of a teacher's professional identity is not natural, but a social co-construction (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003). Though teachers have some agency to author themselves, this authoring and co-authoring through performative acts is continually shaped by subjectivities and governing gazes. Teaching and learning then becomes centred on how well a teacher performs to certain standards (Perold, Oswald, & Swart, 2012). The objectification of learning and teaching the professional self is done through the essentializing, depersonalizing, and normalizing of what it means to be a professional teacher and constant comparisons to a regime of normative standards (Vick & Martinez, 2009). The danger is that professionalism is no longer central to the core of education and has been replaced by an "explosion of auditing activity" (Johnson, 2005, p. 82), bullying professionals to submit to desired and measurable standards of practice (p. 84), with teachers then bullying students with similar vigor.

As subjects of many surveilling gazes, teachers and their students are officially and unofficially evaluated, and measured in term of current social constructs for ideal norms of efficacy and professionalism. I agree with Ball's (2003) assessment that the root of shortfalls in education stem from teachers and learners being constructed in terms of competitive individualism. Does a culture of individualistic performativity instill teachers with the questioning of self and professional insecurity? I posit that it does, creating a division between colleagues and weakening bonds of professional trust and community. This division distorts "best practices" as conforming to normative uses of particular resources, particular practices, and particular temporal structures whereby curricula is

compartmentalized within daily schedules. Because a professional teacher-self cannot easily be separated from the personal self (Korthagen, 2004), it may be less risky to stray too far from the good reputation that accompanies compliance and conformity. This perceived risk may provide explanation for the request to remain anonymous by the teachers whose shared experiences inspired the authoring of the composite character, Pat, in chapter six. By exploring some of the Foucauldian gazes – e.g administrative, parental, temporal, collegial, self – experienced by teachers, the problem of defining ‘good teaching’ not in terms of the aspirations of the teacher, but in the expectations *placed* on the teacher is brought to the forefront. As teachers’ professional identity are systemically reconstructed, so too is their confidence to question and be aware of the ways in which educators, school, and students are audited, evaluated, and ranked. Creating critical awareness through professional conversations of how teacher identity is co-constructed is necessary to empower teachers to regain agency to re-author professional identity and respect. Rather than universally prescribed professional learning sessions, interest based frameworks for professional learning should be offered for teachers to have greater authority in constructing their own professional identity.

Reflecting on how writing has changed me personally and professionally

As I wrote, and read, and re-wrote, and read, and wrote some more, I realized that some shifts in my use of language occurred not only in the academic writings for this thesis, but in my professional and social interactions as well. Writing this thesis has, “deepened my knowledge of myself” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966) and has “given me desire, strength, and enough self-knowledge [to give myself agency, and to construct myself anew for better or for worse” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966).

Earlier drafts of this thesis are evidence of earlier ways of my thinking. Patriarchal language was present in these earlier drafts when speaking of “*my* students” and “*my* colleagues.” I did not have ownership of these people, nor did I intend to express an authority over them and yet, the use of the possessive ‘my’ did just that. I had not really noticed this oppressive use of language until my supervisors – there it is, creeping in again! – had pointed it out to me. Likewise, I was previously unaware that my use of “development” when discussing how subjectivities have changed over time suggested a *natural* rather than *active* fashion of coming to be. Instead, I made edits to use “construction” or “authoring” to more accurately express my understanding of the constitution of one’s self and subjectivities as these words better suggest the acting on or acting of a subject coming to *be*.

Through writing, I became more aware of the covert meaning that language might hold as well as the effects of those meanings to create a reality that hides and/or excludes others. I have shifted and continue to shift toward using more careful and inclusive, rather than exclusive or privileging ways of phrasing what I mean to say. This shift is apparent to me not only when comparing earlier versions of this work to the current draft, but is also evident in my own ways of thinking and speaking in professional and social settings. A critical awareness of language allows me to notice when discursive ways of speaking sneak into my modes of communication, and I adjust accordingly. I am presently wrestling with saying “boys and girls” when addressing a classroom full of students as this language highlights and reinforces a gender binary that excludes those students who may not identify as either male or female. In discussing constructions of gender binaries with the students I teach, I have asked students to catch me and when I address them as

“boys and girls” and remind me to use “my friends” or “folks” or “grade four” instead. My hope is that in their efforts to reform my use of language, the students will become more aware of the exclusionary use of language in their daily interactions. Richardson (2005) suggests that “writing as a method of inquiry coheres with the development of ethical selves engaged in social action and social reform” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 959). The retrospective processes of writing my own experiences, as well as those experiences intertwined with others, has helped me gain a better awareness of who I am today and feel empowered to take more conscious ownership and critical action in the constitution of who I wish to become.

Reflecting on future possibilities

Linked by the running theme of performativity and the subjectivity of identities and evaluative governing practices, it is my hope that this thesis contributes to the academic discussion of the aforementioned topic, and sparks further research on stories yet to be shared by the teachers and students of New Brunswick. Interpreting how my “[t]hought[s] happened in the writing” (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 970) and how they resonate with, or are regarded in opposition, is up to the reader. It was through my privileged, white, male position that I presented my observations and analysis of the data of experiences I collected and shared using a method of writing. In doing so, viewing the structure of our province’s education system through the lenses of critical theory has empowered me to take greater risks in my teaching and question discursive practices that have taken up hegemonic residence in our schools. At the very least, it has given me a space to reflect on my experiences through the lenses of critical theory and express my voice in the safety of academe.

I will admit that at times, I have become frustrated by the momentum of hegemony and the overwhelmingly bleak possibilities to bring about social change. I am often given glimpses of alternative worlds (Brookfield, 2005, p. 77) through television, books, the internet, social media, etc., as well as movement by educative institutions toward democratic teaching and critical thinking; however, ideological hegemony chugs along relatively unchallenged. Hope for change and the sharing of alternative ideas for an alternative social order is cast uncomfortably outside rationalized normativity as thought which is – ironically – too ideological/impractical. Though people are free to think and speak, “expression of difference perversely ends up confirming the superiority of the norm” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 79). Here exists a cycle for some to imagine the better, recognize the roadblocks and limitations, and give up.

In the autobiographic chapter of this thesis, I re-wrote moments that seem to raise questions of my freedom and authenticity in the constitution of my self, “in an active fashion” (Foucault as cited in Lawson, Harrison, & Cavendish, 2004, p. 87). In some of these moments, I exposed in myself a motive to act dishonestly or disingenuously as a means to achieve personal goals and present a performative self in compliance or in opposition to normative standards.

In the first grade, I stole a red button from a jar of counters belonging to the teacher. Was I challenging her position of authority with this act? Was I resisting behavioural expectations placed upon me? Not wanting to be constructed as a thief, I returned the button the next day and offered a tearful apology. When reconstructing my experience of taking a standardized math exam, I shared that I would have cheated if I thought there was a chance of not getting caught. Is the consideration I gave to cheating

evident of a means students use to negotiate the imbalance of power while subjugated by tests, evaluations, and other forms of regulation that work to define and construct the self? A similar instance of the subjugated self challenging a power imbalance of evaluative practices was exposed in chapter six. Pat shared that, because of a growing awareness of being observed and evaluated, actions were authored to present the sort of self that met or exceeded normative expectations by creating more detailed lesson plans than usual. The ability for the powerless to recognize the standards and expectations of those in positions of authority helps to find ways of recirculating power. I had shared in the first chapter that I had strategically used my male status to gain acceptance into a bachelor of education program. Knowing male applicants were rare in the elementary stream, I used my gender to appeal to the selection committee, despite initially not wanting to teach at the elementary level.

I shared my coyness when responding to the questions of two middle school students during my internship, as they interrogated me to confirm their constructions of my sexuality. I had lied to them about not having a girlfriend. Was this inauthentic response done as an act to negotiate a power imbalance and give me a sense of control over the inquisition? Certainly, when I responded with the question, “Does it matter?” when one student eventually asked if I was gay, I had shifted the power in my favour.

The re-written narratives of my theft of a button, my desire to cheat on a test, my strategic application, Pat’s lesson plans, and my coy responses are examples of resistance to regulatory practices that are imposed on the constitution of self. They are examples of actions in response to concerns and anxieties regarding my reputation. But there appears to be a shift in the motives of my actions. When I asked the two students if my sexuality

mattered, I no longer acted in concern of authoring myself to conform to their standards. Instead, I actively pushed and blurred their constructions of gender binaries. By turning the questioning back at the students, I aimed to have the two reflect on the normative, and perhaps homophobic, social standards that appeared to be at the root of their questions. I had shifted from acting to shape a desired reputation, to acting in a more pedagogic approach as a recirculation of power. Critically reading and recognizing the ways that the self is regulated can present opportunities for one to claim some freedom of self authorship. As a teacher, my critical awareness of regulatory practices can help inform my pedagogical approaches that encourage others to question, challenge, and reconstruct their subjectivities with greater connectivity and ethical responsibility to others.

While critically examining the gendered constructions of masculine and feminine binary inherent with heteronormativity, questions for further research were raised regarding heterosexism and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Queer (LGBTQ+) -phobia imbued in education. Shared earlier was an example of how I addressed questions about gay marriage that emerged from conversations of grade one students. This raises further questions about how heteronormative ideologies are circulated by children. Research by Caitlin Ryan (2016) explores the homophobic and anti-gay language used in children's interactions with each other that effectively silence positive and reconstructive LGBTQ+ discourse. Phobia in the form of omission and/or that not officially taught in American school is investigated by Paul Gorski (2013) as he examined if and how LGBTQ+ concerns are covered by multicultural teachers.

I recognize opportunity for further research on "interrupting and challenging LGBTQ oppression in schools" (Mitton-Kukner, Kearns, & Tompkins, 2016). Recent

work by Jennifer Mitton-Kukner *et al.* (2016) analyzes efforts made by an Australian Bachelor of Education program that trains pre-service teachers to be responsible for anti-homophobic education and establish “Positive Space” classrooms. s. j. Miller recommends the implementation of a queer literacy framework in classrooms to “[help] teachers [...] support students to understand and read (a)gender and (a)sexuality through a queer lens” and to “rework social and classroom norms where bodies with differential realities [...] are legitimated and made legible to self and others” (Miller s. j., 2015, p. 37). Current shifts in curriculum development in New Brunswick presents our education system to be a site of future gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ research.

At present, New Brunswick’s Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is piloting a Personal Wellness curriculum for grades three to five. Connected to the Atlantic Canada Essential Competencies statement for citizenship, “Learners are expected to act responsibly and contribute positively to the quality and sustainability of their environment, communities and society. They assess the social, cultural, economic and environmental interconnectedness and act as stewards in a local, national and global context” (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Curriculum Branch, 2015, p. 6).

With this vision in mind, this curriculum creates space for students and teachers to deconstruct heteronormativity and become advocates for gender equality. A possible space to learn gender/sexual self-determination is created as students are expected to examine the uniqueness of people “which includes visible [...] and invisible differences (learning abilities, skills, talents, personal and cultural values and beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, family background, personal preferences, etc.)” (New Brunswick

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Curriculum Branch, 2015, p. 24). From this, homophobic, transphobic, and biphobic acts are explored under the context of bullying. With this curriculum, students and teachers also expected participate in conversations about “the importance of work [while exploring the construction of] gender stereotypes and occupations” (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Curriculum Branch, 2015, p. 33). Once officially launched, research similar to that of Gorski (2013) should be conducted to examine the challenges New Brunswick teachers experience in teaching gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ concerns in New Brunswick. The impact of the Personal Wellness curriculum on cultural shifts in attitudes in New Brunswick regarding heteronormative constructions and gender equality would also be interesting and important future research.

I often look to the classroom as a space of hope and potential to work for something better. Referencing Terry Eagleton, bell hooks (1994) suggests that “children make the best theorists since they have not yet been fully socialized into accepting as natural practices that clearly are unjust” (p. 60). In my classroom, I can – not without risk – work to subvert that which makes us – teacher and students – subjects. As Kincheloe (2008) suggests, the purpose of schooling for critical pedagogues is to “facilitate quality education with an impassioned spirit [...and to...] identify the insidious forces that subvert the success of particular students” (p. 7). It is looking through the fog of hegemony and status quo to find marginalizing norms and discourse which actively exists, but remain subtle or unseen, and working together to co-reconstruct discourses of inclusivity and social justice. It is teaching toward a messy place of uncertainty, searching for alternative rationalities that challenge long held 'truths' and knowledge. It is

to recognize, adapt, and/or dismantle the teacher's position of an authoritative knowledge holder to present students with alternate view of the world around them while inspiring the empowerment of self that rises above dividing practices of ranking and competitive individualism. It is necessary for me as a critical teacher to keep pushing the limits of places of comfortable knowledge, thinking, and questioning and to foster the same outlook in my students. Rather than working for numbers on a report card, my hope is that students will learn that “to be human is to possess the power to change, to better, to be smarter, to become a transformative agent” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 130).

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Candidate's full name:

Colin Michael Steeves

Universities attended:

Bachelor of Arts, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB

2004

Bachelor of Education, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB

2005

Master of Education, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB

2016