Resisting Readin', Writin' and 'Rithmetic

Stories from Inside a Classroom Panopticon

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education

in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Education

October, 2011

Abstract

This study is an account of teacher resistance in an intermediate classroom. It is an examination of the ways in which resistance to dominant school Discourses was possible, and sometimes not possible.

This study involves four main stories of resistance. The first story in the introduction shows how and why I became resistant to many of the dominant Discourses controlling my classroom Panopticon. In the second story, I find space within my classroom to resist the dominant Discourse of standardized tests, by acting on students' questions of and disdain for them, despite feeling the pressure of surveillance. In the third story, I demonstrate how resistance was possible within the constrictive structures of Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPAs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The final story outlines how I, being in relations with others, also exercise power, and that others will resist this, namely, my students. This study ends with reflections on the dynamics of power and resistance, and outlines the current dominant Discourses I face.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Jaded by School - The Birth of Resistance

Throughout much of my childhood, I had thought of myself as a writer. I would write stories, plays, comic strips, scripts, and news articles. I would write to escape my life; it was enjoyable. I would often illustrate my pieces, and my mom or early childhood teachers would bind them for me. I loved to share these stories with my friends - both imaginary and real. Sometimes, I would opt to sell them to the obliging neighbours for some change, and head to the corner store. Writing was a way of life to me for so long. Whenever I got the chance, I would let my imagination soar on paper.

I loved school. I loved my teachers and the friends I found there. The projects were interesting, and I was consistently given the space to use my creativity to activate my weird sense of humour. I especially enjoyed the laughter that ensued when I worked with my friends on projects, particularly those that involved writing. I just loved to think outside the box, and surprise people with my angle on things. It was exciting. I was learning.

It wasn't until high school that this attitude changed for me. I attended a private school in northern Ontario. Here is where I met with some really wonderful writers. They were more affluent than I, and subsequently, I felt an intense competition that eluded me earlier in school. I didn't fare well with competition. I was quickly made aware of how I didn't measure up to the "standards" of the elite at this school. Teachers would hand back my writing with red ink and low marks scratched all over it. I was made to redo numerous assignments. I would spend so many hours trying to write the way my teachers wanted, that I lost sight of who I had been for so long...a writer. Writing became a chore. It was difficult for me to even begin putting a letter on the page. I was scared to make a mistake with my word choices and organization. Insecurity set in, and the writer disappeared.

To this day, I struggle to write. What happened to me in high school led me to become a teacher. I didn't want any child to experience the humiliation I had felt, and the insecurities I had acquired, and must learn to live with. I set out on a quest to find a different way to "do" school.

Dr. Gail Heald-Taylor, a Language Arts Professor at the University of Windsor, Faculty of Education, sparked a chord with me. I would often overhear other students mumble about how "silly" her classes were; how she just didn't "get" kids and learning. For me, however, her classes were therapeutic in that they provided opportunities to critique my own experiences from high school English classes. I was given the chance to start making sense of why some teachers felt the need to destroy the human spirit in the name of learning. I would have loved to have had her as my high school English teacher. I know she would have found value in all the wonderful things I was doing, rather than focusing on my many shortcomings.

Gail, as she preferred to be called, introduced me to alternate ways of looking at learning that involved democracy, peace, collaboration and choice. She introduced me to alternate ways of looking at children that involved honesty, trust, love and joy. Her values resembled those of my beloved elementary teachers. These values were the hub of Whole Language, a taboo term during the mid-90s in Ontario. Gail loved to talk politics, and Whole Language, like everything else involving school, was political. She didn't shy away from promoting Whole Language. She did caution us, however, in our pursuit of such pedagogy, that it was best to not mention Whole Language – she advised us to practice it instead. She advocated resistance. She challenged the traditional views of school. I wanted to do the same. Traditional schooling hurt me. I was inspired to do things differently, and determined to not do harm to others, namely my students.

It was from this point forward that I committed myself to always do what I felt was best for children; to understand children as fellow human beings who all deserve an education to find out who they were, and who they wanted to become, similar to the education I had when I was in elementary school. I wanted to help all my students be writers...if indeed they chose to be writers. And, this was the birth of my resistance.

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I have been teaching for almost eleven years. I am a female, Caucasian teacher, and currently teach a blended class of Grade 6 and 7 students. I have taught in the Intermediate division of the same elementary school my entire career, including my practice teaching placements. My school is moderately sized within our board, with about 400 students, although this number is shrinking each year. Increasingly, enrolment is becoming a major issue, and teachers are fearful of losing their classrooms and being moved to another school, or worse, being pink-slipped. With the auto industry struggling, many of the families near my school have either moved away in search of jobs, hunkered down in the hope of finding work in the service industry, or are trying desperately to survive on limited unemployment funds and welfare.

My school is located in the inner-city of Windsor, Ontario, near the Big-Three auto industries. It is sandwiched between two large government housing projects, bordered by more affluent, white and European immigrant communities. This diversity is mirrored within my school. I have, in my classroom, many poor, white and minority students, many of whom speak other languages at home. Many of the

minority students are of Muslim tradition, culture and religion. I also have many comparatively

wealthier, predominantly white students, many of whom are from direct European-descent. These

students are a wonderfully mixed group, who bring valuable worldly knowledge and diverse

perspectives to my classroom. I learn from them every day.

Dr. Gail Heald-Taylor, who had become my mentor, had encouraged me to try a Master's degree

in literacy. She suggested the program at Mount Saint Vincent University as it offered views that were

not connected to any Ontario Ministry of Education policies, and would provide space for independent

thought. The readings and dialogue I encountered at the Mount changed my life and my teaching. My

view of literacy expanded; it became more inclusive. I began to understand that my students acquired a

variety of "literacies" rather than simply the privileged ability to read and write. The literacies acquired

depended upon the social groups within which my students were embedded - on the human

relationships between and around my students (Gee 1996, 46). It was at this point that I learned how

valuable *community* needed to be in my classroom. I wanted to develop a safe space that allowed

students to find out who they were in the company of other identity seekers. This meant, for me, that I

would need to first focus on where my students came from, valuing their culture, their language, and

the literacies they were already practicing.

I needed to hear their stories. By first discovering who my students were when they arrived at

school, I was able to hear the distinct voice of each student. "It is hearing [these] individual voices that

leads to conversation and conversation that leads to community" (Manning 1993, 12). This was

important to me. I was silenced by teachers in high school. I didn't want to do that to these kids. My

students, like me, had a history, a biography that was worth learning and appreciating. Giving each

student a stage told them that their lives mattered. This curriculum stemmed from the lives of each

student, and as such, provided the room for kids to ask their own questions, and more importantly, to find their own answers.

I found that by bringing everyone's story to the table, including my own, it levelled the playing field. All students could participate regardless of ability. My goal was to dissolve the hierarchical lines that plagued traditional classrooms. By listening and watching closely, I was able to see how all of my students were capable of brilliance (Christensen 2009, 2). Andy Manning (2011) used this metaphor in a recent conversation with me: we are all given a backpack which, while similar in size, contained different things. Although the contents of the backpack my students carried were different, they were no less valuable. We all have had something to contribute. All my kids come to school with something in their backpacks worth sharing. There was such wonderful diversity in my classroom. Focusing on our relationships and community necessarily brought us together; it created space for everyone to belong.

Building community is essential to me in my classroom, but so is making sense of *our* world. I emphasized "our" intentionally. I try my best to avoid artificial questions based on other individuals' concerns. Our curriculum must be reflected in our own lives somewhere, somehow. I believe that the students and I must see ourselves mirrored in what we are learning. I want to investigate authentic questions which stem from the minds of my students and me. I try to focus on what matters to us and to our world as we understand it. "Why?" is the most important question we ask of each other, and to those outside of our classroom. This is the most fundamental way we disrupt the status-quo on a daily basis. This question helps us look at things differently. By asking "why", we begin our year-long acquisition of critical literacy - one of the many literacies we focus on in my classroom. I learn right along with my students by participating with them in analyzing, questioning and creating within various literacies. Critical literacy is important to me as a teacher, because it can help my students in transforming their own lives, and perhaps, the lives of others, making the world a better place for

everyone. Critical literacy addresses the "savage inequalities" (Ayers and Ayers 2011, 23) that I worry will keep my students at the bottom, and impoverished for the rest of their lives. Carol Edelsky (1999) stated clearly: "...education in a proclaimed democracy properly serves the public; i.e., the interests of citizens in a democracy. That position advocates educating people so that they bring that democracy into existence by unseating systems of undue influence. A pedagogy that is both whole language and critical contributes to that project" (33). I don't want my students to simply *accept* their place in society. I want them to at least be able to challenge it.

From experience, I've learned that bringing in the critical is sometimes easier said than done. I always strove to ask the critical questions, maintaining a pedagogy of questioning, but on most days, I was hopeful just to bring in some exciting experiences for my students. That was it, and to me, that was okay. I knew that students were learning all of the time. I was not always aware of exactly what they were learning, nor could I measure most, if any, of it. They may not have been learning that which I had planned. The only certainty I had was that they were indeed learning something (Manning 1993). Knowing this, I tried to take my students on little daily adventures, and tried to keep the conversation going (Manning 1993), knowing that learning and literacy learning were social performances. I tried to tap into their heads for ideas, but when I could not, I brought in some cool ideas that came from me and my life. If I was passionate about something, my kids usually responded similarly. Susan Ohanian (2009) stated my mantra: I can only teach who I am (376). My students knew who I was and who I was learning to be, just as I was learning who they were and who they were learning to be. This was our curriculum. This was our learning. These were our literacies. And, this was me. Regardless of what or how I taught, I believed, as an educator, my main responsibility was to provide a learning environment where my students were cared for, listened to, laughed with, and loved...yes, loved. I think that Rick and William Ayers (2011) summed up best my understanding of the complexities and interconnectedness of teaching and learning:

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> Teaching, a transitive verb, an action word: the passing over or transmission of something from one person to another. The trouble starts right here with the suggestion of a "giver" and a "receiver". In reality, teaching – ubiquitous, dynamic, and abiding – expands into an entire universe: tutoring, or guiding or mentoring, coaching, and counselling, sharing, conversing, chattering, instructing, equipping, enlightening, freeing, informing, directing, encouraging, practicing, elaborating, preparing, back-and-forthing, stretching relentlessly toward the generous world of learning, teaching's twin: acquiring or attaining, studying and reading, wondering and wandering, plugging into and pushing through, initiating, building, creating, grinding, mastering, getting, practicing, elaborating, preparing, liberating. The two are ultimately joined, one to the other, this primal human pursuit: We learn and from the instant we are born we also teach; we teach and we simultaneously learn to the last syllable of time." (xi)

My students and I learned, and we taught - together in community.

When I first started in this profession, providing such a wonderful kind of dynamic and peaceful environment seemed much easier. I felt freer to do what my students and I wished to do, following our own curiosities. Lately, it has been increasingly more difficult to construct the environment and curriculum I envisioned, with my students at the helm – an environment where kids have the "opportunities to create and to build, to invent and compose, to follow their interests to their furthest limits, to be imaginative, curious and venturesome...to be themselves – uniquely, flexibly, autonomously, integrally – to be a part of something beyond themselves – in the company of a grownup" (Ayers and Ayers 2011, 24). This didn't always fall within the prescriptions of the Ministry, and is difficult to do when I am constantly being monitored to ensure that I am doing things as per their outlines and adhering to set deadlines of instruction and education. I felt increasingly frustrated at having my questions and those of my students ignored by the demands placed on us by administration, the board and Ministry. This is where my teacher research begins. My thesis will examine ways that I was able to resist the dominant school discourses and groups trying to control me and my classroom, and the spaces of freedom I found where I was able to carry on with the important work of learning and teaching.

To further explain what I mean by "dominant discourses", I will use James Gee's (1996) definition of *discourse* with a capital *D*:

> A *Discourse* is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'. (131)

A Discourse, to me, is a way of being within a particular 'social network'. The school within which I work, is a 'social network' that values certain ways of being, that may or may not match my own discourses or ways of being. Gee (1996) goes on to explain:

> Any Discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints, and values at the expense of others. In doing so, it will *marginalize* viewpoints and values central to other Discourses. In fact, a Discourse can call for one to accept values in conflict with other Discourses of which one is also a member...Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in a society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological. Control over certain Discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society. These other Discourses empower these groups who have the least conflicts with their other Discourses when they use them. Let us call Discourses that lead to social goods in a society *dominant Discourses* and let us refer to those groups that have the fewest conflicts when using them *dominant group*s. (132)

My Discourse did not match the Discourse of my Ministry, board and administration. *Their* Discourse involved the *accountability* of teachers in the form of standardized testing, curriculum, documentation, continuous assessment and evaluation, and surveillance. This Discourse leads to control over teachers, and is therefore, the dominant Discourse. Those who fell in line with these values and accepted these viewpoints may also have acquired power and status. There are benefits to using this Discourse. Those whose Discourse did not fall in line with dominant Discourses, may be marginalized, and may feel, as I did, the need to resist such Discourses in order to find or maintain their own way of being, and freedom.

Eleven years ago, I was able to set up my classroom as I felt was best for my students and their learning. I was permitted at one time, and without question, for example, after one student demonstrated open excitement over the latest coaster installation, to examine the science and literacy of roller coasters, culminating with a much-longed-for field trip to Cedar Point Amusement Park. Now, if I were to try this I would be met with, "This is not in the curriculum, Heidi." Whose curriculum matters? What counts as literacy? Who decides what kids should be learning? What methodology is best? Does

or should methodology even matter? Since about the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Ontario, along with other parts of the world, has determined that it is no longer up to teachers and students to decide.

Goals of education, and practices inside classrooms, are now being determined by powerful, corporate neo-liberal educational Discourses (Manning 1993, 2). This is the context within which my teacher research is embedded, and understanding these discourses is essential to making sense of my stories, and motives for resistance. After the media constructed a crisis in education, the Ontario government decided, like many other governments, to tighten the reign on education. Kids apparently couldn't read or write like they used to. Illiteracy, according to reports, was rampant. Our kids weren't measuring up to those in other parts of the world. I am uncertain as to how these conclusions were confirmed, however. Nonetheless, educational reform was deemed necessary. Our educational system was said to be in ruins. Teachers took the blame. We had gone on too long un-checked, and our progressive and liberal methods came under fire.

Ontario Premier and former-teacher, Mike Harris, with the assistance of business consultant, Michael Fullan, began this educational reform movement in the 1990s. Harris was a conservative with neo-liberal ideologies. David Hursh (2001) explained Neo-liberal policies:

> Neo-liberal polices emphasize the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalization, the dismantling of the public sector of the economy over production and commerce. The U.S. dominated World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has required national governments to develop economic policies that emphasize economic growth and property rights over social welfare and personal rights. Schools are not evaluated for whether students become liberally educated citizens but whether they become economically productive workers. (2)

The Ontario government, in pursuit of a strong workforce, focused its attention on aligning education with the agenda of corporations and the business community. The goal was to "focus on producing efficient workers who are able to adapt and develop new skills, and work toward the goals of ownership...on the one hand, capital requires educated and flexible labourers, but on the other hand it refuses the idea that labourers should think for themselves. While education of labourer appears

important it cannot be the kind of education that permits free thinking." (Harvey 2000, 103, as cited in Hursh 2001). "That is, they viewed schools as factories that manufactured the skilled workers who are eventually hired by employers" (Altwerger and Strauss 2002, 258).

To avoid free-thought and to further control the dynamics of classrooms, the government immediately established a common curriculum with which all teachers were to follow...period – completely disregarding the inherent complexities embedded within teaching and learning. This curriculum was designed by people in Toronto who had never met me or my students. Nonetheless, they felt that "schools should aid the economy to function as efficiently as possible by sorting and training students in their 'probable destinies' in the workforce. The education efficiency movement emphasized hierarchical decision-making with experts conceptualizing educational goals, curriculum, and pedagogy to be carried out by teachers" (Hursh 2001, 4).

Imposing "standards" as though we never had standards before was just one goal of the reform movement. "A standards-driven reform agenda should include content and performance standards, alignment of school processes with the standards, assessments that measure students achievement against world-class levels of excellence, information about student and school performance, and accountability for results" (Hursh 2001, 4). Accountability Discourse seemed to be the justification for every control mechanism the government had put in place. Not only did they create a curriculum for us to follow, but resources for every subject soon followed, developed for-profit by private publishing companies. To ensure that we are following these mandated materials, regular standardized testing is imposed on our students. The results of such tests are shared, and teachers are made accountable for the scores. The validity of the tests themselves is not questioned, at least not openly. My students are simply sorted into classes of "winners" and "losers" in the name of education.

My concern for my students continues. McNeil (2000, as cited in Hursh 2001) concluded that "Standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools. Further, over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students" (3). MacNeil's research continued to reveal:

> the emergence of phony curricula, reluctantly presented by teachers in class to conform to the forms of knowledge they students would encounter on centralized tests. The practice of teaching under these reforms shifted away from intellectual activity towards dispensing packaged fragments of information sent from an upper level of bureaucracy. And the role of students as contributors to classroom discourse, as thinkers, as people who brought their personal stories and life experiences into the classroom, was silenced or severely circumscribed by the need for the class to 'cover' a generic curriculum at a pace established by the district and the state for all the schools. (4)

I feel continued pressure to not follow the needs of my students, but to fulfill specifically what is outlined on the standardized tests – to cover the curriculum. And, if my kids do poorly, despite the denial from our board, it is deemed to be a reflection of my teaching abilities as opposed to a flaw in the content and perspective of the tests. Schools and teachers with poor scores are subjected to further mandated "professional development", and are on the target list for "random" classroom inspections from board and ministry personnel. The professionalism of teachers is being eroded.

My autonomy as a professional seems to be disappearing before my eyes. I am being watched more and more closely. My test scores and report card marks are now recorded online. This allows administration, board and Ministry authorities to double-check that the subjective (report card marks) and supposedly objective (standardized test scores) numbers match. There are fewer and fewer choices and decisions for my students and I to make. The government and its business communities are de-professionalizing teachers. We are losing our professional platform, and the voice and respected knowledge that accompanies it. Bushnell (2003) stated that "the label of *professional* is a charade, as the surveillance of teachers deprives them of the autonomy characteristic of a professional. To call

teaching a profession is small consolation for the humanistic commitment of its practitioners in light of the tremendous sacrifices they make daily" (267-268).   And, once this happens completely, I fear it may be assumed that anyone could do my job. Just about anyone can easily teach the mindless curriculum and follow the prescribed scripts designed by those outside of my classroom, who do not know anything about my students and me. I am trying to resist the dominant Discourses of standardization that are leading us to this fate.

I am finding it more difficult to teach what my students and I envision. I am feeling more and more pressure to ensure that my students achieve high scores on the standardized tests. To do that, I often feel compelled to teach what is measured by such tests. The problem with teaching to the test that Altwerger and Strauss (2002) highlight is that "students with unique talents and interests that lie outside the standardized curriculum must certainly wonder about their fate. Clearly, such talents and interests are more likely to be ignored when the classroom emphasis is overwhelmingly on material that will appear on standardized tests, and especially when accountability provides no rewards for these unique areas" (261). I do my best to ensure that students' identities are emphasized in the classroom, but it is not always easy to do, with so many other demands on me as a teacher.

What is most disturbing to me, however, is how this external imposition of standards, standardization, assessment measures and accountability is seemingly non-controversial to so many. The focus on "data" which stems from the standardized testing is seen as an *objective* way to improve performance (Altwerger and Strauss 2002, 259). Nothing, however, is neutral or objective. These tests are certainly not written with my eclectic students in mind, and as such, are not fair to them. And, as Altwerger and Strauss (2002) continue to argue, ministries and districts fail to realize that "there is, quite simply, no scientific evidence whatsoever that high-stakes testing and accountability will actually improve student achievement" (261). Nonetheless, many educators feel that accountability is

acceptable and necessary for our profession, not realizing that we have been accountable to our

students, their parents, and most importantly, to ourselves, for as long as I can remember.

Hursh (2001) clearly summarizes this neo-liberal reform movement, and its implications for

teachers and students,

> The neo-liberal states, through the use of standards, assessments, and accountability, aims to restrict educators to particular kinds of thinking, thinking that conceptualizes education in terms of producing individuals who are economically productive. Education is no longer valued for its role in developing political, ethical, and aesthetic citizens. Instead, the goal has become promoting knowledge that contributes to economic productivity and producing students who are compliant and productive...educational policy has shifted emphasis from input and process to outcomes, from the liberal to the vocational, from education's intrinsic to its instrumental value, and from qualitative to quantitative measures of success. (6)

I believe that forcing teachers to act against their conscience and keeping them accountable to a dull,

prescribed curriculum, monitoring and student testing, comes with a great cost. Schools become joyless

assembly lines of human beings. Assembly lines are for materials and products, *not* human beings. As

such, I believe that what is happening to Ontario's children is in fact a human rights violation. And, I

must admit that I have been complicit in such violations, in the name of job security. Although I do not

want to jeopardize my job, I do not want to continue knowingly doing harm to children. It is within this

educational context that I feel compelled to resist the dominant Discourses which, I believe, deskill

teachers, and harm children. Ohanian (2009) articulates "the scary thing about being a teacher: you can

only teach who you are, and if you try to do it while submitting to a script dominatrix, then you lose not

only your professionalism, but also your soul" (376). The current educational Discourse of *accountability*

does not match the Discourse of *learning* that I value and cherish as a professional for myself and for my

students. My students, my professionalism and ultimately, my *soul* are counting on me. I am willing to

fight for it. And, this is where my story begins.

I will use Michel Foucault's interpretation of power, resistance and domination, Panopticon and

surveillance to frame my experiences resisting the dominant and controlling discourses within school.

Foucault views power and resistance as interconnected, and inseparable. "Where there is power, there is resistance...points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network...by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations" (Foucault 2003, 95-6, as cited in Russo, 2003). Power does not exist outside of a relationship because it is someone using power to control someone else. It is not something that someone has within them. Rather it is something that they use to control the actions of others. Power relations are not necessarily linear either. They are complex and often, circular or back and forth. According to Julie Russo (2003), "Foucault makes it plain 'that there is no such entity as power...power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action'" (Foucault 2003, 137, as cited in Russo 2003). Power then is not something that any person possesses; it is not a commodity. Power is something that is exercised by individuals within relations. Foucault (2003, as cited in Russo 2003) explains "that power does not act directly on others, but rather, it acts upon their actions" (137). Power acts to control the actions of others.

A power relation controls my actions at school, and yet, also frees my actions at school. Because I have been involved in power *relations* with the Ministry, board and principal, I have been able to find my own spaces to act. I am the one who acts, and as an actor, I am often able to find new and freer spaces for action. More recently, as this thesis will highlight, I have found it increasingly more difficult to freely act, and to find these spaces of freedom. I am able to find spaces until they are shut down, and I am forced to move elsewhere.

> Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free'. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available...Consequently, there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive facts (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised) but a much more complicated interplay. In this game, freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (Foucault 2003, 139, as cited in Russo, 2003).

I understand that whenever there are power relations, there are also ways to react to such power. If I am able to react to power, then *total* control must not exist.

Resistance is doing things differently than what is expected within the power relationship. Not being silent, for example, and questioning discourses that do not make sense are forms of resistance. Silence is usually expected within a power relationship. Although I often feel that there are few choices left to me as a teacher, according to Foucault, I still have some freedom to act in my own way, in many cases, as this thesis will show. I still have some choice of action – of resistance. No matter how small the effort, it still counts as resistance. "Power and resistance are partners in constituting all subjective relations" (Russo 2003, 6). If there was absolutely no room for resistance, there would be no power *relation*.

There are, however, situations of seemingly complete domination, where my freedom to choose and do what I feel is professionally best for my students is, at best, limited – where resistance is difficult if not impossible – where submission seems necessary for survival. Foucault (2003, as cited in Russo, 2003) explains this point: "one sometimes encounters what may be called situations or states of domination in which power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen" (27). Sometimes, I find that submission is necessary to survive, to stay safe. According to Andy Manning (2010) in conversation with me via Skype, silence and submission could be considered part of my resistance. I must be a part of the power relation, if I hope to change it. If I am eliminated from the game, it is difficult to find new spaces for freedom and resistance. I need to be a part of my school, in order to resist its dominant discourses. I may not completely change the status-quo at my school, but I can at least keep it from completely shutting down my freedom. As Russo (2003), interpreting Foucault, states:

> Domination is, in this sense, a perversion of power, an obstruction of the perpetual renegotiation that is proper to it. If resistance doesn't indicate progressive movement in relation to power, then, if its ontology is to continuously produce power by its very opposition to it, it is domination that resistance can more appropriately aim to eliminate. (7)

My resistance will not obliterate power exercised against me once and for all. I can only hope to resist

the dominating effects of such control. Power relations will always exist according to Foucault. It is

inevitable between people. Relations of domination, however, can be challenged, and perhaps,

changed. This is not inevitable.

We can aim to eliminate dominating relations within such power relations by "practicing self".

According to Foucault (2003, as cited in Russo 2003), we must "not try to dissolve [power relations] but

to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice

of self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible" (39-40). By

finding out who I am, and what I stand for and value, and acting on that, I would be practicing myself,

according to Foucault, and this is the most effective resistance against domination. This small resistance

may prevent totalizing domination which is really all I can hope for. By "practicing self" I try to

"intervene intentionally in the field of power relations to work toward minimizing domination" (Russo

2003, 7). I continue to find my own spaces for freedom, for acting in my own way in my classroom.

When this space is shut down, I seem to find other spaces. I have yet to be permanently shut down, and

I believe it's the "practice of self" that keeps me going.

Foucault's idea of Panopticon and surveillance, challenges the idea of "practicing self". Herbert

Kohl (2009) articulately described the idea of the "Panopticon" as it was first introduced by Jeremy

Bentham:

> "Panopticon" was the name given by the British philosopher and legal theorist Jeremy Bentham
> to a prison he designed during the 1780s. Essentially it consisted of prisoners' cells built in a
> circle around a surveillance core in the middle. The idea was to provide complete monitoring of
> prisoners at all time by guards within the core. Prisoners were unable to see into the core and
> therefore could not actually tell whether they were being observed or not. The motive for this
> was to create an environment where the prisoners would internalize and accept the idea of total
> and continuous surveillance whether or not it was actually happening. It was an attempt to use
> the physical environment as an instrument of intimidation and mind control.   (p. 1)

Foucault used this idea and extended it to include such social institutions as schools. Schools, according

to Foucault, "institutionalize constant surveillance and exert mind control, often without the knowledge

or awareness of the people being controlled" (Kohl 2009, 1). The fact that the object of surveillance

believes that he or she is being watched, whether or not that person is really being watched, is the trap

–the control (Foucault 1977, 200). This "invisibility [of authority] is a guarantee of order" (Foucault

1977, 200). Knowing that principals could be watching at any one moment, or someone could be

analyzing test scores, causes teachers to act according to the prescriptions being provided for them. It's

a form of invisible discipline. This fear within the minds of teachers, whether substantiated or not,

causes teachers to police themselves, their actions, the actions of their students – their overall

classroom discourse. I am aware that my principal or some other authority could walk into my

classroom to observe what is happening at any moment. Foucault (1977) explains the ultimate effect of

the Panopticon on teachers ("prisoners" as he describes):

> The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent
> visibility that assures the automatic function of power. So to arrange things that the
> surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection
> of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus
> should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person
> who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which
> they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the
> prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, because he has no need in
> fact of being so...power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly
> have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon.
> Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment;
> but be must be sure that he may always be so. (201)

The fear of being watched causes me to at once become a prisoner and a prison guard. As a prison

guard, I am more conscious of what I do and what I say, as well as the freedom I am willing to provide

for my students. I guard not only myself but my students as well. I am also an agent of surveillance with

my own students in that I am required to constantly monitor their progress (Kohl 2009, 2), ensuring that

they understand and are learning the prescribed curriculum. Such checks and balances, or at least the possibility of such, makes resistance to dominant Discourses intentionally very difficult.

The dominant Discourse of accountability seems to justify the surveillance of classrooms. As such, there are measures that are being implemented to ensure the transparency of classrooms such as the standardization of curriculum, and subsequent testing, Teacher Performance Appraisals, and Professional Learning Communities. These surveillance measures are meant to ensure teacher conformity to the agenda of the Ministry, at the expense, I believe, of authentic teacher and student community building, literacy learning, citizenship advocating, and identity creating. Teaching within the Panopticon under increasing surveillance makes resistance to these Discourses difficult, but perhaps, according to Foucault, not impossible.

This thesis outlines four connected stories from my classroom Panopticon, that demonstrate power, and of course, resistance. Each chapter will begin with an anecdote derived from my classroom experiences as documented in my Teacher Research Journal, and each anecdote will subsequently be analyzed using the aforementioned ideas as tools for examination. At the beginning of Chapter One: *The Introduction – Jaded by School: the Birthplace of Resistance*, I describe how I came to understand the oppressiveness of dominant Discourses, first-hand in my high school English classes. Because of my new-found awareness to these Discourses, I felt compelled to resist them. In Chapter Two: *Power, Protest and Posters*, I outline how despite the dominant Discourses of curriculum, and the presence of surveillance within the Panopticon of school, my students and I found spaces where we were able to disrupt these Discourses, and think freely. Together, we answered our own questions, and acted, albeit carefully, on what we found out about "school". In Chapter Three*: TPAs and PLCs: Acronyms for Power*, I explain the controlling mechanisms of Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPA) and Professional Learning Communities, and demonstrate how they act not only to control, but also monitor what I do in my

classroom, and how I do it. I also provide details showing how I was able to resist some of this control,

stay employed, and still carry on in many of my own ways with my students in our classroom. In the

final chapter, *Resisting the Resistance*, I explain how I am complicit in the very things I am trying to

resist. I show how I also exercise power to control my classroom and students, and in turn, my students

resisted my control, trying to find their own spaces of freedom. This chapter ends with reflections

outlining my new understanding of power and resistance.   I end this thesis with an Epilogue: *Just the*

Beginning. I comment on the status of the Panopticon within which I am expected to teach today.

Ahead are my stories of resistance, paving a road, albeit a rocky one, toward hope and freedom.

Chapter Two

Power, Protest and Posters

"Where do you think we should we hang these posters?" I asked.

"I think we should put these posters right outside the principal's office for him to see every day, and to remind him of how much I hate writing those tests!" one clever student expressed with conniving conviction.

"What about displaying the posters in the front hallway where everyone will see them, including not only the principal, but parents, superintendents, other teachers and students? There's a lot of traffic here, and this is where I think the posters will have the biggest impact," another student added.

Although these ideas made sense, they seriously concerned me. I suggested a different location, a location we ultimately went with, of course: the back hallway near the library. The students accepted my rationale that the back hallway was in perfect proximity to not only the library but most classrooms. All students and teachers must pass through this hallway to get to the library or their classrooms. It was not frequently used, however, by administration because there was another entrance to these destinations on the other side of the school, closer to their offices. Without further discussion, we hurriedly grabbed some duct tape (we didn't want these posters to come off the walls), and down the back hallway we went, far away from the office.

"Don't forget to put your name on the BACK of your posters," I reminded them on their way out, trying to ensure as much anonymity for them as possible.

The protest posters were fabulous. Although most of the messages against and questions of school, testing and constraints were somewhat camouflaged, I could read them clearly:

Student Protest Posters about School and Standardized Testing 2009-2010

"Where should I hang this poster?" one of my students asked excitedly, holding it up with pride, waiting for praise.

I could not believe what I was looking at. Her poster was too blatant! It could get me in a lot of trouble, I thought. Instead of praising this student, I replied, "not there!" almost yanking the display out of her hands.

In my earlier surveillance of these posters, I guess I had missed a few explicit messages. Blazing across the front of the poster, in bright, multi-coloured, bold print was the unmistakeable message: NO TESTING! – Clear evidence of the kinds of conversations that were happening in our classroom. This beautiful poster was void of any symbolism or camouflage, and it really scared me. The other students' posters, while conveying similar messages of protest, were much more subversive and subliminal. Hers made me really uncomfortable. I succumbed to my fears, and censored the student. I promised that we would find a special place in our classroom for her lovely poster. She willingly complied, without protest. I did give her the choice of where she wanted to hang it in the classroom... just not in this back hallway...others to see.

(Note: The "No Testing!" Poster is not in my collection of Protest Posters seen above because it was, unfortunately, never photographed. It was the only poster posted in my classroom, and as such, was overlooked when a few students photographed these pieces. To this day, I regret my decision.)

Ironically, almost on cue, the Vice-Principal walked around the corner only to witness us hanging these posters. I always knew this was a real possibility. Administrators had been mandated to walk around the schools regularly, conducting "walk-throughs" of classrooms, ensuring our (both teacher and student) compliance. We never knew if or when the walk-through could happen.

My blood pressure shot up at the sight of the Vice-Principal. I was caught! I became incredibly nervous, and remembered inhaling deeply. What would she say? How would she react? What kind of trouble would I be in? What would my students think? What would they do? What would they say? I looked to my students, worried about their reaction. They could have cared less. The VP was so quiet (perhaps that was intentional), the kids didn't even look up as she approached me. I was the one who seemed most concerned. Externally, I tried my best to play it cool, to not draw attention to what we were doing, acting as though we were just hanging some random pieces of student artwork on the walls of the back hallway. I immediately engaged her in conversation, drawing her eyes away from the posters, and toward me.

"How can I help you?" I asked trying to remain casual in tone.

"I need to see one of your students in my office when you are done here. There was a problem at recess."

She glanced around quickly, hoping to find the student she was seeking, but quickly gave up noticing how boisterous and chaotic it was, leaving that job to me. There were no additional comments, or raised-eyebrows, only a quick glance. That was it. She quietly exited the same way she entered.

She was gone, and we were safe...at least for now.

*   *   *   *

In the end, I was able to disrupt the dominant Discourses by generating a conversation to help

my students and I critique school, and acting on our new awareness by hanging protest posters in the

school hallway, where they stayed for the remainder of the year. This chapter will examine how the

Panopticon created fear and dominant Discourses in order to control what and how I teach. It will also

show how, despite these controls, my students and I resisted the dominant Discourses, and found

spaces of freedom.

Disrupting the dominant Discourses was not easy. It created a great amount of tension within

me. I was following the curriculum going on in the heads of my students (Manning 1993), but was

fearful that what I was doing would be considered insubordinate to the board initiatives and agenda.

According to Bushnell (2003), Foucault described school as a prison-like structure where I am the

"prisoner" and what I am supposed to do, and how I am supposed to do things that are prescribed and

monitored by the "guards": administration, the board, the Ministry, my union, parents (256). I was to

follow these prescriptions. To do otherwise would be considered insubordination. Our union had

warned us earlier in the year specifically about influencing students negatively against the tests. My

students hated writing the tests, and asked why they had to write yet another one. This question

sparked our classroom conversations about the "secret education" of school, ending with the display of

our protest posters. The union warned that our board felt it was not the teacher's place to disclose any

opinions which may undermine the validity of the standardized tests, or the institution of "school" in

general. We were advised not to get "political" with our students. We were to remain "neutral". What

they failed to realize, according to Linda Christensen (2000), was that "all acts of reading and writing are

political acts" (vi). Nothing is neutral (Manning 1993). The mandates enforced by the authorities are

political, and as such, are not neutral either. The Ministry and board have an agenda which is achieved

by imposing the mandates for us to follow. Similarly, the conversation I was having with my students

was not neutral and was very political as well. To not continue this dialogue with my students would be

a political act as well. School is a political institution, and has its own agenda, just like me. The

difference was that I could recognize it. By ignoring my students' important questions, I felt I would be

perpetuating the status-quo (human rights violations, tyranny of tests, and constraints) (Bushnell 2003,

262), something I was determined to alter in my classroom. According to Bigelow (1999), "by not

inviting students to critically reflect on their schooling, they are taught to accept inequality as normal

and natural" (242), instead of social constructions which can be changed. I believed that my students

have a right to critique powerful institutions which position them negatively and unfairly. Andy

Manning (1993) supported this claim by asserting that "classrooms need to be places where kids get to

answer their own questions" (13). So then, when my students asked:

"Why do we have to write another test?"

"Who says?"

"Don't you know how we are doing in class? You're the teacher!"

"Who is this Nelson guy, anyway?" (referring to the Nelson Publishing Company)

I felt I had few alternatives, other than to help them answer these questions. According to Bill Bigelow

(1999):

> ...it is a "basic skill" for students to reflect critically on issues of school, equity and social justice.
> When we neglect to invite students to critique their own school lives, we necessarily teach them
> habits of not-thinking and not-questioning – we teach them to be morally numb to their
> immediate surroundings. If we are serious about educating students for democracy, then such
> an education needs to reach beyond teaching about the three branches of government or how a
> bill becomes a law. We need to equip students to enter society as subjects, as individuals who
> look around at the social architecture and ask why is it like this; who benefits and who suffers;
> and what will it take to make it better for everyone? Studying an institution with which they are
> intimately familiar seemed like a good place to start. (256)

My job was to provide an *education*. Bigelow defined what I felt *education* for my students should look like. What better place to start their *education* than with a critique of their own current education; their own school? Their questions opened the door to this *education.*

Critiquing the institution of school was not WRONG (at least not for me, or my professional judgement), but it meant that I was not teaching to the tests, using the resources provided, nor following the prescribed curriculum. Knowing my union's lack of support for resistance made me *nervous* to outwardly (with my students) uncover the hidden curriculum being learned by students within the "Schoolhouse Panopticon" (Bushnell 2003).   What would my principal say? Would this critical discourse be seen as insubordinate? Would it be seen as me indoctrinating students? Critical thinking is part of our curriculum, but would this kind of critical literacy count? A lot of money is involved with the plethora of tests and resources provided. Authorities want to ensure that tax-payers' money is not going to "waste" and that their agenda for students is achieved. They use the standardized curriculum, resources and testing to monitor and control what we do in our classrooms. Without these mandates in place, it is assumed that teachers will not have the faintest idea of what to do in our classrooms. And, according to Bushnell (2003),"the surveillance of standardized curricula [and monitoring classrooms] was justified by this discourse of accountability" (262).   Without the accountability measures, and prescriptions to follow, it is assumed that teachers will not do their job of providing an education for our students.

There was always an underlying concern, created within the Panopticon, that someone might be watching me, or might find out what we were doing or discussing in class. If what we were doing didn't match the mandates, I would be deemed insubordinate, and could potentially be removed from this space altogether. The kinds of literacies we were using in my classroom were not sanctioned by the authorities, and I believed what we were doing actually undermined them. I feared then, that if the

Board discovered what my students and I were discussing and critiquing in class, authorities would view our curriculum as "inappropriate" or "too political" for school. To keep these spaces open, I felt that I had to keep our conversation and posters safe from the scrutiny of administration. To avoid this scrutiny: I kept my door closed, I asked students to write their names on the back of their posters, I monitored the explicitness of their posters, and I manipulated my students into placing their posters in the back hallway far away from the administrative glare.

My fears of being "caught" criticizing the dominant discourses of school with students were not unfounded. Board members toured our school last year. The Ministry sent out agents of inspection the year before, and administration had been mandated to walk the halls of the school at some point each day, inspecting every classroom, without any particular schedule. We never knew when they were coming to our classroom. While there, they would interrogate students about what they were doing and why; they would examine our bulletin boards, looking for the mandatory word walls and anchor charts; they would scan our book shelves, looking for the sanctioned resources; and they would check our daybooks and lesson plans, looking for our commitments to the common curriculum. This didn't happen every day, nor did principals fulfill every part of this investigation of our classrooms. Teachers, however, were made aware of everything that principals potentially had the "right" to do.

This created apprehension among most teachers. Administration could come into our classrooms at any moment. We knew that "administration couldn't monitor all classrooms at all times, but they induced a state of anxiety since they could enter any classroom at any time, without even knocking" (Kohl 2009, p. 1). This fear was created intentionally, in order to control what I did in the classroom. This intimidation didn't control what I did, but it certainly caused me to stay vigilant about the possibility of scrutiny invading my spaces of freedom. According to Bushnell (2003), this is an element of Foucault's Panopticon:

> In this system, power is always visible as the prisoner knows the guard is always present; however, the power is unverifiable as the prisoner must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. (256)

I never knew when my classroom would be evaluated by administration. Knowing that my principal could enter my classroom at any time, and for any reason, created uneasiness. He could be observing me and my classroom practices, and I may not ever know that I am under scrutiny. The unknown kept me in fear, and in hiding. When my Vice-Principal walked in on us hanging the posters, my sense of fear increased. Although she did not openly criticize what we were doing, nor did she, I thought, really pay much attention to what we were doing, she could have done so without my knowledge. I still have no idea. An environment had been created where "the idea of continuous surveillance, whether or not it was actually happening...was used as an instrument of intimidation and mind control" (Kohl 2009, 1). These mind games may have caused me a lot of stress and worry, but did not stop us from our activity of hanging posters protesting standardized testing, and the controlling aspects of school, which clearly remained outside of the institution's official curriculum (Gore 1993, 112).

The Panopticon penetrated the walls around our hidden spaces of freedom. The anxiety of surveillance caused me to monitor and police our critical Discourse. I was "functioning as a central monitor who controls student activity" (Bushnell 2003, 256). Although we were disrupting the dominant Discourses, I still used my authoritative power to control what the kids did, and what went on in the classroom. In this sense, I was accommodating the discourse of accountability, not just resisting it. According to Gore (1993), "schools are sites of domination and liberation" (112). My kids critiqued the test, they discovered the sinister history behind standardized testing, and they discussed experiences of unfairness and humiliation created by the tests; but in the end, they still completed the test, and I marked it. Their scores were entered into the computer database system of surveillance. The kids created posters of protest, but I used my power to control the form of protest, where the protest posters would go, and limited what the posters could look like (i.e. Graffiti, not explicit). I used power to

negotiate spaces for not only critical literacy, but left some room for the dominant Discourses as well. Was this appropriate? Was this ethical? How could I discuss the oppressiveness of school, yet turn around and still control my students? I rationalized that it was necessary to at least temporarily accommodate the dominant Discourses, so that we could later get away with using our own Discourses in the classroom. I felt that if I could make it *appear* that I was adhering to all dominant Discourses, administration would leave me alone, and our conversations could continue without judgement.

It was interesting to me that some of my students remained very uncertain about the space we constructed for critical literacy discourse. They felt that many of the constraints and resources of school were necessary for "proper learning", that the tests were fair, and students did well in school or not because of their natural intelligence and abilities. They believed that kids did well on tests because they worked and studied hard, and because they were smart. They did not understand or value the need to disrupt things. I noticed that these students often did well on the standardized tests. I believe that they valued what school, as it is now, could do for them. These students were mostly white males, from the dominant-Eurocentric cultures, and middle-class homes. They were usually very obedient, polite and not disruptive in class. They easily fit right into school. They believed that school was necessary to land a good job, and most aspired to become "doctors" or "lawyers", and knew that school would be necessary to get them there. They were uncomfortable rocking the boat of school.   Their posters were more inspirational, and advertised what school was good for. They discussed that some kids did not try very hard, and as such, would not go very far in life. This student believed that anyone could achieve anything they put their minds to. To this student, it wasn't school that was going to limit us. We only limit ourselves. This person went on to complete a poster that read "The Sky is the Limit. Work hard and you Can Achieve Anything."   This prompted my question: does everyone end up on top with hard work and effort? "Not always" was the conclusion of most of my students, with the exception of these few.

At first, I was really perplexed by their reaction to our conversations. They didn't seem to understand a lot of the unfairness we were talking about. I concluded that perhaps, school treated them well.   James Gee (1996) explained this for me. He explained that their primary Discourse (home Discourse) may have been quite similar on many levels to the dominant secondary Discourses (school Discourse). Because of this similarity, they would encounter fewer problems picking up the dominant Discourses of school. Their primary Discourse, like the dominant Discourses of school, equated success in school to being successful later on by landing a good job. They may have been reluctant to disrupt a good thing. Gee (1996) further explains that:

> ...secondary Discourses all build on and extend the uses of language and the values, attitudes and beliefs we acquired as part of our primary Discourse, and they may be more or less compatible with the primary Discourses of different social groups. It is of great advantage when any particular secondary Discourse is compatible (in words, deeds and values with your primary one. (142)

The other students in my class, whose primary discourses were not compatible with dominant school Discourses, were made to feel excluded from school. They could feel how school treated them unfairly. The stories of humiliation they discussed in their journals were gut-wrenching. Many discussed not doing well on tests, were often labelled, and some were even remediated by school. They felt that because they didn't do well on tests, some teachers did not like them, and often yelled at them, refusing to listen to their side of the story in arguments. I noticed that many of these students lived in the governmental housing projects, often spoke a different language at home, and/or were multi-cultural and multi-racial. According to Gee (1996), however, these students may actually have an "advantage" (146).

Some of these kids have an insight into school that others may not immediately see. This was made clear to me, when one of my IEP'd, "learning disabled" students, pointed out, during a discussion about why corporations such as Nelson Publishing would push to maintain the publication of

standardized tests and their related resources, that businesses would want to keep standardized testing

because they figured it would tell them who was smart, and who was not; who would be right for

certain jobs, and who would not. She further explained that businesses did the hiring, and would want

to know this information. I was incredibly surprised by her response, but shouldn't have been. She has

probably been told, in making decisions for high school, that because of her "learning status" she won't

do much more than hands-on service-industry work. She was intimately familiar with how and why

tests sort, and subsequently, marginalize people. This particular student may have experienced how

school discourse could be unfair, and was ready, and in some cases, eager to disrupt things. I knew this

to be the case from my own personal experiences of unfairness and humiliation of school outlined in

Chapter One. As such, I too, was eager to disrupt things.

My students and I carefully and quietly navigated and negotiated our way through the power

structures of school, looking for free space where we could control our own discourse of question and

critique. Practicing our own discourse gave us the freedom to take back some of our classroom space,

to resist dominant discourses, if only for a little while before having to move to another space. Moving

about did not change the fact that the kids still had to write the test, and I had to mark it. The dominant

spaces still existed - they did not disappear, and as much as we resisted them with our conversations,

we still had to return to them. I am realizing that the dominant Discourses are not totalizing

perspectives unless you choose to see them this way, and as such, allow them to be that way.   In a

recent conversation with Andy Manning (2010), he explained that Discourses are actually "fractured and

contradictory", leaving room for teacher and student autonomy. Discourses are, as Foucault (1990)

concurs,

> ...not once-and-for-all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are.
> We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both
> an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of
> resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (100-101)

Despite the standardized curricula and administrative surveillance, finding space within this Discourse of accountability for me, my students, and our questions was possible. The dominant Discourses, like all other Discourses, are not stable. They are shifting and changing. There are cracks within dominant Discourses, just like there are cracks in our own Discourses. Within these cracks, my students and I found space that was big enough for not only our questions, but for critique, thoughtful protest and action as well. If we make room for dominant Discourses, to preserve our jobs, or safety, then we must also assume, according to Foucault, that there is room for resistant Discourse. We need to have the courage to find those spaces, however. They are indeed there, if we are willing to look. And, if enough of us find those spaces, then maybe, our resistant Discourse could potentially become the dominant Discourse...until another Discourse pushes us out, that is.

To keep us safe, and our spaces hidden, required that the students and I negotiate power. I had to control some of our plans, because to do otherwise may have jeopardized the sustainability of our space, and ultimately our agenda. Andy Manning (2010), in conversation with me, referred to this movement between spaces as a "tactic in a tactical warfare we are using against the dominant and controlling discourses". Constantly moving to find spaces of freedom is my tactic for survival in this "war". There cannot be a "winner", however, in this kind of war; wars are seldom won. There are many chronic steps, but rarely is there acute obliteration. Instead, we are stuck in a quagmire. Power shifts between my relations and spaces, just like I move in and between spaces (Gore 1993, 94) looking for freedom. Since this "war" is perpetually far from over, so will be the conversation in my classroom.

Chapter Three

TPAs and PLCs: Acronyms for Power

*"I didn't notice any **skills** being taught when I was in your classroom last week. I need to see students learning some **skills** to feel comfortable completing your final TPA [Teacher Performance Appraisal] for the board office. I would like to come back to observe you teaching a different class, maybe during a science or math lesson? I could come in sometime when you are teaching specific skills. You see, Heidi, I am a 'black and white' kind of person. I only saw **shades of grey** when I watched you teaching," my vice-principal informed me before finalizing my Teacher Performance Appraisal.*

"I was also wondering when and how you conducted Guided Reading in your classroom? I didn't notice any records or any kind of observable evidence in your assessment binder of Guided Reading, nor did I observe it happening in your classroom. You do understand that it is mandated and should be happening at least a few days a week in all classrooms?" she probed. "How else do you determine what level of reading your kids are at? You should be creating homogenous grouping of your students based upon their reading abilities, and using the levelled books provided in the book room."

The use of the book room was monitored by our administration; I later came to find out. I have yet to use one levelled book from that room. And, I am sure they were aware of this.

"How and when are you using the mandated Nelson Literacy resources? Are you using your word wall? These are not choices. This is part of your job."

The questions kept coming. This was no "conversation".

"I use the book room occasionally." I lied. "I do, in fact, have a word wall up, and have had one up for many years now. I love the colours of the words on the wall. They are bright and cheery. You couldn't see it, however, because it was covered up by my student's artwork," I responded.

She wrote down every word I had to say during this interrogation. Because some of what I was saying was not very truthful, I began to sweat...just a little. How might this be used against me? I felt like I was on trial for some crime. But, what was my crime? Why didn't I feel comfortable sharing what I really do in my classroom, and why I do it?

"In what way are you drawing from the data obtained from CASI and OWA tests to guide your instruction? They should be completed by now, and the results entered into the provincial database system (MISA). We will be analyzing them as a group at our next PLC (Professional Learning Community) meeting. Be prepared." my vice-principal advised.

I had to pause to think of a good response for this. I didn't use these tests to guide anything in my classroom, except when the students and I critique them, and learn about their historic construction and purpose. If I admitted this to her, I worried that she would view this as being insubordinate to the test. So, again, I chose my words carefully to accommodate this dominant discourse.

"My students complete the tests, and I enter their scores in the database system. From there, my students and I analyze the tests," I replied confidently. This was true. I just left out some parts of this truth, such as the word "critically".

*She smiled and nodded her head while continuing to write down my responses for future reference. She seemed pleased with this answer, however. It **appeared** that I was doing what I was told to do.*

"I didn't notice how you differentiate for the different abilities and intelligences of your students."

*Again, using the same dominant discourse to justify myself and my practices, I replied, "I **differentiate every day**! All of my students are learning. They may, however, not all be learning the same things, or learning what we want them to learn, or participating in the same way." (Discourse learned from Andy Manning, 1993).*

"That's great! Oh yes, and could you please explain the purpose and context of your End-of-the-Month Parties? I noticed in your plans that you have them on the last Friday of every month. What is the educational value here?"

"School is supposed to be fun. I try to make it this way every day. My students are social creatures, and this is a great opportunity for them to socialize with each other, and laugh and play."

"I see," she responded while dotting her I's and crossing her t's on the report she was writing.

*These were only **some** of the questions I was asked by my vice-principal during the post-observation conference of my Teacher Performance Appraisal. Although it was intended to be, this was no conversation. This felt like more of an interrogation. My teaching philosophies and practices were called into question, as was my integrity and professionalism. My classroom didn't function in a traditional manner. I have been trying for eleven years to find out what practices work for me and my students in our classroom. I am still learning. What I do know, and try to construct, is a space where my students have many freedoms and make many of their own choices in preparation for participation in democratic citizenship. I try my best to listen to my students, giving them a voice in their own learning.*

I could sense my vice-principal's reservations about what was going on in my classroom. What she observed and listened to did not match what the ministry, board and administration viewed as teaching and learning. Regardless of what she understood, however, I believed that I was still providing my students with an education; I felt, therefore, that I was indeed doing my job. Her dissatisfaction with my classroom and uncertainty of my teaching practice was made more apparent by her insistence on staying the full ninety minutes in my classroom to observe carefully and further question my students about me and our classroom. More importantly, she also requested a second visit later in the week. This was unusual. Usually, administrators stay for one period, and certainly no more than an hour, and do not come in for a second time unless they was planning on giving an "unsatisfactory" on the TPA report, according to our collective agreement. I immediately felt that this was me. How could I be "unsatisfactory"? My students were engaged, and smiling, and learning. What more did she want from me?

My vice-principal reassured me that this was not the case. Nonetheless, I was still uneasy. She wanted to observe my classroom again because she just didn't see what she wanted to see during her first visit - namely, that I was conforming to the expectations of our board and ministry: focusing on

teaching skills explicitly, using Guided Reading during the Literacy Block, differentiating instruction for different students, using the board-approved resources, curriculum and prescribed standardized tests to guide my instruction. In response, I invited her into my classroom anytime, but would not guarantee that she would necessarily witness any skills being taught in isolation. I spoke with other teachers in my building who were also being evaluated, and sensed that they were not subjected to this kind of interrogation or threat of a second-visit. In fact, they described their experiences as being extremely "positive" and rather "helpful". Despite my resistance to many of the directives, I did not feel that this intense scrutiny seemed fair. My students were still learning and growing – I felt I was doing my job. Why was I under the microscope?

To find out what my rights were, I decided to consult with my union representatives. It seemed that my Vice-Principal was cleverly using my fear of receiving an "unsatisfactory" on my TPA, and my anxiety of having a second observation session, to coerce me on-board. The rumour of union involvement flew rapidly through our school, and my Vice-Principal and Principal seemed to have caught wind of it. I believe that with the advice and coaching of my Principal, she reluctantly backed off, citing her concern over my "increasing stress-level" as the reason.   She said, however, that she would still come in but at a later date, when I was less "stressed-out" over this matter. Blaming my emotional status, I believe, was a way for her to save face, and maintain her authority; it became her decision not to return, and not the threat of a grievance. Whatever her reason, she never did come in for a second visit, I received my TPA indicating my "adequacy" as a teacher, and for now, I have my classroom space back.

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This chapter will examine my experience with the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in which I am forced to participate, as part of the Foucauldian Panopticon designed to control and police me and my students. I will describe how I was able to survive these arduous processes by not caving in, and conforming, but by carefully and creatively explaining what I do, and how I do it, using the dominant discourse, and questioning the validity of many of the mandates which go against my own principles as a teacher. I will explore the spaces I found within this "Schoolhouse Panopticon" (Bushnell 2003) for freedom.

Five years ago, according to my principal and Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA), I was a "satisfactory" teacher, without question. My rather "grey" teaching practices were, in fact, actually celebrated. I felt confident in what I was doing, and liked that my practices were unusual. And, that was okay with administration. My principal, at the time, observed my classroom and students, and I was given a platform to share what I was most proud of in terms of my teaching practices, philosophies and

student accomplishments. I will never forget the reaction of my principal at that time when she witnessed all the wonderful things my students were given the opportunity to do in my classroom; she was so moved by these socio-economically poor children playing, co-operating, sharing, talking, writing, reading, listening, painting, smiling, laughing...that she cried!   My "End-of-the-Month Parties" were seen as valuable social channels, and fun learning events for my students. It was, at this time, acceptable and necessary for school to be "fun". My principal discussed how she wanted me to share my insights of my students, their learning and teaching with other colleagues (for whatever it may have been worth). Nonetheless, I was flattered. She valued what I was doing as a professional, and understood that *skills* were *indeed* being taught and learned. I felt that I was a teacher in charge of my own classroom, and more than just a "satisfactory" one.

Here I am five years later, doing similar things in my classroom, and *worrying* about not receiving a "satisfactory" check. Why is this? What has happened? Why are my teaching practices suddenly not sufficient and other practices more efficient? Whose practices matter? Who uses the "right" ones? Who gets to decide? Shouldn't teaching practice improve with experience? The answer to some of these questions that I received from administration was that "there is always room for improvement"; and "that teacher performance appraisals as well as professional learning communities, help teachers determine where they need to improve." They assume, then, that there is no such thing as an "accomplished" or "expert" teacher outside of those in administration, at the board office or ministry. During our pre-observation meeting, my principal explained that he was considered "the expert teacher" who will act as my "critical friend" to point out areas for improvement in my practice, as well as highlight areas of strength...of course. Together, he explained, we would establish some goals for me to work on in the next few years. While I was tempted to agree with this rationale for TPAs, I could not help wondering when I would ever be good *enough*, and who elected him as the "expert teacher" having not been an active member of a classroom in years? In addition, my "friends" don't

critique me. They accept me for who I am unconditionally. I instantly felt that I would need to change

my teaching practices, and that what I was doing was inadequate. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity

will be reoccurring themes in this chapter. According to Tarnoczi (2006), these feelings of inadequacy

and insecurity are intentionally created by those in administration, and are necessary to control

teachers – to ensure their compliance to the dominant discourses: standardized curriculum, and testing,

and other such mandates, resources and teaching practices. Tarnoczi (2006) states that

> ...each member of the organization is engaged in continuous improvement, 'forever'... [the]
> discourse has constituted the need for change as an unproblematic truth. The references to
> uninterrupted change are framed as something unquestioningly beneficial for teachers and
> students, even though the actual advantages are left unspecified...discourse links educational
> success with perpetual innovation, it enforces the view that teachers cannot and should not feel
> grounded as educational experts. (10-11)

The dominant Discourse stipulates perpetual improvement for teachers. It is assumed that teachers are

not professionals, but more like technicians and workers who require constant monitoring, guidance

and assessment to improve. I was always reading new literature about teaching and learning. I took

literacy specialist courses, and even embarked on my Master's degree in education. Is this not on-going

education? When will it be enough? Who gets to decide who needs "improvement"? What is in need

of improvement keeps changing with each new administration, so how can the improvements be

compared? New benchmarks are created each year, and with each new Ministry and administration.

What is recognized as "improvement"? Test scores? Keeping teachers constantly striving to be better,

or at least in constant change, keeps them from ever being considered as "experts" in our field. This

prevents us from being certain of our abilities, philosophies and practices, and thus, more vulnerable

and insecure, and more importantly, much more easily controlled and manipulated. If we are never

sure about what we are doing, we may always be in need of help. And, according to my principal I

needed help, whether I asked for it or not.

Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPAs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are viewed by authorities as helpful structures to improve teacher practice, and keep us accountable for providing a particular kind of education. What kind of education are we to be providing? – An education that aligns with the corporate world. I believe TPAs and PLCs are a kind of surveillance designed to open up, and control, classroom spaces which are difficult to see from casual observation. The goal of TPAs and PLCs are to assess, identify and report spaces which should be shut down because they do not follow Ministry, board, and ultimately, corporate, guidelines. I reluctantly decided to not shut down any of these spaces myself. I resisted some of these guidelines and mandates because they didn't work for my students. My students said this themselves, and via their own resistant behaviours. Many of these mandates and initiatives were just plain boring, and did not engage my kids. As such, I just couldn't conform. I wanted to wait it out to see how far I could push things.

In doing this, I believe a disruption was made. As mentioned in the anecdote to this chapter, and will be discussed further later on in this chapter, I was interrogated and threatened during my TPA, and often during my PLCs. In the past five years, there have been many initiatives and mandates thrown at us. I have found it increasingly difficult to keep up, not that I have really wanted to. My resistance to these directives did not stem from laziness or closed-mindedness, but rather, from their lack of connection with our own classroom curriculum, and objectives, developed by the students and me. Because I did not regularly use the "scientifically proven", and now mandated pedagogies, methodologies, and practices outlined by the Ministry and board, because I do not necessarily agree with many of them, and because I am often outspoken about my convictions, I believe, caused an increasing scrutiny of my practices during my TPA and during PLCs. TPAs and PLCs are a part of the accountability rhetoric of ministries and boards to ensure "quality" teaching in classrooms, as though there hasn't been quality teaching for some time. As Bushnell (2003) suggests, it is "presumed that external regulation of teachers is necessary because we cannot trust teachers to regulate themselves.

This centralization and externalization of power began in the early 20th Century and is finding its current

manifestation in the narrowly defined accountability and standards movement" (251). I do not know of

any teacher who does not teach to high standards, or who cannot adequately determine the needs of

his or her students. To whose standards are they referring anyway? We are professionals who know

our students, and are accountable to them...always have been. I believe I am one of those teachers who

continue to teach to high standards and have always been accountable to my students, their families,

my community, and my colleagues and principal. More importantly, I've always been accountable to

myself. I have high standards in my classroom, and that is why I am resisting the current mandates and

methodologies being dumped on my students and me. They violate much of what I believe in as a

professional, and as a human being. Kohl (2009) articulates my feelings about education,

> I believe in high standards of literacy. I believe that students are capable of high and
> sophisticated levels of thinking and writing. I believe that children's imaginations and
> intelligence must be engaged in their learning. And I believe that respect for persons, for
> teachers, and students, is at the core of good education. Consequently, it is up to those of us
> who care about moral quality of life in the school to question the values at the core of current
> pseudo-school reform and refuse to accept dehumanizing, damaging and morally questionable
> schooling. (2)

I am resisting the mandates that are unfair to my students. I am not resisting them without due cause.

Ultimately, I survived this intense investigation of my classroom. I am still a teacher in Room 11.

I eventually received a "satisfactory" on my TPA, and am still attending PLC meetings. This came with a

cost, however. My emotions were certainly tested. But more importantly, I had to go on "trial" to

prove that I am indeed a "satisfactory" teacher, doing what I felt was in the best interest of my students.

I had to *prove* I was doing my job. I had to fight to preserve my unique classroom space, and to do so, I

had to disrupt things a little.

PLCs specifically are supposed to be places of "teacher-directed" learning with colleagues. It

sounds ideal – teachers learning together. "Even the words 'professional', 'learning' , and 'community'

leave the impression that participants are embarking on a path toward self-actualization and self-

development" (Tarnozi 2006, 1). Like the TPAs, however, I think the agenda of PLCs is quite sinister. I

have yet to be asked what I would be interested in learning or discussing during any PLC. And, when I

have voiced my concerns or requests, my principal indicated to me that "my opinion did not matter". I

had a job to do, and that job was not determined by me. More and more, I was dictated as to what that

job looks like, and sounds like. The focus of most PLCs has primarily revolved around the "data" derived

from the standardized tests. The data was analyzed with our peers. Low-scoring students are red-

flagged, how we are responding or have responded to the scores is revealed for "friendly" critique, and

common goals to improve the scores are established, and are to be fulfilled by the next few meetings.

TPAs and PLCs are *imposed* on teachers by authorities. They are not optional, and their purpose is to

keep the classroom door open, and what is happening inside of the classroom easily observable. They

are to keep us accountable, as though without them teachers would not be accountable, and would not

provide a positive and productive education for children.

TPAs and PLCs are evaluative structures which aim to judge and control what I do in my

classroom. I am not to be trusted to do what is in the best interests of my students. According to

Foucault (1977), these structures of observation and evaluation are necessary in the maintenance of

power and discipline over teachers in the Panopticon.

> Disciplinary power...is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification. (187)

What I am doing, and how I am doing it is monitored and observed by authorities during the Teacher

Performance Appraisal, and during our bi-weekly Professional Learning Community meeting. During

these evaluations, I am not a subject engaged in mutual discussions and conversations, rather, I am an

object to be manipulated and moulded. During both, we must disclose and share what we are doing

with our principal, vice-principal and our colleagues. They either confirm that what I'm doing with my

students is appropriate for improving test scores, and achieving our collective goals, or they offer

suggestions for improvement, whether or not I ask for them. This is supposed to be a "helpful" session.

I see PLCs as venues to control what is going on in classrooms.

They *document* what we are doing, and how, for board officials, and proceed to scrutinize and

critique our every move in the classroom. Documentation is a form of intimidation over teachers as

well. Who we are, what we believe, what we are doing, and how we are doing it is carefully observed,

recorded during each meeting, and later analyzed. They are, as Andy Manning (2011) indicated to me

during a recent conversation via Skype, "writing me into existence". What my Vice-Principal documents

is exactly what happened, how it happened, and is an account of who I am. Clearly, what happened and

what she recorded during her TPA in my classroom were entirely different. This documentation had

potentially serious implications for me as well. According to Foucault (1977),

> The examination [TPAs and PLCs] places individuals in a field of surveillance, also
> situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents
> that capture and fix them. The procedures of examination were at the same time by a
> system of intense registration and of documentary accumulation. A 'power of writing'
> was constituted as an essential part of the mechanisms of discipline (189).

These TPA and PLC meetings were to demonstrate how we *are* adhering to board and ministry

guidelines, policies and mandates, and to also expose how we *are not* adhering to such policies.

Whatever is recorded is what counts. Observations are always interpretive, and subjective. Writing

things down makes these perspectives permanent, however. These are all elements of accountability

discourse.

My principal viewed "successful teachers" as those having mastered, or who were at least

attempting to use, the "best practices" set out by the board, and those who followed, without question,

all of the mandates set forth. Conformity was celebrated. The conformists, in fact, were often selected

as mentors to the "less successful" teachers (regardless of seniority or experience) within our meetings.

Anyone not doing these things was seen as in need of "improvement" in the form of extra training

and/or guidance or mentorship provided to us by the "successful teachers". It didn't matter how our

students, whom we know best, were responding to the practices. Our students, according to authority,

should be doing exactly what we tell them to be doing. The assumption was that we were the teachers

in the classroom, and we held the power to coerce our students into doing exactly what we want them

to be doing, without question. My classroom just didn't work this way...no democracy does. Just

because my teaching practices did not match the dominant practices, did that mean my practices

needed improvement? And, what did it really mean to "improve" my teaching skills? Is teaching a

science or an art? I view it as an art -- something that is difficult to define and is very different for

different people.   As mentioned in Chapter One, Susan Ohanian (2009) has stated, "you can only teach

who you are" (376). This lends itself to the idea that teaching is indeed an art. And, as such, how do you

really "improve" art? How do you "improve" who you are?

I viewed my Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) specifically as an opportunity for

administration to directly investigate what I was doing, and question it, in the hope of eventually

transforming it, or at least making me feel insecure enough to *want* to transform it in order to conform.

During a TPA, unlike PLC meetings, administration came into my classroom for observation. While

there, they not only observed my classroom and practice, but they interviewed my students. I found

this process rather humiliating. I was asked to provide specific evidence of what I do in my classroom

and how I do it. This plethora of material was given to my vice-principal for several days over which to

ponder. She looked through my daybook, my assessment binder, samples of student work, my files, my

plans, my communication logs, and my emergency daybook. My classroom set-up and design itself was

studied. My vice-principal was looking for particular items to be on display such as word walls, anchor

charts, and student success criteria. This was part of the dominant Discourse of "best practices" and

"accountability".   "Scientific evidence" had been provided by someone (no names were given) that

these were effective in helping students learn. I was not sure of their validity in "improving" student

learning.   The only things I was certain of, was that students were indeed learning. Instead, most of my

walls were cluttered with student art, writing pieces, protest posters, pictures, photographs, inspiring

quotes, sports team posters and pictures of favourite poets and songwriters. Although these were not

sanctioned wall pieces, it was what mattered to my students and me. It was a representation of who we

were and who we were becoming. We focused our time displaying this learning.

My vice-principal let me know that she was also specifically looking for how I conduct Guided

Reading, how I organize my students into reading groups according to ability, how I use the standardized

test results to guide my teaching (which focused primarily on *skills*), how I used the standardized

curriculum in the classroom to direct what students were learning, how I was differentiating their

learning and my teaching for the "multiple intelligences", and how I use the board-approved textbooks.

I had to present everything to her for examination and approval. I had to "provide easily verifiable

evidence of [my] cooperation" (Bushnell 2003, 259). I was under direct investigation, the case being:

was I a "satisfactory" teacher? I felt that I was a satisfactory teacher despite *not* using many of the

prescribed mandates or following the new initiatives.

Some of what she observed, she did not appreciate, or at least was very uncertain about. First,

and foremost, according to my vice-principal, she did not observe any of my students learning any

"skills". She noticed immediately that I did not directly use the curriculum, but followed the curriculum

of what the students and I were interested in. This seemed, to use her language directly, really "fuzzy"

to her. She believed that skills needed to be taught explicitly in the classroom, and that children

required these skills to ensure their future employment. She saw students' heads as empty vessels

waiting to be filled with information from me. As Christine Sleeter (2008) stated,

> For corporatocracy, teaching and learning processes that emphasize mastery of content precede
> or trump thinking; teaching processes that emphasize problem-solving and solution-generation
> are characterized as "fuzzy" if they leave students without a sense of correct, factual knowledge.
> Corporatocratic reform proposals conceptualize young people as empty vessels to fill with
> knowledge partly because their authors tend to conceptualize school as businesses and young
> people as products. Implicitly, young people are taught to look to "experts" as the primary
> source of knowledge, and to consume expert knowledge rather than produce it (7).

My vice-principal viewed that the role of education was to provide students with the skills necessary to

find employment in the workforce. She is part of the "corporatocracy", where education and business

work hand in hand. Schools are seen as institutions which supply a vibrant and successful workforce,

ensuring profits for those at the top. I want more for my students. I want them to be able to question

the unfair corporate world, not just become obedient, compliant workers with the necessary and

needed work skills of the time. I want them to be able to actively participate in, and preserve, our

democracy, not simply perpetuate the iniquitous capitalistic ideals, where the rich get richer and the

poor get poorer. My goal is for them to think for themselves, to problem-solve, to critique and to

continue to ask important questions...and even unimportant ones. My students have had their share of

unfairness for most their lives. Although I don't teach such "skills" explicitly, my students were learning

and demonstrating many "skills", most of which were not taught but learned. My vice-principal missed

so much in her documented observation. This is a big problem in trying to capture teaching, learning

and classroom dynamics through observation, and writing.

All of the skills my students were learning were actually embedded within what they were

doing. Christine Sleeter (2008) supported this idea,

> For democratic educators, teaching/learning processes that develop critical thinking precede
> and trump mastery of particular content. Democratic educators value mastery of academic
> skills and concepts, but believe these must be embedded in thinking; thinking is not something
> to do later on (Kohn 1999). Since learning to live and participate in democratic life is inherently

> social, the teaching/learning process should engage young people with others who are both similar and different from themselves (Dewey 1938). In addition, it should engage everyone in learning to produce as well as consume knowledge. (6)

My kids were learning all kinds of skills all of the time, not all of which were sanctioned, nor were they necessarily observable or measurable. They were learning as much from me as they were from each other. I was not the only "expert" in the classroom. They were constructing their own knowledge with and from each other. I was so proud of the environment my students and I had worked hard to create. There was space for all of the kids, regardless of their abilities, interests or backgrounds. My students were trying to find out who they were, or as Bronwyn Davies (2009) described it as the "art of becoming" (17). My vice-principal, during her observation of us, was only looking for sanctioned literacies, skills and observable learning. I was thrilled and excited by what I saw my students doing that day. I noticed that they were critically discussing and connecting with poetry and lyrics and other types of writing, they were sharing, typing, reflecting, writing, reading, taking photographs, constructing pieces of art, talking about the weekend, asking for advice about what should be included in their portfolio, they were organizing, logging on to You Tube, giggling, helping each other, supporting each other, giving feedback, setting goals, picking favourites, deciding on least favourites, posting things onto the wall, photocopying, filing, omitting, editing, revising, completing, internet researching. What kids do in the classroom are types of social and cultural practices (Gee 1996, 41).

Teacher Research Journal (excerpt): November 26, 2009 "Evaluation Day"

Vice Principal came in 5 minutes early today. She came in so quietly, that I barely noticed her entrance. I was trembling and breathing heavily, anxiously awaiting her arrival. She immediately set off looking around my classroom, noticing what I had up on my walls. She had a pen and clipboard in hand, recording what she observed. My walls were mostly covered with student work, pictures of students and myself at work, shared reading pieces, news articles of interest, photocopies of movies we've watched together, memories and reflections of fieldtrips we'd been on, inspirational quotes, pictures of past students, artwork, poetry. I knew she was looking for word walls, anchor charts, Q-charts. I did have a word wall, but student work happened to be covering it at the time. I wonder if she knew this.

I shared some new titles with the kids. I purposely chose to purchase and share titles that critiqued school such as The Report Card by Andrew Clements. I distributed these new books to children who wanted to begin reading them today, and off the kids went to their quiet space for reading. They were all over the room; on desks, beanbags, lying in cozy corners. I roamed about talking with kids about what they were reading and observing what they were doing. I recorded their titles and page numbers on my clipboard. This was my "Guided Reading". I also helped one student find a book. This student (girl) had been looking for some time at the book shelf. I thought she may need some suggestions. I knew the perfect book for her to try: Someone Like

You. It was my favourite Sarah Dessen novel. Other kids were returning books and filling in their reading records. Kids were reading all kinds of books. A few didn't even have books. They were looking at comic books. One girl, who was not a strong reader, chose to read one of the poetry books created by another student that was on display. One group of two went into the back room to discuss their books. Another group quietly asked me if they could go in the hallway to discuss their books because they were reading the same book and wanted to talk without disrupting the others. I knew that this was not permitted by administration...the kids needed supervision at all times! I said, "No." I suggested they go into my backroom area to talk, along with the other group. This might be received better by administration who was watching this go down. She was recording this. I looked around the room and it appeared kind of chaotic at first until the kids got settled. Would she see it this way?

The kids and I met in a circle for a reading and discussion of the poem The Little Boy – whose creativity and thinking was controlled by school and teachers, making it difficult for him to think for himself. I loved this! I wonder how she would receive this. My students were amazing with their responses. The ideas that they recorded on their pages and shared were great. Ideas that they included: power, control, feelings that some people are better than you, who's right?, who decides what art should look like? This was powerful. One of my students stuttered in sharing a connection to this piece. The kids were so patient waiting for him to finish. My final benediction was this: don't let me or anyone else take away your creativity, your individuality. Today make your writing and your portfolios your own. I glanced toward the VP, and she was writing furiously. What was she recording? Did she notice the critical literacy? I asked kids to share what their plans were for portfolio workshop today. Most were in the midst of assembling their portfolios. I recorded their plans, and sent them off to fulfill what they needed to do, indicating that I would be around to help them. Off they went.

What I saw next just inspired me. It was chaotic in my room. My kids were everywhere, doing different things, and completing different sections of their portfolios. Some were in their seat, some sat near friends. Others were sharpening pencils, or looking for cool paper to use for their portfolio pages. It was exciting. There was a buzz in the classroom. I loved this kind of day. I had 4 kids on IEPs and modified programs who were participating and included in all of these activities. They were creating a collection of their work and reflecting on the term just like the rest of the class. It would be difficult for anyone to find who they were. All of my students were taking my advice, and making these portfolios a reflection of who they were. My VP moved around the room with me, listening to my conversations and recording them. She talked to a couple of students asking them to explain their portfolios, and the purpose of them. I couldn't help but eavesdrop on this conversation. I tried to be inconspicuous about it. Luckily, my kids could respond articulately about what they were doing. I breathed a sigh of relief. They are so smart!

*Some kids were on laptops printing up their reflections and feelings about the term. Many were listening to their ipods. I know that they are not supposed to have them here, but I allow it. I am sure I will hear about it later. Other kids were working on final copies of writing that meant something to them from this term. Some were simply revising these pieces, making them better. A small group of kids asked to continue with their reading conference in the corner. I had no problem with this. Kids were going back and rereading some of our shared reading pieces to include in their portfolios. Most seemed to want to include the poem we just read today. They recorded why they loved these pieces on the actual handout before putting it into their portfolios. I noticed that some kids were on YouTube. I wasn't sure how the VP would take this. There was a small group of boys gathered around a computer. I went over, of course, to check it out. I had to before the VP did, to ensure that it was "appropriate". They were re-watching some of the Poetry Slammers (Daniel Beatty) that we had looked at this year before our Poetry Slam. I let them be. I loved his performance of "Knock, Knock!" as much as they did. A couple of girls were taking pictures of their friends for their portfolios. They were laughing at some photos they would **not** be including. One student wanted a picture of me. I declined the offer. I was not sure what my VP would say. Where would that photo go? The girls also took pictures of the classroom, and where they sat. Great idea! Again, photographing in the classroom was potentially a legal issue with the office, but I let it go. I didn't want to draw attention to these girls who were having too much fun with photos.*

I was listening to many of their conversations as well, wondering what my VP would hear. They were all chatting with one another. Some were asking what they would be doing after school or explained what they did on the weekend. Some discussed what they watched on TV last night. I noticed that some took ideas from each other. I stopped occasionally and celebrated some great ideas for portfolios. Soon thereafter, many kids were doing the same things. My artists were cutting construction paper to create some really interesting cover pages and dividers to organize their folders. They all had to complete their goals for next term, and explain what they might do differently to achieve them. Most of their goals involved reading more books, and they discussed reading specific authors. They also had to reflect on their term and describe what they did, and what their favourites were and what their least favourites were. What was their best work? And, what was not so good? I noticed they were sharing their portfolios with each other. Some were making suggestions, others were just observing. The girls posted some of the photographs of us busy at work on the Archives Wall. Another group of girls and boys were laughing uncontrollably at what one boy drew for his cover page. He, like I, was no artist. He was trying to draw a self-portrait! Not easy, I reassured him. I was thinking that maybe I should quiet them down. The noise level was growing. But why? They were having fun. Some students were updating their reading and writing records, while others were typing up table of contents. I noticed that some

kids were on the internet. I asked them what they were looking up. They needed to know the author's name of the book they had recorded on their reading record. They forgot to include that...at least that is the story they told me. Another student wanted a copy of a reading response to include in her portfolio. I often let the kids photocopy if they know how, but because the VP was in the room, I told her to put it in the photocopy bin, and I would copy it for her later. I have noticed that I kept policing this classroom. Nonetheless, at the end of the class, I had a lot to celebrate. I shared everything I noticed them doing. A few offered to share some things I missed. This was my "mini-lesson" for the class. I often do this at the END of class so that I am able to see what children CAN do first. Whenever I did this, I noticed the next day, kids would be trying some of the things we celebrated. But, like everything else, this doesn't always happen. And, that's ok.

I thanked the kids for their hard work today. I was so proud of them. It really amazed me all the wonderful things they were doing. Their creativity surpassed my expectations. I wondered if they knew that they were being watched as much as I did. Their ideas went beyond what I imagined for their portfolios. Some did not want to stop. Reluctantly, they put away their portfolios, computers, cleaned up their art and put away their cameras and iPods.

We didn't have much time remaining, but just enough for a read aloud. The kids cleared their desks quickly and settled back for our read aloud. I had decided (usually, I ask the kids for input) to begin reading The Report Card...One of our new titles today. The bell rang, however, before I could begin. It was recess. The kids went out, and I told them we would continue with our read aloud after recess. I thanked the VP for coming in, and said that I would see her later. She replied that she would be coming back into my classroom after recess. She had already been there for a good 60 minutes. What more would she want to see? I was exhausted from moving around and policing my classroom. This was a normal portfolio workshop, but I was nervous about what she would think of it. Kids were solving problems and making decisions. I saw a lot of learning and teaching. Would she?

This is what I observed going on in my classroom. This is what my kids were doing, and my vice-principal missed so much of this wonderful learning in her TPA report. She reported that I used many of the "Daily Five Strategies" in my Literacy program (I am not exactly sure what the "Daily Five" are, but my guess is that it involves reading and writing), and that students felt comfortable taking risks in my classroom. She said that my "questioning techniques were excellent", and that I got kids thinking at "higher levels". She mentioned that my "literacy program is continuing to evolve to incorporate many of the components of a successful balanced literacy program" and that I am "encouraged to work more closely with the LNST to further develop my program". Further develop this program? Develop this program into what? Something more in line with the board and Ministry I am sure. She did not include much of this data on her report. Most specific observations were left off. She also reported that she did not see much differentiation going on in my classroom. Everything was differentiated in my eyes. She stated on my TPA, however, that I am "encouraged to develop an understanding of the IEP process, and build a repertoire of different ways to modify the program for exceptional students". She admitted later that she had not even taught this grade before. But, she was the "expert" teacher judging me, my classroom practices and students.

I was disappointed that she felt she didn't see any real "skills" or sanctioned learning going on in our classroom, and that she felt she needed to come back for another visit. This was devastating for me. Andy Manning (1993) indicated in his opening address that, "...learning involves not only the personal construction of social and cultural ways of knowing but also the possibility to, in Dewey's term 'break the crust of convention'. Learning is neither cumulative nor linear" (5). Learning is messy! It's all over the place. This was what my classroom looked like...messy. It was not "black and white", as she believed. It was so many shades of "grey". We were dealing with human beings, not objects. It was difficult and too simplistic to equate learning to mastering a series of prescribed "skills". How do we really know when students have "learned" something once and for all? How do we know for sure what skills they have learned and which ones they haven't? Do we really know this? How do we know if they have even learned what we set out for them to learn? What are they learning? I am not always certain of the answers to these questions. I wanted to pose them to her. I wonder if she had the answers. I didn't go there. What I did know is that my students were learning, and that their learning was messy and scattered. There was definitely a lot of important learning going on this classroom. Unfortunately, it was not recognized or even valued by my vice-principal.

Another big focus during my TPA, and subsequently during PLC meetings, was Guided Reading. I had absolutely no records for Guided Reading, because I refused to do Guided Reading. I believed that Guided Reading, a ministry mandate and part of the dominant discourse, limited what my students could read and talk about. Guided Reading was the latest "rage" within my board. They invested a lot of money in the Guided Reading program: book-rooms, levelled books, reading tables, Guided Reading resources, PLC-time discussing and learning how to "do" Guided Reading. I resisted creating reading groups in my classroom based on student "ability" which Guided Reading required, because I did not want to use the for-profit levelled books in the book-room; more importantly, I did not want to humiliate or embarrass the students in my class by grouping them. My smart students would realize

very quickly that the "chickadee group", for example, was the "lower-levelled" reading group, and the "eagles" were the "stronger" readers. As well, the books written by publishing companies for the purpose of Guided Reading and profit, were boring and not real examples of good literature. The glossy covers and snazzy pictures reminded me of the *profit* that was being made by publishing companies off of the mandatory levelled books the Guided Reading program required. What really bothered me about some of the levelled books is that the publishers would take original literature written by real authors using beautiful language, and edit the material making it more "suitable" for targeted groups. Who were *they* to change this material? In changing the material, did they change the meaning and intentions of the author? I preferred that my kids found books at their own determined "reading level" (i.e. a book they can read, comprehend and be interested in), rather than labelling or segregating the kids themselves. Each student, I felt, could label the books as being easy, difficult or just right. This way, we were labelling books, not kids (Atwell 2007, 40). Labelling the kids as being at a particular determined reading level "undermines their confidence...and narrows their reading experience to selections predetermined to be written at the right 'level'" (Atwell 2007, 40). My kids loved reading all kinds of books , magazines, internet pages, etc. by *real* authors and about *real* issues and topics that they cared about. I refused to subject them to the made-for-profit and extremely dull books in the book-room.

Guided Reading resources and books also provided scripts for teachers to follow. The scripts were aimed at explicitly teaching students comprehension strategies, the effectiveness of which I was uncertain. According to Ronald Carver (1987, as cited in Atwell 2007), "if educators are most concerned with helping students become better comprehenders in general, as is commonly measured by standardized tests of reading comprehension or informal reading inventories, there is no evidence that the currently touted instructional practices are beneficial" (124). I didn't want to waste valuable reading time, nor did I want to interrupt my students' enjoyment of their books to ask silly and predetermined

questions. Instead, I would simply ask how things were going with respect to their novels. I was always

amazed at what I learned from this simple question; I learned about their reading capabilities,

comprehension abilities, the fabulous books they were reading, and more importantly, I would learn

about the lives they were leading, and the people they were becoming as a result of their reading.

According to Nancie Atwell (2007), "what I should know about my kids as readers, day to day, is whether

they are okay: are they understanding what they're reading? Happy with it? In the reading zone? In

need of advice or information from me?" (91). I did this. I tried not to impose any kind of superficial

conversation, like that outlined in the Guided Reading resources. I wanted us to talk authentically about

our books. My students really enjoyed this time with their books. I firmly believed that "frequent,

sustained, voluminous reading will improve reading comprehension" (Atwell 2007, 43), not reading

some short clip from a levelled Guided Reading book, and answering a series of prescribed questions. I

wanted my students to love literature and use it to find out who they were, and not simply to "find the

facts: main ideas, supporting details, causes and effects, plot events, settings, character motivations"

(Atwell 2007, 55) as the Guided Reading program teaches them to do.

Initially, I thought about fabricating some Guided Reading forms to make it look like I was doing

Guided Reading with my students. I thought about simply making up the groupings, and faking this kind

of data. Like I did in Chapter Two with the placing of the protest posters, I was, once again, policing

myself to protect my classroom space. My integrity, this time, stopped me from doing this, however. I

felt that what I was doing was the right thing for my students, and that I should feel confident in this. I

had a lot of research behind me. The kids were reading...they were reading a lot, and a lot of different

things (computer games, magazines, novels, newspapers, institutions, You-Tube, websites, graphic

novels, art, etc.), and not just the text material that Guided Reading offered. Kids were reading, and I

couldn't help but see this as the point. Did it really matter that I wasn't using the Guided Reading

Program? I was still fulfilling the dominant literacy Discourse of getting kids "reading and writing". I was

certain that I had to stay strong, and stand up for what I believed in. I pitched my fudged records, and

waited for the questions to come.

I figured that if I could confidently explain how I assess their reading, and how I guide readers,

and why I do it in this way, I may be left alone. This was not the case, however. Although this rationale

gave my vice-principal some pause to think, she replied that Guided Reading was not a choice, but

rather a mandate that I needed to follow. Or else...what? I wanted to ask, but didn't. Her threat did

make me worry. What I was doing *would* be considered insubordination. I could be written up, and

could potentially lose my job. I knew that our union did not support resistance of mandated programs.

My fears were especially acute knowing that I was under the microscope, and that so many people could

potentially review my TPA; people who could bring disciplinary action against me.

To keep me safe, I used their discourse to carefully explain what I was doing in my classroom. I

argued that what I was doing was, in fact, a *version* of Guided Reading. My students were reading

"levelled" books written by real authors. They were talking about their books, and answering questions.

They were engaged in conversations, but not question and answer interrogations, however. What we

were doing may not have looked like the Guided Reading that Nelson Publishing supports, but can't it

count? I agreed that it was difficult to observe the Guided Reading that was going on in my classroom,

but I reassured my vice-principal that that didn't mean it wasn't going on. I also let her know that I did

indeed "assess" my students' reading. I did not, however, use numbers, but rather, I used notes

outlining their accomplishments and describing what I learned from our conversations. The Guided

Reading program, mandated by my district, makes reading and reading comprehension measurable and

easily observable...an essential component to ensuring discipline within the Panopticon. It was easy to

walk by a classroom and see the official Guided Reading going on: students in groups, reading the same

texts, at Guided Reading tables with a teacher, questions being asked, correct answers being given. This

scripted and predetermined program keeps teachers and students on task. "...Dominant ideology is so all inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as natural, commonsensical, and inviolable" (McLaren 1989, 176). My vice-principal was trained in the dominant Discourse of the board and ministry about Guided Reading, among other things. She did not question the research, resources or mandates of the board. I assume she was under her own pressures to conform. As such, she believed the Guided Reading program to be important in the development of student literacy. I used this dominant language, and my own research, to explain my "program" to her. This, I believe, helped to keep me safe, and in my classroom. Although she threatened to return to my classroom for a second observation, this did not happen. I have been left alone. Maybe she felt that my rationale and research made sense? Maybe she thought that I was on to something? Maybe she agreed with my questions about Guided Reading? Maybe, just maybe, she was fearful of what union might say about this second visit? Maybe she didn't want to confront me on this issue anymore? Whatever her reason, to this day, I do not use the board's version of Guided Reading. I have yet to group any students according to their so-called reading abilities. I have yet to use the book-room, the levelled books, or any of the other Guided Reading resources provided. And, I am still employed. I take comfort in this small victory during this extremely stressful TPA.

TPAs and PLCs are also vehicles for administration to monitor our students' test scores, and find out what we are doing to enhance them. Assessment to authorities meant that learning was taking place in the classroom. According to Kohl (2009),

> Teachers under surveillance are also the agents of surveillance since they are expected to do continuous monitoring of their students' progress. Continuous monitoring implies that learning takes place in measurable increments and that constant testing [and assessment] somehow contributes to enhanced performance. Whether it does or not, it reinforces educational practice which has no space for conversation, exploration, or the personalization of learning. The classroom becomes a humanly impoverished environment, a sanitized place where students' personality, charm, and ingenuity have no place. Morally, it contributes to depriving the young of opportunities for the development of their minds. (2)

Testing and assessment, then, was never easy for me to do. My records indicated that during my TPA.

Similarly to Guided Reading, I resisted using standardized test results to guide my instruction, or to

assess student progress. I kept rather scattered lists of marks and grades in my assessment binder just

to say that I created grades for my students. I preferred to make *notes* of all the wonderful things my

students *were* doing in class.   I didn't like focusing on what they *were not* doing. I was also unable to

show my vice-principal any long-ranged or even short-ranged plans. I explained to her that I was unsure

of where my students would take me. How could I possibly anticipate what was going to transpire in my

classroom?

My vice-principal also requested samples of student work at different "achievement" levels. I

did not differentiate the levels (except when I had to on the report cards).   I could only show her a

variety of student samples. My students and I did not follow the Ontario Achievement Chart. Instead,

we used the "Sales Grading Policy" (adapted from Linda Christensen's *Teaching for Joy and Justice,*

2010) which stated that if students participated to the best of their ability, came to class prepared to

participate in their own way, and they completed the activities presented, they would earn an "A" on

their report card. This really raised eyebrows with administration! I was reminded that my job was to

assess and grade students, use the standardized tests, and related resources, and to follow the

standardized curriculum. She further explained the importance of "knowing where our students are at"

compared to those in other classrooms or in other areas of the province. I was getting confused as to

whether she was referring to the achievement of students or teachers here.

I always thought that my role was to provide an education, not prepare my kids for a test. The

tests themselves are not fair to my students. They do not measure their intellectual capabilities, but

seem to measure how well they can write a test.   To me, this should not be part of my job as a teacher.

I don't even need my students to actually write any of the tests to really know how they would do on

them anyway – not well. The Ontario curriculum and tests were not written with them in mind. According to Ayers and Ayers (2011), standardized tests challenge multiculturalism. They marginalize those whose lives are not reflected on the test – namely my poor, culturally and linguistically diverse students. So, we find our own curriculum in my classroom, and act on it. Although my students dread every moment of this (as I outlined in Chapter Two), they do indeed write the tests just before the submission deadline and I mark them quickly, and then we move on. The tests are supposed to give direction to what teachers should be teaching in their classrooms. We are to analyze the results, looking for deficiencies. This is such a narrow view of learning. What have my students learned that is not accounted for on the test? Does that make it unimportant? Who gets to determine what we learn? Can anyone really determine this? Regardless of my questions, the "next step" or teaching goal for me that my vice-principal provided on my TPA was to "use the data derived from the tests to guide your lessons". She gets to provide goals for me? As a professional, should I not be the one to determine what it is I would like to work toward? I suppose I can live with that next step, although I have yet to make it.

TPAs and PLCs are clearly another part of the Panopticon described by Foucault (1977): "The Panopticon is a physical and social structure designed for the observation and regulation of its residents' activities...Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor" (200). What I do, and how I do it, is certainly made visible during TPAs and PLCs. I had no choice but to open my classroom cell to the scrutiny of "experts", who would document, assess and could potentially modify my classroom. If I did not agree to this, my job and teaching licence could be in serious jeopardy. The imposed fear of punishment helps discipline people into line (Foucault 1977). And, according to Ayers and Ayers (2011), "fear permeates schools today" (x). It helps to control what my students and I do. TPAs and PLCs operated under the assumption that I would change myself, my practices and my philosophies to avoid consequences, and preserve my job.

The fear of exclusion is also created during TPAs and PLCs, and can lay the groundwork for

compliance with board objectives. It seemed like I was being compared to other teachers, and against a

set of predetermined standards and practices. If I didn't measure up, I would feel inadequate and

excluded from the group. And, I left most PLCs feeling this way. I believed that this feeling was

intentionally created. Tarnoczi (2006) explained that "...exclusion can be used to promote educational

managers' interests ... [in that] a 'sense of belonging' to a PLC [or being a 'satisfactory' teacher like

everyone else] is expected to eliminate competing claims to organizational management" (15).   This

seemed to me like a form of psychological manipulation to control human beings. The idea was that if I

wasn't doing what another teacher was doing, and they were applauded or rewarded for their action, I

would feel left out, and want to do what that other teacher was doing – a type of coercion. As a result, I

second-guessed the validity of what I was doing in my classroom after almost every PLC meeting, and

most certainly felt uncertain, as outlined previously, during my TPA. Fear of exclusion created

insecurity. It's believed that feelings of insecurity might cause us to change; to conform to what others

were doing, and to what was celebrated during the TPA or PLC meeting, which was almost always

aligned with board or ministry discourse (Tarnoczi 2006, 15).

At many points leading up to the TPA, and prior to PLC meetings, I contemplated changing what

I was doing, or at least lying about it to satisfy the requirements of my administrators, even at the

expense of my students, professionalism, and integrity. The notion of consequences is usually powerful

in persuading people to behave in a particular way and to do particular things (Davies 1999, 151).

Foucault (1977) explained that the Panopticon does not have to exercise any direct form of power. It

does not require a heavy-hand to control and manipulate its members. Foucault (1977) further stated,

> ...constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed...its strength is that it never really intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise...without any physical instrument, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of mind over mind' (206).

The imposed fear of intervention, insubordination, job termination, and disrespect from peers or administration, and subsequent exclusion from the group, was intended to help control me. It tried to push me into line, making what I do, and how I do it more standardized, and as such, more easily controlled. It worked to a degree. I conformed in some ways, such as administering the standardized tests, not because I was being constantly and directly monitored, but because I could be at any one moment (Foucault 1977). I policed myself by determining what I had to do in my classroom to stay safe (determining test scores), and what I thought I could get away with (not imposing the Guided Reading Program). Despite my fears, I was able to peel back at least a few arms of the Panopticon during my TPA.

It was during my PLC meetings, that the arms of administration enveloped me again. There was really no escaping the Panopticon. I seemed to be able to fight off one area of the Panopticon, only to be introduced to another shortly thereafter. My students' test scores were not good. As such, my performance as a teacher was directly called into question by my principal during a PLC meeting. Bushnell (2003) reminded me that the test results were as much about teachers as about the students.

> ...standardized tests...overshadow the work of teachers...as they constitute the ultimate evaluation of teachers' abilities. Test scores are published in local newspaper, by schools, and property values rise and fall according to these scores. (262)

I was being held directly accountable for low test scores, something that was also a concern during my TPA. Holding teachers accountable for test scores, also kept us from focusing on the real systemic issues of low test scores. Tarnoczi (2006) explained that "by focusing responsibility on the teacher, PLC rhetoric renders the educational governance framework invisible and therefore, not contestable" (14). Pointing the finger in the direction of teachers kept us from pointing the finger back at administration, the board, or the Ministry. The PLC meeting gave us the space to discuss this openly with all eyes watching. I was pulled into an open dialogue with my principal. In PLCs, my principal and our LNST (Literacy and Numeracy Support Teacher/Coach) were always trying to engage us in "conversation".

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This "conversation", as administration liked to call it, usually ended up with teachers being challenged, attacked, embarrassed, and subsequently, silenced. No matter how much I tried to resist this engagement knowing their motive, my principal always managed to drag me into the "conversation". I had difficulty keeping my mouth shut on such issues that mattered to me and my students. He knew that. This form of forced or coerced dialogue is an intentional part of the Panopticon. I believe that "use of this dialogue is a calculative technology that aims to change or reconstitute an individual's behaviour...through open dialogue [during PLCs and TPAs] teachers are expected to learn to share their inner most thoughts to discover and break down negative beliefs which are keeping them from being more creative and productive" (Tarnoczi 2006, 16), aligning with the vision of the Ministry. Getting me to open up about my opinions around standardized testing and Guided Reading helped my principal and vice-principal to understand my perspective, not because they were really interested in what I had to say, but rather, to try to change or reconstruct my thoughts so that they might be more in line with the agenda, goals and direction of the Ministry. This seemed to me like another "game"...another form of mental manipulation and control.

When I shared my thoughts, I was always put on the spot. I was bombarded with a series of prepared questions and researched statistics challenging what I was saying. I was put on "trial" until I could no longer defend myself on the spot. As a result of this "show", many in my PLC group became more reluctant to share their thoughts. I was often made to feel very embarrassed at the end of such "discussions". This was an intentional form of intimidation. By responding openly and honestly during PLCs, as I was encouraged to do, I was almost immediately silenced by my principal who let me know explicitly, and in front of my peers, how little my opinion mattered.

Teacher Research Journal (excerpt): March 24, 2009 "Another PLC meeting"

...I did not want to admit what I was doing in class to this group of people. I felt very isolated in what I was doing. I was all right with that, but I did not think it would be received positively. I saw what I was doing as "critical literacy" stemming from the questions of my students, but my colleagues and principal, I feared, would see it as "indoctrination". So I tried to change the

focus away from describing exactly what we were doing (critiquing school and testing).

I looked at my principal and asked this question, I will never forget, "So, let me get this straight, you are wondering what I have done in my classroom to address the question on the CASI test about "characteristics of a biography", and you are noticing that my students' scores are still low despite what I may be doing, are you implying that I am at fault here...that I am responsible for the low test scores on a standardized test? Low test scores are a teacher's fault?" I was getting really angry. They were either pointing the finger at my students or me. No one at the table dared to ask about the test itself. I knew that my kids were learning, and were excited about what we were doing. Although we didn't address the question, we were learning, and isn't that the point?

My principal used the latest board lingo to respond, "All students can achieve, Heidi, and student achievement comes from solid teaching, from "best practices". So, yes, I guess I am suggesting that this is your fault."

Whose "best practices" mattered? I was outraged. I wanted to start crying, but held back. I was embarrassed. My colleagues, I am sure could sense this. I felt that I was engaged in a battle I would never win. I was out-numbered. They all had made up their minds. I wasn't going to change anything. I had to defend myself, however.

I replied that these tests don't measure the learning that was taking place in my classroom. It missed so much of what the kids were doing with its narrow, dull focus of "analyzing texts for their characteristics". The critical literacy that was being acquired inspired me. None of this was necessarily measurable, but it was learning, nonetheless.

"Tests are just one piece of the puzzle. Keep that in mind, Heidi. They are only a snapshot of what our kids can do."

"A snapshot? Really? Why, then, is there so much money, time and energy spent on this?" I continued to question.

"How else can we assure accountability and guide our teaching? If a child isn't doing well on a test, it may be because of the classroom practice, or it may tell us that there is something that needs to be addressed with the child. The test helps keep classroom instruction focused."

Focused on what? What the Ministry wants us to focus on regardless of the interests of the kids, I thought to myself.

Before I could get another word out, my principal continued, "Heidi, your opinion doesn't matter. At the end of the day, this is what we must do. The Board and Ministry sign our pay cheques. They are the bosses. You need to get on board with this stuff. It's here to stay."

I left that PLC feeling awful, humiliated, demoralized, and inadequate. My colleagues couldn't even jump to my defence. They watched in silence. They were aligned with the principal. I was no professional. I felt so alone.

According to Bushnell (2003), "...teachers who challenge the status-quo are regarded as unprofessional" (269). Most other professionals are applauded for their new and innovative ideas. Teachers are only applauded when their ideas align with Ministry objectives. I was frequently reminded by my principal of what the Ministry thought my job was, and was threatened "to either get on board" and, as we were reminded at one staff meeting, that if we couldn't get on board, we were "to get out". I think this show was to silence me as much as it was to silence my peers. I was the example. Such humiliation was an attempt to coerce me back into an acceptable position at the PLC table. It worked...at least until the next meeting.

In the end, while I was certainly no "expert", I knew that I was not an "unsatisfactory" teacher. My students were learning, and their parents indicated their appreciation of what my students and I were doing in the classroom together. Using Foucault's idea of Panopticon for analysis, I could only presume that this intense surveillance I felt was because I was not conforming to all of the mandates and initiatives, as I suspected my colleagues may have been. "The Panopticon was a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals" (Foucault 1977, 203). TPAs and PLCs were part of the machine...the Panopticon. Administration used this panoptic machine, and the pressures it created, to try to construct another type of teacher, one that quietly and dutifully accepted and fulfilled the corporate agenda and dominant Discourses of the Minsitry. As such, the interrogation of me was meant to seem threatening. I think they had hoped to intimidate me into changing my classroom practices. The TPA and PLCs questioned my professionalism as a teacher, and my choices had to be defended. I felt like I was on a continuous trial within the Panopticon. I kept wondering when I would ever "arrive" as a teacher in their eyes. During these "trials", I had to provide proof that I was indeed teaching "skills" in my classroom; that I was using Guided Reading and the related literacy resources and tests. This was "education", to administration. While I disagreed, to survive this trial, I used their dominant Discourses to articulately *explain*, not *justify*, what I did in my classroom, and how what I did was also "education". This was how I exercised power. I pushed back with my defence: creatively explaining why I was doing what I was doing, and how it "fit" with their objectives. I knew this was something that my administration could understand. I believe my explanations and voice disrupted their thinking just long enough for me to escape their intense gaze, to find spaces of freedom to carry on, while they found other spaces to inspect. They knew that I was a "satisfactory" teacher. They had difficulty arguing otherwise, knowing my thorough understanding of my own practices. TPAs and PLCs exercised power. But, so did I. Despite being observed, scrutinized and intimidated, despite being interrogated and threatened, despite my fear of

consequences, despite being humiliated for using my voice to speak out challenging the dominant

discourses...I am *still* standing.

Chapter Four

Resisting the Resistance

"Reply to this if you do not want to go on the Awareness Walk tomorrow. I don't want to go. Doesn't she know that we don't care about these issues? It's not like we are going to make a difference anyway. Who cares? It's going to be so hot outside. This is so dumb." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:00 PM.

"I give this idea a thumbs-up." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:01 PM.

"This is so fucking gay. I cannot believe that we have to do this. FML." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:01 PM.

"She's fucking gay too. I cannot stand her voice, and the things she talks about. I think we need to bring her up to date. LMAO." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:02 PM.

"I'm so bitchy to her too. Doesn't she get it? Maybe I can make her cry. LMAO. Maybe then, we won't have to go on this walk." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:03 PM.

"Let's just stay home. That way we won't have to go on the walk." Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:03 PM.

"Thumbs-up!" Posted on Facebook: Wednesday, May 28th, 2:04 PM.

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This was a five minute Face-book page conversation intercepted, received and printed for me by a few loyal students, with access to Face-book, who had concerns, rightfully so, over the content. The "she" in this Face-book message was, of course, me. A few of my students were resisting our classroom conversations, and upcoming "Awareness Walk", and used Face-book text messages as a way to organize against this event. This chapter will outline what, why and with what effect, these students resisted what I was using for my *own* resistance against traditional schooling and common curriculum.

Reading this page was devastating. Quite frankly, I was actually surprised to read these awful comments about me and our upcoming "Awareness Walk" (title of which was changed from "Protest Walk" by my principal, in true Panoptic, administrative style...the word "protest" was "too political"). I had always prided myself on being progressive, open-minded and critical in my approach to my classroom, students and teaching. I thought that I pushed beyond the traditional dominating techniques of school; my students were free to be...or were they? I strove for peace, democracy, fairness, equality, and often, for emancipation. My vision for their future was vivid and hopeful. I never intended to do harm to my students. But, in the end, I did. And, they showed me how they, too, could exercise power, and took the wind out of my sails.

Nowhere in the Ontario curriculum were there expectations for students to learn about lyrics and protest. As we indicated in Chapter Two, this was part of my resistance to the prescriptions for learning determined by the Ministry. My students loved music. I noticed that they were constantly attached to their iPods and were looking up the latest music videos on YouTube. This observation prompted a discussion about how writers and artists used art, music and lyrics as a form of protest. In following their interests, I encouraged the kids to write their own protest lyrics on a global issue of choice, and create their own music to go with their lyrics. We designed t-shirts and they presented their songs to each other. I thought it was fun, something else not often found in the curriculum. After having watched a documentary film showing marginalized people protesting against global water companies, I thought it would be a great idea to also assemble picket signs outlining my students' issues, sport our tie-dyed t-shirts, and go on our own protest walk, taking our concerns, posters and t-shirts outside of the classroom block. I felt that I was following the social justice pedagogy which encourages giving kids the chance to act on, and to take their concerns outside of the classroom. I thought it was important for them to be able to at least feel like they were creating change to the status-quo...a goal of

this pedagogy...my pedagogy. And, the next day, I let the kids know that this was what we were going to be doing.

This was where their resistance to my resistant curriculum began. I never stopped to ask if this was something they would be interested in doing. Whose agenda was I serving? Whose was being silenced? I would never know, as this idea was not something that the kids generated, or agreed upon. I didn't ask them about it. I just assumed that they all would want to do this, especially knowing there was ice cream involved.   I was wrong. Most students went along with the protest walk willingly. Others, clearly, did not want to go, nor valued its importance. My agenda reared its head. This was not my students' thinking. It was my own.

In hindsight, I should never have assumed anything about my students. They were used to our conversations leading to activities. I believed that "curriculum should be co-constructed by students acting in their own interests" (Ayers and Ayers 2011, 20). This didn't happen this time. I didn't give them the chance to act in their own interest. Not taking the time to reflect on this activity, we went ahead with the walk. The kids seemed to all enjoy themselves, but I was still unaware of how they truly felt. The kids and I raised awareness around the neighbourhood about a variety of issues. Trucks honked. The kids yelled. Passers-by asked us questions. The kids created rally chants and songs. Fists were pumped, pictures were taken, and memories were made. The warm afternoon ended with a stop at the ice cream shop. The kids and I ended up having had a lot of fun. Upon reflection, I remember that even the kids who wrote the Facebook protest page thanked me for a great day. They, too, were beaming with the excitement of possibly having made a difference in the lives of others. It was shortly afterward that I was made aware of how some of my students truly felt.

The Facebook page upset me. I was angry. I felt betrayed and humiliated. My confidence was shattered. I suddenly became so uncertain about what it was that I was doing in the classroom, that I

felt it difficult to return. It threw me into a spiral of self-doubt (it's easy to do). Luckily, I found out

about this on a Friday. I had the weekend to digest and re-evaluate things. These students were clearly

not happy with my plans for action, or our issues for discussion. Why were these kids resisting this

walk? Why did they not want participate? What had changed? Whose agenda was being valued?

Whose was being silenced? Whose voices were heard? Whose voices were silenced? These were the

standard questions that often preceded most of our classroom conversations. I realized by the end of

the weekend, that perhaps, this was an exception...we didn't talk about these questions prior to our

walk. Remembering Andy Manning's (1993) opening address helped me return to school on Monday, by

stating that:

> There is in this sense no getting teaching right. Just as being is a state of becoming so teaching
> is a never ending journey. It's not a quest with a pot of gold, a right way of doing things, at the
> end but a journey that never ends. We need to abandon our quest for perfection and certainty.
> It's the gap between our envisioned curriculum and the real curriculum that keeps us growing.
> Said differently, we need to abandon perfection and substitute learning as the goal of teaching.
> Everyone has the right to screw up a good theory as well as the responsibility to keep it growing.
> (8)

I think I screwed up. It certainly wasn't the first time, either. I recalled in Chapter Two that there were

some kids who did not want to construct the protest posters. They had a different perspective than me

and many other students. Perhaps my envisioned curriculum superseded the real curriculum going on

in the heads of my students. I may have widened the gap between what mattered to them and their

lives, and my own agenda. Or, my agenda may have overshadowed their thoughts, concerns and ideas.

Either way, I really felt that I had screwed this one up, and felt terrible.

After mustering the courage to come back to school, I pulled the group of resisters together in

my classroom. I needed to find out what was going on. I asked them why they didn't want to do the

"Awareness/Protest Walk". I also wanted to know specifically what it was that they did not want to do,

and, most importantly, why they didn't come to talk to me about it – why they used subversive means

to speak out against the walk (i.e. Facebooking each other). By listening carefully, I learned that they

were afraid to hurt my feelings. They thought that I would get upset if I found out they didn't want to

do the walk. They saw my passion for what we were doing, and didn't want to take away from that.

They also felt that it really wouldn't have mattered anyway...they would still have had to go; they felt

that it was what most of the class, including me, wanted to do. They did not think their voice would

have mattered if they expressed it openly. I could relate. Their reluctance to speak out reminded me of

my own reservations of speaking out against administration, the Ministry or Board. I was afraid of

repercussions. Perhaps, they felt the same. They understood the existing and inherent power structure

between us...despite my determination to level the field. I was beginning to understand how they felt.

I thought I understood this power relationship, and as such, tried to eliminate the walls between

us. I thought that I had always had an open-door policy with my students. I was so certain that I had

established trust with them. I had always encouraged them to talk to me. I did not initially, and before

the walk, however, open the door to any dissent from my students...I did not ask these kids if this was

something that they wanted to do, or if it would be helpful to their cause. Their voices were missing. I

left them out of this decision, and assumed they would all go along with it. I exercised my power as the

teacher, and most of the kids followed it. Because of this authoritative decision by me, they wouldn't

dare speak out openly...I was still "the teacher"...the authority figure. Within the Panopticon, according

to Foucault (1977), despite feeling that I was open-minded, I still exercised power over my students

simply by the position I held.

> ...it[s] possible to perfect the exercise of power...its strength is that it never intervenes, it is
> exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow
> from one another. Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and
> geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of mind over mind'. The panoptic
> schema makes any apparatus of power more intense: it assures its economy ...it assures its
> efficacy by its preventative characters, its continuous functioning and its automatic
> mechanisms. (206)

My students were aware that there is a power system in place at school between the teacher and pupil,

and as such will behave a certain way. That created a condition where if I wanted to exercise any form

of control, such as deciding to go on the Awareness/Protest Walk, it was easy for me to do so...the

power structure was in place to allow me to make this decision. It also laid the groundwork for my

students to be potentially silenced. Some of my students were afraid that I would not truly listen to

them. I think that they may have been right. Perhaps, listening to my students was something I claimed

to do, but did not do *well*. But, as Foucault (1977) contended, where there is power, there is resistance.

Some of my students resisted the power they felt, and were not used to this feeling in our classroom.

Perhaps, I should take comfort in knowing that not all of my students committed to my way; that some

resisted the ways of control and domination in which I was resisting myself.

There was a "eureka" moment for me during this frank conversation with my resisting students.

During that brief talk, I learned about what was going on with them, and more importantly, they taught

me a lot about myself. I will be forever grateful for their honesty, as I listened to their complaints. Ayers

and Ayers (2011) reminded me of what teaching and learning was about to me:

> ...teachers must struggle continuously to see more, and to see more widely. A starting point is
> to recognize that every student comes to the classroom with a life already under way, a set of
> experiences and circumstances that are *sui generis*, a story in progress. And further, the teacher
> can assume that each student is both the one and only who will ever walk the Earth as well as
> the chief expert on his or her life, each the author of a singular and unique script. Recognizing
> this, teacher might struggle to perform a necessary and radical reversal: becoming students of
> their students first, in order to become better, more attuned, more effective teachers...this
> points toward dialogue, everyone listening to others with the possibility of being changed, and
> everyone speaking up forcefully with the possibility of being heard. You must listen and speak,
> learn and teach. Without freedom of expression, we are doomed to accept current dogma,
> received ideas, prejudice, and popular stereotypes. (90)

My students were well versed in this kind of radical school discourse. They expressed during our

conversation, that this was not something they were interested in doing. They did want to learn about

other people in other parts of the world, but didn't think that the protest walk was necessary, nor would

it make much of a difference to their own lives. They enjoyed writing music and lyrics, but they wanted

to write about issues that mattered to them, not necessarily about the issues of some other country or

groups of people. I could not have agreed more. They were right. In my classroom, they were used to

posing questions, and moving in their own directions. Not this time. I put myself in the driver's seat of their car, and they knew that I didn't belong there.

We had been critiquing traditional school discourse since they had first asked the question about standardized testing outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis. We had discussed and expressed our feelings, opinions and experiences in traditional classrooms. They understood all too clearly the role of the current educational system: "to pacify and domesticate, to promote and to police the existing hierarchies of privilege and oppression in which poor youngsters know their place (the street corner, the charity line, the prison) and accept it with a minimum of bitterness and with zero resistance" (Ayers and Ayers 2011, 20).   Many of my students were the poor kids that the educational system wanted to remain poor, and disenfranchised. My students knew that, and didn't like it. They understood the hidden curriculum of school all too well. It was the topic of our conversations and research months. In the end, they expressed anger, and decided to channel this anger in the form of protest posters displayed in particular places in the school hallway. Their posters challenged "the way it spozed to be" (Herndon 1968, as cited in Ayers and Ayers 2011) in school. They understood school as boring, with an emphasis on test scores, tracking, and obedience. They wanted to find out who they were, without school defining that for them. It was at this point, we discussed "subversiveness" as a safe form of resistance. My students, nor I, wanted to get into trouble, but we wanted a safe place to freely express ourselves. We wanted to keep spaces of freedom open, and protected from the watchful eye of administration.   We needed to keep it on the "D.L." as they coined it. This kind of subversive, resistant discourse was learned early on in the year in my classroom. I should not have been that surprised then, that perhaps my students felt they needed to be subversive to keep their spaces of freedom open. Because of the power structures inherent between teachers and students, they may have felt that that was their only place to openly resist what we were doing. They learned early on how to do this.

What we were doing for the Awareness Walk may not have matched the real curriculum of my students. According to Harman and Edelsky (1989), alienation toward critical pedagogy can arise when the acquired literacy fails to resemble what students are used to at home, and begins to more closely resemble that of their more mainstream teacher... "to become truly literate on must 'join the club' and decide that reading and writing [and protesting] are things that 'people like me' do. But who am I like: my (Chicano...working-class, etc.) parents...or my mainstream teacher?" (398) I instructed them to pick a global issue to research, write lyrics about and protest. Were my students able to identify with the issues they chose? These issues were part of my literacy and discourse, but perhaps, not theirs. They were well aware from our conversations and critique of traditional school that most of the time school was boring, did not affect their lives, and that students were not able to control the direction of their own learning. They were used to being given the opportunity to ask their own questions. In this particular instance, I did not give my students this chance. I always assumed I was acting in the best interests of all of my students. I wanted them to be able to understand the inequalities of our world, question them, and act against them. But, perhaps, my students did not want to examine other parts of the world...especially when many of them were suffering here, at home. While my motives were noble, I cannot help but question whose agenda I was serving...theirs or mine? Was this what they wanted to examine? Could they grasp the unfairness when they lead similar lives of poverty, inequality and unfairness every day? I knew my students cared about social issues and social justice, but which ones, and justice for whom? Was this walk something that made sense to them? I did not pose these important, critical questions, and as such, I silenced my students. My critical social justice pedagogy and practice became exactly what my students and I had critiqued months before...traditional, boring and obviously, dominant, school Discourse. And, like months before, some of my savvy and critical students recognized it, and resisted it.

Although it was painful to contend with, my students' resistance to my critical social justice pedagogy and practice demonstrated its dominating capabilities. I cannot help but wonder how I was complicit in the very thing I, myself, tried every day to identify, question, and ultimately resist? I initially had disregarded Foucault's warning that "everything is dangerous" (Gore 1993, 56), including my own radical pedagogy (Gore 1993). This was the discourse of my classroom. It was dominant in our conversations. As such, it was a dominant Discourse, as dominant as the traditional school Discourse we critiqued, and similarly, came complete with dominating practices, effects, and therefore, resistance. My students and I examined the institution of school, standardized testing, labelling students, grading policies, but never had we discussed my own practices within the classroom. Gore (1993) reminded me of this danger,

> Pedagogy is one of the major techniques through which modern disciplinary power functions, such work within and against pedagogy would be consistent with Foucault's insistence that we work as 'specific individuals'. Altering the regime of pedagogy requires more than analyzing the institutions and ideologies in which and through which schooling occurs. Specific practices also require attention" (146).

I had thought about my own practices, and often reflected on them in my teaching journal. But, I had never opened the door for student questions and critique. I just assumed that what I was doing was always the "right" thing for them. I thought that emphasizing critical literacy and social justice in my classroom was the "right" approach to resist the common, prescribed Ontario curriculum. While I understood how the Ontario curriculum expectations left out the voices of my children, I didn't realize how I might be doing the same thing. I forgot, just like the curriculum designers in Toronto, that perhaps my students had their own vision, their own questions to be answered that did not fall within the realm of "critical, social justice pedagogy". Their questions, concerns, ideas, topics were usually a focus for us in the classroom. This is where many of our learning moments came from. This was *my* resistance. This time, however, I didn't hear their questions, desires or demands, nor did I ask to hear them when deciding on the Awareness/Protest Walk. I stopped listening, and "took momentum away

from them" (in conversation with Connie White via Skype, 2011). My pedagogy may have become a "regime" (Gore 1993, 56), and as such, according to Gore (1993), may have had "effects of domination" (145). Some of my students protested this on Facebook, and tried to organize against the walk. This was *their* resistance.

I learned about the "dominating effects" of my critical social justice "regime" from my students. It was when I brought these students to the table for a conversation, that I realized how I had shut down their space for freedom by not keeping the conversation going. They found spaces where "they could [carry on] in search of rather than in accordance with or in accommodation to" (Ayers and Ayers 2011, 37). When I shut down that open space of constructing together, the kids found other, more subversive spaces of freedom on their Facebook accounts. They lost space to exercise their power, and found space where they could resist, in order to possibly exercise power again. Similarly, when administration or the Ministry shuts down one space for me to act freely with my students, I lose my ability to exercise power, and I creatively resist by finding some other place to continue the often tabooed conversation, ultimately, exercising power again. I needed the help of my students to identify this weak spot in our relationship, and to remind me to keep space open for alternative viewpoints. I can exercise power to try and keep spaces open, as well as to shut them down, just like my administration, and just like my students.

This open conversation with the resisters in my classroom really helped me come to terms with, and put in perspective, this event. I wish it would have happened sooner than it did. Before this conversation took place, I felt that perhaps my students didn't like me. I am human, and I seek acceptance. Hearing their voices during our discussion helped me to not take their actions personally, but to understand them critically. I am grateful to them for this opportunity. By clearing the air with honesty, accepting criticism, and understanding the perspectives of my students (learning they were

reminiscent of my own), I became hopeful again. In realizing the similarity between my students'

resistant perspective and my own, I could not help but speculate that perhaps my students were indeed

learning well, and that I needed to get back to that kind of co-constructed learning in the classroom.

Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) also consoled me when they stated that

> Along with entertaining new discourses, risk taking also supports adopting a critical stance. This
> means coming to an understanding that parts of what we believe about teaching, learning and
> curriculum may not be working...we are aware of the partiality of our understanding, staying
> open to the possibility that our best thinking at a particular moment may be wrong – that we
> may need to imagine a different approach. (16)

To realize that my critical, social justice pedagogy was not working required my students to disrupt my

thinking, and helped me become "reflexive" about my teaching. Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008)

define reflexivity as "being aware of our own complicity in maintaining the status-quo or systems of

injustice. Even though we may be committed to social change, we often are implicated in perpetuating

oppression. Being aware of how we have our hand in the cookie jar is an important aspect of adopting a

critical stance" (18). I was focusing on "others" in an arrogant way. I wanted to save the world, and

wanted my students to help me do it. That was not fair to them. Some may not have been ready to do

so, nor saw its plausibility, when their own homes were in a never-ending disarray. Some of my

students may have had a difficult time focusing on other people's problems half-way around the world.

Some have too much to contend with at home to take their quest beyond their community. Some may

not be interested yet, if ever. This may have explained why my students resisted the Awareness/Protest

Walk. Regardless of what their rationale may have been, the Facebook text message caused me to

question these practices, and my beliefs about teaching. By doing so, I learned how my teaching

practices and classroom Discourses could be complicit in oppression just like many of the more

dominant traditional Discourses of school that I continue to question and resist. My practices needed to

be examined as closely as the traditional practices we had been examining all year long, and that I too,

was capable of repression. Resisters seem to be the best teachers in the world. They helped me to

reposition myself in the world (Manning 1993, 7), and rethink my practices. My own practices and

discourses have now become fair game in our conversations and critiques. In return, I may have also

taught my students how resistance does indeed disrupt things.

Most importantly, the biggest lesson I have learned, not just from my students' resistance and

exercise of power, but from my own and that of my administration as examined in previous chapters, is

that resistance stems from power, and power stems from resistance. According to Foucault (1977), one

cannot exist without the other. Neither one is all-encompassing, nor completely liberating. They are

constantly circulating between individuals. The relationship is the continuous pushing and pulling

between forces. Power and resistance are intimately connected, and I am learning, they are extremely

complicated. Gore (1993) articulately explains how Foucault interpreted power:

> ...Every relation between forces is a power relation, where force is singular but essentially exists
> in relation with other forces, such that force is already a relation (Deleuze 1988, 70). Power is
> not necessarily repressive since it incites, induces, seduces, makes easier or more difficult,
> enlarges or limits, makes more or less probable and so on (Foucault 1983). Power is exercised
> or practiced, rather than possessed, and so circulates, passing through every related force.
> Students, as well as teachers, exercise power. In order to understand the operation of power
> contextually, we need to understand the particular points through which it passes (Foucault
> 1980). (52)

My students were exercising power. I was exercising power. My administration exercises power during

PLCs and TPAs. The Ministry exercises power, mandating PLCs and TPAs. In exercising power, then,

according to Foucault (1977), we also exercised resistance. My students organized on Facebook, I

continue to try to follow the curriculum in the heads of my students, the administration continues to

walk-through my classroom unannounced, knowing I received a "satisfactory" on my TPA, and the

Ministry continues to promote standardized testing as education. Power exercised by each of us could

not be exercised for complete domination, because resistance would be right there to push back from

someone or some group, somewhere, somehow. In that sense, then, couldn't power and resistance be

considered the same thing? Resistance is power, just operating in the opposite direction.

What I have found out for certain, is that power, and subsequently, resistance, are complicated. They involve real people, with real lives. There are real consequences in exercising power, and in resisting that power. We are all searching to find our true selves, and what we believe in; we are all searching for spaces of freedom to act in accordance to whom we believe we are. Exercising power, and resisting power, helped me, my students and even administration, find spaces of freedom. We are complicated, reflexive, reflective beings. We are all searching for the same things...freedom to be and to act. Once we find these places, we will resist power to hold onto them, until they are shut down. Then, we find new spaces. This is ongoing. Because of the cyclical nature of power and resistance, it should never be an "us vs. them" dynamic. Rather, power is a relationship between human beings where we are constantly struggling to gain our footing. Recently, my vice-principal approached me to express her relief that she did not have to evaluate my teaching practices and performances this year, and that at the same time, she appreciated that I had given her a lot to think about. She was not alone. Her admission helped me to understand that we were all in this circle of power together. For once, I could see eye to eye with her; I could relate. My students and vice principal gave *me* a lot to think about in terms of my teaching practices and Discourses. I gave my students a lot to think about in terms of dominant school Discourses. My teaching practices helped me to disrupt the thinking of others, and to find spaces for freedom. Perhaps, this is the best resistance to the forces of the Panopticon that we can hope for.

I began this research thinking that I was going to change the world, and change education for the better once and for all. I was going to resist the dominant Discourses, and create the positive change I had envisioned for my students and their education. Although I have not given up on this dream, some may be disappointed with the lack of closure I have to this journey. I am not able to offer a lot of prescriptive guidance, nor am I able to describe any profound changes in the status-quo of education that may have resulted from my on-going resistance within the Panopticon. Despite always

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being worried, looking over my shoulder, wondering what administration might think (a side effect of existing within a Panopticon), I was able to use resistance to find new spaces for learning and being. In Chapter One, I identified my first memory of oppression linked to the dominating Discourses of my own high school experience, and how, soon thereafter, I learned how to resist them. In Chapter Two, I resisted the mandated curriculum, and was able to create new spaces for learning where the students and I thought critically about the hidden curriculum of school, and learned how to actively speak out against its disciplinary power using protest posters. In Chapter Three, I was able to maintain my old spaces of freedom within my classroom, despite administration trying to shut them down via PLCs and TPAs. I carried on with sound practices that made sense to me, using research and the dominant Discourses to justify my rationale. Finally, in Chapter Four, I realized that not only was I resisting, but I was also exercising power with my students, and they were capable of doing the same. Power and resistance existed within all of my relationships at school. In recognizing my own potential for my practices to be dominating and oppressive, I was later able to resist this. I became reflexive, and repositioned myself within my current space of freedom. I gave up trying to find any kind of "truth" once and for all. Andy Manning (1993) reassured me that this was okay. "The goal is not find truth, not to replace one truth with another, but to illuminate contradictions and offer possibilities, other stories to live and experience out of" (11). This I did do. My stories were full of contradictions, but also offered possibilities that I hope will be useful to other teachers also struggling for freedom.

I have learned a lot by analyzing my own classroom stories. The only thing I know for sure, however, is that although resistance is complicated, it's sometimes difficult to exercise because of the more dominant powers exercised by others within the Panopticon, I was indeed able to use it to find my own space. Resistance *will* happen within the Panopticon because there is also power being exercised. Resistance helps us find these spaces, which do exist, if we look carefully, and think creatively. I must also remind myself that resistance can be just as oppressive and dangerous as power itself. As Gore

(1993) explained, "...if everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (136). And, I had

better get busy. There will always be something to question, something to challenge, power to exercise,

power to confront, resistance to pursue, and of course, freedom to find. For this, I am hopeful.

Epilogue

Just the Beginning...

Teacher Research Journal: September 21, 2011 "I Am Watching You!"

It happened today. I received an email that I had been dreading. I knew it could always be a possibility, but thought that it would only happen on TV or in the U.S. Certainly not in Canada, and certainly not with our board. We received notice from our union warning us that hidden video cameras were discovered in a school within our district. The surveillance cameras were disguised as smoke detectors. There was no audio, only video. Needless to say, prompt action was taken and the cameras were removed. However, the union asked many questions, and few answers were given. I was hoping to hear that this was an isolated event, and it will not occur again. The response we received was alarming to me. The board feels that they have the right to consider such action if they feel something is "amiss". Amiss? What does that mean? What could be "amiss" in a school to warrant such drastic action? The board will reserve the right to define "amiss". As well, they did not consider the staff room, or any other room in a school, a place where it is reasonable to expect privacy. Our union wanted us to realize that despite thinking we are in a private place at work, we may not be. More gravely, my union stated that they do not believe this to be the first time this has been done, nor will it be the last.   The board stated that this kind of covert surveillance "may" occur again, if the circumstances warrant this. Who gets to decide this? I am very fearful.

Teacher Research Journal: September 23, 2011 "The New Regime"

I am suffocating under our new administration. I am being watched daily. The principal or vice principal have been in my room every day this week. They have walked around the classroom looking at student "Where is the Math" posters and their "Identity Posters" asking me to explain why we were doing these and how did I feel they connected to the curriculum. Both the principal and vice principal asked my students to explain what they were working on, and why they were working on them. Luckily, the kids answered "appropriately"...I guess. The principal, on one of her visits, cornered me to inquire about one of my IEP'd students. She said that his name kept coming up in her notes as someone who needed significant assistance. His name came up because I have asked for assistance for him multiple times, but have been met with this response multiple times, "We need to be careful how we use our Educational Assistants in the Classroom. They are to be used for students in wheelchairs, or with physical needs." We not have students at our school that fit that criteria, but we do have students who could use some one on one support...such as one of my IEP'd students. She then asked me on the spot if I was even aware that he was to be on a "modified program" (whatever that means). Of course I was aware of this! She asked me what his "modified program" would look like. Although, at this point, we haven't done much to warrant such modifications, I responded that his "program" (I do not really call it that) would look like the rest of the classes, and he would fit in where he could, and would do what he could. She responded that he should be using different textbooks at his "grade level". His "level" would be far below the rest of the kids. I would have a hard time doing this. But, I just nodded. I thought my evaluation happened last year?

I asked other staff members in the school if they have encountered such visits. They mentioned that the vice principal popped into their classrooms to say "hello", but did not interrogate them or their students in any way, nor did she look at anything on their walls. I feel like I am being targeted here. What have I done? It seems to me that there has been talk about me from the previous administration. My union steward has advised me to keep their visits documented, and that if this direct surveillance continues into next week, union should become involved. I have heard from a colleague from my new principal's previous school that she "rides" teachers she wants to get rid of. Why me? Other staff members have noticed that both principals are in my room and around me a lot. What

has been said about me? Do I ask too many questions? Is it because I don't use the textbooks? Could it be because I follow the curriculum created by my students and myself? Is it because I love to keep the kids together rather than send them to the Spec. Ed. Rooms? I have been warned that this new principal demands to see daybooks, assessment notes, she interrogates, watches, gets those not on board to join committees where they will feel forced to fall in line, she makes them rewrite report cards, demands to see lesson plans. There is no trust, especially for those who do not conform. I have nothing to hide, except that I am providing my students with a more critical education, and am not teaching to the test. She is known to "write-up" such people who are resistant, and insubordinate. She has even tried to terminate one teacher. Where could this going? What should I do?

Last week, I felt the need to, not only shut, but lock my door when I showed the National Geographic 9/11 documentary. We were warned by the new principal to only show the sanitized videos from the board office. Or else?!? What?!? I have been told to take the ipods from students that have always been permitted in my classroom. I was told that by having the music in their ears, I will not be able to monitor what they are listening to. I could care less what they enjoy listening to! My kids feel stifled too with so many new rules they must now follow, the restriction on ipods being only one of them.

I've talked to other staff members, and we are all fearful and uncertain about what we are doing. It is the third week of school, and we already feel the culture changing. I seem to be tiptoeing around the school. Anything I ask for and inquire about, is met with policy, more rules and regulations. The principal and I have already met about EQAO scores from last year, and I have been informed that they were "low", and that we need to come up with an action plan to help us get the scores up this year. The Grade 3 teachers are absolutely devastated because they worked so hard with their kids to improve the scores, and they all went down, across the board. I've reassured them that it didn't matter what they did, our kids would still do poorly on these tests. Test-makers don't write with them in mind. Scores and data are already replacing my wonderful students, and the year has just begun. I need to tread carefully, quietly and creatively. I need to survive this year.

A new regime has begun.

My spaces for freedom are continuing to shrink. I feel new power being exercised to control teachers, students, and even the lovely secretary at our school. A much more rigid culture of fear has firmly and swiftly descended upon us. I am being watched very closely. I am being questioned regularly. I am not trusted. Eyes and ears seem to be everywhere. I am getting more nervous each day about continuing with our classroom curriculum and critique. My feelings have been intentionally generated. Of that, I am certain. Foucault (1977) reminded me that the new regime is keeping me as visible as possible to establish their power, and instil in me, fear:

> The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. (201)

Power is functioning. The Panopticon is alive and well...and, is growing in strength. While I'm still trying

to remain hopeful, fear is rearing its ugly head. I will need courage to push back against the narrowing

and most uncertain road ahead. And, this may only be the beginning...

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