

THE SHAPING OF SELECTED TEACHERS' IDENTITIES AS  
INNER CITY ACTIVISTS:  
THE POLITICS OF CONFIDENCE

BY

CHARLOTTE REID

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Faculty of Education  
University of Manitoba  
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This one is for you Moehau.

## ABSTRACT

### The Shaping of Selected Women Teachers' Identities As Inner City Activists: The Politics of Confidence

Charlotte Reid

This study has as its focus three intersecting areas of interest: teacher activism, pre-service teacher education, and inner city education. Taking as its starting point a version of teacher activism that is embedded in the lives of women graduates and the realities of teaching in the inner city, the study sets out to examine the ways in which three women teachers, each a graduate of the Winnipeg Education Centre pre-service education program, came to construct for themselves identities as "inner city activists", and the significance that a shared context of the Winnipeg Education Centre had on the development of these identities.

This research draws upon a social constructivist methodology with an interest in the notion of activism as it is constructed and understood in the lived experiences of these women. The study was based upon interpretive biography, the purpose of which was to construct lifestories through a series of co-constructed, collaborative interviews, delving into what it meant to be an inner city activist. Of paramount importance was the pervasive ethical sensibility of maintaining trust that was freely given. It was this sensibility that enabled the participants, with increasing confidence, to define, name and determine their activist identities. In defining their activism these women were also identifying issues that were preventing inner city children and families from leading self-actualized lives. Part of this realization came in the form of the perceived need for changes to inner city education. The significance of this study is situated in the meaning that was revealed during the construction of the three lifestories, the common themes that emerged and how this understanding reflected upon Gerie, Katie and Grace's activism and the effect it continues to make on the their own lives and the lives of the children and families of the inner city.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER ONE      *BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY*

Introduction	1
The Winnipeg Education Centre: A Shared & Embedded Context	2
The Relationship of the Winnipeg Education Centre to the Inner City	3
The Historical Context	5
Inner City Education	7
Inner City Teachers	9
The Winnipeg Education Centre Program & Curriculum	11
The Affirmative Action Consideration	12
The Effects of Economic & Social Shifts	14
Inner City Teacher Education	16
The Intricate Contextual Web	22
A Research Design	23

### CHAPTER TWO      *LITERATURE REVIEW: ACTIVISM*

Introduction	26
The Shifting Metaphor	28
Establishing the Web	29
Women Activist Mothers: All of Whom are Women	30
Activist Teachers & the Millennium Malaise	31
Teachers & Political activism: Some of Whom are Women	34
Academic Activists: Some of Whom are Women Action Researchers	36
Political Teacher Activists: Some of Whom are Women	37
Pedagogical Classroom Activists	39
Paulo Freire: The Activists' Activist	39
Social & Cultural Pedagogical Activists	41
Research Activists: Some of Whom are Women	43
Collaborative Research Activists: Many of Whom Tend to be Women	44

Humanist Activists & Psychological Activists: Men & Women	45
Pragmatic Social Activists: Most of Whom in the Literature Tend to be Women	46
Historical Activism: The Antecedent for Women	46
Feminist Activists	47
Evolutionary Activists of a New Social Movement	51
Activism as Resistance: Women	52
First Nations Activism: Women of the Academy & the Community	53
Entrepreneurial Activism	54
Integrated Activists	55
Applied Activism: Men & Women	55
After the Web	56
What May This Mean?	57

CHAPTER THREE      *THE METHODOLOGY: MAKING SENSE*

The Contextual Imperative	61
The Shaping of Meaning	63
The Methodological Commitment	63
A Constructivist Methodology	65
Coming to Terms With Subjectivity	67
Lived Constructivism	68
Truth, Validity & Meaning: What It Means to Be	69
The Tenacious Circle	70
The Integrated Constructivist-Interpretive Method	73
The Constructivist Connection	74
More Constructivist Shapes	75
The Significance of Intersubjectivity	75
Primus Inter Pares: Tension or Tenacity?	76
Down From the Glass Ceiling	79
A Need for Pervasive Ethical Sensibility	81
The Significance of Narrative	82
Compelling Method & Compliant Data	83

The Research Design	
The Identification of Participants	84
The Interpretive Process	85
The Presentation of Data	86
CHAPTER FOUR	<i>A RESEARCH CONTEXT: A SUBJECTIVE ACCOUNT</i> 88
A Positioned Researcher	88
A Life Story	94
Research & Clarification of Meaning & Reflection of Experience	97
The Retrospective Significant Horizon	106
A Perpetuating Struggle Towards Authenticity	108
Off the Steps	109
Themes Emerging	110
CHAPTER FIVE	<i>PROLOGUE TO LIFESTORIES</i> 111
CHAPTER SIX	<i>GERIE'S STORY</i>
Wearing Our Own Skin	117
For Gerie: The Effects of the Winnipeg Education Centre	119
Later On & Now	126
Before WEC: This is Not the Art Room	129
Out of the Art Room	135
The Exploration of Activism	139
Activism: First Person Singular	140
The Business of Self-Efficacy	150
The Ethic of Caring	152
Community	156

CHAPTER SEVEN      *GRACE'S STORY*

It Fits Me	161
Grace: Motherhood	166
Are You a Feminist or Something Else?	173
A Good Fit	182
Naming Mother; Naming Feminist; Naming Activist; Naming Grace	190

CHAPTER EIGHT      *KATIE'S STORY*

Connections	192
An Anishinaabe Woman: Connected Knowing	195
The Ribbon Dress	202
Heard, Understood & Appreciated: Women's Spirit	212

CHAPTER NINE      *FRIENDS OF THE MIND*

The Genealogy Conveyed: Ordering Subjectivity	219
Community	224
The School Experience: Efficacious or Not?	230
Against the Grain: The Beginning of Resistance	234
To Be or Not To Be: Subjectively Speaking	235
First Person Plural: Speaking Subjectively As An Aboriginal Woman	239
Distinct, Tidy-Minded, Purposeful, Non-Acquiescing, Confident Activist	241
Feminism: Insight or Oversight?	242

CHAPTER TEN      *NAMING OURSELVES*

Experiencing the Winnipeg Education Centre	247
Grace, Gerie & Katie: The WEC Piece	263



CHAPTER ELEVEN     *MAKING CONNECTIONS: THE PROBLEMATICS OF ACTIVISM*

Pulling the Thread	279
Define or be Defined: The Naming of Activism	288
I Think She Got It	292
The Telephone Room	292
The Business of Caring, Authenticity & Activism: The Politics of Confidence	293

CHAPTER TWELVE     *CONCLUSIONS: OCCUPYING SPACE IN GOOD COMPANY*

The Face of Activism	304
Making Room: A Transformative One	310
Define or Be Defined	311

REFERENCE LIST	317
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## Chapter One

### Background to the Study

#### Introduction

This study has as its focus three intersecting areas of interest, teacher activism, pre-service teacher education and inner city education. Taking as its starting point a version of teacher activism that is embedded in the lives of women graduates and the realities of teaching in the inner city, the study sets out to examine the ways in which three women teachers, each a graduate of the Winnipeg Education Centre pre-service education program, came to construct for themselves identities as "inner city activists", and the significance that a shared context of the Winnipeg Education Centre had on the development of these identities.

For a substantial group of educational theorists, whether they are seen to be working primarily from the overlapping perspectives of "critical pedagogy" (Giroux, 1983, 1998; Apple, 1996; Connell, 1994), "anti-racist education" (Sleeter, 1986; Dei, 1996) or progressive education (Shor, 1992; McClaren, 1994), a central, unifying commitment is to issues of equity and social justice (Cochran-Smith, 1999) and to an understanding of schools as political institutions. Associated with this perspective is the stance that sees the roles, functions, and interests of schools and the greater society as inextricably intertwined. As such, schools can never be neutral institutions-their effects are either to work towards social justice or to reinforce and reproduce practices, structures and ideologies that support inequality and injustice-and teaching (and teacher education) is an unavoidably political as well as pedagogic activity. Creating a more just and equitable society in Canada is an agenda that requires the participation of schools and both the active and critical engagement of teachers. "Inner city activism" at the outset of this study, is situated broadly within this orientation and is explored more fully in Chapter 2.

Broadly cast, the purpose of pre-service teacher education programs is to provide teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions thought necessary for entry into the teaching profession. Alternative programs such as the Education Program

at the Winnipeg Education Centre seek, usually, to provide access to students traditionally excluded from a university education and to provide a curriculum that will adequately educate teachers to recognize the educational strengths and meet the needs of minority students. The contribution (if any) of the Winnipeg Education to the development of the sense of "inner city activist" is a central part of this study.

With an interest in the notions of "activism" as they are constructed and understood in the lived experiences of three women graduates of the Winnipeg Education Centre, this research draws upon a social constructivist-interpretive methodology. Using interpretive biography, the purpose of which is to construct collaboratively, from a series of interviews delving into what it means to be an inner city activist, individual lifestories which will explore how each of these women came to assume this role, and the extent to which their experiences at the Winnipeg Education Centre played in this process.

Because of my commitment to the construction of meaning and the importance of research reciprocity, context takes on a particular significance. For this reason, attention in this opening chapter is turned to a fairly extended consideration of the Winnipeg Education Centre and inner city education. It is this consideration that offers a shared and embedded context for each of the women teachers whose lives are the focus of the study and for myself as the researcher who has worked as a professor at the Winnipeg Education Centre for more than two decades. This section of the chapter precedes the initial articulation of the research questions which are situated within this context. The research design is discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

### The Winnipeg Education Centre: A Shared and Embedded Context

The Winnipeg Education Centre represents a unique, alternative Canadian teacher education institution that is responsible for a program which leads to a five year Bachelor of Education degree and provincial certification. With an access mandate based upon principles of affirmative action it provides the opportunity for a post secondary education to people who have been denied entrance into a post secondary education program due to the lack of the traditional entry requirements, poverty and social disenfranchisement. Throughout its history the Centre has existed in a complex social

and political milieu where issues of gender, class, race, the uneven distribution of power combined with ever present funding exigencies have continued to inform and challenge its original mandate. It has conducted the work of educating teachers through periods of political and cultural change and reform: the most current being that of a conservative restoration. (Apple, 1996). In general terms, the heart of the mandate for the program is to contribute to the economic and social development of the inner city of Winnipeg through the provision of a Bachelor of Education degree to persons, primarily from the inner city, who possess the general ability for, and commitment to, a vocation in education but because of various degrees of social, academic and financial restraints or language barriers, have not been able to access traditional forms of post secondary education.

Winnipeg Education Center's uniqueness lies not only in the fact that it actively recruits representation from the inner city population; recent immigrants, women, aboriginals and the working poor, but also that this minority, multicultural composition has remained relatively constant throughout its history.<sup>1</sup>

The inner city has been seen, at times and by some, as being in need of special initiatives to address the perceived failure of education to provide for the needs of its children. Implicit to the purpose for the existence of the Winnipeg Education Centre is the belief that inner city residents have unique contributions to make as educators because, after having lived in it themselves and confronted the issues, they can best understand the effects of the nature of the environment on the supposedly underachieving inner city child. Furthermore it is believed that these people are situated in a more advantageous, strategic position from which to identify the difficulties of inner city education and find effective ways and means to overcome them.

### The Relationship of the Winnipeg Education Centre to the Inner City

The inner city has been and remains of significant interest and importance to both the provincial government and the local school division administrations. Winnipeg School Division #1, which serves the inner city school population, has for many years

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<sup>1</sup> The yearly Selection Committee statistics provided by the Winnipeg Education Centre (1982) and seen as public accountability will support this constancy.

operated with its own separate inner city department and inner city superintendent. This attention has been brought about by an understanding that in the inner city, learning would be more effective in an environmental context that was economically viable and sustainable. This particular school division and Manitoba Education and Training are the two main official, bureaucratic, stakeholders for inner city education. From time to time they work closely together in the classrooms and schools in an attempt to problem solve and work through curriculum issues, and at other times they work discretely.<sup>2</sup> This sort of divisional and governmental activity, whether separate or in collaboration often occurs far outside the reality of the inner city where people live, work, raise their children, run small businesses and generally carry on with life in an integrated manner. The mandate of the Winnipeg Education Centre is to position graduates back inside the area where the perceived problems live as everyday realities. The work of the Centre is to provide these "resident insider" teachers with the skills, analysis and credentials to realize their goal of becoming effective teachers. The significance that the Centre plays in the development of activists who originate from this environment, is part of an interesting and useful inquiry, adding insight to the field of education generally and to the inner city in particular.

The inner city is not often celebrated in the press, by the School Division, or by the academy. Often it is chided as a violent, ugly area with an unstable and transient population. There is little credence given to the stable population who live in the area and choose to have their children attend neighborhood schools, plant gardens, or risk a small business venture, seemingly, with no need and no plans to leave. While people do leave the inner city and move away for a whole host of the usual reasons, the more interesting thought may be for those who choose to remain because it is their home community, complete with its problems and imperfections.

Over the past three decades, many of the people who live in the inner city have found their way to the Winnipeg Education Centre Access teacher education program and after

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<sup>2</sup> The new Social Studies curriculum provides an example. The Government of Manitoba as part of the Western Regional consortium is undertaking the development of a new curriculum, K-S4. Shortly after the news of this initiative came about the Superintendent of Inner City Winnipeg announced that the Inner City Department would be adding their own Aboriginal Studies curriculum as an addendum to the provincial curriculum.

four or more years graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree.<sup>3</sup> It is true that upon graduation some of the aboriginal inner city graduates choose to relocate back to their First Nations home communities to teach, and that some graduates have chosen to work in more affluent, suburban communities and leave the Inner City of Winnipeg entirely. However, a substantial proportion of the graduate teachers choose to return to both live and work in the inner city. Why this is so and what they do with their teaching lives when they do go back to the inner city is one of the primary purposes of this study. Distilled further, the question is why did some of these graduates become inner city activists ?

### The Historical Context

Winnipeg Education Centre is a complex institution with an often turbulent history and more than a brief interpretation of this lies outside the scope of this study. As part of this complexity, the Centre has had to keep pace with the changing demography and geographical boundaries of the inner city of Winnipeg. In 1972 when the Centre was initiated the boundaries were, "the C P R tracks on the north, The Red River on the East, McPhillips, Notre Dame, Sherbrook on the West and Portage on the South" (Johnson, 1972, p.2). Today, characterized by an increase of public housing and a growing Aboriginal and immigrant population, the geographical areas of River East and Seine River are now categorized by some as inner city because they are experiencing the same problems and attempting to work through the same issues as those found in the larger area known as the core area or the Inner City of Winnipeg.

Throughout its history, the diversity of the student population of the Centre has been reflective of the new immigrants that have come to Winnipeg. Often large groups of people came to the Inner City of Winnipeg during a short period of time such as during the influx of many Chileans, Vietnamese, and El Salvadorians, arriving during the late seventies and early 1980's. Other immigrants such as Filipinos and Portuguese came over longer periods of time. This characteristically diverse, dynamic inner city, the

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<sup>3</sup> The Education Program has experienced three host universities but has remained as a degree program throughout these changes and also from being first a three, then four and now a five year program.

program delivery of the Centre and the stressed inner city school system intersect often and in many differing ways. In order to attempt an understanding of this continually perplexing, sometimes uneasy alliance is part of the context development serving as the base for this study.

The Winnipeg Education Centre has been inexorably linked to the inner city and inner city education. The juxtaposition of these three components is pivotal to the philosophical and operational base of the Centre. Understanding the women graduates and tracing their motivation to become inner city activists is a way to situate this study in an inquiry examining the significance of sustaining the post secondary access program.

Participating collaboratively in the development of the life stories of those women, told in their own voices, while both researcher and subject continue to live this inner city reality everyday in the schools, communities, and a teacher education program, seeks to acknowledge and synthesize the theoretical and practical ability of ordinary people, especially women who have been privately active and publicly silent for most of the Winnipeg Education Centre's history. What this means in essence is that these persons, those women, both researcher and subjects who have been living on the "front lines" of this experience, will have an opportunity to make sense of it with a reciprocal, intensified look focusing on inner city activism. There is an additional sense brought to this study that meaning can be constructed by experiencing ordinary people in an extraordinary way through the exploration of themes that develop through the construction of their life stories. The discourse will advance an alternative voice that will add a new interpretation to inner city education and inner city teaching, perhaps by challenging the meaning held by dominant, traditional, models. The intersection of the education system as seen and understood through the Centre and the activist women graduates will provide an impetus for the inquiry.

The teachers and administrators involved in inner city education are constantly involved, actively, or involuntarily, in the dilemma of how to meet the needs of the children in their care. Inner city educators are a recognizable, organized entity often lead with a banner asserting that the traditional educational system is inappropriate for inner city children. This can be interpreted in several significant ways. Often the first comprehension is that the system is not fair, that it is inequitable across every facet of education including funding, issues of diversity, resource allocation, and equal

opportunity. The second level of understanding is that the needs of inner city children are not being met intellectually, physically, spiritually or economically. In order to counteract the reproduction of these inequities found in the inner city, women generally, are, and have been for years, involved in "low to the ground"<sup>4</sup> community activity such as the building of political safe houses such as the Andrew Street Family Centre. These places, based upon principles of social justice, develop as store front sites where democratically run, grassroots community based activity, revolving around the lives of their inner city children is housed. Andrew Street Family Centre, Ma MaWi Wi Chi I TaTa Family Centre, North End Women's Resource Centre, Native Women's Transition Centre are but a few of many such houses. Women who are active in these houses are often active in similar ways in their neighborhood, inner city schools. Many of the women who work in these political safe houses and schools are teacher graduates of the Centre. To understand what a program such as the Winnipeg Education Centre may have had in supporting graduate women teachers in becoming activists who by choice and with determination, return to the community, to put their schools, their political houses in order, is of consequence to a study such as this.<sup>5</sup>

### Inner City Education

"It's not that the education in the Inner City is better or worse than anywhere else. The problem is that it's inappropriate to the needs of the students" (Dienes, 1973, p.1). This comment documented by the director of what was then the Winnipeg Centre Project (renamed Winnipeg Education Centre in 1978) has been and remains a mantra of many of the people expressing insight into the ills and vagaries of inner city schools and inner city education. The implications of the quote is to reveal a long list of potential problematics: the curriculum as it is uncovered is often unconnected with the everyday lives of the children; middle class teachers with liberal ideologies, although often well meaning, misinterpret the academic and social behavior of the children in their care and tend to reproduce their own middle class values and tenets. The absence of representation

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<sup>4</sup> Low to the ground is a phrase used by people who work at the Centre which could be interpreted as grassroots activity.

<sup>5</sup> Winnipeg Teachers Association has an active Inner City Committee.



of teachers from the inner city robs the children of important, positive role models with which to identify. Parents are not always seen as being able to provide the support and guidance necessary for child care due to the lack of the resources required for healthy development.

In the schools the curriculum and assessment is constantly thought to be inappropriate.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, inner city children, for example, score poorly on the standards testing for grade three mathematics when compared with suburban scores. The standardized literacy rates on achievement scores are usually lower than the national average. The drop out rate is significantly higher, the migrancy rate fluctuates from high to higher, violence and gang activity is prevalent. Teachers confront Fetal Alcohol Effects, the problems of inhalant abuse, street and domestic violence, abuse and neglect. The effects of the culture of poverty are evident in lowered expectations, forms of resistance from young adolescents, identity struggles and a lived expectation of failure. Doors are locked, principals carry walkie talkies, surveillance cameras are beginning to appear and every school has a code blue to alert teachers of trouble.

At times by self definition and at other times as an expression of others, inner city teachers are looked upon as a group onto themselves. They work in a very difficult environment prone to controversy where they are expected to act as parent, counselor, advocate, social worker, nurse, coach, and eventually teacher. In the year 2000 there were 19 schools designated as inner city with approximately 400 teachers.<sup>7</sup> While each school has a varied mission statement they all retain several common characteristics which gives them their status as an "inner city school". This characterization was initiated in 1977 when the Winnipeg School Division #1 struck an Inner City Advisory Committee whose purpose was to recommend programs and methods for dealing with inner city schools based upon a recognition of the unique nature of the student and the environment in which he or she attended classes. In February of 1977 this committee issued a report recommending that schools with the following characteristics receive additional financial and general resource supports.

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<sup>6</sup> The debate concerning the appropriateness for inner city is ongoing and can be seen in the Winnipeg Free Press.

<sup>7</sup> Demographically information concerning the inner city schools can be obtained from the annual report issued by the research department on Wall Street.

1. Income of area - 25% or more below median income of the city
2. Turnover of school - 35% or greater
3. Single parent families - 10% or greater
4. Unemployment of area - 10% or greater
5. Heads of families with below grade 10 education level - 50% or greater
6. Population of school - 40% or more - from public housing (Vanderhoef & De Roo, 1978, p. 26).

This early study of Vanderhoef & De Roo defined the inner city environment as:

....the area of first settlement in Winnipeg. Commercially it is the central business district of Winnipeg; physically it is the oldest in the city, diverse in building and housing types; socially it is the cultural centre for Winnipeg's population and is a gathering place for migrants and transients from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; economically it is the location of the poorest people and many marginal businesses. (Vanderhoef & De Roo, 1978, p. 4).

The spatial or geographical area of the inner city needs to be seen in more fluid, flexible terms because of the variety of neighborhoods that exist within the one defined area and because each of these distinctive areas are seen as declining, transitional, stable or revitalizing. It follows from this that the schools would also reflect these relative distinctions and provide the need for change. The school is important to the social fabric of any neighborhood, perhaps even more so in the inner city. The schools play an influential role in determining why some neighborhoods are in decline while others are experiencing revitalization. The schools such as William Whyte Community School, along with the safe house Andrews Street Family Centre seem to have a vital part to play in this stabilization. It is this part of the embedded context that the Winnipeg Education Centre women graduates originate from and to where many of them choose to return.

## Inner City Teachers

Within this context, inner city teachers function in an environment informed and challenged by two major and competing ideologies. The first major ideology is that of educational reform with an underlying supposition of adaptation. Those teachers who are adhering to principles of adaptation have as their basic target, the classroom. Here the goals are to provide a sound, basic education for the children that have been assigned to their care. The method for solving problems in the classroom originating with the children or the curriculum to be taught, is to adjust, accommodate, shift, suit, sort through, keeping with the characteristics of low level reform. Work related activity, if extended past what is required, is likely to be limited to activity such as selling chocolates for an annual fund-raiser or tallying points for corporate pizzas offered as rewards for the number of books the teacher can encourage the children to read. Adaptation is a time honored survival tactic and academically produces no more or no less effective teachers. The question is how does this strategy fare in the inner city school system? Why are some teachers content with this analysis while others may not be?

A variation of this ideology involves teachers in reform activity which extends somewhat outside of the classroom with the vocational target reaching past the immediate children in the classroom to those in the entire school. This attitude necessitates an interest and working knowledge of school division politics, with perhaps an active membership in the local teachers union such as the Winnipeg Teachers Association which could perhaps involve running for office. Teachers involved in reform move outside the classroom, reaching for external funding by writing proposals, lobbying for funding by writing letters, seeking reform by initiating and signing petitions and venturing into the community to attend meetings or by actively participating in events such as the recent Manitoba Teacher's Association's "I Support Public Schools campaign". The goal in this instance is to improve the existing structure by having more of it, or making what is already in existence stronger and more viable. There can be and often is, an issue of equity brought to bear, in the sense that, each child, each school, should have an equitable share of the resources and opportunity but there is limited attention to broader

issues involving radical change to the school and the larger societal context in which it exists.

A second, quite distinct ideology working in the inner city revolves around that group of teachers seeking radical change through a critical analysis of social and pedagogical change. These are teachers who believe that the problems that exist in inner city schools cannot be solved with conservative reform. Instead they seek to transform, to go beyond adapting or adopting by moving towards social change in the larger society in which schools play a significant role. Their major goals involve a curriculum based on transformative pedagogy leading to the empowerment of individual students based upon a critical collective consciousness. This consciousness is based upon a sense of social justice where there is to be an end to the reproduction of inequalities and that this idea is at the forefront of determining the major role of teachers and schools in society. In creating this change, radical teachers find themselves becoming involved in developing and participating in the economic sustainability and social development of the school community. How inner city teachers realize this analysis while remaining in the classroom or determining for some, the necessity to leave the school to work outside to precipitate this change is part of this inquiry.

#### The Winnipeg Education Centre Program Curriculum

The Winnipeg Education Centre has a program that was initially designed to meet the perceived needs of inner city communities. One of these primary needs is equity, another is a sense of legitimacy which provides the ability for inner city people to teach their own children in their own neighborhood schools in a way that is understood as appropriate for them. The Winnipeg Education Centre rests at the intersection of these two prerequisites and provides a program which responds to both. During the time that the Centre has been in existence it has built its recruitment and selection process, program development and assessment and evaluation upon principles of affirmative action which in the province of Manitoba has become known as the Access model. The original mandate supplied to the Centre in the form of an agreement with the Government of Manitoba stated that the Centre would serve equitably those minority populations who reside in the Core Area of Winnipeg. Based upon the demographics of the Inner City in

1973, when the Centre first began, the mandate was interpreted to mean that 50 % of the yearly intake of students would be aboriginal, 25 % would be recent immigrants and 25 % would be what was known as the "working poor" from the inner city environment. Selection criteria also specified that the applicant must be 21 years of age (proviso for mature student status at the University of Manitoba), and live in, work in, or have knowledge of the inner city or a similar environment. It was also required that the applicant must demonstrate academic, financial and social need for the program. Academic need was considered to be the absence of the traditional university entrance requirements or an interrupted student history. Grade 12 was not mandatory but a minimum requirement of grade 10 was a bench mark below which a students chances for academic success were considered problematic. Financial need was carefully considered and financial aid was allocated to those with low family income, or to welfare recipients, or to those with some means to handle students loans or similar financial exigencies. Generally financial need is expressed as being at or below the poverty line as issued by Statistics Canada. Social need is the most subjective area to clarify but is considered for those who would benefit from the supports the program offered to single mothers, survivors of abuse, neglect and family violence. These factors would have normally posed significant barriers to the applicants ability to access a regular post secondary education.

The smaller setting of the Centre, its academic supports, the immediacy of counseling supports, supportive and innovative timetabling, the opportunity for small class sizes lead to more one to one involvement of students and instructional and support staff. These criteria were meant to ensure that those persons who most needed the program and reflected the mandate were the ones who were selected, while the supports offered by the Centre were designed to coincide with the needs of these students in order for them to be successful.

Winnipeg Education Centre began as an alternative teacher education centre and has remained so even though it has evolved into a more stable, permanent institution than the word project would imply when it began as the Winnipeg Centre Project. As with most institutions believed to be an, "alternative", the Centre has struggled with the need for credibility. Credibility from the degree granting university, from the inner city teaching population, from the inner city cultural and ethnic groups, social agencies,

associations, and residents as well as the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Winnipeg Teachers Association, and its own alumna. In designing and carrying out its program it has had to attend to the requirements of the academy, the selected students, the educational community, the current theoretical educational hegemony, and the major funder who also happens to be the current provincial government.

### The Affirmative Action Consideration

As well as the credibility issue, the staff at the Winnipeg Education Centre has sought to do more than give lip service to the principles of affirmative action but to realize it through its day by day operation. The credibility concern and those issues related to affirmative action do not always cohere and at times are flagrantly opposed. Strong elements within the larger society and the university are often at odds with their perception of the value and purpose of affirmative action as lived at the Centre. Critics of affirmative action argue, among other issues, that it does more harm than good, because it exacerbates rather than reduces racial hostility. American critics of affirmative action believe that it is unconstitutional and recently Proposition 209 in California states that "no state institution can discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to any individual, group on the bases of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting" (Proposition 209, State of California, 1996). In the everyday workings of the Centre this attitude presented itself with arguments from local critics such as co-operating teachers, for example who believe that people who are given preferential treatment will not value their education believing that it was inferior or that they, themselves are inferior and somehow not entitled to it. There was also the belief, from critics that admitting students who are unqualified to benefit from the education, for example by not being readily hired, would produce a lowering of standards and further provoke cultural tension rather than relieve it. Advocates of affirmative action took an opposing position which lead with the understanding that there was a pressing need for trained minority teachers to become leaders in the inner city school system and believed that these teachers would not throw aside the important insights or the commitment many brought to the inner city, even after experiencing some personal success.

Throughout the national debate for and against affirmative action, the closing of many access programs due to restrictive funding, the development of segmented special interest programs, the Centre has wrestled with the idea of equity and accessibility to a university education for all those persons who traditionally have not been attended to. It is the only teacher education program of its kind still existing in Canada due largely, to its interpretation of affirmative action, its relationship to the inner city and because it continues to produce graduate teachers. The Centre continues to respond to critics who view the program as anachronistic, a curiosity which can no longer provide an alternative teacher education because it has, by relinquishing its mandate, become more and more mainstream. The Centre is often the focus of controversy concerning its legitimation; teachers and administrators are often apprehensive about the quality of the graduates, there is often a sense that Centre students are getting an easy education compared to how hard others have had to struggle, that the course offerings are not up to the level of real university standards and that the degree, once granted is second rate. This sort of criticism may or may not be code for racism and class bias (Orlikow & Young, 1994). The open, tenuous, often precarious nature of the Centre fosters an environment where people of every conceivable political and pedagogical stripe, some well meaning, some capricious and opportunistic, find fertile ground to experiment, incite dissent, or express liberal angst. Oftentimes whether or not the Centre is a success or failure in its attempt at interrupting or stopping the reproduction of inequalities found in the inner city has become a moot point.

This level of consciousness raising necessary to inform and involve community people in an understanding of what lies at the foundation of the Centre, is dependent on the analysis, leadership and commitment of the current Director and the resident staff and the overall relationship to the host University and the funding agency of the provincial government. It also depends on whether the Centre is weathering one of the many crisis situations that arise. An example of this occurred when the students' living allowance funding was devastatingly and abruptly shifted in 1994 from government funded allowances to student loans or bank sponsorship. Previous to this devastation, students were provided tuition and a living allowance based upon a sliding scale concerned with the number of dependents, debt load, and previous funding allocations.

This shift drastically changed the nature of the program and the students who were recruited.

### The Effects of Economic and Social Shifts

There have also been many shifts in the program development of the Centre but the funding issues began a contingent, spiraling threat to the very existence of the Centre. The student allowance funding change was responsible, not only for a dwindling number of applications the following year but also a noticeable cultural effect in which students began to view themselves principally as consumers of courses and services owed them. The Centre began to take on the character of a market economy and the cost of individual students bent on making the grades took on more and more of a competitive edge. After all the difficulties and challenges the Centre has survived it is this one that has the potential to destroy its original intent as it eroded away many of the built in organizational essentials such as timetabling, course scheduling, extra contact hours, to name a few of the structural issues that were in place to assist non traditional students cope and thrive in the university setting. There is a sense that these supports which previously enabled the development of community and collectively are being circumscribed by individualistic, consumer, student rights. The issues of community building, cultural relevance, student government, began to slip away; usurped by the tensions of economic survival.

This discussion began by outlining the Centre as a complex institution with a sometimes turbulent history. The brief introduction is to provide a brief contextual background to the place where inner city women applicants become graduate teachers. The Centre has several distinguishable time periods such as, before and after the student funding was extinguished, when the Centre was housed in Dufferin School in the heart of the Inner City of Winnipeg, after it was moved to Elmwood, while the program was administered by the University of Brandon; when it became part of the University of Manitoba; when the Social Work Program became a partner, when the University of Winnipeg became responsible for the program, and so on. The inquiry will not look at or concentrate on any one particular era as a prerequisite for choosing the subject participants but will rather situate the inquiry into the time and place that defined the



context for when the particular teacher activist was studying. It is this context where the question that frames this inquiry originates: what relevance did the Winnipeg Education Centre have in the development of women graduates who subsequently became inner city activists.

### Inner City Teacher Education

The teacher education program at the Winnipeg Education Centre has been involved in the debate and ensuing controversy surrounding the dilemmas of and purposes for teacher education, and more specifically teacher education for inner city (urban) schools. At the centre of this generalized debate lies the question, "do inner city teachers require special preparation and if so who can best provide this?" When the Centre was conceived in 1972, North America was emerging from the generation of teachers who were concerned with deficit education described as the culturally deprived child, best characterized in the literature of the 1960's as the interaction of teachers and the then labeled disadvantaged child or an examination of the demands made on teachers by the unique, often deplorable conditions experienced in the inner city school environment. The focus of the times, both managerial and curricular was based upon the perception of the need to overcome loss or deficiency in language, cognition, as well as behavioral issues. The leading educational theorists of the time such as Riessman (1976), although responding to a deficit model disagreed on its fundamental interpretation. Critics pointed to the fact that the use of the term deprived implied that their had been something lost and how, after all, could you lose your culture. Being disadvantaged assumed a "less than" culture which is not possible if it is being lived everyday. Failure was attributed to forces external to the family or the child him or herself. This amounted to a discussion that was based upon whether there was a lack of successful cultural attributes (deprivation) or whether there was an absence of privileges that others enjoyed. (disadvantage). In either case there was a decade in the 1960's where teacher education created prescriptive programs and curriculum to prepare inner city teachers to overcome these forms of deficiencies.

The decade of the 1970's saw teacher education spinning around competency based programming sometimes referred to as the "effective school movement" accompanied by

the insurgence of "multicultural education". Multicultural education was of particular interest to inner city schools who had a large student population of indigenous people and recent immigrants. During this time period however, teachers who were considered change agents or unionists were not encouraged to develop curriculum or other materials advocating transformation, except in some instances where the effective schooling people connected school characteristics with the affect they may have had on the inner city child's learning performance. Reform not change was the prescribed outcome.

ERIC descriptors introduced the term multicultural education in 1979, defining it as "education involving two or more ethnic groups and designed to help participants clarify their own ethnic identity and appreciate that of others, reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and promote cultural pluralism and equal participation" (Weiner, 1993, p.39). The primary actor in this venture was the teacher who was expected to change his or her negative attitudes towards diversity and to develop positive teaching and learning strategies to operationalize this idea in the classroom. The idea of diversity was often seen as a dichotomous categorization. Allan Orienstein (1981) coined two terms to describe this phenomena; environmentalists or hereditarians. Environmentalists were concerned with social and economic factors, such as family income and setting and children's cognitive styles as reasons for lack of student achievement. The hereditarians attributed academic failure to inherited deficiencies. This affected teacher education, more to the point inner city teacher education because it both precipitated and fueled the argument for how teachers should respond to how inequity would be best rectified: with the belief that school characteristics had little or no affect on overcoming social problems or that failure was genetically driven and as such undercut an understanding of a need for educational change. This set of controversial ideas and deficit educational financing lead to a new approach to teacher education called the competency model or the effective schools movement. In fact, this particular model influenced teacher preparation like a hard wave, engulfing students and educators in a very short time. Competency teacher education programming generally can be understood as a method based upon the belief that a students success depended on his or her ability to perform a set of discrete teaching tasks satisfactorily. These tasks were generic to actual teaching situations which were given, for example, to student teachers in advance, so they knew the outcomes before setting about to teach them. Then they would be evaluated, measures

against these same prescribed outcomes. The process and the results were also subjected to stringent monitoring and documented as elaborate checklisted student teaching evaluations. This was meant to elevate teaching to a more scientific stature and which would lead to the standardization of teaching by establishing performance criteria (Weiner, 1993). This model had an effect on inner city schools wrestling with diversity, by predicating the belief that improvement for under funded inner city schools was dependent on the idea of correcting teacher deficiencies and identifying those discrete, check listed, abilities teachers needed in order to be a good inner city teacher in a diverse cultural environment. The criticism to this model was that it did not take into account the fact that competency based teaching reduced teachers to technically driven, facilitator- mechanics who were ill prepared to deal with the values and politics that pervaded inner city schools and the turbulent society they were part of. The diversity debate as issues for teacher education unraveled in a discourse that could not seem to transcend the issue of who was at fault for the failure: negative inner city school characteristics and teacher deficiencies or the child him or herself. Common ground was never functionally realized and teacher education was propelled into the 1980's and the decade of excellence.

The "excellence movement" eclipsed and often contradicted the equity- diversity discourse of the two previous decades. The excellence movement had as its central tendencies, teacher quality and individual student achievement. The criticism mounted to this competitive edge ideology which camouflaged issues of diversity under a cloak of excellence while in fact creating a new and higher educational standards for everyday students which did precious little to address the needs of students in the inner city who would not have either the resources or the opportunity to meet these new and expected standards. Critics saw this movement as being widely responsible for the gulf between those who had and those who had not. Advocates sought ways to ensure excellence through the improvement and professionalization of the teaching force where the teachers own authority would replace the bureaucratic hold experienced by teachers for generations. The teaching body would have the responsibility for setting standards that ultimately originate with the attitudes, values and beliefs of the teacher. Curriculum development took on a more of an emancipatory quality. Inner city education generally and inner city teacher education specifically was reduced on the whole to a lip service exercise. Inner

city teachers were left more to their own devices as most of North America was concerned with the success of the no name, generic, individual child where children of diversity became part of the general mix (Weiner, 1993).

Throughout these three decades there were people who were writing and thinking about the plight of the inner city children and how teachers could best be prepared to teach them. The voices of Herb Kohl, Jonathan Kozol, Ira Shor resonate throughout this time period, developing the consciousness of teacher activists across North America which emphasized the need to view the education of inner city children of diversity directly, not as an addendum or a hidden embarrassment to the system that should not have occurred. A sense of complacency developed in schools with regard to inner city teachers revolving around an attitude best characterized as "everybody knows but nothing really can be done for them". Teachers retreated into quick fix, gurus, and ostrich like avoidance of the societal issues that lived in their classrooms everyday. Kozol, for example, has written nine major works chronicling an activists consciousness from the early 1960's with Death at an Early Age (1963) to the more recent Savage Inequalities, published in 1992. The themes throughout his work are constant: the understanding of diversity and equity that is based upon an appeal to "rescue" (his well defined word) the inner city children by redistributing wealth. He views children in the inner city as casualties of a conflict of a society that refuses to see or chooses to ignore the fact that a change in ideology, a reform paradigm shift, so called liberation curriculum, or even an army of more skilled teachers, will not significantly alter the welfare and education of inner city children.

The fact that this theme has been constant in his writing for some thirty years is testimony to the heart of the matter and the continual disparity that exists in the inner city. Reviewing course outlines in teacher education programs such as at the University of Manitoba, will reveal that Kozol and other writing activists, have been cited as reference material throughout; placed on a bibliography as an antidote or alternative view to the hegemony of current educational thought. Winnipeg Education Centre for the most part adopted and advocated this alternative theme of critical pedagogy, based upon the belief that its responsibility to teacher education extended past the institution and on into the inner city and the all encompassing issues of diversity and inequity. The fact that most of the students who entered into the teacher education program had experienced

both, the affects of diverse backgrounds, poverty and inequity, and were interested in and committed to, making the difference as teachers or at least personally overcoming its negative aspects, contributed more and less to the ethos of the Centre and the lived curriculum of the program. The writing and central imperative of visionaries such as Paulo Freire (1968) had a significant impact on the teacher education program of the late seventies and early 1980's to the extent that staff and students attended teaching conferences where he was present, (Calgary, 1983), that his books and articles were both in the library and used as course material in student teaching seminars (Portage La Prairie Literacy Project, 1985) and courses generally. A critique of Freire's "banking concept" of teaching which referred to the nature of knowledge and its acquisition became a tenet for the Curriculum and Instruction courses taught at the Centre. This attitude was further developed through the ferreting out of like minded co-operating teachers as role models for field placements in the Inner City schools of Winnipeg School Division #1. Freire's imperative that schools must play the decisive role in the ongoing change and transformation towards a truly democratic society was considered as part of the day by day operational struggle of the Centre as well as the pedagogy that was being taught to student teachers.

The Centre kept abreast of the current initiatives and research of interest to the inner city schools. The education program monitored the "We Can Rescue our Children Movement" that originated in Chicago. In this study associated with the movement the participants reflected the gravity of the situation in the opening salvo:

Public education in Chicago is in a state of crisis. Our children are scoring far below national and international averages in reading and mathematics. Nearly half of the children who enroll in the schools drop out before graduating. Violence, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse have become problems of alarming proportion. The Chicago Public schools have been given many opportunities for reform, but the system has failed. More money has not helped. Chicago spends nearly \$4000 per year per student on its public schools more than the state and national averages and three times the amount of parochial schools" (Walberg, Bakalis, Bast & Baer, 1988, p.1).

With this call to arms came the banner of voice and choice where the parents and public must choose the best schools to meet the needs of the children with the result being the total restructuring of the school system and the end to ghettoization. The thought developed in a study such as this one and others such as the fall out from the Brownsville - Ocean Heights experience in New York City, had considerable impact on the system here in Winnipeg as may be seen in the formation of a few community schools in the core area advocating parental involvement and community development leading to a more stable environment advocating sustainable development (William Whyte Community School is one primary example). The Centre developed over the years close, collaborative relationships with schools such as this one, primarily as field sites for the student teachers. These partnerships, along with the fusion of traditional university requirements formed the academic basis for the teacher education program.

The teacher education program sought resources from places such as the Project True (Teacher Resources for Urban Education) which originated from Hunter College in New York. There was, and still is, a paucity of academic material singularly devoted to Inner City schools in Canada. At the time this is being written the Winnipeg One School Division is addressing this void by developing Aboriginal curriculum meant to be used throughout the system. Consequently, sources such as the one mentioned above become important, at that time to the development of a teacher education program such as Winnipeg Centre. One example of this may be the study lead by Estelle Fuchs, (1969) who researched novice teachers as they entered into teaching lives inside inner city schools. This detailed study provided detailed interpretive data about the daily life of novice inner city teachers over the critical induction period. Using an anthropological interpretation Fuchs outlines the perils and provocation that often characterizes the new inner city teacher and which she believes explains why so many of them do not stay in the inner city or are failures in their vocation. Her insights in a study such as this were invaluable in both understanding inner city schools and more to the point what a teacher education program could do as a result to prepare novice teachers for the onset of this phenomena.

Most recently there is an emerging type of research and writing appearing as resource material for teacher educators and students having to do with a more generalized, human, social science, psychological approach to issues of importance to

teachers of inner city children. For example in 1993, a study appeared titled Identity and Inner City Youth (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). This particular work is an ethnographic piece that involved the study of inner city youth which points out the dichotomies that persist; those perceived by politicians and policy makers on one hand and the realities of their everyday lives on the other. The study looks at how social organizations such as, for example, our own Rossbrook House here in Winnipeg, act as environments that enable young people to form bridges to mainstream society along with a more positive sense of self and a reason to pursue hopeful and positive enterprises such as the ability to learn. The question that studies such as this one raise for people involved in teacher education programs such as the Winnipeg Education Centre is the ability to recognize the underlying assumption that inner city schools have although largely unheralded, been trying to develop an embedded context all along while struggling to provide academic sustenance as well.

The most significant impact on the program at the Winnipeg Education Centre was and continues to be the student teachers themselves. All of the students came from the inner city of Winnipeg or what was identified as a similar environment. They came to the program with the knowledge base and experience of living, going to school, working or receiving welfare, and being parents of school age children. Originating from the inner city or an environment such as a First Nations reserve community or in the case of the immigrant students an area of both politically and poverty stricken Santiago Chile or San Salvador these applicants fit the mandated entry requirements which made them, by their choice to teach there, candidates for successful teachers in the inner city. The two criteria of origin and motivation, were for a long period of the Center's history, viewed as synonymous.

### An Intricate Contextual Web

The shared and embedded context of the nature and history Winnipeg Education Centre, the complexities of the Inner City of Winnipeg and Inner City education, and the lives of the women graduates form an intricate contextual web for the development of this study which has as its focus the question of how and why some of the women graduate teachers became inner city activists. The context is shared by both researcher and

subject participants which is viewed, for the purposes of this study, as a necessary attribute of research reciprocity. It fosters well the attitude of "showing people where to look without telling them what to see" by recognizing the shared context rather than dictating or manufacturing a context in which the research could take place. Placing the considerable emphasis of the Winnipeg Education Centre is a recognition of the need to view these women not as decontextualized subjects but as situated, connected, reciprocal human beings. It is the intercontextualizing of the Centre, the inner city, inner city teachers and schools, and the lives of the women graduates that forms the genealogy of this study. It is this intercontextuality that will enable the possibility for the study to foster and register the development of a richly constructed narrative of why some women graduates became inner city community activists.

### A Research Design

The Winnipeg Education Centre has operated as an inner city education program with a mandate to recruit teacher candidates from residents of the inner city and to prepare them to teach in, and provide leadership for, the inner city schools of Winnipeg. Recruiting some 15-20 persons each year into the program each year has resulted in the graduation of 250 male and female teachers (as of July 1999). Not all of these graduates have remained in education and not all have chosen to work in the inner city, nevertheless a significant number of these graduates do choose to teach in the Inner City of Winnipeg.

The informants for this inquiry will be drawn from the list of 236 women graduates compiled in the summer of 1999 from the original Winnipeg Centre archival files. These files chronicle the graduates from the inception of the Centre in 1973 until its 25th year. Out of the 1999 figures of 250 graduates, there were 14 men. There have been years when the program did not include any men on the graduation roster. The women graduates are representative of Aboriginal and Métis decent, as well as those emigrating to Canada from Asia Pacific, Central America, the Philippines, Portugal, Chile, Poland, Vietnam and India. Many of these women enter the program as single parents with varying degrees of disrupted work and educational history, a background of poverty, racism, and often as survivors of violent and abusive relationships and



substance abuse. There are individual as well as general characteristics known upon entry to the Centre by the adherence to the selection criteria that have been in place since 1972 for the purpose of ensuring equitable access of those persons eligible to enter the program. All of these women were between the ages of 21 and 49 and they demonstrated the lack of traditional entrance requirements graduates, the majority completing less than Grade 10, which is considered to be the minimum grade level required to begin successful study.<sup>8</sup> In addition these women have been away from formal classroom study ranging in time from 5-12 years. Significantly, all of these women graduates, upon entry to the Centre, lived in worked in, or had knowledge of the inner city of Winnipeg or a similar environment and were perceived to have need of the financial, academic, and social supports that are offered at the Centre. Upon completion of studies, most of these women sought employment in inner city schools and day care centres. Others have returned to their First Nations Communities to teach, some of whom are now retired, while several have become administrators in Winnipeg School Division # 1, some have moved to school Divisions outside the inner city area and a small number have left the province.

What is of significant interest to this study is that a small number of these women teacher graduates have gone on to become inner city activists. There is not a statistical number for how many there are or positively who they may be; what there is, is the perception that they do in fact exist because of the behavior they exhibit, how this behavior is perceived by others and the activity these women become involved in.

Initially a recognition of activism can be seen in the form of acknowledgment from colleagues, media attention, organizations such as CHOICES, The Aboriginal Teacher's Circle, and associations such as the First Nations Accountability Coalition of Manitoba. Initially a list of potential participants will be drawn up by myself as researcher. This list will be compiled by considering the situations that these women are in today and how the community in which they are situated perceives them in a communal or public way and how this reflects upon the working definition of activist. At this point in the process an inner city activist is defined as a person (in this case women) who purposefully go

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<sup>8</sup> Grade 10 was viewed by the Access program policy guidelines to be the basis for the academic requirement to enter the program. It was a flexible guideline and was used along with other criteria to determine if a candidate was ready for successful university study.

about the business of their lives to better the lives of children in their inner city community. This community may be the teaching community of schools. It may be the pedagogical community of Manitoba Education and Training or the Aboriginal Resource Centre. It may also be the political community of the Aboriginal Teachers Circle or the Winnipeg Teachers Association, inner city chapter. Each of these communities acknowledges or advertises many of these people as those who are making a difference in the lives of inner city children and the environment in which they live. This acknowledgment of this "activity for making a difference" is evident when you read the community newspapers, speak to teachers and principals, as you view the programs these women develop, and the projects they manage and evaluate. It is from these women that the three participants will emerge. The final choice of who the three will be is dependent upon availability, the degree of interest in participating and a general level of compatibility between the researcher and participant which forms the prerequisite for the reciprocal nature of the method.

The intent of this study is to reach beyond simple identification of who may be activists and to continue past the establishment of essential and non essential criterial attributes and the creation of a descriptive taxonomy. The intent is to be realized in the uncovering of meaning that seeks to understand why these women did and do what they do and the significance of this behavior to others. It is understood that these women who became inner city community activists will make important, positive contributions to social change especially with respect to children and schools situated in the inner city. These women activists will also function as role models for persons who identify with them and for whom they exemplify success. It is also anticipated that the ideas that originate from these activists may differ from those of the mainstream and, as such, will contribute new and meaningful understandings of issues and concerns of the inner city education community.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review: Activism

#### Introduction

Working through the development of a comprehensive literature review is a discovery in the sense of how you come to know something as you construct it. In this case the search was for how activism is portrayed in the journals and books of academe and to some extent the text of popular culture. Resonating throughout the time spent on this activity, was the sound of an Inuit storyteller I once had the opportunity to spend time with. Her eloquent tales spoke of redemption and Sedna, the goddess, with the half fish body. There were further tales of finding a way from here to there, about family life and why people do what they do. It was a meaningful learning experience which characterized again, for myself as an educator and researcher, the importance of metaphor and the power it can convey if approached respectfully and practiced thoughtfully. The use of metaphor<sup>1</sup> is used as an integral tool in some of the recent feminist research methodology (Belenky et al, 1986; Witherell and Noddings, 1991; Schulz, 1997; Reinhartz, 1992; Britzman, 1996) and has shown itself in the analytical philosophy of Derrida's deconstruction interpretation (Wheeler, 2000) and in the criticism and critical interpretation of literary text (Barthes, 1969). For myself as an educator it has become a form of pedagogical scaffolding during the shared construction of meaning during the development of the teacher education program with its diverse student population of the Winnipeg Education Centre. The constructing of, and sharing in, the interpretation of metaphors has been a way to bridge the dissonance resulting from the residual fallout of "mis" understandings brought about by reductionism. The reductionism experienced, for example, by an elementary school child who has been taught what it means to be a Dutch child through the portrayal of this child as red

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<sup>1</sup> Lakoff, (1992) has a general contemporary theory of metaphor that argues that metaphorical expressions are not found in language but rather in thought where we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. This metacognitive consideration of metaphor in this study acknowledges an interest of some feminist researchers to ground their epistemology in metaphor as seen in the work of Belenkey et al, 1986.

cheeked, wooden shoe wearing, tulip holding, bloomer and winged hat wearing individual. This reduced image of the Dutch child is inviting intolerance or "mis" understanding because there is no context to support or abdicate this particular portrayal. Within the context of the Centre this idea translates as the women students coming to their studies having to confront the "mis" understandings many people have of them: characterized as weak, disadvantaged, and lacking the learning ability and capacity to succeed. Both examples are stereotypical and a base for ridicule and fear and other overt and covert forms of prejudice. A shared metaphor in the shape of a narrative could provide a context: a framework for a dialogue to develop as the basis for a more positive meaning to develop to determine whether there may or may not be more to being a Dutch child and to understand why this may be so. Can the child still be Dutch without the tulip? Can a woman become a teacher and an activist in spite of the perceived disadvantage?

The story format for this story teller was not the usual one of: the beginning, character and plot development, middle expository narrative, leading to the denouement and on to the spiraling finish. The format for this storyteller depended on who her audience was, and what she wanted to teach, share or familiarize people with on that particular day. In some instances she would begin with plot development, and then proceed to the beginning and the context development. On other days she would begin at the end of the story and then work towards the context and characterization. The Inuit people in the room would wander in and out, listen to the story as much or as little as they needed, and when the story was "over" for them, they left quietly or sometimes with a short burst of satisfaction and approval. Many of the others in the room and by others, I refer to the non- Inuit audience, found this format to be disquieting and difficult. The behaviour of the Inuit audience and often too, the story teller, was thought to be rude and inappropriate, or on the other hand, a quaint, curious novelty. This experience could be seen alternatively in a more positive light as a very thoughtful and powerful way to show people where to look without telling them what to see. The storyteller was creating an experience, a metaphor, enabling the active listener to construct the story in a way that made sense. Each listener was left to shape and interpret the story using their own voice.

The purpose of this inquiry is an attempt at making sense; making sense of why and how women become inner city community activists. How women become inner city

community activists may well be the story the Inuit storyteller could tell and in many ways the literature review provides many possibilities for this story to develop. In the beginning the review unfolds very much in the way of the Inuit storyteller. Reading the articles, biographies and accounts of activism began as the formation of a metaphoric web of literature naming activism in one form or another. In this case, after a thorough look at the literature related to activism, many strands began to mature on the activist web. The activist web grew to include strands named as activist mothers, pragmatic activists, social activists, cultural activists, feminist activists. The web continued to expand to include pedagogical activists, political activists, entrepreneurial activists, community activists and teacher activists. If left as a loosely defined web, the literature would remain solely as an interesting backdrop for an exploration of activism. Much as in the construction of the Inuit story, the reader of the literature review is encouraged to take what is needed to facilitate the creation of individual thoughts and ideas on what activism is or what activism means. On its own this provides some interesting insights into activism. What is evidently missing, is a most significant part of the process of meaning making. What is missing is the context where the meaning generated by the literature review is to be transformed. The people who walk away from the Inuit storyteller are taking with them that which they need to form the context of the shared metaphor. They will individually or with the companionship of others construct the meaning. As such the use of metaphor to the extent described here demands a shared context if the meaning is to be significant. It demands more than a tolerant attitude adhering to the thought that the person has the right to tell the story and be heard. The contextual character of metaphor demands that the person must also be understood.

The arrivals and departures of the story audience act as a sorting, classification device that enables them to first of all, see the connections, tensions, similarities and differences, analogies in the elements of the story being told; the lesson to be learned. Secondly, at some point the audience leaves with the ideas, theory, and connections needed to construct their own meaning of the story being told to them. I approach the literature review in the same way. The purpose then for the literature review is to thoughtfully survey the literature, then to organize this literature into a web of classifications and to use this classified web to seek out common elements shaping the work of defining what activism may or may not be. The web is not a rigid linear

structure but one of maneuverability allowing for connections and links to be more readily revealed. The extent of the meaning created will rest in the integration of the interpreted life stories of the women activists and the context of their stories and the ethical research sensibility of how they are shared and interpreted.

### The Shifting Metaphor

The comings and goings of the Inuit audience are much like participating in a perceptible figure ground phenomena where based upon the perception of the viewer the significant figure in the forefront can retreat into the less significant background and when new perceptions are introduced or reconceptualized the reverse may occur. Making sense often occurs in the moment of transfer or shift in the figure ground phenomena. Women at times understand this process as the antithesis of the rigid demarcation of the personal and public, the political and non political. The meaning making transfer is most often subtle, fleeting and sometimes imperceptible. The literature will provide theory, insights and ways to recognize the meaning making opportunities. The context will provide the significance. The skill involved will be for the researcher to recognize when a shift is about to happen and to be able to hold the situation long enough to be able to glean the significance of the event or circumstance and interpret the meaning from it.

### Establishing the Web

Activism shows many faces in the theoretical literature encompassing the political, (Munro 1998), the pedagogical, (Sleeter, 1998) and the social community (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). The political, the pedagogical and the communal share a similar context yet the way each one perceives their circumstances can be viewed as discrete. For example, at times the teacher as activist is included in an anthology where other forms of activism are discussed. A work on activist mothers has in it life stories of activist mothers who are also or happen to be teachers. There are works of activist teachers where none are portrayed as mothers. The ideas relating women to activism appear at this point as a tangle of types and circumstances.

The process of establishing the web begins with reading the literature. The untangling begins with uncovering, naming and characterizing activism in the many forms it presents itself in the literature and then linking the strands together based upon similarities that seem to predicate connections or strands that appear to be, for the purposes of this inquiry, more significant than others. The result of this connected webbing will be the development of a working definition of activism as drawn from the different segments of the literature.

### Women Activist Mothers: All of Whom are Women

The first example of web strand identification occurs in the work of Jetter, Orleck and Taylor as they attempt to make sense of The Politics of Motherhood (1997). Choosing this strand to begin with was an arbitrary decision. There was no sense of applied hierarchy in the development of the web strands. The intent was to be, at first, thorough and eclectic and not specifically ordered. The literature at this point of the exercise develops as a mind storm of types and ideas where each strand was accepted as it appeared in the literature. The classifying and ordering leading towards a broad definition is to come at the end of the review. By approaching the literature in this non hierarchical, open manner, composites of activists, as well as fictive activist accounts; each situated along with the more developmental models will discourage the creation of the stereotypical activist. As with the Dutch boy without the tulip it allows for the question: can you be an activist without the female gender?

Continuing on with the first strand, The Politics of Motherhood contains articles written by many women activists, from many geographical areas of struggle; environmental activists, community activists, education activists. These women share three orientations; the fact that they are women, that they are activists and that they are mothers. They differ in most other ways, be it politics, race, class, and sexual orientation. While it would be stereotypically naive to think that there is one coherent motherist, activist theory, it is not a huge stretch to see that there is a link between motherhood and political action. One of the authors, Orleck quotes philosopher Sara Ruddick's argument:

The work done by individual mothers in caring for and nurturing their own children gives them a particular political viewpoint from which they can work to change the world of all children. That maternalistic perspective, with its emphasis on giving and nurturing life, has been associated with many different kinds of mother activism: from environmental justice to subsistence, anti-militarist, and even nationalist struggles (Ruddick in Orleck et al., 1997, p. 5).

Many mother activists appear in Politics Of Motherhood, (Orleck et al., 1997) as women teachers. The interesting aspect brought about in this work is that it clearly shows that not all the activists portrayed are feminists and that there is no romantic sentimentality or sense of naturalistic idealism, moral superiority or vacuous selflessness that sticks to the pages. The important point for purposes of this study may be to note that mothers are a powerful political identity around which these women have galvanized influential grassroots movements for social change. Women from the Inner City of Winnipeg who are activists were not included in this book but some of them may well have been. The majority of the Education Program student population have been and continue to be single parent mothers. Some of these mothers, graduated and became teachers. Some of these mothers, graduated, became teachers and then became inner city community activists. This pattern develops several strands for the conceptual web. Rather than developing this discrepancy by using a competitive edge by asking why is that all of the graduate mothers did not become activists or why were there not more of them, the question will be why some of them did become inner city community activists and to do so by looking to what these women may have shared in common rather than what they did not.

While reading this book, an awareness emerges that points to a gap between activism and volunteerism. The gap necessitated the development of a new web line because of the perceived separation of activist and volunteerism. Activism and voluntarism when associated with women may seem to have a similar patina but the literature does make in this instance a marked distinction. Activist women, in this instance are those who for whatever individual or collective motivation politicize their family responsibilities in order to bring about change. Women volunteers are not politicizing their family activity but are carrying out that political activity prescribed by others in a more pragmatic



sense or a motivation determined by others, one in which they join for a short duration but may not always live out for long. This does not negate the fact that there are women who do volunteer for a lifetime.

### Activist Teachers and the Millennium Malaise

As the world turned to the year 2000, teaching as a vocation is confronted in one way or another with the forces of, "significant economic restructuring, pressured by the dynamics of globalization and regionalization" (Robertson, 1999, p. 7). The issues of globalization and regionalization seems to be developing an ideological mantra which suggests that activism may provide an antidote to the dilemmas of the approaching and unfolding millennium. Robertson elaborates on the current educational context as a time of unfettered consumerism, a time where the universality that held together the Canadian welfare system is threatened if not all but vanished, where the reshaping of the work force due to technological advances has reduced public spending and increased accountability and where economic policy has taken precedence over universal social policy. Although this dialogue on the woes of globalization is credited here to Smaller and Robertson (1999), it appears in similar form in every recent Educational Foundations text and also in numerous Educational Administration treatises. The issue for a study of activism with regard to these negative aspects of globalization and the accompanying malaise is to look at activism within this context.

For teachers of all stripes this negative globalization leads to a decrease in funding accompanied with the urgency and the need to do more with less. It also increases and intensifies teachers work loads as they are required to be nurses and social workers and fund raisers as well as accomplished pedagogues. Ironically there is less public respect for this increased intensity: teacher bashing has become an increasingly pastime searching for legitimacy (the 1998 Manitoba Teachers' Society campaign "I Support Public Schools" was an organized attempt to counteract what has been coined as teacher bashing). Add to this is the abandonment of our inner cities, the dissolution of cultural identities, and continuing economic disparity there exists in our society what philosophers such as the Canadian, Charles Taylor, (1991) calls the "malaise of modernity". Situated in this described malaise are Canada's inner city teachers, working

within a contemporary context of consumer capitalism, globalization, the erosion of the welfare state, and having to do more with less. This milieu has created both a political and pedagogical angst for those who chose to teach in these communities. This web strand offers activism as a reaction or response to the current societal pressures, the perceived public apathy or anger directed towards teachers and a general malaise of modernity.

### Union Activists Teachers

The political gaze and activist stance in this continuing context appears as several focal points. One of these occurs when teachers become increasingly aware of and active in their professional unions such as the Manitoba Teachers' Society or the Winnipeg Teachers' Association. In their seminal work, Teacher Activism in the 1990's, Harry Smaller and Susan Robertson have gathered together, edited and written themselves and others, into an understanding of how teachers unions create the environment for political teacher activism to combat the destructive nature of globalization on the educational system. The political activism that is being advocated for in the piece that Smaller contributed to this work is based upon what he calls, "globalizing from below". This translates to mean that teachers unions must organize internationally to counteract the burgeoning corporate agenda seen as problematic in many areas of the world. The book includes a piece by Spaul that relates how Australian teachers political attitudes sought to bring down the government (Smaller & Robertson, 1996). In addition, Robertson and Chadbourne document the New Zealand teacher's struggle with a right wing conservative government bent on decreasing educational spending by increasing its control on the teachers. The teachers involved in each of these struggles and ones similar are considered to be political activists.

This web strand develops a form of activism that is overtly political in nature, involving both men and women seeking to confront the more pragmatic, universal or global problems associated with education as a system. These unionist thoughts concerning activist motivation becomes one more strand for the activist web, one that associates activism with issues related to today's contemporary teachers. The questions emerging from this strand is whether the globalized unionist activity analyzed here

creates a context where men and women teachers recognize the same concerns and act accordingly. This web strand suggests two areas of interest for this inquiry. The first issue is whether an interest in global or universal activism can inform activism that is being constructed on a community level such as the Inner City of Winnipeg. Secondly, if the activist context was local such as the Inner City of Winnipeg and not global, would men and women teachers view the issues differently or would they view these issues not by gender but through another set of criteria?

### Teachers and Political Activism: Some of Whom are Women

Continuing with this particular theme, the literature continues to provide reference to teacher activism; in this case shown as categorizations of differing manifestations of teacher activist behaviour. J. F. Morrow (1982) has gone as far as creating a typology of teacher activism based initially upon the extension of binary opposites consisting of "us" (the teacher's union leadership) and "them" (the traditional opponents of the Department of Education). Morrow's analysis indicates that clustered behavioral characteristics form around terms such as "militant", "left wing", "right wing", and "conservative". Left wing activist for example he describes as "an activist teacher who is radical in political orientation, has a collective and organic rather than an individualistic or hierarchical view of political and social processes, is presupposed to direct action rather than consultation or persuasion in situations of industrial disputation, and finally has a preference for comprehensive and progressive educational programs in contrast with selective of traditional approaches" (Morrow, 1982, p. 139). This set of complex characteristics if viewed holistically would seem to mean that it is near impossible for them to apply to all left wing activists all of the time. To this end Morrow concludes that a simple dichotomous typology of teacher activism based upon left wing, right wing, militant or conservative is inadequate. Coding the teachers according to the strength of their attitudes to "us" and to "them" and accompanied with the understanding that in the end it is factored down to which side of the dispute they held to, he established a matrix typology in which nine categories of teacher activism emerged. The points listed below show the characteristics ascribed to each type of activist. I include this taxonomy in its entirety as an example of how this particular

author exemplifies a way of trying to understand activism by categorizing it using a typology.

1. Militant Unionists: strong “us” identification-evolutionary view of social and political change-tend to be male- good sense of how organizational decisions are made - close to promotion -on their way to further graduate studies- secondary rather than primary teachers - direct action is seen as the only way to get things done - conservative view of pedagogy and curriculum issues - blame preservice training for pedagogical incompetence's - union is more important than employer or the teaching profession.

2. Crusading Militants: moderate identification with us - relatively young-secondary teachers -less on the verge of promotion - still mostly male but there are some women with a feminist disposition - ideology is the prime motivational factor - union goals are displaced with broader objectives - tend to pedagogical progressiveness but tend not to devote time to professionalism but any activity is linked to activist activity - most likely to proselytize their political and social views to parents and students.

3. Alienated Militants: weak identification with both us and them - major goal is to maximize the effects of disruption and confrontation-experienced setbacks in their teaching careers - militancy is seen as personal power rather than collective - their positions in forging alliances from one group to another and to turn also from one issue to another - tend to be male - lacking in tertiary qualifications - unpromoted - relatively conservative philosophically - concerned with prestige and autonomy rather than teaching skills.

4. Good Unionists: strong identification with us, moderate with them - younger - well qualified - commitment to militant action no more intense than other forms of activism -involved in educational innovation - unionism appears as extension to their professionalism - male predominately - secondary teachers.

5. Moderates: Moderate identification with us and them - flexible attitudes often vacillating - tend to be more independent of the merits or otherwise of union leaders directions - principle is more important than solidarity.

6. Grubs: weak identification with us - moderate with them - work to discredit union leadership - older - junior promotions - primary level teachers - less tertiary education-suspicious of progressive pedagogy - adept at internal rank and file positioning.

7. Opportunists: strong identification with both us and them - basic motivation is expedience - generally ambitious - young, unpromoted secondary teachers - education predilections remain undefined - ambivalence and indeterminateness to structured and processes.

8. Watchdogs: moderate identification with us and strong with them - senior male teachers - regards selves as custodians of values external to the union-promoted to administrative positions - connections to governmental and key educational personnel - tend to conservatism - concentrate on undermining changing directions within the union structure rather than disobeying policy.

9. Infiltrators: weak identification with us and strong with them - loyalty is to unions antagonists and work to discredit the leadership - associated with other political groups - reflect right wing educational interests - male primary teachers, who are experienced but not promoted - evangelists of sorts -may be receiving financial support from other fringe groups - promote confusion to rank and file through communication devices.

The conclusion reached by Morrow's study is that the activists he observed, of what ever political stripe, are commonly male, secondary teachers who are promoted or soon to be promoted. Their motivation seems to be that of reform and interest in maintaining the balance of power. The question arising from this strand is a direct one asking if there are activist issues that are of more interest to men than to women and what role the contexts of public life and private life may play on this issue. This strand also brings to light the issues of motivation and intentionality for those aspiring to the role of activist. It also relays the thought that one form of research relative to an understanding of activism seeks to understand or define activism by developing a typology as a means to organize the concept.

### Academic Activists: Some of Whom are Women Action Researchers

The Academy brings to the discussion a form of activism that might be referred to as "intellectual activism". For example, Howard Solomon, writing in an anthology discussing difference and equality defines an intellectual activist as one who, "in carrying on (i.e. developing non-traditional areas of study), carries out ideas (i.e. translates them into praxis) and ensures that they are carried across to the public arena" (Solomon, 1997, p. 182). Challenging the traditional territory of academe, he talks of the contested arenas of town and gown, public and private, teaching and service. The dichotomous nature of either or in this case sparked him to look at research in a new way; one that has him looking at the shame of being denied promotion as awe- fill and not awful. In looking at this own position in a new way, as he put it, "as sacred trouble makers" (Solomon, 1997, p. 188). This form of activism, he believes allows him to occupy different spaces, to see and to heal "a professoriate battered by institutional in fighting, disciplinary isolation, and the rhetoric of backlash demagogues" (Solomon, p. 189). Opening up the definition of the academic to include activism allows those intellectuals he call amateurs to do their work out of love. He does not conclude that there is a gender bias relative to this discussion of activism. The appearance of this particular web line, again, links the issue of activism to the question of motivation. It also links activism and the comprehension of activism to the role of the researcher in an inquiry such as this one, who is more than likely to be an academic.

### Political Teacher Activists as Critical Pedagogues: Many Now Who Are Women

At this point in the review the literature took a distinct categorical turn with the development of the web strand uncovering and linking the issue of activism and teacher activism to critical pedagogy. This aspect of the review began with a revisit to the work of Ira Shor. A revisit in the sense that this writing has informed my teaching practice for decades and now also the research into this inquiry. Ira Shor (1992) has been arguing for a critical, democratic, empowering teaching force for decades. His views on empowerment cohere with the spirit of this inquiry which defines empowerment not as a helping process involving a helper and a recipient or a subject and an informant, but an

act involving participation in a reciprocal activity leading to the liberation or transformation of both. His current work is predicated upon an agenda of values; values that he believes, would contribute to empowerment. He describes these values as participatory, problem posing, affective, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary and activist. (Shor, 1992). Activist teachers according to Shor's characterization, are those teachers who question the status quo while promoting democratic values for both self and the society. He develops this idea further by stating that critical pedagogy is activist activity because it questions the dominant norms, it develops participatory methods, and insists that knowledge is in no way a fixed entity but is in a constant state of flux. This flux provides activists with the opportunity to rethink or reconceptualize experience within the context of the larger society. Activist teachers according to Shor would be those involved in dialogic<sup>2</sup> classrooms where the activism takes different shapes depending on each individual context. In an activist teachers classroom students will learn that education is something they do and not something done to them. In other words they go to school to learn not to learn how to go to school. An additional characteristic of the is form of activist teaching is that teachers will enable their students to become change agents. It is the re discovery of Shor's activism that leads to both the creation and continuation of the web strands involving critical theory and critical pedagogy and the reconceptualization of a teaching practice into that of a research imperative.

Critical pedagogues such as Henri Giroux (1985; 1986; 1988) call Shor's activist teachers "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988, p. 100). Giroux defines transformative intellectualism as a "critical referent for educators to make problematic the interests that are inscribed in the institutional forms and everyday practices that are subjectively experienced and reproduced in schools..... means that critical educators need to understand how lived and material forms of culture are subject to political organization, that is how they are produced and regulated" (Giroux, 1998, p. 101). The curriculum of these transformative classrooms are involved with reconceptualizing many of the "disabling ideologies and behaviours, such as self

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<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin has contributed greatly to the understanding of the dialogic process. The understanding of dialogism for this study has been gleaned from Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World (1990).

reliance, classroom silence, getting by, playing dumb, political cynicism, anti-intellectualism, white supremacy, male dominance, excessive consumerism, dependence on authority and so on" (Shor, 1982, p. 190). Another characteristic of this activism is the deliberate and strategic development of strategic community alliances; often implemented through service based curriculum, usually political and always situated. A further activist characteristic is knowing how to read the open spaces and critical moments that occur in the everyday classroom that allow for critical dialogue and activism to thrive. It is also important the activist teachers develop teaching and learning instructional strategies that are conducive to the promotion of the activist classroom and the possibility of propelling activity spawned in the classroom out into the larger society.

#### Pedagogical Classroom Activists

Another face of activism shows itself and is clearly defined in teaching as daily life, as part of the pedagogy and the curriculum of the classroom environment. This form of activism is practiced by teachers who want to bring about change and reform by what occurs or does not occur in their classrooms. Ponder (1971), in The Teacher as Activist, concludes that activism should be considered as a means of increasing teacher effectiveness. He points to the fact that educational institutions are political in nature and these political realities call for changes; changes that occur far too slowly. He believes, however, that teachers are in a position where they, "can change schooling without waiting for a change in schools" (Ponder, 1971, p. 367). To deal with the political inertia while not being bound by it, Ponder advocates a practical formula for this activist teacher based upon the idea that classroom teachers must be prepared, "to examine our own political efficacy by reviewing our conceptions of the social studies curriculum, and by involving ourselves in public affairs" (Ponder, 1971, p. 367). To this end Ponder states that the myth of teacher neutrality and avoidance of controversy needs to be challenged and that teaching behaviour must change to accommodate the reality that teaching is a political act in a politicized system. The sense of political and



self efficacy<sup>3</sup> uncovered by the development of this strand may be an important concept in understanding the motivation of inner city teachers.

### Paulo Freire: The Activist's Activist

The work of Paulo Freire appeared often during the search for activism in the literature. Paulo Freire has sustained a vision of activist thought through a lifetime of teaching and political activism (Freire, 1970; 1973; 1978a; 1978b). Freire's central tenet throughout his long tenure as an activist was the problematizing of the totality of reality seen by him as natural, historical and cultural. By this I believe he meant the antithesis of the current technology notion of problem solving where a person steps back from perceived reality, analyzes it into parts, finds ways to address efficient means for efficient ends and then translates or even dictates this all into policy or rules.<sup>4</sup> Freire believed that this operation distorts the totality of human experience<sup>5</sup> by reducing it to bits that are amenable to mere difficulties needing solutions (Freire, 1973; 1993). Freire's activism takes the shape of the transformative individual who embraces the task of codifying the totality of reality into symbols, seen as language, which can generate what he called critical consciousness affording people the power to change their relationship with reality. This has become known as "conscientization" or the "method". To exercise this form of *conscientização* activism, Freire advocated the concepts fostering dialogue and reciprocity based upon a commitment to equality and non elitist forms of leadership. His legacy includes a far reaching dialogue on the dialectics of subjectivity and objectivity of reality where he warns of the trap of overestimating the subjective to the detriment of the objective and visa versa. This he believes can be

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<sup>3</sup> Efficacy is considered here as the work of Albert Bandura who determines it as the belief that unless people believe they can produce desired effects in their actions, they have little incentive to act. "Perceived self- efficacy refers to the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> In 1987 I spent a week in Calgary at a teaching conference where Freire spoke about this as a significant aspect of the understanding of the conscientizing pedagogical process. I refer here to my notes and the proceedings of this learning experience.

<sup>5</sup> The film, *Starting From Nina: The Politics of Learning*, is an example of Freire's concern for this distortion. The film documents experiences of consciousness raising

overcome by the immersion into history where a person may expose the distinction between reality and the environment that can and will conceal its possibilities. (Giroux, 1983; 1985). Recently critical pedagogues have added to a pedagogy of possibility the concept of a pedagogy of hope to the "method". Freire's balanced approach of theory and practice lends to this study a sense of possibility and hope and as such, this web strand begins to resonate more and more with both the spirit of the inquiry and an idea of activism.

### Social and Cultural Pedagogical Activists

In Multicultural Education as Social Activism, Christine Sleeter (1986) traces an analysis of the struggle of multicultural education towards legitimacy. As an activist activity she argues that multicultural education as taught in the classroom has been a form of resistance to the reproduction of issues such as that of white, patriarchal supremacy. This challenge to the dominant ideology of schooling and education is presented through the teaching experience of working teachers as they wrestle with the attempt to design real, rather than illusionary or cosmetic curricula for the children in their care. These attitudes are carried under the banner of teaching for social justice. These teachers involved in this activity are considered to be social activists of the pedagogical variation. Her interpretation of multicultural education in its many forms is an interesting way to draw out the characteristics she ascribes to activists and why this may be so. Sleeter (1986) begins with multiculturalism as a form of therapy, where racism, classism, and sexism are described as psychological diseases requiring a healing process. Teachers take on the role of healer or therapist where the sickness is taken away by eliminating the bad attitudes of stereotyping and prejudice through positive, appropriate information acquisition and experiences. In this way the political becomes in fact the physiological. In this form of reductionism the person may in fact interact easier with difference but it cannot affect action that will direct real and significant institutional change. Another form of multicultural education is viewed as multiculturalism as teaching technique; a set of instructional teaching and learning

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among working people in Ontario: immigrant workers, school children in a working class neighborhood and clerical workers.

strategies to develop with children who are culturally different. The "them" these children become are taught using materials and strategies that best manage the expediency of the diverse situation. Again this approach does not address the political and social realities that speak to "them" and the significance of the issues and once again there will be no meaningful change, politically or socially. This form of activism may not be able to reach out into the Inner city communities and may or may not be of much significance.

Sleeter next develops the idea of multicultural education as academic discourse that belies the notion that a battle of words will bring about purposeful change and improvements to the quality of life of people such as those characterized as disenfranchised and living in the Inner City. The problematic Sleeter sees with the academic discourse is that it is too far removed from any organized movement for social justice. This form of activity is not viewed as activism because it is not directly relational except at times as a form of mediation. The aspect of "relation" seems to appear as a criterial attribute of activism and an important one for the character of the inner city.

Finally in her fourth analysis Sleeter looks to multicultural education as a social movement; one that she believes differs significantly from the previous three she has outlined. Referring to Tilley (1993) she begins with a precise definition of a social movement being, "a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity and worthiness" (Tilley in Sleeter, 1993, p.7). Persons involved in this sort of activity are shape shifters: those who seek to shift the balance of power that control decision making, define circumstances and distribute resources. Sleeter distinguishes four kinds of actors in a social movement: the constituent base, the powerholders, the activists and then the general public that is not overtly involved. Again citing Tilley, Sleeter relays that "activists stand between the constituent base" (Tilley in Sleeter, 1996, p. 224). It appears that the role activists play is to organize the constituents, articulate their concerns and negotiate with the powerholders. Sleeter describes activism as a role and not a group affiliation, inferring that one may be an activist in some contexts and not in others. The conclusion she reaches is that "what one actually does, and with whom one works, identifies one as an activist"

(Sleeter, 1996, p. 225). She continues to write emphatically about the relationship of the activist to the constituents: the activist - constituent connection is deemed crucial in affecting change. When activists become a loose group unto themselves and become involved in making claims about themselves they move dangerously away from the powerholders thereby losing their original intent and impact for change: the energy expended becoming both empty and diffuse. These persons may be advocates but are essentially not thought to be activists. Once again an important concept when the issue is one of activists spawned in their community of origin, among people they live and work with. Sleeter's strongly worded advocacy for an understanding of activism based upon the relationship of the activist to the constituent and the community supports this inquiry as it seeks to make sense of activism as an activity that develops from the experience on inner city teachers who become inner city activists.

#### Research Activists: Some of Whom are Women

Continuing with thoughts and ideas concerning activism, works such as the one edited by A. Gitlin (1994), scrutinize the role of researchers as those, when armed with a political reference, act upon and seek ways to stop the reproduction of the persistent and important problems schools face surrounding the trilogy of race, class and gender. Gitlin's recent 1994 work Power and Method: Political Activism and Educational Research challenges many of the traditional assumptions of educational research. Each of the offerings in this work speak of research as political activism. Research is presented as political activism in this book because of the shared belief by those writing, that there is a growing sophistication in how we ask the questions and by a renewed understanding of how power is created, used and abused. Following this there appears a growing abundance of new literature that deals with how researchers place themselves in the research process and view their work as part of a larger, widening power relationship or life world. In his own words Gitlin writes:

For those writing in this volume the central question is not how researchers of different orientations can learn to get along so that we can maintain the discipline and continue doing research in accustomed ways, but how the whole enterprise of research, both qualitative and quantitative, can be reconceptualized so that it can more powerfully

act on some of the persistent and important problems of our schools, namely those surrounding issues of race, class and gender. (Gitlin, 1994, p. IX).

In the important introductory comments of this work, Michael Apple writes that a new approach to research must go past simply paying lip service to research as political activism where a researcher aligns him or herself to as he calls them "oppressed groups but then go about their business in ordinary ways" (Apple, 1994, p. ix). The purpose for research as outlined by the 17 authors who contributed their thoughts to this work reflect in one way or another the understanding that the large issue related to research must be what the knowledge gleaned is for and who will benefit from its formation. This is an unsettling issue because it becomes highly subjective as it demands that researchers or research recipients come to terms with our own personal relations to power, domination, subordination in our life worlds and society generally. The activism portrayed in this approach to research will be viewed as research activism for educational intervention. It is also an attempt to blur the traditional boundaries that exist between theory and practice, researcher and researched, public and private and so on. It realigns the idea that the researcher can be both the subject and the object of the research or as Apple puts it into a research tense where a person can:

...be subjected, studied, controlled, manipulated, ruled. Yet she or he can also be the subject of history, can build and participate in social movements aimed at transforming the institutions and social relations that deny us the values we most prize (Apple, 1994, p. xi).

This approach directly seeks what the relations between political activism and research may be and challenges the assumption that careful research adhering to proper protocols does not necessarily make it a good thing. A startling revelation and an important one for a study such as this one which assumes the importance of the shared context where one participant is the researcher and the other is the researched. The ethical sensibility for this study is underwritten by the attitude developed by this web strand.

### Collaborative Research Activists: Many of Whom Tend to be Women

Adding to the growing sense of activism are works such as the one offered by Ristock and Pennell called Community Research as Empowerment: Feminist Links, Postmodern Interruptions (1996). In this work the authors struggle with the issue of whether activists can view research and empowerment as a synergistic enterprise. Ristock and Pennell explore the idea that social activism and research can be an effective, congruent enterprise leading, in their particular research agenda, to a way to end violence towards women and children by way of the concept of empowerment. The activists they envision are linked to the community through the research process and in that way the connection is formed and the social action becomes collaborative. This stand uncovers the activist issues related to praxis: the transformative power of integrating theory and practice. The question is how does an understanding of this relate to the development of inner city activists who may be attempting such an integration.

### Humanist Activists and Psychological Activists: Men and Women

Recently in our university bookstores and appearing on course outlines connected to student teaching or teacher education generally are works such as that of the self proclaimed educator and spiritual activist Parker Palmer. In a literary style in works such as The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, (1998), he concludes that he was not a monk but rather an activist: an activist because he could not thrive on the virtues of stability, centeredness and balance but came to view and understand his work as based upon the variety and vitality of action. He views these contradictions not as polar opposites or either or choices but paradoxes where he lives and teaches in the active tension between the to develop contemplation and positive action. This strand suggests that spiritual and evangelistic motivations for activism do exist which may or may not be based upon a universal application of values or associated with a more right winged fundamentalist attitude. In the book The Four Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary (Arrien, 1993), the author develops a strategy for encouraging contemporary environmental activism based upon an awakening of the traditional spiritual values of the world's indigenous people. In

this case Arrien outlines the contemporary activist as a change maker incumbent upon the four archetypes of the warrior, the healer, the visionary and the teacher. This strand contributes the thought that an activist may be a composite of more than one single identity. Arrien's discussion of environmental activism also highlights the thought that adding the adjective environmentalist before the definition of activist acknowledges the presence of context as part of the definition for what an activist may or may not be. Palmer's writing adds to the review the perspective of courage and a recognition of the human spirit as a recognizable aspect of activism.

#### Pragmatic Social Activists: Most of Whom in the Literature Tend to be Women

In another view of political activism Keresty and O'Leary in You Can Make a Difference: A Teacher's Guide to Political Action, (1998), construct a pragmatic 'how to manual' directed at how a teacher can become an activist when you need to get something done which was in this particular case, the restoration of their Reading Recovery programs, about to be squelched by budgetary restraints. Each chapter is one systematic step along the way of thinking and acting politically in order to restore something that had been lost. Acting politically in this instance means staying in the teaching profession but moving outside the classroom by networking in the larger community and lobbying politicians to secure funding and argue for the need in a change in policy. These teachers are also considered to be activists. This literature strand points to the pragmatic, sometimes episodic motivation for activism based upon a utilitarian attitude; perhaps applied for this one situation only.

In a similar vein the literature contains many more types of how to manuals such as the one to be reviewed here titled, Women for a Change: A grassroots guide to activism and politics (Zepatos & Kaufman, 1995). In practical, reasonable, affordable terms the book is designed to provide women with the tools to build power. Rifling through this practical tool box uncovers devices to organize, fund raise, and develop campaigns for activists of all stripes and occupations, teachers included. The book contains the stories and recipes of women who learned to love politics by becoming involved. The evangelical assumption throughout, is that every woman would see the light concerning activism and would embrace it wholeheartedly if they could just understand how to do it. The way of it

is not entirely clear in the piece. It does however, uncover the question of whether or not you can teach someone to become an activist. It further raises the issues if activists are not to be created by being taught how else may they emanate?

### Historical Activism: The Antecedent for Women

There are some historical works in the literature that chronicle the history of women activists; often including teachers and those issues of interest to women teachers such as social justice, child welfare, work, reform and feminism. Works such as, To Do & To Be: Portraits of Four Women Activists (Schofield, 1997) is one such account that documents the struggles of four activists faced with the challenges of learning to be and to do through activism. Petra Munro as recently as 1995 wrote an article clearly positioning women teacher activists as an important source of activism and political ideas as far and away as the Suffrage movement. These activist teachers at the onset of the 20th century brought to the attention of the world issues of equal pay for equal work, tenure for educators, pensions and maternity leave. In fact Munro documents the belief that activist teachers were the spark that ignited the suffrage movement, citing as reasons for this, women's experiences as teachers in classrooms that had begun, after a cloistered beginning, to develop an independent financial autonomy along with the opportunity to develop speaking skills, organizational prowess and collaborative relationships with other closely associated women.

Munro goes on to relate that these early women teacher activists were in a position to see that the reformation required to develop and sustain a democratic society needed more than the vote but also an understanding of politics that would incorporate women's experiences into the mix and that this enterprise would be entered into seriously with the knowledge of women's culture as tantamount to that of other groups in society. From this web strand we learn that the concept of activism, although not generally new is relatively new for women. It is also interesting to see that some of the first women activists were teachers acting from the context of the classroom and the skills that these women developed as teachers and then applied as activists. This historical antecedent situates the activist struggle in the issue of whether it is a stronger, more advantageous



position for teacher activists to work in and through the context of the school and classroom or to extend that context into the community and the larger society.

### Feminist Activists

Another variation of social and political pedagogical activism carries with it the feminist voice. Pedagogues such as Jennifer Scanlon writing in, Keeping Our Activist Selves Alive In the Classroom: Feminist Pedagogies and Political Activism, (1993) asserts that feminist educators are trying to foster both personal and educational change in the classroom by keeping a feminist culture alive through such practice oriented, everyday teaching activity such as assessment and evaluation. Linda Briskin (1990) in her monograph titled Feminist Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning Liberation outlines what this culture in the classroom may look and sound like as it takes on the form, the language and activity of activism. It would assist young women in confronting oppression and the fear of change by developing ways of understanding, recovering, and sustaining agency. Briskin sees the fear of change lodged in the powerlessness that many individuals experience as they view the rules of the outside world as being non negotiable. This view may, according to feminists such as Briskin, explain why women tend toward the naturalist orientation as the way to explain their place and value in the world; a world of mothering, caring, and service of one form or another. The volunteer agencies that are depended upon more and more as a social resource because of dwindling governmental resources and a chaotic medical system, know this to be a fact. This analysis does not encourage change because why would we as women choose to destroy or malign that which has defined us. If there is to be any possibility of change it is incumbent that women first overcome the pessimism associated with this state of naturalism. In order to do this Briskin offers this analysis:

Our society basically denies our status as agents of change, except as agents of personal change; it suggests that we lose ourselves and our individuality in the collective experience. Such a view confuses individualism (which prizes the rights of individuals over the rights of the collective) and individuality which focuses on the development of individual potential. To reclaim the right to change the world as to

change ourselves- indeed, in order to develop fully our individuality--means to resist individualism). (Briskin, 1994, p.26).

The analysis of these two women, both described in activist terms provides a basis for women teachers to be active for change in the classroom by educating and encouraging other young women to become active themselves. Each of these people are considered to be activists. This web strand develops an aspect of activism not seen before in the literature, that being the need for activists to be role models in order to foster activism in others: in this case young women students.

### Community Activists

The activist face now turns to the community. At this site feminist activists are more concerned with what we do about education rather than what we think about education. At this site activists initiate activity that takes them from the classrooms into the community. This interest of developing an activist stance in the community relates to Briskin's analysis of the need to resist individualism and enter into the collective consciousness. Penny Rosenwasser in Visionary Voices: Women on Power: Conversations with Shamans, Activists, and Healers (1992) shares the life stories of several community activists, teachers being one among the many. These life stories as they unfold embodies activism as making things happen and getting things done in the community. The women who share these stories characterize their activism as gaining power by the honest acceptance of mistakes, by learning to live with internal truth, by standing for worthwhile principles and by knowing that intellect and intuition come together as a way of knowing. Themes emerge in these stories that bring about the realization that collective work brings success, that power can be collated with joy and happiness, and the enlightened understanding that transformation is not difficult because it is so far away but because it is so close. In each of these activist life stories there is the sense, albeit expressed differently, that grassroots activism and persons views as dispossessed can tip the balance because as a collective in the community of origin, you can define what it means to be human, what power is and what it is for. This will create change, change that is meaningful and will alter their life world.

For a long time women's public agendas seemed to be two dichotomous halves: either you were involved in personal transformation or on the other hand, some sort of social activism. The forms of teacher activism and activism generally that have been discussed here suggest that they contain within them the possibility but also the struggle and the many of the contradictions involved in accomplishing both halves of the women's agenda. For example, uncovered in this work are themes such as activist mothering which is thought of as, "political activism as a central component of mothering and community caretaking of those who are not part of ones defined household or family" (Naples, 1998, p. 11). This dichotomous nature is revealed as women draw upon their traditional identities to justify taking action outside their immediate families in order to improve the lives of the others in their community. When this understanding differentiates community activity from politics it assigns a dichotomy that limits the potential and powerful ability to change the situation to that of amelioration. It becomes another form of activism when the personal and the political become an integrated force bent on change. Motivation then, is a key aspect of activism.

To this end Nancy Naples continues the discourse of activism with an understanding that institutional analysis, isolated historical episodes, long term psychological processes, will not shed light on what motivates and sustains political activism. In her book titled Grassroots Warriors-Activist Mothering, Community Work and the War on Poverty (1998) Naples states emphatically that, "political activism in the face of the community is influenced by the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, class and political culture that can only be understood through an embedded analysis that foregrounds local practices and individual perspectives" (Naples, 1998. p.9).

Turning specifically to women, teacher activists, Kathleen Casey constructs a landscape where women are not only creations of discourse but makers of discourse. Casey, early on in her work, I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change (1993), frames a view of activism that contains within it the understanding that women teacher's interpretations and the meaning they give to their experiences have been until very recently, "not only been unrecorded, but actually silenced", (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 210). Her inquiry into the lives of a group of activist teachers was meant to, "undermine the over powering influence of dominant conservative discourse" (Casey, 1993, p. 3). Her book has a tone of

celebration of voices being heard, voices being added to the debate; seeking in fact to recreate this possibility of public debate that she believes has been suppressed and dominated by an overtly conservative agenda. This notion of a voice added is a central and significant tenet of this inquiry.

Joan Johannson in her work, Discovering the Bright Warrior: Confessions of a Social Activist (2001), brings a local, Winnipeg perspective to activism based upon what she names as "the call to justice". Her work traces her development as an activist originating from her reasoned and lived experience that predicated two approaches to poverty; charity or justice. Her activism grew to be an exploration of how she could move from the negativity of poverty with the accompanying fear, antipathy and sometimes violent struggle, to an emotional space of peace and reconciliation, without compromising her search for justice. This work adds an understanding of activism that frames its development, not as a political strategy or addendum, but as an actual, viable alternative to traditional partisan politics. It is the form of activism that Johannson espouses that is reflected in the recent posters that are today seen about the inner city which read: when parents starve their children it is called child abuse, when the government does so it is called fiscal responsibility.

#### Evolutionary Activists of a New Social Movement

There have appeared one or two interesting studies, referred to in the literature as NSMs or New Social Movements. This phenomena is defined as:

...movements that are generally middle class in membership, and which mobilize through net-working rather than through the workplace organization pre-dominant in the older type of socialization focus on employment issues and initiated by trade unions, or by political parties based in trade unions" (Melucci in Searle-Chatterjee, 1998, p. 259).

In this study published in 1998, the author examines the proposition that today's activists are, "supposedly surfacing and associated with employment in the educated service class which make use of cultural capital derived from educational assets rather

than managerial expertise derived from within organizations, or property or financial assets" (Boudrieu in Searle-Chatterjee, 1998, p. 259). These people are considered to be more involved in caring or creative pursuits and are believed to be especially prone to radical activism. New Social Movements include those related to feminism, environmentalism, peace education and anti-racism. Searle-Chatterjee defined an activist in terms of three overlapping criteria: self- ascription, the having of a leadership role in a campaigning organization, and thirdly, that a considerable amount of time and energy was expended in the "cause". Adding to the debate centering around why contemporary social movements are increasingly associated with the middle class in state employment Searle-Chatterjee concluded that the disposition to activism was established prior to employment and that higher education was not a critical factor in most instances. She concludes that, "it was the intersection of familial socialization with personal experience or learning of environmental degradation that lead to action. For the feminists it was the experience of the contradictions in their socialization as well as the material conditions of their existence which led to their activism" (Searle-Chatterjee, 1998, p. 277).

#### Activism as Resistance: Women

Another approach places activism within the sphere of feminist educational thinking. Petra Munro (1998) views her sense of activism through a critique of a cultural politics of resistance. Set in a historical framework she traces a discussion of resistance and educational feminism through liberal feminism (equality for men and women with no challenge to the power structure), to the structuralist view (emphasizing oppressive power of institutions like schools and also language to what she refers to as interpolate subjects), and finally to post structuralist feminism that concerns itself with constructing meaning and subjects, a process viewed as shifting and precarious. In her work she begins with the thought that she will place her study of three teachers, using narration, over a period of fifty years within the theory of resistance. She admits to being lured by the notion of the transformative individual and as she puts it, "the image of the activist teacher popularized by heroes like Conrak and terms like the transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1998) were seductive. The teacher was

transformed from a passive woman to an active, revolutionary hero, who sought to save the children. Save the children from whom? In part, it was from, "women teachers" (Munro. 1998, p. 109). Resistance theory she read as public, oppositional and active along with the reproducing notions that humans are autonomous, and that change is linear and in fact public. When it came time to interpret the stories of the three women educators she discovered that they did not correspond to the traditional ideas of, "power as oppositional, subjectivity as unitary and resistance as public" (Munro, 1998, p. 109). These women, Munro came to know as experiencing activism in large part, by rewriting the theory of resistance through a sense of self representational agency, seen in the narration as, "appropriating dominant ideologies, constructing fictions, verbal subterfuge, deferral, defining themselves as drifters and being docile bodies" (Munro, 1998, p. 124). This would more than indicate a complex view of activism that is multiple, contradictory, and situated.<sup>6</sup> The complex treatise of dispels any notion of understanding activism as romanticism or women's work. In fact her understanding brings to light the thought that traditional ideas of why women may become activists needs to be reconceptualized and the stereotypical definition of a typical women activist is to be avoided.

#### First Nations Activism: Women of the Academy and the Community

The Inner City of Winnipeg has a large proportion of people from the First Nations. Many of these people have become teachers. It made sense to look to the literature to locate them in the activist literature. First Nations educators such as the American Henrietta Whiteman write that the main objective of any Indian Studies program, teacher education included, must be, at the beginning, to visualize the ideal Native American as the end product. She envisions a total individual, a complete personality, who can assume any place in Society. Whiteman states that, "the end product I visualize being developed in Indian Studies program is one that I refer to as a warrior- scholar- community activist" (Whiteman, 1972. p. 5). Her vision of the ideal native American

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<sup>6</sup> This trilogy of words appears verbatim or synonymously throughout feminist epistemology and research methodology: the interpretation of these descriptors and their significance vary upon the philosophical or political predispositions.

as activist is first of all used as an opposition to passivity but not characterized as the destructive militant who teaches contemporary paranoia but rather one who is destructive by obliterating meaningless pedagogy by developing effective programs. This person would have energy and ability to make good decisions, especially with regard to academic program development, that would enable sound positive change for native peoples.

Aboriginal activists are appearing also in Canadian public life. On March 3, 1999 written in the Winnipeg Free Press, is an account of an Aboriginal women by the name of Leona Freed from Portage La Prairie, Manitoba who has been lobbying the federal parliament about the way in which reserves are being administered. She states for example that "without accountability, democracy and equality there is no such thing as self-government". The article continues to relate that for three years Freed has been a thorn in the side of the aboriginal leadership and its partnership with Indian Affairs, an activism that she says has resulted in her tires being slashed and her mobile home shot at. Freed is no longer allowed into her home band office and is currently trying to build a national coalition of grassroots women to push for greater accountability on reserves. The article continues by adding this statement from Nelson Wiseman: "Along with better education and an awareness that the Canadian Charter also guarantees them gender equality.....women like Freed are more likely to stand up for their rights" (Winnipeg Free Press, March 3, 1999). This strand points to the thought that the combination of race and gender sometime may transcend the issue of race as the single, dominant issue for activism and that education may supersede all else.

### Entrepreneurial Activism

Appearing in the popular literature is a relatively new phenomena of interest to those trying to understand activism. The internet will reveal this as social entrepreneurship. This form of social activism is described as the combined "passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation and determination" (Dees, 1998). The purpose for this activist entrepreneurship is to play the role of change agent by creating and sustaining social value by relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve, by engaging in continuous, creative and innovative

processes, but at the same time, not being hampered by limited resources and by being accountable to the constituencies that the activism is meant to relate to (Dees, 1998). This set of behaviours is being cultivated by those activists who seek feasible ways to financially organize and manage projects based upon their version of a collective social conscience. This strand places activism in the realm of pragmatic, expedient way to achieve preordained ends. It begs the question of whether this may be a form of technological activism that is far removed from the people it seeks to support.

### Integrated Activists

Another form of activism appears in the literature; one that could be typed as adjectival activism. It appears as one adjective plus the word activism such as activist-mothers or entrepreneurial activism. What started to appear were combinations of descriptive characteristics such as Naples (ed.) book titled Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender (1998). The multiple articles in this edited work uncover issues ranging from reconceptualizing agency in domestic violence and a reconsideration of cultural feminism. It appears much as a primer for community activism; one that helps form the agenda for action.

References to activism, not exclusively, but often when women are naming it, are found nestled and defined in the works of those women and others who write of women and silence and women and resistance. Often the two themes are intertwined with each other and then connected through reconstruction into a spirit of possibility. It is this spirit of possibility that drives this inquiry. It is this spirit of possibility that guided the review of the literature. The literature revealed many women involved in many forms of activism: political, community, social; both pragmatic and entrepreneurial, pedagogical, and originating from the academy and the classroom. From the literature emerges many shapes of activists, defined as nurturing mother activists, strategizing classroom pedagogues, radicalized resisters, pragmatic social reformers, or as historical antecedents. The contribution that this study may make to the literature will be not only to add a new classification of activist as inner city activist. More importantly the study will address the significance of how and why this happened and what can be learned from the experience.



## Applied Activism: Men and Women

The Activists Handbook: A Primer for the 1990's and Beyond (Shaw, 1996) is an example of an attitude toward applied activism, activism that can be identified and then analyzed to understand how it can be made to work. A "how to" manual of sorts, it sets out to describe how to recognize and precipitate activism as direct action. The author also sets about to relate to the reader what impact the strategies and tactics his direct action activists employ and subsequently what affect the deployment has on various campaigns such as homelessness, environmental issues, school reform and disability rights. The book has an ethos of "same struggle, differing tactics." The book identifies what direct action would look like and then demonstrates how to choose and set a tactical agenda, how to use the media, and how to know if and when your activist strategies are successful. The author believes that his activism model is a stimulant for progressive change that challenges elected officials as not the only ones able to affect positive social change. The book develops a surrounding aura of, "if they know how to build it, activists will come". I include this work and the ideas of this author because I have observed that as I delve deeper into the literature, there is a sense that activism is shifting from overt political radicalism to an almost prescribed, group trendism.

Recently Watchdogs and Gadflies: Activism from Marginal to Mainstream (Falconer, 2001) has appeared. Falconer's purpose is to provide a hard look at activism meant to redefine the meaning of citizenship and democracy in Canada. Falconer's work, through a series of case studies of those he views as various issue activists, traces a common motivational intent for each of the groupings. Activists of this ilk are concerned with gun control, anti tobacco legislation, homelessness and so on. The commonality Falconer underscores is the belief that these people are convinced that they are more effective operating outside the traditional political process and institutions and as a result of this have begun channeling their skill, energy and commitment for change into an activist life. The theme of this work is this:

The fact that we have to have a word to describe some one as an activist is a bad thing in a democracy.....if we had a healthier democracy, if more people were

engaged.....wouldn't be out of the ordinary. And we wouldn't call it activism, we'd call it citizenship (Falconer, 2001, p. 259).

### After the Web

At this point I chose to move beyond the literature review and look carefully at the web that has developed. I left the narrative told by the literature and began to take from it the strands that I believed I needed to make sense of the inquiry and the question of why some inner city teachers became community activists. The strands of the review, if viewed as independent and discrete will offer insights and queries with regard to activism. If the interpretation is left as such, the review could perhaps provide a limited basis for beginning to compositely define activism. At best it would be an eclectic definition, descriptive, categorical and perhaps to some extent characteristic. This inquiry is not meant to measure a prescribed definition of activism by examining it by comparison or contrast to the participants of this study deemed to be activists. Rather the purpose of the study is to understand activism as it emerges from the participants. The interpretation of the graduate teacher activists narrative life stories is intended to provide the definition which will in turn form the basis for meaning.

### What May This Mean

Much like the participant audience and the Inuit storyteller I now leave the context of the story and take the proceedings gleaned from this experience into a context of my own: in this case the context of activism and the lives of those graduate teachers who became activists. It is for the researcher to begin the process of untangling the web and retying it again. The construction of a conceptual framework based upon the conceptions the literature did or did not provide will initiate a working definition of activism; a definition that will form a significant aspect for the context of this study. The development of a sense of intercontextuality between the context that the literature may provide and the context that the researcher and the research participants share will also contribute to the initial definition of activism. The process of conducting the interviews and interpreting them as data will hone this definition and construct the meaning for it.

Another significant theme in the literature concerning activism was the emergence of activism as a way of integrating theory and practice while teaching. This was revealed in the literature of critical pedagogy where activist teachers use their classrooms as non reproduction sites for anti racism, sexism, and class biases. This attitude suggests a political stance as perhaps being an attribute for the development of an activist who happens to be a teacher, or a teacher who happens to become an activist. Since the majority of classroom teachers tend to be women there may be more teacher activists. The issue is whether this is because there is simply more women teachers to become activists or not become activists or is it because women, for whatever reasons, view the classroom as a prescription for activism.

In looking at the community and the development of activism the literature provides a portrayal of both men and women activists. Women are viewed most often as developing a low to the ground grassroots form of activism that at that level, gets things done and make things happen. Motivation with an accompanying sense of urgency appears to be a key factor when you consider what prompts the " getting done" for these community activists.

There is a sense in the literature that a person may "become" an activist and there is also the sense that activism may be inherent in all people as a set of characteristics that come into play if the need arises or if the motivation has matured. There is also a perceived distinction in the literature that activists are not always directly perceived as leaders but rather as doers. As I am writing this an economic summit is being planned for in Quebec city. The newspaper media has recently developed the story of how activists are being trained in an Ottawa boot camp in ways to oppose, through civil disobedience, the proceedings of this particular summit (The Winnipeg Free Press, February, March 2001). It begs the question of whether persons can on one hand, be trained to be activists, or on the other hand, hone those activist tendencies that already exist within the character of the individual. For the past year the New York Times has been tracing the development of a teacher recruitment campaign organized by the Greater New York School Division. This Division is responsible for their diverse, inner city school population, largely in Brooklyn and the Bronx, where 99 schools are perceived to be failing and "where four out of five fourth graders in our city's most challenged schools fail to meet the state standards in reading and writing" (New York

Times, July 2, 2000). In this intense media campaign the brightest and best minds; people who already are successful professionals in other enterprises are offered the challenge of doing something positive about the failure of these schools. In turn they will be paid a teacher's salary of \$31,910 and the city will provide them the opportunity of acquiring, non gratis, a master's degree in education. After a rigorous selection and one month training session which some board officials have called boot camp, the recruits will be assigned to an inner city school. They will then be referred to as teaching fellows who will be considered the pioneers of an "alternate route" teacher education program. This program could be seen to resonate as an activist based teacher education program.

Louise Derman Sparks (1993) is an activist teacher in the sense that she has developed pedagogical strategies for young children to confront racism and protect and defend themselves from the hurt that results from racist behavior. Moreover she names her young, early years students who are participating in this behaviour as activists. Teaching and classrooms, especially in the urban, inner city environment provide contextual sites for activism to develop. The webs in the literature that support this deal with pedagogical activists such as Louise Sparks, Christine Sleeter, Ira Shor, and Jonathon Kozol. Although pedagogical activists are of course both men and women, the interest for this study is with women who have become activists. Winnipeg Centre who graduates mostly women who enter a vocation where most teachers are women provides in a sense the context of majority which provides a significant reason to exclusively study women graduate teachers.

Leaders may seem to be more easily defined by what they can do and activists more easily defined by who they are. An example of this may be that of activist mothers who are involved in activism as a result of their motherhood. The significance of this gleaned from the web is that while leadership may in some sense be an attribute of activism it may not be the most significant one and may in fact be interpreted differently than the more traditional, administrative version of leadership. The question arises now of whether the context spawns activism, whether activism spawns the context, or whether the intercontextuality of activism and context generate activism.

Webster's Dictionary (second edition, 1978) defines activism as the doctrine or policy of being active or doing things with decision. The dictionary defines an activist as an individual who favors, incites, or demands intensified activities, especially during a

time of war. Alice Walker (1998) defines the foundations of activism as those people, whatever the consequences, have stood side by side and expressed who they really are, and ultimately believe in the love of the world and each other which allows them to understand that "There is always a moment in any kind of struggle when one feels in full bloom, vivid, alive. One might be blown to bits in such a moment and still be at peace" (Walker, 1998, p.87). Ira Shor situates his definition of activism in critical pedagogy where activist teachers think and reconceptualize their practice within the context of the dominant society. Christine Sleeter (1998) views multicultural education as a form of activism that offers resistance to the reproduction of male, white patriarchal values which she views as entrenched in our schools as they exist as part of the larger society. Ristock and Wine (1991) include in their treatise on feminist activism in Canada, a piece by Linda Christiansen-Ruffman who defines the world of women activists as subjective, partisan, engaged, concerned and representative.

All of these definitions are situated, be it in the semantics of the Webster's dictionary or the critical pedagogy of Christine Sleeter or the passion of Alice Walker. This study is situated in the shared and embedded context of the Winnipeg Education Centre, Inner City schools and to some extent the critical analysis of schools in a general sense. Each one of the participants in this study will add their own context of where their realization of activism brought them to. It is the interplay of the figure-ground construction that will provide the insight which will lead to the formation of both a definition of activism and the meaning these particular women ascribe to it.

Informed by the literature and the conceptual web construction, the definition of inner city community activism will begin as this notion: people (in this instance women for the reasons already cited) who become purposefully involved in conducting the business of their lives to do what they view as necessary to better the lives of children and the community in which they live.

## Chapter Three

### The Methodology: Making Sense

It would make sense that an inquiry whose purpose is to create meaning would be best suited to a methodology that is designed to shape, construct and interpret meaning. Consistent with this purpose the research draws upon a constructivist interpretive methodology using interpretive biography and life stories to explore notions of inner city activism through the lived experience of three women graduates of the Winnipeg Education Center's Bachelor of Education Program. The development of narrative is a fundamental way human beings make sense of their experience and these women who are telling their life stories offers a way of grasping human behavior and the meaning of it through the ways in which people use language.

Theorists such as Holquist, (1990) and Bakhtin, (1981) among others, believed that there is an intimate connection between language and selfhood; both existing in order to mean and create meaning. This complexity of freeing the narrative to sensitize the meaning and the behaviour is also seen in the work of Bakhtin (1981) where the link of language to self is reiterated through the negation of a univocal narrative and the development of a plurivocal one based upon the idea that, "I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of whom I am not aware" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. xx).

This methodology is viewed as a compliant one because of its ability to receive and interpret the genealogical context of this study, consisting of the Winnipeg Education Centre, the women graduates, inner city community activism and to a lesser extent inner city education and teacher education. While there are many forms of constructivism in the literature today, all forms of constructivism share two distinctive characteristics. The first characteristic being that the methodology requires a response to prior knowledge, indicating the significance of biography and life stories. The second characteristic being that learning takes place, data is interpreted and knowledge is created when the learner, subject, researcher is actively involved, interacting in the environment. These aspects of constructivism indicate the importance of embedded context, shared or otherwise.

Definitions of constructivism tend to be descriptive such as the one given by Kenneth Gergen who writes that:

I will take constructivism to represent a range of dialogues centered on the social genesis of what we take to be knowledge, reason, and virtue on one side, and the enormous range of social practices born or sustained on the other..... construction is a means of bracketing or suspending any pronouncement of the real, or the reasonable, or the right. In its generative moment, constructivism offers an orientation toward creating new futures, an impetus for societal transformation. (Gergen, 1995, p. 1).

He extends his definition to include the following prophetic statement describing constructivist modes as, "paraphrased easily in the daily argots of political activism" (Gergen, 1995, p. 14). It is an interesting notion to think that activism may in fact have an innate language unto itself.<sup>1</sup>

This methodology is a form of antidote to what Charles Taylor (1991) has called heightened individualism where the danger lies in the possibility of the life story becoming therapeutic meandering<sup>2</sup> rather than a quest for meaning. It is as Taylor argues incumbent on the researcher to avoid the reproduction of impoverished narratives by keeping to the genealogical context as the basis for collaboration. Life stories of the decontextualized kind do not contribute to change but become part of what Harvey (1989) called the tyranny of the local alongside the specificity of the personal. He writes that social context, critical theories, political and cultural analysis will be replaced by localized stories, divorced from any real or powerful relationship to meaning. In order to avoid this criticism this inquiry will address these issues by first of all responding to the perceived importance of context and relatedly to give a primary focus to the balance of the research giver and the research taker. This inquiry also intends to address these issues by responding to the perceived importance of context and its ability to redress the balance of research taker and research giver.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor (1985) writes on human agency and language.

<sup>2</sup> This is my phrase but there is literature related to narrative as a form of therapy.

### The Contextual Imperative

The layered genealogy and context of this study consists of the Winnipeg Education Centre, the women of its Bachelor of Education program, inner community city activism, and to a lesser degree the broader based contexts of inner city education and pre-service teacher education. Attention to this context is centrally significant to the development of a research reciprocity which in this case means that it will in turn establish a significant basis for close, active, interpretive, collaboration between the informant participant and the researcher participant. It is through this form of collaboration in the development of the life story that persons can transcend the notion of "I hear you", "I captured your story", to those of "I am trying to make sense of it", and "I am trying to construct meaning from what you are telling me". Without this form of contextualizing, researchers such as Eisner (1991) argues that any form of life story acquisition can easily resort to replacing or overwhelming any attempt at seeking meaning. When there is no well developed, rich and shared research context the method may become one of individual imprinting and misprinting: the process where researcher and informant may be creating meaning but for differing contexts.

### The Shaping of Meaning

The intent of the inquiry is to compose, interpret and learn from the meaning that is created as these women graduate teachers construct and shape their teaching lives into inner city activists. Questions will arise that may address their motivation for the activist life, the historical and biographical antecedents that may have prompted this turn of events, and after reflection, what sense these women graduates may make of this aspect of their life. This is a highly subjective, women's view of the world which carries with it a set of research problematics from the beginning. Using life story interpretation subverts the need to be true in the sense of not lying, and replaces it with a search for truth through voice and the legitimizing of that voice through the meaning it can and will convey. The study is searching for meaning not explanations. In the holistic sense this is developed through an understanding (agents and actions) of cultures and in the individualistic sense through subjective meanings whereas an explanation



orientation seeks systems (structures) on the holistic basis and rational choice forms the basis for individualism.

### The Methodological Commitment

This particular dissertation then, is to be informed by constructivist and interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. The agency for the method will be narrative inquiry and life stories. The significance of this paradigm or perspective is that the particular meanings brought to bear from this approach are incumbent upon and shaped by the user (Schwandt, 1994). The literature based upon constructivist interpretivist theory is gathered around a loosely connected family of philosophical and methodological lures, held together by what Blumer in 1969, referred to as "sensitizing concepts".

The governing imperative throughout this inquiry is the thought that the problematic of this method will be concerned with the dilemma of showing the women I will be interviewing where to look without telling them what to see; a concern I have long held, and tested continually, as an educator. This realization of my own is shared and supported by constructivist theorists such as Schwandt (1994) and Denzin (1989). Schwandt (1994) in a piece titled 'Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry', published by Sage in the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994) refers to the method as making it possible to "merely suggest directions along which to look rather than provide descriptions of what to see", (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). This handbook article forms the basis of this particular exposition of constructivist interpretist theory by building it and using it as the framework for the development of the understanding of constructivist methodology for this study. It was used as a road map to indicate proximity and direction and alternate routes. When it was important or necessary to clarify some of the aspects of constructivism that the framework directed but did not substantiate, additional sources were sought out and added to the narrative.

A corollary to this governing imperative outlined immediately above is that a constructivist interpretivist research methodology will share a central tendency that seeks to understand the infinitely complex world of lived experience from the vantage point of those who are living it. The question is, how did you become an inner city activist? (showing where to look). Nestled in the response to this question will be an

interpretive response to why these women may have become activists (without telling them what to see).

For constructivist interpretivists practitioners and researchers, the belief exists that in order to understand the world of meaning one must construct and interpret it. This idea is firmly supported by Schwandt in this commentary:

...the inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer's construction of the construction of the actor one studies" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

It is important to realize that as human inquiry the constructivist and interpretivist share a generalized framework but have some areas where they appear to be distinct unto themselves. The first distinction is in how they view individually, the purposes and proclivity of human inquiry. The second distinction is how they know what they know about social behavior. In either case however, it follows then that both constructivist and interpretivists are more concerned with knowing and being rather than with the method. Each narrative of social constructivism has three layers: the first is epistemological(knowledge base), the second is ontological (being) and the third is method. Whatever the method and in with whatever language used to convey its development, all forms of constructivist interpretivist researchers, observe, listen constructively, ask questions, and then document and examine the resulting data as text. How these criteria are used are best determined by the person who initiated the inquiry and the reason the researcher had for orchestrating the particular inquiry. In turn the inquiry is also shaped by the philosophical and methodological commitments brought to bear by the participants. Constructivism is then, the theory base and interpretivism provides a method for portraying the meaning sought in the narrative, the life story.

## A Constructivist Methodology

The literature, generally speaking, separates without too fine a distinction, interpretivist and constructivists into several identifiable categories. Often these categories are classified by a particular theorist or group of theorists. In the books and articles bent on discussing and arguing constructivist interpretivist methodology the work of the theorists (Guba, 1990; Lincoln, 1991; Van Manen, 1990; Geertz, 1988; Blumer, 1979; Denzin, 1989; Gadamer, 1976; Dilthey, 1976; Ricoeur, 1974; Gergen, 1994) provide a lexicon of concept development and theoretical underpinnings for a constructivist interpretive methodological situation. The literature does not however reveal a "carved in stone" definition of constructivism but can be found under the cloak of hermeneutics viewed as a representation of a wide range of dialogues centering upon what people take as reason on one end (what is) and the tremendous reach of social behavior originating from these discourses on the other (what could be). To this end it is useful perhaps to attempt to understand it by examining how the various pieces are constructed and how each of the slightly different models work.

To begin with, a discussion of constructivist interpretivist metacognition, thinking about thinking, is layered upon several tiers; the first stemming from the sense of hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1985; Gadamer, 1975; Hirsh, 1967; Ricoeur, 1976). Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation (Van Manen, 1990). The narrative imperative of interpretation can be traced through, for example, in one way, through the work of Gadamer, the Verstehen tradition of sociology seen in the phenomenological work of theorists such as Alfred Schutz in his work, The Phenomenology of the Social World, (1967), and followed by the more current sociological critiques of logical positivism (Berlin, 1999) is currently evocative. This example is included here to acknowledge that constructivism has developed many approaches and many interpretations of the meaning it is intended to convey. It also provides me with some initial reassurance in recognizing that constructivism is no place to hide out methodologically. It also acknowledges that the connected concepts that form this interpretation are complex and naming them here is not meant to suggest expertise, for example, as a phenomenologist, but to glean the sense making devices that emerge

from a phenomenological approach and consider them as sensitizing concepts for this study.

Historically, all interpretivists argue for the uniqueness of human inquiry even though they may implement it somewhat differently. Human inquiry is seen as different from that traditionally inquiry thought of as naturalist inquiry. Naturalist inquiry seeks exactitude and scientific explanations whereas interpretivist constructivists are searching for meaning. There remains in all forms of this basic inquiry approach an unresolved tension, evident in the literature as the literary wrestling with the named concept of the subjective, objective opposition or described as the engagement objectification dichotomy by (Denzin, 1992) and interpreted also by (Hammersley, 1992). The ironic nature of this form of the method is that it seeks to celebrate the first person subjective experience or the "I" of the experience, and then becomes deliberately disentangled from that experience in order to examine it. This ironic turn carries within it, both the problematics and the power of the method. The tension that this turn takes will affect the ability of the participant and researcher to form the sought after reciprocal relationship. There are many difficult passages in the constructivist narrative seemingly bent on camouflaging or misdirecting the reader away from the issue of whether or not the "I" can express truth and validity as legitimate both "in" and "of" the research experience. The role of the researcher is a major consideration at this juncture. In fact, the wrestling with the drawing of the line between the researcher and the women involved in this inquiry which is a large concern in the shaping of this particular form of the interpretivist constructivist method is part and parcel of both the worth of the experience and the meaning brought about as the result. This thought is an important one for this particular inquiry.

#### Coming to Terms With Subjectivity

The literature reveals a middle ground of interpretivist constructivist theory, loosely categorized as the, "synthesis of social realism and constructivism which although rejecting negative aspects of empiricism thinking simultaneously adhere to the avoidance of subjectivity through the judicious use of method" (Schwandt, p. 119). This particular methodological staging area is an attempt to develop credibility by the

development of “error reducing” strategies. Triangulation, reflexivity, data auditing, come generally to mind as examples of one such pattern and as such is also a crucial consideration for this inquiry. The question arises at this point as to whether the avoidance of subjectivity through the use of method as camouflage is an attempt at rigor or to disguise too large of a dissonant distance, or where the researcher and participant have evolved into a characteristically inappropriate research cartel.

Another layered representation of interpretivist constructivist theory is to flatly deny that there is any dichotomous opposition of objectivity subjectivity by thoroughly embracing the hermeneutical nature of being alive. Philosopher theorists such as Taylor (1989) and Gadamer (1976), speak of the act of interpretation as the very condition of human inquiry and not simply a social science methodological option. Rabinow and Sullivan cited in Schwandt write, “The interpretive turn is not simply a new methodology, but rather a challenge to the very idea that inquiry into the social world and the value of understanding that results is to be determined by methodology” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 120). This notion informs this inquiry by underpinning the imperative value of embracing lived experience as a significant and integral aspect of the methodology: one that will address the issues and concerns regarding truth and validity by integrating, “it was lived” into the research provisions.

### Lived Constructivism

Constructivism is given further dimension in the third layer of the interpretivist constructivist approach seen in the framework position offered by Schwandt (1994). Here the defining characteristic of the interpretation of being is the idea that in linguistic and historical terms we do not live lives in time and through language but in fact we are the language and we are the history. In educational terms we live and construct our own life curriculum. Schwandt points to the heart of the matter when he relates that language and history are both the condition and the limits of our understanding and that it is this realization that makes the process of meaning making hermeneutical. The literature does in fact, often refer to this tenacious process as the hermeneutical circle. The idea of the hermeneutical circle and how it presents itself is a significant aspect of this inquiry.

Borrowing from, or adding to anthropology, interpretivists conclude that human behavior is purposive; resolute and persistent in its determination. Interpretivists will argue against behaviouristic tendencies viewed as mechanistic, stimulus responses accompanied by associative behavior and instead grasp an understanding of human behavior that is teleological in nature. Teleology is defined here as being the presumption that purpose and purposeful striving toward ends or goals is an essential element of all events and the existence of something is explained by the function it serves (Reber, 1995). This sense of motivation or intent as being integral to the function it creates or serves is an important thought for this inquiry as it seeks to determine why some women graduate teachers became activists.

Schwandt interprets theorists such as Jerome Bruner and Charles Taylor with this description of humanity: "social agents are to be considered autonomous, intentional, active, goal directed; they construe, construct and interpret their own behavior and that of their fellow agents" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 120). It is not surprising then that interpretivists debunk theory neutral data and other empiricist notions such as operationalism here defined as the transformation of an abstract theoretical concept into something concrete and measurable in an empirical sense. This is an interesting research concept to wrestle with in the sense that it begs the question of whether the purposes of the inquiry will be served by viewing the graduate teachers as something concrete, measurable and static. Constructivist interpretivists view empiricists who speak in those terms as missing the important element of intersubjectivity defined here as a first order construct as shared or common meanings. Charles Taylor writes of this intersubjectivity as: "ways of experiencing action in society which are expressed in the language and descriptions constitutive of institutions and practices" (Taylor, 1987, p. 75). Generally speaking then, constructivist interpretivists focus on processes where meanings are created, negotiated, mediated, sustained, modified; all within the context of some specific human behavior such as becoming an activist.

### Truth, Validity and Meaning: What It Means To Be

An attempt at an understanding of meaning is an important one for this study. It is the construction of meaning that is the intent of the method; the reason for conducting the

inquiry. In this sense there is a distinction made between truth and meaning in the manner which elicits the response that each can exist on their own. The phenomenological evolution of meaning or verstehen is an interesting one. Verstehen has as its underlying concept the understanding that people behave as a consequence of meaning and that meaning is socially constructed. Neopositivists, looking for a new form of empiricism launched into the subjectivity aspects of verstehen, arguing that it was the empathetic character of inquirers that lead them into the heads of their subjects allowing them to grasp hold of the metacognitive ability of the subject which in turn directed "guess what I am thinking" at the meaning of the behavior of that subject. In turn this enabled the subject to be part of an even more rigorous empirical test as a result. Verstehen was left then at this point as a heuristic device for questioning; a useful tool for discovery but with no direct value for the development of justification or meaning. The intent here is not to form a criticism of positivistic verstehen but rather to understand more of what it might be by looking to what it is not. The sensitization gleaned from this conceptualization is to consider the purpose, the limitations, the problematics of verstehen as a form of justification to be proved or meaning to be conveyed.

What it is best seen in the eloquent rebuttal to the criticism of this positivist tradition in the writing of Alfred Schutz. In his book Phenomenology of the Social World (1967) Schutz distinguishes several senses of the term Verstehen or meaning which is the central and most sensitive concept affecting this study and as such should be considered at this point in the development of the interpretive constructivist understanding. In the first sense it was referred to as the experiential, every day commonsensical knowledge of human affairs and as Schwandt interprets Schutz to mean, "it has nothing to do with the introspection or pointing to the subjective states of actors; rather it refers to the intersubjective character of the world and the complex process by which we come to recognize our own actions and those of our fellow actors as meaningful" (Schwandt, 1994, p.121). The constructivist interpretivist method of inquiry is formed heavily by this ontological or "what it means to be" concept of meaning and life world. Life world is now defined by theorists such as Van Manen (1994) as the world of lived experience containing certain pervading structures that can be studied. Schutz (1967) and those who advocate his thinking, see Verstehen and

meaning as a method peculiar to the social sciences in the first order as a process that we make sense of our everyday world and in the second order the process whereby the inquirer attempts to make sense of the first order. Therefore this theoretical attitude supports the idea that the constructs which the inquiry will elicit will be made by the women that I intend to interview. This I believe is a significant aspect of the inquiry.

### The Tenacious Circle

The phenomenological understanding of interpretation has two positions and it is important to consider this because it distinguishes what each position views as data. The first as advocated by theorists such as Dilthey and Hirsh assume that meaning is a, "determinate, object like entity waiting to be discovered in text, a culture or the mind of the social actor" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 121). The method almost becomes an exercise in exegesis which identifies and explains objective meaning in a precise, word by word process. The text is the data and the method is the discovery of the text. The second position is where the data is the active construction of the text where the method is the relationship of the text to the person creating the text. In both these processes the hermeneutical circle can be employed as a methodological device where you consider the whole in relation to its parts and the parts in relation to the whole. It is thought that the data for this inquiry will be viewed more as a construction than a discovery, although the theory would support both approaches as possibilities.

Hermeneutics has in this chapter been defined as a systematic investigation of interpretation where interpretation is the practice of finding meaning. It is anticipated that during the interview process the hermeneutical cycle or circle will come about in a configuration that will form much as an embossed relief of the women and the lifestories they will construct. This relief will have two layers to it, the first is hermeneutic autonomy where the individual woman participant will be able to determine meaning for herself. The second layer is hermeneutic heteronomy where the investigation of the interpretation will be left to me as the researcher to explain and document for others. Together the interviewing process will create a hermeneutic circle or cycle which like the Inuit storyteller did with the Sedna story. The research literature reveals a compelling paradox: being that in order to understand the whole of that which we



investigate we must first understand the parts, but to understand the parts we must first understand the whole. We cannot understand one without understanding the other. It is however an opportunity to establish the figure ground relationship, it is a prime opportunity to establish context, it is a prime opportunity to develop intercontextuality between text and reader, between participant and researcher. A measure for the success of the meaning making aspect of this inquiry will be how we can break this cycle of the whole and the parts leading to the whole and the parts, long enough to grasp the meaning during those brief glimpses of intercontextuality where we can enter the circle.

A further position posited by the philosophical hermeneutics of theorists such as Charles Taylor and Clifford Geertz and their primary concern with ontology or being which views hermeneutics as a fact of life so to speak. Taylor and others part company with phenomenologists who immerse themselves in capturing the subject's point of view, with some form of verification, and with discriminating between the emic (that perspective of the native or insider interpretation of or reasons for her customs and belief system) and etic (that perspective of the external, outsider researchers interpretation of the same customs and belief system). The etic perspective is concerned with what things mean from an analytical perspective. The emic perspective is concerned with what things mean to the members of a society. Philosophical hermeneutics transcend dualism of all sorts and contend that if the interpretations gleaned do not seem authentic then, "there is no means of verification procedure we can fall back on. We can only continue to offer interpretations; we are in the interpretive circle" (Taylor, 1971-1987, p. 75). This attitude towards the blending of the emic and etic perspective appears as a compliant theoretical fit for a search for meaning based upon dynamic lived experience. This understanding of the going beyond, transcending nature of insider outsider dualism formed by the emic etic relationship points to the researcher participant relationship once again, and the need for a reciprocal arrangement as a more meaningful compliancy for the shared and embedded context that this study seeks to recognize and interpret. The perspective will not actualize from critical distance of the separation of emic and etic posture but from a stance originating in a shared and embedded context that provides a less rigidly defined researcher and subject. The intercontextuality of this attitude will provide moments of flashpoints where a sense of mutuality can develop that will enable new insights to originate in this

developed context. The shared context also provides a staging area where the insights can be held long enough to be thought through and be made sense of.

It falls at this point to trace the constructivist interpretivist paradigm towards symbolic interactionism and its many deviations. The extensive writing of Norman Denzin (1977; 1987; 1988; 1989; 1992; 1994) develops as its central tendency interpretive interactionism, along with the method he and others have come to cite as interpretive biography or life stories. In his recent writing Denzin speaks about the need for symbolic interactionists to be less concerned about false pretensions of ethnography that sees realism to be a more self conscious approach. Denzin seeks an approach that is firmly rooted in language or communication that will, "produce and shape the meanings that circulate in everyday life" (Denzin, 1992, p. 96).

In Denzin's (1989) more recent writing where he appears to be reconceptualizing the ethnographic method, he argues that not only must language, culture and feminist philosophy be addressed but it must be addressed as critical. The main purpose for this critical ability is to expose the omissions and commissions relative to race, ethnicity, gender, and class. This attitude may be a critical attribute for the conceptualization of this study and the emphasis on women, women teachers, women activists.

### An Integrated Constructivist Interpretivist Method

The line of thinking in this exposition, as guided by Schwandt and the Handbook of Qualitative Research, (1994), turns at this point to the dialog of constructivism. The hyphenation of the terms constructivist- interpretist here is the symbolic attempt to link the two while at the same time recognizing that they do have different but related arrangements. The qualitative research literature reflects this thought either directly or through inference. For the purposes of this inquiry it is important to understand where and how the two methods are similar and whether or not these similarities can be integrated as "a" method. Leading to the heart of the matter the statements that follow form the distillation of the suppositions of a constructivist method. Again the direction of this lists originates with Schwandt and acknowledges the framework his work provided for this methodological narrative. First of all, it appears that, constructivists do not cohere with modernists who believed that facts are simply out there for us to study and

that with rational observation, independent from ourselves as observers and as a result of an exercise that is disciplined, and ordered, we will be able to determine what these facts are. This next statement may well be at the heart of the matter. Constructivists believe emphatically that, "knowledge and truth are created and not discovered by mind", (Schwandt, 1994, p. 124). Constructivists see the pluralistic and resilient character of reality. Reality is expressed and represented in a myriad of forms: pluralistic in the form of the language, symbols, and the systems it can create. Resilient in the sense that reality is stretched and shaped to fit human intents of human beings. These sometimes startling elements suggesting the images and concepts of transmogrification may well be beginning to form an interesting metaphor for this particular inquiry. The concept of shapeshifting comes more and more to mind.

Constructivists argue passionately that there is no unique or predetermined world outside, over there; a world not seen as independent of the people who live in it and the symbols and artifacts they create in order to live in it. Constructivists are concerned with the experience and reality of everyday life and this is expressed in the theory as an emphasis on the, "instrumental and practical function of theory construction and knowing" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). In one form or another the literature describes constructivists as person theorists who reject the idea that any, "natural or essential givens precede the process of social determinism" (Fuss, 1989. p.3). Constructivists do not easily take as given such things as truth, self, man, women, activist and so on but rather view these concepts as the result or construct of complex, intricate, puzzling and important discourse.

### The Constructivist Connection

The connection made to constructivism and the nature of inquiry is this. In some sense we are all constructivists as we go about our lives and our knowing of it: our minds do in fact act upon the sensory data that we accumulate throughout the day. It is the sense of humans as active and concerned with activity that will form a central tenet of this study. The inquiry is itself concerned with activism which has at its foundation the idea of experience acted upon.

At first glance constructivism might appear trivial, somewhat transparent, superficial and certainly open to criticism. Positivists could argue that the construction of concepts such as self or activism are simple abstractions and as such are no more than convenient devices which allow for a way to manage the variables. Stating that we are going about constructing our lives, living out our curriculum, constructing our narratives, developing our biographies, becomes unimportant in the time it takes to say it, to name it. The way to counteract this thought will be to add the element of meaning to the discussion: constructivism for a reason, a purpose, a retort to the "so what" of the process.

### More Constructivist Shapes

There are various forms of constructivism that addresses these questions. Goodman and Elgin, (1988) posit a pragmatic view of constructivism that forms an antidote to the view of truth or certainty seen as the correspondence between a truth claim and the already pre existing world out there. These authors suggest a view of "rightness" rather than "truth", believing rightness to have in their words a, "broader reach" than truth. Believing as they do in the irretrievable temperament of certainty they posit a view of adaptation where we humans, "can adopt habits, strategies, vocabularies, styles, as well as statements" (Goodman and Elgin, 1988, p. 159). Furthermore, cognition is reconceptualized in the pragmatic form of constructivism to broaden understanding where we begin, "from what happens to be currently adopted and proceed to integrate and organize, weed out and supplement, not in order to arrive at truth about something already made but in order to make something right, to construct something that works cognitively, that fits together and handles new cases, that may implement further inquiry and invention" (Goodman and Elgin, 1988, p. 163). Is this more camouflage or a viable way to make sense of or approach the question of why and how a person became an activist? Would this approach provide a fit that would provide the space to shape the meaning for this perceptibly elusive inquiry?

### The Significance of Intersubjectivity

Of significance to this particular inquiry and the pivotal nature of inner city activism is the idea of intersubjectivity which is central to the theory of what is known as constructivism. The Oxford definition of intersubjectivity states that it is primarily a phenomenological term which refers to the mutual constitution of social relationships suggesting that people can reach consensus about knowledge or about what they have experienced in their life world, at least as a working agreement if not a claim to objectivity. Van Manen refers to intersubjectivity in that, "the human science researcher needs the other in order to develop a dialogic relation with the phenomena, and thus validate the phenomena as described" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11). The philosopher theorist Alfred Schutz, in this seminal work The Phenomenology of the Social World (1967) writes of the notion that the world that people create in the process of social exchange is this:

However, if I look at my whole stock of knowledge of your lived experience and ask about the structure of this knowledge, one thing becomes clear: this is that everything I know about your conscious life is really based upon my knowledge of my own lived experience. My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. It is only because of this that, when I look backward, I am able to synchronize my past experiences of you with your past experiences. (Schutz, 1967, p. 106).

### Primus Inter Pares: Tension or Tenacity

The idea of synchronicity is essential to this study and the proposed relationship between the researcher and respondent. Guba (1990) in his work refers to the role of the researcher as the *primus inter pares*, the first among equals, emphasizing the cooperative effort that this attitude requires if it is to be at all successful. The success of this inquiry will be gauged by the ability of both the researcher and the subject participant to both establish and benefit from this attitude. It also informs and prepares

both the researcher and participant of the inevitable tension that will occur while attempting to establish some level of synchronicity.

The emphasis here for social constructivists is not on the meaning activity of one individual but rather the collective meaning as shaped by language, metaphors, and other social processes. This idea of the collective search for meaning is an important one for this inquiry because several women activists will participate which will initiate a broader understanding through the use of the method of comparison and contrast.

A detailed outlined framework of constructivist research methodology can be seen in many forms: one that is prevalent in the literature in the one developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989). They have established a set of criteria that illuminate the constructivist research paradigm and will be developed here in their entirety. First they state that the philosophy that supports constructivism is idealist (a construction in the minds of individual). Added to this is the notion that as well as being idealistic is it is also pluralistic and relativistic (multiple, conflicting, constructions, all with the potential to be meaningful). In the final analysis, Guba and Lincoln state emphatically that truth is a matter of the best, informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is a consensus at a given time (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The process developed by these two theorists and others is again referred to as the hermeneutical circle. There are several versions of this circle but they all contain elements of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, re analyses that leads to a joint interpretation of researcher and respondents and a construction of the case or narrative. The reference made to idealism offers a sensitizing concept for this study in the sense that the spirit of this inquiry is based upon the construction of meaning, accompanied with a perception of possibility and hope.

These constructions can then be looked at for their fit with the information they encompass, the extent to which they work and finally to the extent to which they are relevant and are modifiable (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). In conclusion then, constructions are attempts to make sense of or interpret experience. These tend to be self renewing and self sustaining. The success of the construction will depend on the range of data and the researchers degree of sophistication in handling the data. The level of trust than can develop will cultivate the important aspects of intersubjectivity. Constructions by their very nature are meant to be shared and have the possibility of becoming excellent

learning resources. Guba and Lincoln use the word malconstruction to note that all constructions are not good ones even though they may be meaningful. Malconstructions are, "incomplete, simplistic, uniformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by inadequate methodology" (Guba and Lincoln. 1989, p. 143). I would refer to these malconstructions as impoverished narratives. If there is added to this, a sense of disrespect for the informants or a lack of fidelity to the people involved in the making of the construction or the overt sentimentalization of informants, a malconstruction will most assuredly occur and the narrative will not be legitimate.

The criteria for standards are viewed as framework specific, so for the researcher and the respondent to share, for example, the derivations of education and teaching from the perspective of the teaching and learning perspective, would be of benefit to the construction process and evaluation of this particular study.

Finally, a view of constructivism as a problematic is apparent throughout the literature. There are the perpetual concerns of criteria and objectivity, the lack of what Schwandt calls critical purchase, the feminist concern of researcher authority and what may be perceived as privilege, and the continual barrage of epistemological and philosophical claims that ebb and flow throughout the development of a methodological narrative.

Many researchers of whatever bent will state at some point in their discourse that society appears to be poised at the crossroads of two paths. The one fork offers the liberal hope and optimism of John Dewey (it is interesting to see how his work has surfaced lately and not just in Education) and to the seeming despair of Foucault and the accompanying formidable prison metaphors such as the relentless panopticon. Constructivism for the purposes of this inquiry and drawing upon the literature will be thought of as a range of dialogues, centered around what society takes to be knowledge, reason and goodness on one side and the tremendous sweeping extent of social practices and behavior; either originating or sustained by these discourses on the other. Constructivism has within it the possibility in its critical moment, the creation of a form of what has been referred to as bracketing which allows for a moment the suspension of pronouncements of the real, the reasonable or the absolute; long enough for a researcher to look for meaning. It carries within the method the possibility of the development of meaning making, tropic, devices such as synecdoche to develop as

meaning makers. Synecdoche is a trope, a metaphorical form that allows a part to stand for a whole or the whole to stand for a part. It may develop a way to understand how activism is viewed in the part it played in the whole of the lives of the women I will interview. Synecdoche evokes the need to read between the spaces that are not there in order to better understand what has been transcribed.

In the very broadest sense constructivism is an optimistic, hopeful methodology, a methodology of possibility; a way to wreck havoc on Weber's iron cages and Taylor's worries of the malaise of modernity. This attitude is based upon the understanding that political action does not always have to be based upon combative behavior upon large sweeping landscapes in order to be considered effective or important: low to the ground, grass roots inner city organization may attest to this. The form of political activity envisioned here and informed by the constructivist method is in fact, situated in the local, everyday and the immediate. It is relational in the sense that it is scattered and as such involves all of us in some ways and not in others. Simultaneously it is also diffuse in the sense that it could reduce an aggressive and alienating posture of a more traditional political stance (one perhaps that the subject participants in this inquiry may have been experiencing) with an alternative stance based upon highly contextualized ground work that seeks meaning as the basis for change. It has an appropriate methodological shape for the intended subject participants that will form the backbone of this inquiry.

#### Down From The Glass Ceiling: A Look at a Feminist Perspective

From a feminist perspective this interactionist methodology looks to ways that the language and activity of the inquirer and respondent will be read in ways that are gendered, classed, situated and biographical (Lather, 1991; Munro, 1998). Weiler (1988) defines feminist research as characterized by a "new definition of the relationship between women researcher and women subject" (Weiler, 1988, p. 58). The result of this perspective is a view of the human condition that is driven by the likes of power, ideology, emotions, violence and how people position themselves among these human capacities in everyday life settings. Feminist research, based upon this premise,



can make ideology conscious in such a way as to be able to reflect on beliefs, to articulate them and then perhaps to change them.

The form of relationship, in this inquiry is predicated upon myself as the researcher teacher educator who espouses a form of feminist pedagogical practice and has abandoned the traditional teacher student power relationship and chooses instead to examine, together with her students, the nature of class, race, and power from a perspective of change and redefinition as it relates to teaching and learning.

There is currently developing, a substantive body of literature linking women, research into women's issues, and constructivism. The interest began with work such as the well known, well read, Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of self, voice and mind (Belenkey et al, 1986). In this literature credence is given to the research concerned with the lived experience of women by identifying ways and means that women create meaning and experience their life world in the particular situation in which they are located. This literature is also concerned with the idea that women have not always readily found expression or meaning in the traditional conceptual thought systems. Language for feminist social constructivists is more than a representational, depiction medium. It is understood by feminist research methodologists and epistemologists that a transparent, see through view of language has lead to the creation of gender viewed through the glass ceiling, where the verbal practices involved in social interaction and that the voices of women have in many instances been silenced or ignored. A corollary to this is that women are currently thinking and concerning themselves with the social construction of the research encounter which onto itself I find to be a social construction. It is in fact what is happening as I write this piece on methodology.

A reentry into feminist theory based upon the research commitment that would seek to inquire into women as activists led to a renewed look at the literature. There is a current debate in much of the literature that is concerned with whether or not there is or ought to be a perceived difference between feminist epistemology and feminist research methodology. The other question that arises is whether in fact there is a distinctive feminist research methodology and if it does in fact exist what might it look like and sound like and feel like and subsequently the question arises as to whether or not it has a more specific purpose than a traditional, generic approach. (Reinharz, 1992; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Hawkesworth, 1989; Weiler, 1991). In this sense the

review of constructivist methodology takes a sharp shift into a discussion of what it means to get past this debate and construct an understanding of "beyond methodology". This led to the discovery of the work of Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook who wrote a piece actually titled Beyond Methodology (1998). In this work they use the existing debate to develop some of the factors that hinder or possibly stimulate feminist scholarship. Their collection of articles and analysis provide a framework to look for common ground upon which this inquiry may be placed. They begin by sorting through epistemology and methodology. Epistemology means to them the study of the assumptions about how to know the social and apprehend the meaning. Methodology is the actual techniques and practices used during the research process. Four themes form the framework of this book: reflexivity, action orientation, affective components of research, and use of the situation at hand. Of significant interest to this study was the work on the action orientation of feminist methodology where the discussion moved away from a view of human nature as passive, always acted upon by outside forces beyond the individual's control, toward a view of the individual as an actor capable of resisting pressures to conform. Extending this idea to the low to the ground everyday world can be heard with the voice of Patricia Collins (1989) who believes that a self conscious black women's every day behavior can be a source of resistance and a form of activism. She speaks: "People who view themselves as fully human, as subjects, become activists, no matter how limited the sphere of their activism may be" (Collins, 1989, p.78). This attitude towards a feminist methodology lives within the spirit of this particular study.

#### A Need For a Pervasive Ethical Sensibility

Inevitably this debate would confront and uncover the issue of feminist methodology and ethical sensibility. There is the issue of not betraying trust freely given. There is the special responsibility of the researcher to anticipate whether research findings can be used for purposes other than those intended by the inquiry. There is also the issue of the power relationship between researcher and participant where the power of the researcher can be hidden or camouflaged. There is the matter of the critical distance between the researcher and participant. All of these issues are at the foundation of an ethical sensibility based upon the search for reciprocity, a concept that is of certain

importance for this inquiry. It was understood that tension could develop during this process. I recognized this as a possibility and a risk to be taken.

While reading life stories such as Julie Cruikshank's (1990) Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Elders several ethical issues are evoked. The book is the stories of three Athapaskan women of Tlinget ancestry. The format for the telling of these life stories was that of a collaborative effort where the subjects, in this case Aboriginal women, tell their stories to the researcher who translates, transcribes and edits the narratives that the experience provides. The criticism that may evolve here is that even though there is an attempt at collaboration, there remains an unequal power distribution with the researcher having the upper hand. As a result of this perception an attitude of colonization could certainly develop based upon the argument of who owns the story and will these stories be expropriated. This sense of colonizing women's stories is to be actively avoided in this inquiry. What is the saving grace for the criticism lobbed at the construction of life stories such as Cruikshank's is that in her work community is assumed and not being sought. The thought that stems from this idea is that when community has already been built it will form the necessary, appropriate or meaningful context for legitimate research collaboration and therefore eliminate the concept of colonization, at least in this instance. In this inquiry, there already exists a shared community, that being the shared and embedded context of the Winnipeg Education Centre.

### The Significance of Narrative

In her work Life Stories: the Creation of Coherence (1998) Charlotte Linde reveals how she has come to understand that life stories express the sense of self, who we are, and how we came to be that person. She also believes that life stories communicate this self sense to others. This is in essence what this inquiry is setting out to do. Atkinson defines the life story as, "the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as the result of a guided interview by another" (Atkinson, 1998, p.8).

The way that the constructivist theory will be acknowledge the format of the life story to be actualized in this inquiry will be through the development and interpretation of narrative. Several decades of teaching and working experience as a teacher educator leads me to think that the construction of life story narratives may have an even deeper level of meaning than Linde posits in her discussion of life stories. I suspect that not only do life stories express and communicate as she describes but that they may also be a way of containing the incredible complexities of life, long enough for us to learn from them. This thought is why it is incumbent upon myself as researcher participant to not only listen and collect voices but to construct the meaning that will be conveyed during this process. Robert Fulford (1999) in his work The Triumph of Narrative offers support for this position when he tells those who read his book that, "we can accept contingency as a beautiful mystery that will always be a part of life.... or we can decline to accept it, and instead look for patterns, plots, meanings" (Fulford, 1999, p. 15). Fulford believes that narrative carries within it the ability to appear to replicate life as it, "mimics the unfolding of reality" (Fulford, 1999, p. 15). The issue is how skillfully both the research giver and the research taker are in holding together, long enough, this replication, so as to summon the meaning from it.

By choosing this method the crucial issue of ethical fidelity appears as a significant consideration. Acknowledging Nel Noddings definition of "fidelity is not...faithfulness to duty or principle but a direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation" (Noddings, 1986, p.497). Schultz et al (1997) deliberate on this issue by predicating that a sense of fidelity requires that research is conducted with someone to whom we are in relation to and experience allegiance with. Acknowledging the need for a pervasive ethical sensibility as an integral part of this study is a way to demonstrate the allegiance that Noddings and Schultz have both named as necessary for research fidelity. It is this attitude toward allegiance and fidelity that supports the conviction that this inquiry does not seek to empower the women who are involved. The whole notion of being able to empower another human being is a tragic misnomer. The only person who can empower, is the one who empowers him or herself. In this process of individual empowerment, the other can witness, can document, can speak of, and can participate in another's empowerment by working through their own, but it cannot be done one for the other. In a narrative of caring for and caring about that this study seeks to build, helping and

empowering as developmental concepts will be extinguished and allegiance and fidelity will be reconceptualized as the central tendency.

### Compelling Data and Compliant Method

The development of this chapter for the dissertation on Social Constructivism, is in itself a social construction: one that developed long before the life story interviews were to occur. One of the consequences of this is that this will place determining effects upon the research methodology. These determinants originate in the context: a context that developed reciprocal relationships, an emancipatory sense of caring, a pervasive sense of ethical collaboration, and a commitment to hope and possibility. Constructivism is a theoretical perspective or a set of epistemological presumptions or as written above: sensitizing concepts. In determining a method to construct meaning or a meaning for activism you would not be seeking purely psychological explanations for activism because it is not compliant with the tenets of Social Constructivism. On the other hand, I would not expect to find the deep meaning I am seeking by using a closed interview or a survey sample. Life stories along with a collaborative interpretation (critical hermeneutics) of them provides the opportunity for rich data to be accumulated along with the staging area for their interpretation. It provides the respectful opportunity for each of the participants to be idiosyncratic to the degree that meaning will develop in a transformative way from which all participants will learn: gain new insights, affirm and validate others and turn towards hopeful dividends.

### The Research Design

#### The Identification of Participants

The participants for this study will be women. This initial criterion is a deliberate choice based upon the shared and embedded context that form a significant aspect of this study, the heightened awareness of feminist issues, the fact that the majority of graduates from the Winnipeg Education Centre are women, the fact that historically women are the majority of the teaching profession, that women are perceived to be

involved in grassroots activity in the Inner City of Winnipeg, and the supposition that much can be learned from the meaning conveyed through the construction of the life stories of these women.

The second criterion will be that the women participants for this study will have been involved in some form of inner city activity for at least five or more years. This thought predicates the idea that activism does not spring from the diploma but rather that you may become an activist over a period of time. Classroom teaching and participation in this study are not synonymous. Participants may have been teachers for some time but may now be organizing in one of the safe houses, working as consultants and so on. Participants will be living in Winnipeg but not necessarily in the inner city.

The third criterion in the identification of participants is that, in one or more ways, they will have been recognized by others.<sup>3</sup> The recognition could come in the form of media coverage of some form of inner city activity, or an acknowledgment of making the difference or in a byline of a local, community newspaper. The recognition would be the kind for example, where the participant would be recognized as an activist by persons such as the Inner City school superintendent, Pauline Clark or by researchers, such as Jon Young, both publicly known for their involvement in the area of inner city issues.

The final criterion for the identification involves the level of fidelity that is required to support the intent of reciprocity for this study. To this end there must be perceived to be the possibility for a degree of trust to be sustained between the researcher and the participant. It would seem that a teaching and learning antecedent that has already been lived through by myself (now researcher, past teacher) and participant (now activist, past student) would form a basis for the possibility of compliance and trust.

### The Interview Process

The interview process is based upon tenets of qualitative methodological theory, in this case social constructivism. The interviews will become life histories (stories) or

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<sup>3</sup> Initially there was an idea to compose a panel of inner city principals, agency personnel, Winnipeg Centre past staff and directors, to compile a list of graduates they thought were activists. This list would then be used to determine those who would be interviewed. This idea was abandoned because no degree of confidentiality could be

as sometimes identified as interpretive biographies or auto biographies. As stated above, only women will be interviewed. Three women will become the participants for the study: three is considered to be enough of a sample to form comparisons and generalizations while allowing for the space required for the detailed text that each life story entails. The interview process will involve two major intervals. The first interval will consist of an interview requiring at least a two to three hour time period. During this time two major things will occur. The first will be to familiarize the participant with the purpose of the study by allowing that "I have been studying activism and as part of this study I want to interview women from the Centre who may be able to help me understand what activism may mean and the reason I think you may be able to inform this study is because....." After the introduction to the study is understood and the conduct<sup>4</sup> for the inquiry is determined the development of the life story will begin with one initial question: Tell me your story. Tell me of your life. At this point no more direction will be given. The researcher will interfere only to affirm, to encourage, ask for clarification or in the case that direction is overtly solicited by the participant. The intent now for the researcher is to listen.

It has been made clear by this time that the participant is free to refuse to answer any of these direct questions if they choose to. The next interview will involve the collaboration of the researcher and the participant involving the question. "I think that you are an activist. Can we talk of this and if and how Winnipeg education Centre may have had an effect on your becoming an activist?"

The next interval will have in effect, two stages. The first will be that the researcher and the participant will review the lifestory.. The second interval will involve the presentation of data.

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provided to the participants as WEC is a small community and no amount of changing names or dates would protect the identity of the participants.

<sup>4</sup> This conduct is reflected in the ethics review process where for example, it would be made clear at this point that participants are free to leave this process at any time and expect that they either take the data or have it destroyed.

### The Presentation of Data

The researcher will then write the final interpretation. There will be no forced attempt at consensus but at this point if the participant wanted a piece removed from the initial interview it will be done at this stage. The participant will be given the final documented life story. The final result will be three life stories with three interpretations. Following the documentation of the three interpreted life stories a final chapter or chapters will be added to the dissertation to look at what may be learned from the generalizations that form from comparing and contrasting the three differing life stories. The level of significance in developing these life stories will be determined by how well the experience ensures the right of the participant to tell her story but also the right to be understood.



## Chapter Four

### A Research Context: A Subjective Account

The purpose of this chapter is to position myself, the researcher in the research methodology. It begins with an analysis of language as the methodological base for collaborative research. The analysis leads toward an understanding of how language can develop research based upon action as an integral aspect of the method. In this case action is predicated on a sense of hope and transformation that is seeking both a method and the politics of confidence. As a researcher I have positioned actions and the use of language in a search for authenticity developed within an exploration of subjectivity.

### A Positioned Researcher

For the purposes of this study participation and collaboration are used interchangeably. The meaning ascribed to these two concepts is that they both involve collective, reciprocal actions. Earlier on in this dissertation, the significance of participatory research in the hermeneutical, social constructivist tradition was shown to develop around language and the meaning derived from the application of it through the development of life stories. Language is a significant consideration for the differing approaches of critical pedagogical, phenomenological and hermeneutic methods. A common denominator noted by each of these theoretical and methodological approaches is that language forms a basis for the understanding and development of important social change; albeit from differing political and sociological perspectives. In the literature that speaks of the interpretivist aspects of the method a new imperative concerning language emerges: that being that language is synonymous with action relevant to being (Herda, 1999).

Participatory interpretivist research differs from traditional positivist research in significant ways. Using traditional, positivist research we expect to develop specific skills to seek answers; techniques we can learn, but following this train of thought, these skills, if left disparate with no application or action taken, will then by their nature and use sometimes be forgotten. It is akin to teaching for the test or memorizing

the equation and forgetting it immediately after the test has been completed. However, ethical knowledge involves moral judgment and can neither be learned nor forgotten. (Herda, 1999). Based upon Herda's assumptions I would add that research having an integral ethical component does become a moral act and therefore, an action. This understanding of research stems from two decades of teaching where I view teaching as a moral act; a form of mediation, the action between universal thought and ideas and a particular context. Teaching and research have, I believe, this commonality. The key concept for both is to act, or anticipate or foster action. Participatory research methodology, for the purposes of this study has embraced the concept of action as an integral aspect of the method.

Reference has been made in this work to critical theory, particularly critical pedagogy. The addition of action to the characteristics ascribed to participatory interpretivism resonates well with Freire's maxim that: "to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds" (Freire, 1973, p. 44). Peter McClaren relates the foundational tenet of critical pedagogy in relation to action in this transformative way:

Critical pedagogy resonates with the sensibility of the Hebrew Symbol 'tikkun', which means to heal, repair and transform the world.....it provides historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education who still dare to hope. Irrevocably committed to the side of the oppressed, critical pedagogy is as revolutionary as the earlier views of the authors of the Declaration of Independence: since history is fundamentally open to change, liberation is an authentic goal, and a radically different world can be brought into being (McClaren, 1989, p. 160).

This thought informs the intent and the spirit of this inquiry, the thought being that the understanding of the legitimization for action developed through the use of language and in this instance, life stories. The attempt as with "tikkun" is to consider this activity as the development of a politics of confidence based upon a presumption of hope.

All forms of research have within them, three aspects: the epistemological, (knowledge, structure, explanation) the ontological (meaning, understanding, being) followed by the method. The method that has been constructed for this study does

acknowledge the importance of all three aspects, those of knowledge, being and method, but the more overt shape of the research is primed towards a deliberate shift towards the primacy of the ontological and being aspects of the research; those aspects that support the development of the method and the corollary of the imperative of language as action. For critical pedagogy and critical theorists this notion of ontology is determined as:

...work to change organization's and society to embody more responsive and inclusive communities: reject the emphasis on scientific predictability based upon the assumption that it is possible to norm human beings: question and change the legitimization processes that render normal existing change in schools, businesses, hospitals and other places of work: place the role of ethics and moral imperatives above technical skills and mastery learning: and discover through language new ways to live out personal and social change (Herda, 1999, p. 8).

Unlike the critical theorists, Paul Ricoeur does not see critical hermeneutics and participatory research as radical or revolutionary, but rather a summons for action based upon his sense of collaboration: "the summoned object....the self constituted and defined by its position to the respondent"(Ricoeur, 1995a, p. 262). The summons Ricoeur speaks of is understood as the re experiencing of the ordinary in an extraordinary way: not as a radical event but an integral part of life, not a ruptured or serialized event but a continual and vital activity of living every day.

The role of the researcher for this study is important and transcends the job of scribe, designated authority or sole analyst. Ricoeur's "summons" suggests a set of dynamic relationships between researcher and participants; positioned always in relationship, of being respondent to the other one. As a researcher I am already in relationship with the women with whom I hope to carry out the inquiry. The notion of community as a contextual basis already exists. This understanding transforms the approaches an inquiry such as this one can foster and also change the position of the researcher to one of co-constructivist or co-participant of the research method. In this way I move from being a neutral observer or social advocate to a position of being within a transformative act with others (Herda, 1999). This is a stance I have tested and long

held; consistent with my teaching at the Winnipeg Education Centre, the site of this research.

Again and again, the theory of critical hermeneutics, interpretivism point to the significance of language and the relationship to research as action. Hermeneutics views language not only as a tool or vehicle but as, "an action that is the medium of our lives" (Herda, 1999, p.10). I take this to mean, that language as an action, connects us to others, to their history, to the communities in which they live today, and to a sense of an envisioned future for tomorrow. Language then, is more than a representational tool or a structure. In the structuralist tradition, language is thought of as something that structures our world. In the hermeneutic tradition language, as action, is thought of as an event. This attitude towards the use of language coheres well in the event and action oriented field of activism and education wherein this study is situated.

A fundamental purpose for a researcher who chooses the hermeneutical, social constructivist method is that of seeking new and alternative ways to approach problem solving as a prerequisite to social change, one that moves past coercive policy making, inappropriate or questionable intervention of program implementation or the advancement of a new or revised technique. Viewing policy as technical intervention brings to mind Herda's idea that techniques and the technical can be lost or forgotten or are only useful in directed circumstance and are not transferable to others. Critical hermeneutics as an interpretive arm of social constructivism may transcend this approach to problem solving by activating the democratic, moral and collaborative capacities of human beings as they work as activists towards change in schools and the communities in which they reside. These capacities are not skills that can be tested and then forgotten: intrinsically they need only to be activated. The question is: what activates these capacities. How does this form of behaviour and activity differ from similar activity that is defined as leadership or advocacy but not activism? Language as action will precipitate this exploration.

In Chapter One of this dissertation reference was made to two major policy reviews that were carried out to determine the feasibility of the Education Program at the Centre. In a time of economic restraint these reviews were to determine whether the program was living up to the mandate and also if it was fiscally responsible and viable. The questions prompting these reviews were: is the money spent on these people well spent,

will more money make this a better program, will less money affect the program, how can the program still be viable with less money, should the program be allowed to continue and the money continue to be spent on maintaining the program, should old policies be removed or altered, do new policies need to be put in place to improve the value of the program. Ratcheting the program up or down, in or out, based upon funding decisions and policy changes did not address the notion of why the candidates became good teachers and what determined this. This form of decision making determining whether the Centre ought to continue or not based upon economic rationality limited the text of those reviews to initially one of apprehension and fragmentation, briefly replaced by one of momentary relief followed by more apprehension. Because these reports were not a shared or collaborative effort little was learned of the value the program may have had on the people who came to the Centre to become teachers, and more to the point inner city teachers. This understanding of governmental policy reviews does not ignore the perceived need for there to be investigations into the fiscal responsibility of social programs such as Winnipeg Education Centre. The possibility does exist however, that this study may add as a corollary, an increased level of understanding concerning the viability of Access programming through the exploration of the life stories of three of the programs graduates based upon the question of how they became activists and what effect, if any, the Centre had on the formation of these identities. In constructing these identities narratives will be developed that will be able to hold several plots, plots that add to the charts, numbers and statistics of a program review, a heightened awareness of why this program may be important in other significant ways. Gadamer (1988) understands this awareness and describes it as a broadened horizon which draws attention to the need to express both the limitations and potentials of human understanding. It is the intent of this study to broaden the horizon from the limitations of a review process towards one where the significance emanates from meaningful life stories.

The discussion comes again to that of action. The action for this study is based upon the sense of the reciprocal activity between researcher and participant in the relationship formed that can develop the possibility of seeing and understanding the world differently and subsequently learning from the experience. This belief is predicated upon a notion of advocacy where a sense of responsibility proceeds an exercise

of rights. To understand this more fully it is necessary to know who you are. This applies to the research process as in any form of human communication where who we are and what our responsibilities are tantamount. Again the positionality of the researcher is a significant consideration for this study. The research stance developed for this study is one of "from within" not "from above" allowing for a collaborative, creative interpretation of the past in order to reconfigure the future, to bring about possibility, confidence and hope and the change that may need to come in order to operationalize this change. This will be an alternative text or perhaps an additional one to that of program reviews and the general lack of research concerning the Centre and those who have spent time there. In this way the issues and problems brought to bear in the findings of the segmented program reviews are returned to those persons who need to develop the capacity to deal with them, that being those directly involved, the teachers and students of the Winnipeg Education Centre. This thought is what precipitated the need, not to look for a more efficient research posture and method but rather a change in the understanding of myself as a researcher and to understand the reasons for the changes. For this I have looked to a portion of my own life story in the belief that in doing so reciprocity will be honored and understood. With this sense is the clear understanding that participating in the reciprocal research process by naming part of my own life story is a precondition of a transformative process that this inquiry has set out to achieve. However, this study is not about my 'self' the researcher and strict attention will be paid to see that the focus rests with the three graduate teachers who became activists. This one episode of my own life story and the interpretation of it is one that I will share with the three research participants as part of the collaborative process.

The gauge to monitor this reciprocal activity so as to avoid the pitfall where the study becomes "about her the researcher" and not "about them as participants" continues to be informed by Alfred Schutz's (1967), sense of *Verstehen*. To understand, in general terms means to comprehend the meaning of something: in this case why three women graduates from the Winnipeg Education Centre constructed for themselves, identities as inner city activists. Further to this is the succinct notion, that understanding is the basis for all interactive subjectivity. Persons generally and researchers specifically, in this instance deal with the research process successfully

only to the degree that they reciprocally understand each others motivations and causality, at least for the purposes realized for this study.

The incident documented is a portrayal of an event that occurred very early on in my teaching life, one that precipitated a framework for how I came to view myself as an educator. This particular episode has undergone several interpretations over the years. I have documented three of them. The first is an anecdotal melange of thoughts and questions emerging from the search for authenticity and the second is the distillation of the event through the educational philosophy of Thomas Greenfield (1993). The third is one that emerged as I took on the role of researcher during the construction of this dissertation. I have come to understand that this incident began to shape my own activism and an understanding of what it means to be one.

### A Life Story

I have been looking for authenticity all of my life. I find that at first I spoke and thought of it almost as if it were an artifact that could be found, an object, with shape and texture, smell and taste; something that could be held and examined, lost, searched for and rediscovered. This search for authenticity began, for me, as the idea of either you had some or you did not, it was there or it was not, you could see it or you could not. The thought of trying to define authenticity began for me, as the idea of either you had some or you did not, you could see it or you could not. The thought of trying to define authenticity or construct a meaning for the idea did not develop until I wondered and watched it occur or disappear in my life world of school and the classroom.

The first recollection I have of authenticity being of importance in my life was when I was growing up in a small prairie town where our family social life consisted of large Sunday family gatherings. The women would gather in the kitchen handing advice and babies back and forth, cook the meal and take turns chastising the children who were not allowed to bother the men in the parlor or race through Grandma's small house. The men sat in the parlor with rolled up white shirts, smoking also rolled Export A cigarettes, and sometimes drinking rye and coke out of coffee cups with roses on them. In this world the children were delegated to Grandma's basement, along with the canned peaches, the sauerkraut preserved in crocks, and rows and rows of sea green pickles. The game we

played most often when we were indoors was school. I remember quite clearly that when I was the oldest and could decide that we would play school today, I would only suggest the school game as a possibility, if we had the genuine articles to use; someone would have had to have brought a real book, usually the health text as it proved to be the most interesting artifact from the real world of school, and then some real paper, yellow pencils or the fat red ones and then there also had to be crayons and chalk. My young cousins were happy with any reasonable facsimile for these artifacts but I was not. They had to be the real thing or I was having none of it. I see now that this was the beginning of the exploration of authenticity referenced to originality; being that you either had it or you did not.

I began, or so I thought, the real job of teaching as a very young woman of twenty, fresh out of the one year teacher training program at the University of Regina. I was a fledgling rookie booked into a tough inner city school in Regina, Saskatchewan and found myself with thirty grade one children and the real artifacts of texts, chalk, both yellow and fat red pencils, and a very large blackboard covering three sides of the room. I remember very little of the first two months except that I cut and pasted at a frantic pace and cried often. My conscious life as a teacher person got a jolting jump start one November morning that sets my view of authenticity to this day. It was one of those soft, mornings, quiet, before the snow comes, with a gray ceiling resting just above your head. We were 'doing' Math, page something or other in one of those Think and Do series workbooks. The Queen, her picture at least, and I at the front of the room, and the children in rows of the completely centralized classroom. At around 10 o'clock in the morning, one small child jumped up from the desk that was bolted to the floor, ran over to the window, squealing with delight "look teacher, the snow is coming." And so it was; big, clean, fat, flakes. Immediately the whole crew of children propelled themselves over to the window ledge. Without a thought I ran to the back cupboard and grabbed a package of black 8 x 10 construction paper<sup>1</sup> and quickly lead the children out the door, down the steps and out into the front yard. For not more than a moment or two my twenty year old self and a group of six year old children caught snowflakes on the black paper and on our tongues. We tasted them, we danced around them, spoke of them, questioned and wondered

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<sup>1</sup> I have learned that keeping black construction paper in the freezer during the winter months, will create optimum snowflake observation because they melt less quickly



about them and then laughing and talking headed back towards the classroom. On the landing stood the principal, resplendent in polyester, obviously very angry. Turning on his heels he called out to me that I was to come and see him at recess. Recess provided him fifteen minutes to inform me that what I was doing was a violation of the timetable which clearly stated that I was to be 'doing' Math. Moreover, in a rather somber voice, he concluded with the argument that I was preventing real learning from happening when I encouraged playing in the snow. What would the parents make of this escapade? He added that this was a serious infraction and would be placed on my record. Somewhere in a dusty basement I envision this bad report smoldering away, an icon offering to the sanctity of real teaching. This was one of the first of these sorts of experiences which combined and recombined to form my idea that authenticity could be seen or felt or it could not. That it could be benevolent or it could not be. Authenticity to my twenty year old mind had to do with reality, credibility and being real.

I have lived my teacher person life with a shadow of an idea of what was authentic; always elusive, never directly defined. I saw it in terms of it being there or not being there. You could find it or you could not, you could see it or you could not. I have now read about authenticity in the literature of philosophy and educational administration. The discussion initiated by Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher develops what he terms as a modern view of authenticity and the goals of self fulfillment or self realization in which it is couched. This background gives moral force to the culture of authenticity including its most degraded, absurd or trivialized forms of self indulgence or doing your own thing, just being myself and the accompanying attitude of you can take it or leave it. This, for Taylor, does not mean that authenticity feeds on heightened individualism and ignoring relations with others and society as a whole but on the demands of wholly and completely recognizing difference, going beyond a sense of procedural justice or fairness and equity to the mutual support (political, personal and value laden) of each other's self determination. He speaks of authenticity as involving creation and construction as well as discovery. In involving originality Taylor,(1991) tells me that this frequently leads to opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. He also believes that in order to be true, authenticity requires openness to horizons of significance because otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance. Authenticity must also have a form of self expression

through language and dialog. Taylor points to the fact that the demands placed upon a complex view of authenticity will always be in tension and allowance must be made for this inevitability. This is not accomplished, however by privileging one demand of authenticity over the other such as creation over the horizon of significance. One demand does not wax or wane at the expense of another. For Taylor the expression of authenticity must not forget any of these essential demands or elements, no matter how difficult they may be to confront because all of them are necessary for a coherent dialog to occur. It is in the space where affinity and contestation of these criteria play out that the daunting task of learning and meaning will happen: a thoughtful measure of intercontextuality that we have been hearing much of lately and forms an important aspect of this study. This interpretation belies the critics who comprehend authenticity as a static, unsituated, superficial concept.

Recently I have begun to think more overtly of what the notion of authenticity could mean as a basis for teacher education research and my role as a researcher. The thought process, language and concepts brought to light reflect so strongly in the world of schools and the responsibilities teacher and children have in them. I need to know if authenticity could be defined in schools by teachers and activists or of what conceivable value it may be to construct meaning from the idea of its very existence. Most importantly I want to know if exploring a definition could generate reasoned thought or theory and bring it to an already existing intuitive idea. Would this process of operationalizing authenticity add richness and knowledge to my work as a teacher and the teaching vocation generally? Could it provide an alternative discourse for the silent 20 year rookie teacher standing on those elementary school steps? Did this exchange with the principal direct my own development as an activist?

This aspect of the positioned researcher is the tracing the development of the subjective concept of authenticity around a theoretical construct of Thomas Greenfield. (1993). Thomas Greenfield made sense in this instance; the views he presents are couched philosophically in his own search for authenticity and in his work directed towards an alternative, humanistic approach to a positivistic world of Educational Administration and as such are a good fit for this inquiry.

Thomas Barr Greenfield's Nine Propositions Into the Nature of Organizations and the Possibility of Inquiry into Them

Research as Clarification of Meaning and Reflection on Experience

The problem depicted in the exchange between the principal and the young teacher is one of two competing discourses, although one was internalized and therefore silent. Weber's iron cage had descended. Weber's iron cage (Weber, 1958) used by the philosopher was a metaphor he used to describe what happened when the kind of disenchantment occurred during an incident of the manager and bureaucrat outlined below. The iron cage as interpreted by Taylor are those powerful mechanisms of social life that propel us into the direction of the unconscious temptations of the primacy of instrumental reasoning dominating the modern age. Instrumental reasoning is "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end" (Taylor, p. 5). As an explanatory example of this phenomena Taylor cites:

A manager in spite of her own orientation may be forced by the conditions of the market to adopt a maximizing strategy she feels is destructive. A bureaucrat, in spite of his personal insight, may be forced by the rules under which he operates to make a decision he knows to be against humanity and good sense (Taylor, 1991, p.7).

The rationalism of the principal was desiccating the sources of value; constructing an iron cage of bureaucratization, resulting in a loss of meaning and freedom in this situation. The principal was exhibiting a scientific positivistic discourse which defines the primacy of the timetable where the policy for its use was made paramount while the teacher was looking for authenticity as expressed through the application of a connected, activity based, real, concrete learning experience based upon a highly subjective curricular adaptation.

Outlining unequivocally the research context above, acknowledges Thom Greenfield's (1993) caveat that research must take into consideration methodologically and philosophically the relationship between the event, the phenomena and the context in which it resides. Secondly this outline documenting one, single, detailed incident, also reflects Thom Greenfield's second major research theme asserting that we need to pay

more heed to the specific rather than the general. The context developed here also documents a reflection of Greenfield's development of reality as social construction and the importance of subjectivity and values. It is on these two supporting tenets that Greenfield displays his research orientation as nine propositions.

Thom Greenfield's human approach to his philosophical views of education, education administration and research has become the second of the snowflake interpretations. The nine research propositions he offered as a framework for thinking about research methodology became for a considerable period of time the framework for how I began to think about teaching and learning as an integral and significant aspect of research methodology.

Proposition 1: That organizations are accomplished by people and are responsible for what goes on in them.

Research Significance: A school is one of Greenfield's organizations or by his definition a set of people caught within a definition of how they will relate to each other. Many people spend a large part of everyday life in schools and some persons want to teach, to learn; while some are compelled by some other force or motivation not to or in some way subvert the efforts of others. Some teachers are constrained in Weber's iron cages, created by the confrontation of conflicting discourse, while others treat the cages as a liberating opportunity and go on to make schools a good and positive place to be. Why does this happen? Why do schools change from time to time? The people who are most likely to know are the people involved, the principal, the teacher. What prevented them from a discourse that could have mediated rather than exacerbated the event? Why do some of these people need the iron cages, seek to keep them, while others have no need or fear of them? Does escaping these cages in some way precipitate activism? Fundamentally this proposition is declaring that schools are human enterprises, based on human relations. As with other institutions, schools do not exist as a separate entity from the teachers and children in them. It is the teachers and administration that will determine what happens in school, will evaluate it and take responsibility for it. The iron cage descended over the situation between the young teacher and the administrator. The silent discourse of the teacher was met with the rule and order dictated discourse of

the principal. The discourse of the principal was the keeping of the timetable, keeping to what is to be taught, keeping the faith as to what sort of children must emerge from the learning experience. The verbally silent, yet practically expressed dialog of the teacher was that learning is connected, learning can be a freeing experience, learning is continuous. The discourse of the principal was one of scientific management, with so many minutes allotted for math for maximum concentrated output. The discourse of the rookie teacher was knowledge construction and freedom.

#### Research Questions

1. Is there a way to learn from the collision of two competing discourses?
2. Is there a way to prevent the power struggle that seems inevitable when two discourses collide? Is the struggle necessary to create change?
3. What in fact happens when the rift that is created during the struggle creates a dissonance. What fills this chasm or replaces it? Is it positive or negative?

Proposition 2: That organizations are expressions of will, intention and value.

#### Research Significance:

The possession of a will connotes choice; moral choice. Having intention forms purposes by which to act upon or in order to achieve something. Greenfield describes organizations such as schools as modes of being that provide the frameworks and context for action. Organizations become a set of instructions as to how to 'live the life of school' or where children learn how to go to school and do not go to school to learn. The power of these organizations, Greenfield says is in their transformative capacity of this human action. People control organizations. The individual exertion or restraint of will and intention and its interplay on others defines the complexity of the institution.

#### Research Questions:

1. How could the administrator have created an environment that would have allowed the voice of the rookie teacher to be heard?

2. In this instance the timetable through the principal ordered and controlled the school and the two other actors, teacher and principal. How could this discourse be rewritten as to make this a transformative rather than a win - lose experience?

Proposition 3: That organizations express becoming, not being.

Research Significance: Schools are dynamic not static places to be; they are constantly moving, evolving. What happens today is the result of what happened yesterday and the basis for tomorrow. The cycle is never-ending and it is the individual teacher, administrator, who is responsible in the end for his or her action that occurs as the cycle continues. In becoming there is the choice, according to Greenfield, of what to do and how to do it.

Research Questions:

1. How can the young teacher and the principal enter into decision making based on moral choice?
2. What will influence the young teacher to do the thing right or to do the right thing?
3. Does the inability to make moral choices inhibit teachers from continuing to grow and develop, from becoming as it were?
4. How can a principal create the space for a teacher to participate in moral decision making?
5. If this teacher continues not to be heard, and no longer can "become" as Greenfield states it and remains at a static level of being, will this encourage a posture of inside true and outside false as a method of compromise to authority and conscience? What will happen as a result of this dissonance and the perceived perception of difference in what she says and what she will actually do? What affect will this have on the classroom?
6. What is the relative merit of effectiveness based on a prescribed definition such as length of math periods have as opposed to discovering the shape of teaching math as it goes along?

Proposition 4: That facts do not exist except as they are called into existence by human action and interest.

Research Significance:

Facts may be seen in this context as human capacity for thought. Greenfield allows that in his world the line between fact and value is at best blurred and for the large part what we see as facts occur in our heads. Truth cannot be validated by means independent of the person seeking it. If the knower and the known blend together there is no possibility of the objective stance of positivistic research thinking. Knowledge for Greenfield is human knowledge created by agents engaged in active inquiry. Moreover the impact of this knower can never be "cleansed" as he put it, from the known. Greenfield's concept of subjectivity is quite pronounced in this proposition.

Research Questions:

1. How could it be determined that the twenty minutes that the children were experiencing snowflakeness was not a valued experience?

2. The scientific timetable discourse was a generalized response. The principal could relate the same discourse across town and it would have been understood. The same could not be said for the teacher because the school down the road would have a different context and it may not have been snowing. Teachers must be able to closely link as a legitimate enterprise their experience to the facts they acquire. The teacher saw the snow, saw it as a legitimate, meaningful learning experience, and acted upon that knowledge. She did not wash away herself from the fact of snow, what she knew of it or her feeling for it. The principal wanted to negate this process entirely and resort to the generalized policy. Should there or can there be a compromise in this situation?

Proposition 5: That man [woman] acts and then will judge the action.

Research Significance:

Judgments made about facts are more important than the facts themselves, Greenfield believed. In themselves facts decide nothing, they do not speak for themselves, people decide about the facts and what is to be done accordingly. He explains that ought cannot be derived from is. It is once again back to the old chestnut, the failure of fact in the face of values, of facts being unable to tell us what we need to do. Schools are value ridden

organizations with many and perpetual opportunities for moral choice, decision and action. These are very human enterprises that defy rational, logical, positivistic science for as Greenfield states "How can a decision flow from the facts rather than from an attitude towards the facts or from personal value." (Greenfield, 1993).

Research Questions:

1. How can we view the teacher's tacit, personal knowledge or contextual method of knowing as something to value as opposed to the technical rationality displayed by the principal?
2. How can researchers immerse themselves in the experiences of teachers in order to understand, interpret and apply this knowledge? Should this research become a joint enterprise of researchers and practitioners as they live together in practice?
3. Can individual teacher inquiry be spoken of as research or is it something else ?
4. How could the teacher have used this proposition to develop an alternative, viable, discourse?

Proposition 6: That organizations are essentially arbitrary definitions of reality woven in symbols and expressed in language.

Research Significance:

This appears to be the proposition directly related to Greenfield's belief in the social construction of reality where human beings construct reality and manipulate it through the use of symbols. The most important system of symbols being language. Within this theoretical construct Greenfield defined organizations as contexts for the development of knowledge and meaning. Language is at the heart of this process by which we understand reality and by which we control self, others and the natural world. But language is only a context or framework for speech to be possible. He creates now, the analogy of organization as the context and the possibility of action, where language is to talk, as organization is to action. Structure in an organization is something derived by action and talk but a context for this talk and this action must occur for the concreteness to exist. The context for this action must be the organization. Therefore organization such as schools, school boards can change if they are viewed as not static, or external entities based on generalized laws or policies. Schools are a context for meaningful change where teachers and administrators actually create the school that enables them to act.



Research Questions:

Was part of the reason for the silent discourse of the teacher because she did not have the language to express her meaning of the snowflake learning experience to the principal? Superimposing the rational language of the principals perspective on the teacher would not have helped in articulating her meaning, but the principal would have been easily able to communicate his concern through the language of scientific management. Is there a way to redress the balance in a situation such as this?

Proposition 7: That organizations expressed as contexts for human action can be resolved into meaning, moral order and power

Research Significance:

The trinity expressed in this proposition are what Greenfield calls the three faces of an organization. The essence of this proposition is what he describes as asymmetries or anomalies in meaning and morality and in the power of certain individuals to force their meanings and morality upon others. Humanity is perhaps not the overtly rationale species the positivists base much of their theory on. To this end organizations need to be understood through recognizing and coming to terms with these asymmetries or flaws in morality.

Research Questions:

1. Would the recognition of the teachers personal or tacit knowledge of the learning experience be an acceptable antidote or compromise to that of the administrative authority of the principal?
2. Why would the discourse of the principal be considered rational in this situation?
3. Why would he view that the actions of the teacher would be evaluated as irrational and thereby inappropriate and not to be sanctioned?
4. What would be the way to come to terms with Greenfield's asymmetries that are evident even in this one small incident?

Proposition 8: That there is no technology for achieving the purposes organizations are to serve.

Research Significance:

Again organizations as social inventions, created by people is reiterated. People have the ultimate responsibility for their success or failure. In this proposition actions are something and organizations are something else. Organizations are instructions on how to act; announcements as to what moral order is best and also the design for the distribution of power among people in asymmetrical patterns. These announcements and instructions are all people made and the issue becomes not what to do but how to do it. This ultimate responsibility will be experienced by humans not by science or mechanistic devices and as such remains as the most significant option we have.

Research Questions:

1. Are there any generalized models of scientific theory that could have assisted the principal and teacher in this situation?

2. In this school or in schools operated by scientific rationalists how can it be possible for an individual teacher with her own approach to teaching, to be held responsible for her own practice? How could this teacher teach the way she thought she ought to when the principal expected her to teach what is supposed to be taught or in this instance, what the timetable dictated?

Proposition 9: That there is no way of training administrators other than by giving them some apocalyptic or transcendental vision of the universe and of their life on earth.

Research Significance:

There are no physical or natural laws to explain organizations as there is no science or technology of values. For Greenfield the way to train administrators is through a philosophic understanding of the magnitude of being in control of someone else's life. He advocates that administrators be sent to environments totally alien to them and all they regard as normal and natural, thereby enabling novice administrators to see the human spirit in an expression of differing realities. Greenfield believes that, "the jolts and the disorientation of this experience would be directed at making administrators take a few journeys through the wall of reality in hopes that on their return they would see life in more complex, ambiguous, and humane terms." (Greenfield, 1993)

### Research Questions:

This incident reaches well past the issue of the timetable and whether experiencing snowflakes was authentic learning. It uncovers the differences underpinning the philosophies of the two individuals as to their intentionality of what it means to be an educated person and what education is for. It speaks to the often horrific responsibility it is to manage or direct someone else's life: someone who may not agree with your position or may even vehemently disagree with what you believe to be true and what is or ought to be done about it. Could we look to the idea of intersubjectivity as a way of understanding these differences in order to attempt some shared resolution? Is this a sufficient method to reach Greenfield's level of communicating reality in the world of schools? Would this have solved the communication problem for the principal and the teacher standing on the steps of that particular elementary school?

### The Retrospective Significant Horizon

This retrospective interpretation of the rookie teacher on the steps of the prairie elementary school, may have at the age of twenty, provided her with a way to develop a discourse with which she could have either defended her position on the development of curriculum or lead her to find others to articulate and argue her sensibility. It would have helped her to examine, clearly and distinctly the context in which she was teaching. It would have helped her to sort out the many voices that were beginning to resound in her head, wife, teacher, life partner, woman, mother, daughter. Her voice was silent as she received the rebuke from the principal because she did not have the language to speak of or the method or the questioning ability with which to learn how to do so. Today the no longer twenty year old, can reflect back and understand what the forces were that shaped her thinking and reasoning about teaching and learning. With the very distinctive and authentic tool of the interpretive paradigm or model of possibility, Greenfield and others have provided, the permission, the skills, the reasoning, the impetus, leading to the ability to interpret and integrate life experiences into an integrated event; meaningful, purposeful, active, connected and authentic in its dimensions. It has also provided one very large measure of congruence between the personal and private world, encouraging the language of the private life to become the backbone for the public life and visa versa;

each aspect eventually contributing to the development of an integrated person. What the rookie teacher was about to do was embark on the composition of her own life, her teacher-person life. What she does with this life is not a pursuit of abstractions, authenticity being an already burgeoning principle of her life, but an improvisation of sorts, sometimes rational, sometimes not, life itself becoming an interpretive inquiry.

These interpretations of this same incident are quite different and were documented several years apart. The first significant idea ferrets out the observation that in the Greenfield interpretation, there appears to be an avoidance of the subjective use of I. It appears that I refer to my self in descriptive terms as the teacher, the rookie, the young woman, the teacher person. Greenfield, however, has a name. It appears however, that in the piece that muses about authenticity I am comfortable in using I. Although the analysis of authenticity was rudimentary, the germ of the idea of authenticity as transcendent to "doing your own thing" or as trivialized self fulfillment is beginning to develop into a more mature understanding of subjectivity. Authenticity for me now involved creation and construction as well as discovery and after identification it would have to be named. As well as originality it began to mean that you are in opposition to the rules of society and sometimes to conventional morality. It was demanding an openness to horizons of significance and was reaching for self definition through language. The fact that these characteristics may be in tension is not now considered to be a deficit position, nor is one characteristic subordinate to the other. I recognize that my search for a deeper understanding of authenticity has surpassed the perceived originality as recollected in the need for the fat red pencils in order to be the play teacher. Authenticity as characteristic originality and sincerity has been eclipsed to those of meaning, choice and the dialogic process.

Throughout both of these interpretations, woven back and forth through the development of several attempts at an understanding of authenticity, is the work of Charles Taylor. I have learned the meaning of Charles Taylor's (1989)(see also Abbey, 2000) concept of soft relativism and how it is relevant to meaning, choice and the dialogic process because of its all encompassing notion of subjective value which was an important issue for the young teacher on the steps of the schools; who she will become, who she has become and who she is becoming still. The notion developed here is that soft relativism allows for things to have significance not of themselves but because persons

deem them to have significance, or because, people wanted it to be so or made the decision that it is so, or just felt it to be wantonly or unwantonly significant. It is the first realization that I made as the rookie on the steps of the prairie school. I came to realize fairly early on in the classroom that deciding that having the red pencils made me a real (at this point synonymous with authentic) teacher was not so. I also learned that choosing to ignore the timetable because I felt it was the thing to do did not make me into a real teacher either. Simply deciding to ignore the timetable was not the intelligible thing to do. I learned this when I soon realized that I could not just simply 'decide' that snowflake running was better than math timetabling. This revelation was also fortified when I soon learned that I did not know what sense to make of other teachers whether in the staffroom or in the hallways who conveyed to me that they too felt the idiocy of the primacy of the timetable. This is a self destructive process because feelings did not and will not determine significance, feelings determine more feelings. It is a trap of sorts, one that women teachers as reflected in my snowflake incident, often find themselves confronting. This attitude remained with me for sometime. It remained until I learned that in order for me to know what significance meant I would have to employ a measure of intersubjectivity on several levels. This process began for me when I was still an elementary school teacher beginning with an understanding of curriculum that was expressed as a intersubjective process of transformation. I was struggling with these ideas and concepts long before I knew what they were, long before I attended university classes, long before I could name them, and long before I came across Bakhtin and the dialogic process. I have learned, from Charles Taylor (1989, 1991, 1992)) that what was happening to me in the struggle to define authenticity, which was the conceptual framework of my teaching for many years, was that I was constructing a horizon of significance. I view this to be that, in this case, my teaching, was beginning to take on an importance against a background of intelligibility. This intelligibility conjures up moral reasoning: a form of reasoning that needs to be premeditated with someone else in order to transcend the rank of feelings to that of thinking critically. This promotes the possibility of intersubjectivity. It was incidents like the snowflake phenomena that precipitated this. Although the awareness did not occur immediately, one of the things I could no longer do after incidents such as this, was to suppress or deny this horizon as it took on the level of significance that it did. It was the process of developing my own

horizon of significance that placed me and kept me in the affirmative action, access program of the Winnipeg Education Centre and shaped my own role as an activist. It is here that I see that the need for an understanding of authenticity has become an integral aspect of my own politicization. It is the posture I have taken to my work with Katie, Grace and Gerie.

### A Perpetuating Struggle Towards Authenticity

I have come to understand in my pursuit of a language for and an understanding of authenticity that not every one accepts or appreciates the concept or views its significance nor the method by which I have come to develop and interpret it. My sense of authenticity carries with it a definition of self as a struggle to become a unified [authentic] individual through the composition of my own narrative and the means with which to interpret it. It is during the composition of this narrative that the opportunity arises to re negotiate this life or reconfigure it so as to understand and learn. This becomes the initial form of intersubjectivity which when combined with the understanding that this subjective relationship when brought to the relation of others will become the basis for interpretive lifestories based upon critical hermeneutics. The critical issue at this juncture that affects the concept of authenticity is the understanding of what may constitute subjectivity which is the underpinning of the definition of self or selfhood. I have learned that post modern feminists balk at the idea of an authentic self because they view the self as situated in a unitary subjectivity and "an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she is" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Post modern feminist theory views subjectivity as nonunitary and as such is multiple, conflicted, complex, fragmented and in constant flux. The concept of authenticity in its traditional definition becomes incoherent where subjectivity is discussed as fixed, an essence. My view of subjectivity is better said by Kathleen Casey with: unlike the alienated personas of post modern discourse, this self is not a jumble of fragments: she can articulate her own coherence. Acting within the limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power(Casey, 1983, p. xv.).

### Off the Steps

Thinking back to and then forward from the incident of the snowflake curriculum and the irate principal I have thought about what the best way would be to document this as part of my life story. In attempting to think this through I have determined several conditions for how this understanding would affect the lifestory research that was intended for the inquiry involving the three women teacher activists. The first thought is that documenting an interesting lifestory of a women becoming an activist could, on its own be an interesting activity. The construction of the story would be a useful addition to the paucity of historical information regarding the Winnipeg Education Centre Education Program. In this way there would be a response to the interest in adding voices to this milieu of human experiences. When I think of the young woman on the step the question arises: would having a voice, an opportunity to speak her mind have solved the dilemma of the snowflake curriculum? I think not. It may have been a prerequisite but having a legitimized, authentic voice means having something to say and having say involves saying to others. In other words the voice needs to be understood. The best way, to understand why these women became activists is to ask them why and to have their narrative texts understood. Ethical considerations of how a sensitive process such as this one could descend upon the participants as emotional poaching is instead viewed in this study, not as the negative process of encroachment but the positive appropriation of possibility. This can be realized with a view of research collaboration conceived within a framework of social justice where it is possible to shift our emphasis to an understanding where equity and fairness is not measured by equal distribution or receiving equal rewards for deeds done to an attitude where it may be desirable to give more than we receive and that this process can be reciprocal.

### Themes Emerging

Paul Ricoeur's (1976) writing about the hermeneutical process in that he sees understanding as the proper achievement of language might well be the mantra for the study as a whole. This thought coupled with his notion of action and summons will provide the attitude for the research conversations to take place. This view of critical

hermeneutics ascribed to Ricoeur, (1976); Herda, (1999) and Blamey (1995) that speak of the hermeneutical process not as basis for a radical rupture but an integral summons to everyday life is a theme that this study will explore. There have been many occasions throughout the years I have spent as an educator considering how this notion of Ricoeur's may have relevance towards developing an understanding, a social construction of the ways the women graduates have made sense of their lives, in this case as activists. It's a way that my 20 year old self who took those children out for snowflakes was looking for ways to legitimize that snowflake experience by keeping it real. On the way, along the way, I became an activist in order to do it, to get it done. On the way, along the way, I met, as an educator, women from the Winnipeg Education Centre who were also seeking to legitimize their own experiences and also became activists. The intersection of these social constructions has been the result.



## Chapter Five

### Prologue to the Lifestories

This prologue is to be the introduction to the part of this work titled 'Wearing Our Own Skin'. It encompasses the introduction to the lifestories of the three research participants, Katie, Grace and Gerie. Prologue as defined means beginning. A prologue also connotes preface, forward, opening, lead. It anticipates what is to come and provides the impetus for bringing together linking thoughts that will become themes. It also encourages the development of intercontextuality that is important, if the circularity of the hegemonic circle can be held up to the scrutiny of the research method. Throughout this work the concept of context has been an important one. Context has developed from a first order concept seen through descriptive adjectives such as accessory, attendant condition or adjunct; each word a descriptor for the positioning of the word as singular contextuality, that being one person working through one individual context. This work has relied on contextuality as a primary sensitizing concept for the research method. It has however, expanded upon the idea of singular contextuality as adjunct and broadened it to a form of intercontextuality. This means that contextuality is not left as a singular attendant device but is a shared process enabling transformation and meaning as a result. Intercontextuality can and did occur in this instance when two people were able to develop a research protocol based upon sustained interactivity.

This notion on intercontextuality is supported by the work of Michael Huberman (1999) when he writes about the reframing of the goals of research from that of "informing" to one of "jointly constructing knowledge" through shared activity. In this particular research instance the level of sustained activity had a longitudinal aspect before the work of the summer's interviews because the relationship of student and professor had evolved into the interaction of researcher participant. The relatively seamless nature of this collaboration did not emerge from a blending of the role of researcher and the role of participant but from the development and consideration afforded the shared and embedded context of the Winnipeg Education Centre. This created what I now call a level of intercontextuality. For this to be more than a convenient configuration the context must be legitimate and authentic to the persons who live within

that context. As well as documenting the context in their own voice, it must be listened to and accepted as it is being told. The sequence, the intensity, the time line, redundancy, synecdoche, tropisms, omissions and commissions are significant aspects of the development of context and for them to remain legitimate they must be accepted as they are given. It is not for me as the researcher to take the context as disparate pieces and then rearrange them in a configuration that is convenient or tidy. When the context is taken as given it then provides a space for themes and nuances to become clearly visible, while at the same time, having the context alongside to provide a ground for interpretation. When this is constructed as intercontextuality between a compliant research relationship, the meaning will be there in the text. It will not need to be spelled out as "look there it is" but rather "this is what it may mean".

Having said this, it remains that a prologue as a beginning has the important task of creating a way to accept the way the context of the interviews will unfold by supplying a way to address the dilemma of "showing where to look without telling what to see" until the lifestory as told by the participant and researcher has been a fully developed in the way they have chosen to do so. For this to be a legitimate enterprise each of the three participants were encouraged to tell their stories as they chose to construct it. The interview schedule had two tiers, the first level was the solicitation of the lifestory. For this tier, each participant was asked one question at the onset of the formalized "summer of interviews". The question was "tell me your lifestory". No other parameters were given and none were asked for. That is why each of the stories were told differently and appear differently, in format, within the text. There is no single recognizable format because none was given. There were no planned or scheduled prompt questions. Prompting was limited to those related to time considerations, comfort and phatic encouragement. Gerie began her life story with when she became a student at the Winnipeg Education Centre, Grace began her story, as she put it, "when I was born because that is how I think", and Katie's began by emphatically naming herself with " I am Katie".

The second tier of interviews began with my telling each of the participants, that based upon the working definition of activism, that I thought them to be activists. Based upon this, I then asked them directly, what affect the Winnipeg Education Centre may or may not have had upon the development of their activist identities. During this

interview, a collaborative dialogue ensued, between myself, the researcher, and each of the three women graduate participants. During this interactive process prompting originated from one or the other of us, on an ongoing basis, and is an important, integral and legitimate piece of the documentation of this tier of interviewing.

There was one common element to each of the lifestories in both the telling and writing of them. The warp thread that holds a weaving together is the one that holds the longitudinal shape of the tapestry. The warp thread for the lifestories was the development of activist identities and the perceived role of Winnipeg Education Centre in the becoming of one. This warp thread was this common context to all three of the participants and also, to myself as the researcher. The woof thread is the horizontal thread, when woven with the warp threads creates the shape and the strength of the tapestry. The woof thread for each of the participants varied in the same way as each of their life contexts were different. The pattern for the individual tapestries is therefore different, unique to each one. The patterns they create are based upon the context as it was woven together. It was not reconfigured to an already existing design. The same is true for the documentation and interpretation of the lifestories.

There is an element of risk taking in not following a regimented pattern or anticipated order because you cannot predict or anticipate or recognize the pattern emerging then until it is right there upon you. It is likened much to those figure ground phenomena learning theorists like to give to us as students, to show how what is in the foreground can often be interpreted as the background, if we are not sure of the context or if the context has been tampered with. In other words, what seems to be a ground phenomenon for the development of an activist identity can quickly become a figure phenomenon if the context has changed or is in some way no longer a legitimate context. It is only that moment that the figure-ground can be held together for as long as we can keep it together, that the activist identity will be there. That is why in all of the stories, no matter what form they take, when the figure ground comes together as an incident or nuance that provides the basis for an interpretive understanding of how this person came to be an activist or how the Centre did or did not contribute to this, they are brought to bear as they happened during the interview process. They do not appear as tidy conclusions at the end of the chapter. If any meaning is to be gleaned from this enterprise it will occur within the context that is being shared and developed as part of the life

stories. The critical issue remained throughout this study as how does the micro world of the researcher and participant construct enact and change the intersections between them, so that they become in some form a learning community (Huberman, 1999). The Social Constructivist literature addresses this issue of intercontextuality in ways that are reflected as Huberman's three questions, questions he resonates with the work of three other theorists.

1. Do both practitioners and researchers actually attain what Habermas (1987) called "interactive thinking?"
2. How important is what phenomenologists call "hermeneutic awareness". (Husserl, 1971/1980), in which a single authority gives way to a coherence of different viewpoints?
3. Can one really achieve what postmodernists call "tactical humanism" or "accountable positioning" (Abu-Lughod, 1991) as the result of interactive understandings - that is understandings that allow for reciprocally understood experiences and work? (Huberman, 1999, pp. 292-293)

It will be useful, as part of this prologue to establish a collective profile of the three participants. It will enable the process of intercontextualization by clearly distinguishing Katie, Grace and Gerie as individual women. They are not stereotypical, "Access women students", but in the same token they are in fact women, they were students, they were Access students and they are activists. Katie will soon be forty years old, she is separated from her husband of many years and is now the single mother of two teenage boys. She comes from a large Anishinaabe family. Her father is a Christian pastor. She became interested in her connections to her Anishinaabe culture in her late 20's; her spirit name is Clam Woman; Katie has responsibilities during the Sun Dance ceremonies. Katie has become proficient in Aboriginal curriculum development and works for the Department of Education where she both designs curriculum and works to develop the policy to implement it. Of late her particular interest and energy is directed to the development of the Aboriginal language for school children and young adults. Of the three participants Katie was the last to graduate in the mid 1980's. Katie intends to begin the pursuit of graduate work shortly and is an inner city activist.

Grace is 46 years old. She is the mother of a grown son and daughter and as she says a "granny" to two little girls. She was a single mother and now she calls herself a "single granny" as well. Of the three participants, Grace was the first to graduate. She graduated during the transfer of the Centre from the University of Brandon to the University of Manitoba in 1980. Grace, after a brief sojourn in the classroom, has been involved in low to the ground community activism for some 20 years. She calls herself a Metis Indian. Recently she has decided to return to university and begin a Master's program in Social Work. She is an inner city activist.

Gerie was a single mother for some time, raising two young children. This summer she married again and the family now has two more children as part of the blended family. Gerie graduated from the program after Grace and before Katie. Her parents were both deaf, and from as she refers to it "European lower class backgrounds". She has worked in the Inner City of Winnipeg as a teacher activist since graduation both in schools and the safe houses that she helped establish. Gerie is now pursuing graduate work and is interested in developing an expertise in Urban Education. Gerie is an inner city activist.

## Chapter Six

### Gerie's Story

#### Wearing Our Own Skin

Gerie's story is the first of the trilogy of life stories. *Wearing Our Own Skin* portrays the importance of "knowing who you are" but also the significance of "becoming confident with who you are". The idea of knowing who you are develops through integrated themes that appear in the three lifestories: each with more or less intensity, told in their own way. Chronologically, Gerie's was the first of the three lifestories to be developed. As it was the first of the lifestories to be solicited, it was also the first opportunity to anticipate and identify the themes that might be common to all three participants. Gerie constructed her lifestory, beginning emphatically with her life as a student at the Winnipeg Education Centre, recounting critical incidents of her life and continuing towards the completion of a full circle in the interview, by returning again, to her life at the Winnipeg Education Centre. The themes of *self efficacy*, *caring*, and *community* as they relate to the development of activism, appear for the first time. Gerie's telling is compelling; frank, direct and often very candid. The thread that provides the strength for Gerie's telling is her willingness to learn more about herself as a teacher and an activist and her willingness to participate collaboratively during the exploration of how Winnipeg Education Centre may have had an affect on her development as an activist. She prefaces her telling, time and time again with this statement: "it is so important to know who you are in the classroom, in the inner city community, in your life". This attitude and her ability to see the significance of the research inquiry and to trust in the process gave continued sustenance to her lifestory. Of the three participants, she most compellingly upheld her time at the Winnipeg Education Centre, to be the prime motivation, the primary intervention, and the foundation for an understanding of who she was, who she is now, and who she may be becoming.

*"The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and failure of individual men and women... Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both...No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey."*

*C. Wright Mills (1959, p. 6)*

*"Unlike the alienated personas of post-modern discourse, this self is not a jumble of fragments: she can articulate her own coherence. Acting within the limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power."*

*Kathleen Casey (1993, p. xv)*

Gerie is thought of, and counted among, several social constituencies as a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Education program of the Winnipeg Education Centre. Very early on in our conversation I became uncomfortable with the sound of what I began to refer to as "beginning" language meant to characterize her life, even though the Manitoba Teachers' Society, her senior colleagues, and often the education research literature, will refer to her in text or statistics as a "beginning teacher", "an entering graduate", or a "new", "rookie" teacher. As our initial interview time together unfolded and as the themes and patterns emerged as she told her story, I began to understand why this language was unsettling. Gerie may chronologically be a recent graduate but she could not in the usual sense be characterized as a novice teacher. Gerie brought a significant measure of personal knowledge to her life at the Winnipeg Education Centre and was in the midst of a great upheaval in her life. "Beginning" or "recent" or "novice" did not seem appropriate and began to seem somewhat demeaning based upon what was being told to me. Her life story as it unfolded belied the novitiate concept time and time again.

The impact of this realization was responsible for the development of the first theme of self efficacy to emerge from Gerie's life story. The way she chose to tell her story was to forego the usual story format of, beginning, middle, and end. She chose to begin at a time and place that could not be situated as the usual beginning of a life but from a

significant point much later on. From there she continued on and eventually made a complete circle. This format she chose made it very clear that life at WEC<sup>1</sup> couldn't be separated out from her life as a whole because she kept coming back to it as a jump off place to another aspect of her life. Her approach to WEC became a form of synecdoche<sup>2</sup> where WEC, as part of her life was meant to convey the whole of her life.

As she spoke to me during the time we spent together, I thought again of the Inuit storyteller. The storyteller who may start the telling half way through and continue until he or she comes to the beginning some time later. The listener must put the story together. I came to believe as time went on, that as with the storyteller, this too was a significant aspect of Gerie's story and how she chose to construct it. I did not intervene to set her straight so to speak, because of this.

To begin with, Gerie was in many ways a nontraditional student. She eluded the traditional categorization of most of her student contemporaries by being a mother of two children and well past the age when most young women go to university. With very little money, few resources, and without the usual university entrance requirements she struggled to young adulthood through a maize of failed junior high and early high school experiences, by living on the edge of being the "bad girl" and living through two brutal and demoralizing physical assaults. Gerie brought to her studies and involvement in the WEC culture a richness of personal knowledge and experience. Gerie came to the learning community in the midst of tremendous personal upheaval and with considerable passion. Beginning is not an adequate word to speak of Gerie. Her story is one informed by renewal, hope and perpetuation.

#### For Gerie: The Effect of The Winnipeg Education Centre

Gerie began her story by talking about being accepted into WEC. Gerie applied for WEC after 10 years and several unsuccessful attempts at trying to establish a household where the husband is the traditional "man as provider". As she succinctly put it, "I both wanted and needed him to go out every day with the lunch pail and come home at night with it." When it was abundantly clear to her that this was not going to happen and that

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<sup>1</sup> WEC is the term Gerie used when she spoke of the Winnipeg Education Centre.

<sup>2</sup> Synecdoche is used as a literary device to receive together two things. It may take the form of a figure of speech where the whole of the thing is put for the part or the part for the whole.



the marriage was faltering, she began to look for a way for her to become the provider; the lunch pail carrier. Resolved with the attitude of, "doing whatever it takes", she stumbled across WEC and after two attempts began her life as a full time student. At the onset, Gerie speaks positively of her experience at WEC, beginning with the process of being selected into the program. She had been a Special Education Tutorial Assistant for some time in an inner city school; her most significant assignment being that of caring for a spina bifida child during the controversy of mainstreaming severely handicapped children into regular classrooms. Amongst the confusion of the school personnel not knowing what to do, and by using her good common sense and street wise chutzpah, she became the expert in how to care for this child. The teacher in charge was grateful for Gerie's developing expertise and "withitness" and said to her one day, "you should become a teacher, I know this place called WEC, where people like you can go." The comment of this teacher of "people like you" is significant. If this was an exact recall of the phrase used by the teacher it is an indication that Gerie was perceived to be someone with a specific identity, belonging to a group. Throughout the interview time Gerie identified people as "you people," "those people," "WEC people," so it is conceivable that it is her term and her way of identifying herself as part of a distinct group.

Gerie took the meaning from this particular exchange with the teacher that she was one of "those people". This teacher happened to have an application form which Gerie took home. After studying the entrance criteria for several days, Gerie decided that she would never be accepted to be one of "those people" and promptly let the deadline date go by. Another year went by and Gerie realized that the time had come for her to do something about the financial future of her two small children and herself. In some sense she is fatalistic about her finding her way to WEC. She believes that if a welding or plumbing course or some program of that ilk would have materialized before WEC she would have been lost to teaching and become a tradesperson instead. At that very moment she was in desperate need of financial security.

She is quite blunt about the serendipitous intervention that steered her path to WEC. "Thank God, for WEC, don't get me wrong but I could just as easily been a plumber." Gerie did meet the application deadline the next year and began the long complex selection process. She was terrified throughout the entire experience; not because she would be denied entry but that she would be accepted. Gerie remembers vividly returning home

late one afternoon to see the white business envelope with the now familiar logo on it lying on the kitchen table and being unable to open it, bursting into tears that would not stop. She interrupted this part of her recollection by emphatically stating, "you have to understand, I don't cry, I've been through lots but I don't cry, never did, so this in my memory is how much strong emotion this caused me". Finally, she remembers phoning her sister and having herself coached through the opening of the letter.

She marks this moment as the beginning of the most major effect any such intervention has had on her life. This letter, she believed was the beginning: heralding the permission she needed in order to make a very significant change. She initially thought that, "these people, university people, know what they are doing and they would not be letting me in if they did not think that I could do it." Again she is classifying people; in this case, "these people" are the university bureaucracy, the gatekeepers to her plans.

She has, for reasons unknown to her, very few vivid memories of the initial orientation and the first few days at WEC but does remember one thing. This was a brilliant blue banner, fastened to the end wall of the gym which was emblazoned with: Are You In the Right Place at the Right Time? This gave her an anxious moment because she had decided that, "you people knew what you were doing", and the way the question was posed gave her pause to wonder if this was all a mistake and perhaps she was not meant to be here after all. Yet another categorization of people emerges in the form of "you people", the people at WEC. During those early days she recalls a constant waffling of feelings from one extreme to another:

Gerie: When I first got to WEC, I saw that some people who were at the earlier selection events, like the interviews, didn't make it, and this was good for me in the sense that I believed that I must be there for legitimate reasons because obviously not every one got in. I thought you guys knew what you were doing and saw my potential and I felt good about that. I also saw that there at WEC on Chester Street I was in the grown up world. I don't know how else to describe this other than I had become part of this group that I envied. This was even more exciting when I got my first textbook because I had always believed that university meant getting expensive textbooks. I remember going home that first time and showing my family that book

and saying "see you guys, this book cost \$45, this is the real thing, it cost \$45." At first I was so very grateful to be there and as the days went on I was so grateful again because I was also with people that I could like and this was a huge bonus. I did not have any ideas of what university profs should look like so I assumed that you all looked and sounded like profs and just accepted that, although I remember that when I had to go to campus for some reason, I can't remember anymore for what exactly, and saw the people I thought that we, we being WEC, had something over them, not sure what exactly but I felt it.

I got my first jolt after a few weeks when two of the new students dropped out. My confidence in your ability to believe that I could do this got messed with when I saw that it was not a done deal and people could and would leave. I was terrified that you had made a mistake and I could be next, and it took some time for me to realize that the reasons they left had nothing to do with my situation. Although this really threw me for a loop it forced me to focus on what needed to be done; the honeymoon was over. I actually began to work hard on my studies, reading a tremendous amount. I did okay for the most part, except for History and those first bad marks were another dose of reality. I knew what the prof was saying but I could not get it on the paper, no matter what, and I think the guy gave me a mercy pass. I realized that this was not a gift but something that I would have to earn for myself if it was going to work. It became a struggle to get those marks and it became more and more important as time went on that I could actually do what needed to be done. While this was going on I saw two more people drop out, and you people let that happen, even seemed to encourage it. This just increased my determination to succeed because I could see now very clearly that nobody could or would just give this to me no matter how much they believed that I could do it. I think that this was the main reason why I succeeded and some others didn't. This made my determination even stronger because there was always the fear of dropping out for whatever reason, whether I did the dropping out or it was done to me and that kept me going a lot of the time.

The reason I accelerated my program was not because I had any great interest in getting out there and saving the world but because I thought having money would make it better, my homelife, I mean. I was barely holding on at home and I felt the

pressure to get out quickly and was getting still more pressure from my husband at the time to drop out and get a job. By second year I was holding on term by term.

Gerie also remembers the early weeks and months at WEC as being characterized by the phenomenon of "boundary pushing." Gerie experienced this pushing as trying on roles and attitudes, "like a new pair of sneakers to see which ones fit for what so ever purpose". This creation and release of tension was a very significant aspect of every day life at WEC and one that Gerie marvels at because it was not only encouraged but also celebrated by most of those she identified as the supportive teaching staff. She develops the metaphor of her early WEC experience as being on a train track entering a station to get fuel and passengers and then heading on out again. She remembers her overall experiences at WEC as big explosions at the beginning and the end with one big rumble in between:

Gerie: This rumble, is still there after five years, and there is no doubt that my life today is largely due to WEC, it is the biggest influence on my life, the largest intervention. At this point in my life WEC gave me positive feedback, not only positive really, that term doesn't really work now, but feedback of all kinds, from peers, from assignments, marks, from talks we had with you people. Even a simple thing like the librarian knowing my name was so important, I wasn't getting this recognition any where else in my life. This starts to sound like a used up cliché but I mean it when I say that I, for the first time, was given an opportunity to find out who I really was. Maybe this sounds romantic now but that is big stuff when it happens for the first time to someone like me at my age. I've thought a lot about this over the years, these past years anyway since being at WEC, and still I'm trying to figure out my philosophy. I still wonder if I am who I am because of the events of my life or if I am who I am despite the events of my life. Was I overcoming my difficulties to reach my potential or was I lead there, that sort of thing. WEC gave me the place, the time and the encouragement to explore this like I was a kid. I got to wear a lot of different hats in that short period of time, got to be a lot of different people. I had good friends for the first time and had supports outside my marriage. I tried on a leadership role when I ran for WECSA student president. I was amazed at how I was listened to by you

people, you validated my experiences, my opinions and I began to realize that after talking through some stupid opinions at first, I could develop good ideas about important stuff. This is where the growing up happened for me. I don't know what happens normally in adulthood or naturally, because I didn't have that, but I know that for me, I grew up during those three short years at WEC. You remember, I was already in my 30's. I defined for myself what an adult, a real adult, was at WEC, until then I had a very narrow definition, often someone else's.

She believes, however that the WEC influence did not include deciding what sort of teacher she was going to be. Gerie believes she already knew her characteristic teacher self before she entered the program and was convinced that she was to be a warm, kind, nurturing, caring teacher and was most strident about it. Moreover she was going to work with little ones. Here again Gerie uses WEC as the springboard to talk about another significant aspect of her life. Her initial idea of herself as an early years teacher was going to get a jolt, when her second year field placement was in a Junior High. After initially fighting the placement she quite suddenly was taken aback by a startling realization that, "this was where I was supposed to be, this was where I belonged and no where else." It was then she realized that she had returned full circle to relive or reconstruct her own disastrous, debilitating junior high experience. Gerie came to terms with her own experience by allowing herself to know these young people and helping them avoid the pain and confusion that had been inflicted on her, initially with nothing more than an intuitive sense of what to say to them and perhaps more importantly, when to say it. I hear no blaming from Gerie as she speaks of her perception of the adults in her life betraying her or not supporting her or being there when she needed them to be. I hear her talk about this as events that happened, events she did not initially question outright but now can reflect upon and learn from and how these experiences affected her life and her teaching, and eventually her activism.

At this juncture WEC was to have a significant influence because:

Gerie: I was shown how feelings could be translated into curriculum and once again I was given permission, only now I knew it as the accreditation or validation, to do

what I knew was the right thing. I believed then and still do that a philosophy of teaching was with me when I came, but WEC gave me the tools, taught me how to balance the Division, the school, and the needs of the children. It also gave me the language I needed to speak out and ask for things, so I can play the game of doing what I need to do to get things done. I was also given the place to try to develop my arguments against maintaining the status quo. I have often wondered if the WEC experience deliberately or without knowing produces cynics or at least people who do not easily accept things. I was encouraged by most of you people to question authority which I still do today. You taught me how to look below the surface of things and behind things. You made me see that, if you think that it's the end of something, wait a few minutes, like when I first took English and thought about how you can analyze a book. Previously I thought a story is a story, you read it and that's that, it was what was on the page and I was the reader and that was all there was to it really. But I learned how to see some depth in what I read and get past the surface of people, ideas, everything to what is real. I could not do this though until I was willing to look at myself in some depth in the same way, WEC helped me to this, it was the biggest, most important intervention in my life.

At this point Gerie is relating how WEC or "you people" gave her both permission and opportunity to teach "against the grain". Teaching against the grain would at some point become for Gerie, translated into strategies she uses to live her activism. To this understanding Gerie adds further insight into how the WEC context provided the time and place for the nature of this activity to develop.

Gerie: WEC can do this because it is small and I was not one of a million in the back of a big hall. I would never have been able to speak in a place like that, I know that, because I know that even in a room of 50 people, most of them are going to know more than me. Being comfortable allowed me to learn how to agree to disagree with people and still like them the next day, in fact learn from them too. It forced me to define what I believed. In a larger environment I would have found ways to get them to tell me what I had to do and then get out fast. At WEC you can't do that because the place demands that you invest in yourself. It gave me a base to act outside what was

only hidden inside before. You people, with one exception, who stood in front of the class made no distinctions, created no barriers. There were few judgments made about where I came from and with this one exception I was accepted for who I was and what I brought to the place. This one person was a Miss Manners who told us how to dress and talk and eat. With this was the attitude of you must do this because you don't know better and I will show you. It wasn't a matter of showing that there were choices of how to talk and look and what some of the consequences were but you must do this. One example was this Miss Manners person saying that it was important for women to smell nice because inner city children liked their teachers to smell good. We were also told that we should wear dresses. This made no sense because what I remember about my teachers was not how they looked or smelled but how they treated me. People resented this person enormously but I never said anything because she outclassed me. It was good in a way that this happened because she stood out and made it look like the exception it was. It would have been different if more of you people were like this one, and it is important that you remember this when you hire someone that they are not classist but a WEC person.

A WEC person has real characteristics and it means more than identifying the students and graduates from there. A WEC person is real, there is no pretense, no putting on of airs and being something that you aren't. A WEC person is down to earth, straight forward, not intimidating, that sort of thing. The most important thing about WEC was your willingness to listen to my life experiences like for example, the fact that I had two kids at home. My experiences were constantly validated, not put down or discarded, even though they were not always positive or maybe applicable. I was able to look at my life in the larger context and build on my experiences as a foundation. If I was on campus with a whole lot of middle class kids, straight from high school who are worried about car payments I would have had a different time, I know that. I am sure that I would have been taught to discard what I know and start with something else, with nothing of me on which to build, with no affirmation of what I already was. WEC was not perfect, don't get me wrong, but this was still the most important time of my life. I can always spot a WEC person, can usually tell pretty quick, funny thing though not all grads or staff I meet from WEC are WEC people.

### Later On and Now

Gerie then launched into her current role as a teacher person:

Gerie: I still get a kick out of telling people that I am a teacher, an inner city teacher. I will not teach anywhere else I don't think, even though I could, I have no desire to because I know that I am where I am supposed to be. I do not have to put aside who I am and who I was to be in an inner city classroom, because it is a part of everything that I do in the classroom. I think that part of the reason that I am as successful as I am is because parents sense this as genuine behavior on my part so I must be able to be trusted, it gives me a small bit of authority. They know that I am the same person in the classroom as I am in my own living room. This idea is not just an acceptable one but one that is crucial and necessary to be an effective, powerful teacher and I am in this case a real person teaching real kids.

Gerie understands upon reflection, that WEC played an important role in encouraging and validating her struggles to develop as an authentic teacher-person. She believes that WEC showed her ways that she could "wear her own skin all the time and never have to put it in a drawer for later." She believes that this affirmation allows her to teach every day without as she put it, "making herself up", before going into the classroom. Gerie calls herself a professional in the sense that, "this is what I need to do and where I need to do it, it is a responsibility I choose to accept, and I have been given permission to do this in a wider environment, with other peoples children." She continues with:

Gerie: I fail this when I have had to give up on children, when I see that they need to hit bottom before anything positive can happen, that wait time is painful for me, waiting until I can do something. I sit taller when I talk about being a teacher, I like telling people that this is what I do, even with the current wave of teacher bashing that is happening now.

She then began to talk of who had given her permission to teach:



Gerie: Well, it was you people I guess, at first anyway, but now me. I say this now because I know what a huge impact schools had on me, people did or seemed at least to give up on me and I know, really know, how just one right word, a comment or a question or a look can be enough of an intervention to change the direction for a whole life. It did mine. I had a young boy in my class not so long ago who was supposed to be involved in guns and violent behavior. I asked for volunteers one day for something or other and I put names on the board which is what I usually do and later that day he and I were off driving to get something or other for the classroom and he said to me quite bluntly, "I'm not a bad boy you know, I' m really not."

Gerie told me that she quietly reassured him that she understood that and he contradicted her with, "well you do so think I am bad, because you didn't put my name on the board, even though I had put my hand up and if that happens it means that I am a bad boy." Because Gerie is real to those children in her class it afforded her the trust necessary for the young boy to confront her so he could pursue get the intervention he may have needed at that moment. It is also her knowledge of the experience that she herself had lived so many times, which enabled this one small incident at least, to have a positive, healthy, meaningful outcome. She was able to reassure the boy that she had not labeled him the bad boy. She builds her teaching life on these connections and how she defines what it means to care about and for children.

Gerie tells of the incident where:

Gerie: A consultant, of something or other, said that I had a "parenting complex" and that I over identified with the children and was too much like a parent. To this I say nonsense, to this as an unapologetic advocate for kids I say, what can be wrong with that. Again I give WEC the credit for being able to stand my ground on this, not melt in front of this authority consultant but rather carry on and do what needed to be done. WEC let me start with my life experiences as a foundation and build from there, otherwise I don't think I could do this sort of thing. You can see some WEC students get stuck in the dump and blame attitude and chose to use their energy that way; but

for me I was able, and this was never easy, to fix, maybe there is a better word, my life, to make it my responsibility, and then put this ability into my teaching self. This is how I think I can develop ideas like the single fathers initiative that I have just now got going, which is definitely a direction of leadership for me. So with this new sense of direction I find that I now may seem to beg for forgiveness rather than seek permission. This is a big change for me. WEC was large in this, it validated me as a person which allows this to happen. I now know what it means to be a confident person, at least in the corner of the world that matters to me. If you know who you are you can talk to anyone, anywhere, and make things happen and this translates into something positive. Sure, sometimes the old insecurities do reappear, but not often and not for long, and only if it involves someone who wants to make me less than I am.

#### Before WEC: This is Not the Art Room

At this time in the interview Gerie began to speak of her life as a child and young woman. She was the middle child, white with parents of mixed European decent. Gerie was born in Winnipeg to deaf parents. Sign language was her first language and the only form of ready communication in her home. Her father was a truck driver and she remembers that there was never much money in their home but she was unaware of being poor unless someone defined it for her or pointed it out to her in some direct way. Gerie remembers elementary school fondly: " My elementary school was a wonderful experience the whole time, I felt smart, felt capable". Throughout her elementary experience the family moved around and about the North End and Elmwood areas of Winnipeg. This did not seem to affect her school successes as she remembers pleasantly that she, "got all A's on my report cards and the teachers liked me".

Outside of school, her early years experiences were largely defined by having deaf parents and because of this, "we always got clothes and hampers and lots of stuff and I thought this was because my parents were deaf, it never occurred to me that boxes were showing up because we were poor." Life changed for Gerie in many ways once she approached Junior High. Her time there was marked by confusion and initially a sense of betrayal, neither of which she fully understood or came to terms with until she came to

WEC. This began in 1973, after yet another family move, when she began her Junior High experience in an inner city school. On opening day, she remembers vaguely being in the big school gymnasium with all of her old friends and what seemed to her hundreds of new ones. Every one received a card with a room number. She recalls:

Gerie: There was 7A, 7B, C, D, E, F, on a blackboard, along with names written underneath and we each had a card with a room number and letter on it and were supposed to find our name and match it to the room on this card. I got the card with 7D. We were all asking one another what room we got. The others got 7A, 7B but no one got 7D. I didn't think too much about it until after I found the room and went inside and saw that it was the art room and right away I knew something was wrong; this was not a regular classroom, it was obviously not a real classroom, there was art stuff all over the place. I couldn't see any of my friends either. I was absolutely devastated, absolutely devastated.

After a long, serious pause Gerie continued with, "I didn't want to say anything about it being a mistake because I never learned how to do this sort of thing because in the deaf culture you don't question and people are quite passive, so I didn't know then how to speak out." By the end of the day Gerie knew that this was a tough crowd. Ironically, she recalled thinking:

Gerie: Funny thing was, I knew that I had the marks to be in the A or B room but I began to think that I was the one who had made the mistake and I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, and the only reason that I got good marks in elementary school was because people were being nice to me because my parents were deaf.

Gerie recalls that her 12 year old mind perceived that the real marks were hidden somewhere but then changed her thinking:

Gerie: I quickly began to think that if the school puts me here I must be one of those people, one of the tough crowd. It didn't take very long before I was swearing, smoking, dressing all in black, doing whatever the 7D kids did. I gave teachers a hard

time because everybody did it. I traveled with the group from class to class and never once questioned the teachers about my being in 7D because as I said earlier, it's just not part of the deaf culture to challenge the hearing culture. I thought again and again that the school knows what is right and if they put me here it is because I must be that way. I have often thought when I was at WEC, how similar this experience in Junior High was to those people I heard about who were at residential schools.

To her way of thinking, being inappropriately labeled and jolted out of the previous well-being of her elementary, good time, school experience was responsible for even more serious repercussions. It was in some sense the same experience as not understanding her family to be poor. Instead the reason for the care parcels were she thought because of the deafness. In recounting this time she began with:

Gerie: In what seemed like a very short time I didn't see my old friends at all anymore because our schedules were different and I had more shops then they did and that sort of thing. I was amazed at how easy it was to skip school and get away with it, no one seemed to be bothered by it, so I started doing it a lot. But at home, you understand, I was still the good girl, the dutiful daughter who did all the interpreting, the translating and speaking for my parents with doctors, that sort of thing. It didn't take too long though for me to start failing classes because I was missing so much. I started drinking, not partying stuff, because I still went home to my parents at night, but at the lockers or in the washroom. How we would do this was to take a gulp at break with something mixed in a pop bottle. Still, the only real time I had to act out was during the day, usually at or around school. Then I started to go out with older guys with cars and money and I remember that for a long time there was a 7:30 in the morning poker game going on in the lunch room and lots of times when it was over I would leave school and go somewhere else. What did I do, well I read a lot interestingly, mostly Science Fiction, wrote poetry and stories and did enough, I guess, to get out of grade 9.

The Junior High school pattern was halted abruptly when she was assaulted one spring evening. Gerie decided to talk of this first physical assault because she believes it

to be a significant aspect of a large portion of her life because it shaped for a very long time, her view of what it meant to be an adult. When it was time to review her lifestory I asked her, upon retrospect, if she wanted this removed. "No, I think not" was the reply. "It is part of who I am, what happened, it needs to be told, it frees me from being the victim, so I want it to stay".

Gerie: I was at Sisler when I started baby-sitting a lot and one night I was assaulted by one of the parents on the ride home. Throughout the preliminary hearing and the actual court I got a first hand experience of the justice system. Everything was out of my hands, I was cut off from my friends, and most of these adults in this adult dominated experience certainly didn't care, or at least didn't care for me. When it was over and the guy was in jail I went to the guidance counselor one day and told her right up front that I was going to quit school. She didn't call my bluff nor did anyone else in the school. So I started to blame myself for the assault, if they were going to let me go so easily from school it was because they knew the assault was my fault, that I was the bad girl, they should know.

The pattern of the non or inappropriate intervention of the adults in her life appears to continue. Gerie's perception of the nondescript interaction with the guidance counselor lead her to quit school immediately and soon after she located a job in the newspaper which was away from the city at a fishing lodge.

Gerie: My parents didn't try one bit to stop me, they even drove me up there to the place, the camp or whatever. When I got there I found a whole lot of 17, 18 year olds in a dormitory, cottage living arrangement. Looking back at it now it really was like a residential slave labor camp. At this point I have to say that I would never have gone there if one single adult would have tried to stop me, or taken an interest in me in some way. Sometimes I think that maybe the guidance councilor was having a bad day or just didn't realize I meant it, but all it would have taken was one word from her and I would have stayed in school but all this just convinced me that she must know that I was bad.

The fishing camp proved to be a whirlwind of activity and experiences for Gerie:

Gerie: It was actually a wonderful time, we partied, had romances, we broke each other's hearts, made up, it was a very teenage time. I had a boyfriend a bit older than me and we moved into a squatter's shack. I lied about my age and got a job cocktail waitressing at night and then cleaned cabins during the day. The relationship with my boyfriend was what I thought I wanted, someone older, an adult figure to take care of me but it was on again off again, didn't last for long and I ended up going back to the city, not to my parents who were not, or so it seemed, interested in having me back in their house. So I got a room at the downtown Y. Soon after I got a night shift job in a Seven Eleven. I was really proud of myself for getting this job and taking care of myself in a grown up way.

After a few thoughtful moments Gerie continued with:

Gerie: This is hard but this needs to be said because it explains so much of what comes next. One night when I was there alone I was again physically assaulted by a customer and this completely changed this new path I was on, I lost all my confidence, trust, I couldn't work or do much for myself after that for a long, long, time. This was when I met Peter and began to cook and clean and be a wife. I couldn't go out much or at all, I stayed at home and Peter went out with the lunch pail to work. We moved to B.C. for awhile and there I got pregnant. That was a time I needed to be sheltered and being a mother at home was for me, nurturing and healing. I took five or six daycare kids into my home at that time and once again I felt good about what was happening to me. I got my Grade 12 too because the woman who sponsored my day care license encouraged me to do my GED. A friend of hers was teaching and I took the course and I did really well. It was the first time in a long time that I was with people who wanted the same thing as I did. Peter and I had completely different goals, his was to make his million and mine was to have a husband who went out every day to work and came home with his lunch pail. In this GED I was surrounded by people who had dropped out of school and it was okay, they didn't seem to be bad people, and with an instructor not much older than me. We talked a lot in the prep class and once again

I got the message that you can do this Gerie. All this time I was operating my day care, feeling better and better about myself.

The instructor was nurturing for her in several different ways which she spoke of as "you're doing good Gerie, look at Gerie's work, that sort of elementary school style that worked for me, it built my confidence up again and the bonus was that the instructor didn't know anything about my background so it had to be real, it couldn't be anything else." With some new found confidence in herself she began to talk about herself as a teacher:

I may have stayed a day care operator and never gone on to a teaching career if I hadn't seen an ad for a TA job in my daughter's school. One day I got all dressed up and went and knocked on the principal's door. I never would have done that a year sooner but I did, and was eventually hired by the school division. When I went to the door of the classroom that first day, everyone was so relieved because they believed they had the expert who could deal with a very difficult C.P. girl, so I began to be who I pretended to be. I let them believe that I knew what I was doing. When I walked into the grade one classroom I figured the first thing I had to do was make the teachers feel comfortable having this girl around. If she got too intrusive or loud I took her right out of the room, I just found my own way. I ended up making the learning materials, I talked to the parents in the school because there was still hard feelings about having her there, I talked to the therapists. I did this for a year and one day I was talking to the Special Ed. teacher, a WEC grad who said, you're good at this Gerie, why don't you go and get your degree?

The story has now come full circle. Her memories of the selection process, the year she actually followed through on her application are mostly good ones with many illustrations of giving herself permission to present herself as who she thought she was. She carefully chose what she thought was a teacher looking outfit to wear to the interview and then promptly resorted to the familiar jeans and sweatshirt " they could take me or leave me as I am, nobody knows me here so there is nobody to come back and tell anybody else how badly I screwed up. I decided that I would go there and do this somehow, but as me." A turning point to the raising of her level of assuredness came from the experience of disagreeing with the videotape of the Marva Collins story as it

was presented during the two day orientation, "Am I In the Right Place at the Right Time." Marva Collins is a teacher in Harlem and very outspoken about her views of inner city education. Gerie decided that to be herself she had to stand out and disagreeing about something appeared to be a way to do this. She remembers, "how good it felt to be who I was and not have anyone tell me to leave or find me out and then on top of that to have some of the group actually agree with what I was saying when I said that she [Marva Collins] was wrong being too strict and that kids needed to play." In being able to speak out, to stand out and give herself permission to be herself, Gerie was ensuring that she would never again be sent to the art room.

### Out of the Art Room

*"Everything changes when you tell about life" (Sartre, 1959, p. 57)*

A realization of Gerie's story came about much like the pentimento effect, where old paint is scraped away from an oil painting. Initially her life unfolded for me much like this old painting that had been painted over, and when the paint was scraped off, something new was revealed, displacing what was previously there. This peeling away in an attempt to reveal meaning was not a taking away or eliminating but a construction, one layer on to another. Gerie had been a student of mine. I thought that I had grown to know her fairly well, believed that I knew what was important about her life and what was significant to her about her student experience. As I listened to Gerie tell her story for the first time and then subsequently as I read and reread it many, many times over and began to construct the text it became increasingly apparent, how little I knew or understood her and how old notions were in fact scraped away and replaced with new insights. I only knew of her life as a category or set of selection criteria, as association, a role or set definition of white, female and other. How little I knew of her life seemed to correspond to how little connection I had made to understanding her life in her world and its relation to the larger world; WEC being a significant aspect of this. I also came to understand that knowing Gerie and telling her story and those of others, would be a powerful way to develop ideas, theories, and insights into both the pedagogical and political aspects of life at WEC; to understand it, think about it, to improve it, perhaps



to even transform it and create arguments for sustaining it. I saw too, that the void created by the lack of knowledge of our students can and does create a form of dissonance where the void that is created is filled with half truths, misnomers and false information and this is what often forms the basis for the foundation of the program. It may be true that WEC does not function simply to befriend students by fostering an overabundant familiarity but rather does exist to participate in a process of teaching and learning, whereby students become the best teachers they can be. Yet to not know them well is to cultivate reductionism where each of them is reduced to the lowest denominator which more often than not becomes the connecting factor rather than an authentic assessment of who they are, and who they are becoming as teacher activists and what this could all mean.

As I worked on this first part of her story I was struck time and time again of how extraordinary an ordinary life is when you look closely. This experience is much like Nel Noddings description of the sudden sensation of joy you experience as, "the recognition of the reality of relation to another in our intellectual world" (Noddings, 1984). The implications for this thought resonated with what the French Feminists call, "écriture feminine", which translates as the need to attempt a radical form of writing about women's lives that Patricia Clough defines as a form of writing that transgresses structures of domination and forms a kind of writing which reproduces the struggle for voice of those on the wrong side of the power relationship. (Clough, 1992). I believed that issues and history portrayed in Gerie's life warranted such an effort, an effort beyond the traditional sociological hallmarks of the patriarchal system of marriage, kinship and sexuality. Hers was not a story that would or should fit into that ready made blueprint but emerged as a story of a life trying to establish a identity of its own. In this way the telling and constructing of a life story is an interventionist activity; providing a voice and a forum for what might have otherwise not have been heard. Gerie's story is now indelibly printed on my mind and will be fixed on issues of my teaching and ideas of what WEC could and should become.

While writing her story I became increasingly and simultaneously attentive to both the descriptive (phenomenological) and interpretive (hermeneutic) aspects of the activity or method. Descriptive because of the need to capture how things appeared to Gerie and interpretive because her story warranted more than the listing of

chronological events. One interesting effect of this realization was the attempt to capture this phenomenon in the language, tropism, synecdoche, metaphors, pauses, semantic tags, and other nuances she gave me. Meaning developed as we constructed her life story together and through the profitable use of language, not osmosis, this meaning can be examined and be made sense of. Gerie's dichotomous references to "those people" and "you people" and "WEC people" establish vivid lines of demarcation receptive to translation and the determination of their significance. This is only one example of Gerie seemingly 'creating herself' as characterized by mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, beliefs, and institutions (Dilthey, 1987) which are objectified through language as her story is built. "Those people" and "you people" has become a language taxonomy, as revealing as any statistical one could be. This linguistic taxonomy assists in establishing clues leading towards her understanding of class structure, gender bias, or institutional values.

A perceptive look at Gerie's metaphor of the train and how it related to her WEC experience suggests opportunities for the exploration of both subjective and objective knowledge as she relates her inner thoughts while attending to her world; balancing each idea and then developing an integrated or newly constructed thought (Schon, 1983). Schon explains this train formation of Gerie's as a generative metaphor, synecdoche, where seeing one thing as something else helps to generate new perceptions, explanations and inventions. Her metaphor for early WEC life was that of being on the tracks, going to the station, picking up passengers and fuel and heading out again. A picture of WEC emerges as a place where journeys continue, take on new people and ideas and experiences, and move on again. Not a place to begin or end with but a place to acquire fuel and then move along.

Gerie's life story has become more than a list of memories or ordered chronological events. Through semiotic devices such as language taxonomies, theme development and bridging metaphors, she is in fact constructing knowledge about herself. In doing so she is codifying a procedure of "connected knowing" (Belenky, 1986) that is based upon references to the self, the vocabulary of feeling, and the recognition of temporal flux and change expressed through internal dialogue brought out into the open during the construction of the story. This internal dialogue, often suppressed, is given a method of expression or a voice in the form of the life story. In essence Gerie becomes the author of

her own life. This idea of multiplicity and connectedness permeates Gerie's life story. When this stance is compared to the more traditional epistemology of separate discrete knowing it provides an alternative way to experiencing Gerie's life.

As Gerie's story unfolded there was the growing awareness from a pedagogical position, that the most significant aspect of the enterprise was the ability of interpretive biography to teach. Life stories will assist all the participants in reflecting upon and confronting feelings in a thoughtful manner that acknowledges the notion that the first person is closer to us than the third. In a community of learners does it not make sense that we can, within these communities that we create, legitimately and credibly read and write meaningful stories amongst ourselves, seeking ways to improve and make sense of our own lives? Can we, by not confusing familiarity with knowledge develop a pedagogy of inquiry, a politics of confidence, which would support this thought? Curriculum theorists such as Van Manen (1989) refer to the pedagogical character of theorizing where learning creates important, often powerful experiences where people can change as a result of being engaged in transformational activity. In this way professionals and students alike can wrestle with the contemporary malaise of detachment, from community, from learning, from change and reform.

Finally, a narrative study of lives is an act of commitment and caring: caring in the sense that Nel Noddings refers to as a relational approach to ethics and moral education. Teaching is more than a technical activity. It is a moral art or craft with more depth than a rational, linear disposition to the larger issues of justice, equity, and fairness. To attend responsively to consequences that persons face as a result of these issues requires insights that transcend or at least form an alternative to separate, often inaccessible abstract thought. These insights will come in the form of narratives such as Gerie's who is researching her life as she lives it. The dimly lit principles that govern WEC, the institution, become more vivid when held up to the scrutiny of stories like Gerie's. When the stories begin to add up we should, at least in the WEC community, be able to understand more fully, what is working, what is not, what needs to be changed and where the central tendencies may be found.

Many tantalizing questions emerge from her story. WEC was a major interruption at a particular time in her life, an intervention she believes leading to significant changes. Would these changes have occurred in another environment? At another time? Is there

something about WEC and “you” people as Gerie calls them that was essential to her experience, both positively and negatively? Is there any connection between her reference to the deaf culture and how she views culture in the usual, broader sense? Her life unfolds as a series of interventions, some appropriate, some not, some violent, some benevolent, some controlled, some capricious. Was WEC an appropriate intervention and why or why not? Several times Gerie refers to the realness of people, behavior and events. She traces a pattern of the search for authenticity, often believing that she was denied access to the possibility of a real life by circumstances, authority and power beyond her control. At WEC she finds authenticity defined as real WEC people and non WEC people. Is this good feeling some reactionary romanticism or is there something there to explore more fully? Why does she equate the Miss Manners persona as class biased rather than simply an inappropriately, interfering staff person. Why was Gerie finally able to come out of the art room when she entered WEC? Would she have been able to do this if she had become a plumber at Red River College? Gerie’s story is like holding a mirror up to the face of WEC, shedding its reflection back on itself, allowing the knowledge and insights to emerge, over time, from her first hand experience.

The “why bother” amounts to this in the end. It is unnatural for the internal dialogue that goes on in all of us not to have out. In today’s educational debate there is much discussion of inclusion in one or more of its many forms. Where better place than in an institution of learning, with persons labeled by many as marginalized persons, most of whom are women, to bring this narrative form out to be understood, perhaps as the politics of confidence.

### The Exploration of Activism

The next series of conversations with Gerie occurred sometime after the initial elicitation of her autobiography which forms the basis for her life story. It is currently a happy time in her life. She soon will marry and at the beginning of the next school term begin a new teaching position: these are events that she is pleased about and looking forward to. Because a considerable amount of time had passed since our first encounter, the first portion of our time together was spent once again reviewing the purpose of the study, the ethical considerations and how the inquiry might unfold. Shortly after, I

began, in some detail, to explain why I had invited her in particular to participate in this study on activism. I first relayed to her the working definition of activism that is to be explored during this study: an inner city activist is “a person who becomes purposefully involved in conducting the business of their lives to do what they view as necessary to better the lives of children in particular and the community in which they live.” After conveying this idea to her, I told Gerie that I thought that by this definition, she was an activist and that a purpose for this study was to explore the reasons why this may be so and how it came to be and what effect if any the Winnipeg Education Centre may have had on this development.

#### Activism: First Person Singular

Collaboratively, we began to explore activism during the initial onset of the second tier of interviewing. This proved to be a different process than the solicitation of the lifestory. The dialogue revolving around activism generally and her own individual activist identity did not, at first, develop easily as did the telling of the lifestory. It began to be a more comfortable process for Gerie as the notion of collaboration became clear and we began to work through the process together, providing prompts for each other. It did then become a reciprocal process. The initial reaction from Gerie, after explaining in considerable detail how I understood her to be an activist, was not the response I expected. I had assumed that she would be pleased with my sense of her as an activist and that she would be eager to explore her work in the inner city based upon this assumption. This was not the case. Gerie was obviously uncomfortable and pulled herself away, curled down into the couch and for a short while looked away. I began by relating to Gerie the working definition of activism that appeared at the point I stopped the literature review. We continued by my asking her directly what her thoughts were on my expression of her activism:

Gerie: I'm a little bit embarrassed. Well, again it's, I guess part of it is, I hope is that I live to peoples expectations because I don't necessarily see all the things that others see and I'm worried about the impostor thing, it just, I mean I just find it very flattering, I don't tend to see it easily. I mean to me an activist sort of

creates out of nothing. I don't know, I picture people a lot more dynamic, and a lot more inspiring, like Grace. She has done so many, many things, created many things. I think a lot of it has to do with how I define my role as a teacher and maybe I just define it differently than the "September box teacher" and so this maybe appears that it has an activist component. I think I am reacting to another label, its compartmentalizing. I don't have all these compartments, I don't have all these roles, I'm just me, this is who I am, then what I do just naturally comes out of that rather than something being more than or added on, like activism. I don't know about activism. I've never thought about it before you talked about it.

Charlotte: Okay, hold that thought. I just wanted to point out one thing here. Two summers ago I went through all 265 files of graduates from WEC and retrieved some statistical information on our graduates. Actually this is where this idea about activism came out because when you're going through somebody's file, looking at age at entry, number of children, language spoken, education at entry, that sort of thing, these files start to become people again This is where as I was going through them, I began to, idly at first, sort them into piles, I pulled them up without even really much knowing it and out of those 200 and some whatever, there are 256 are women graduates and I think we only have 25 or 30 men in the whole lot. Most of them are women, and out of that the pile that I pulled out into stacks I labeled them first in my head, working teacher, non working teacher and then I started shifting to activist, working teacher, principal, leader. At the end I had a big stack of working teacher, a small stack, 4 or 5 of principal leader and 6 in the activist pile. You were one of those.

Gerie: Really

The process I was describing to Gerie was the task of reviewing all of the files of the women who had graduated from the Education Program. The purpose for this was to acquire statistics about these women related to age, race and ethnicity, education background and so on. This took a considerable amount of time and I found myself reflecting back on who these women were and what had happened to them after they had

left the Centre. I began to create piles, unconsciously at first and then more deliberately. The categories appeared as those who are working as teachers in some capacity or other, administrative teaching leaders such as principals and then activists, more to the point inner city activists. This categorizing process was later superimposed upon the literature review as part of the exploration of what an activist may in fact be.

Earlier on Gerie had described the "September box teacher" as one who brings out her box of September material and uses it over and over again without any notice of who may be in her class that year. Gerie believes that she is not a "September box teacher" because before she would do anything in her classroom with regard to the curriculum she would first know her students, who they were, what they needed and what she could do to foster this. This discussion of the "September box teacher" helped us to understand that Gerie was, at first, much more comfortable, at first, talking about activism as it related to her teaching in the inner city than to the more general concept I spoke of earlier. I also see that her view of herself as not a September box teacher is one of the reasons I saw her in the activist place as I sorted through the files looking for statistics, my first look at a demography of activism. These thoughts lead to some considerable time talking about her teaching vocation in the inner city:

Gerie: You know, the significant aspects of being Inner City teacher is knowing who you are and how it defines your teaching, like the September box teacher. The September box teacher is teaching who she is. I think when I went into teaching my big worry was where my first teaching job would be, would I go some place where I would feel comfortable, where I'd feel that I would fit in and I think that was the start of sort of defining who I was, but what does that mean because I found that when I started going to my student teaching practice I went to some very different places and sort of found out, started to define who I was and started to be proud of who I was I think, I don't know why, I have a hard time putting this into words. I think that kids, the inner city kids that I worked with most definitely can spot people who are not sure of who they are or not sure of it, like who are phony, they can spot them and very quickly you learn to be up front and honest in response to the sort of honesty that you get back right away from them and I think that's what made me figure out

and define who I was but then to be comfortable being who I was with my students. This struggle really does happen every day. Does that make sense?

When I used to go to Middle School for my student teaching, there was this expectation that I was supposed to be a certain way. We were told by the professor how we were supposed to dress for student teaching, how we were supposed to act for student teaching, even smell, all those sort of things and I started off going to Middle School in skirts, I had two skirts, a black skirt and a red skirt, and then I had a couple of nice shirts and of course our placements were long, right, so I'm trying to be this sort of person for more than one day. Now looking back I could see what was happening. Over the placements, the shirts started to change from nice T-shirts to sweat shirts. Looking back I think that must've been a real interesting picture to see me with a sweat shirt and a skirt sort of thing. I think it was that I was trying to be somebody else and gradually over time and in a sort of strange way it became, "this is really me". You know, I'm more comfortable this way and I noticed my language was the same way. I spoke a certain way or tried to speak a certain way, trying to sound professional and trying to sound like I was a teacher and trying to impress the parents that I really knew what I was doing and I really knew what I was talking about. I found over time that I corrected myself less and just got comfortable more. In the end the placement was a success in that I learned a lot, accomplished a lot but I think what was really interesting was that my placement was in the alternative setting 4, 5, 6, my placement was there. Those teachers I got along with great, it's the teachers in the rest of the school that I didn't get along with. I think it was just sort of a symbol, the clothes and the language, I mean, what I valued, how I wanted to be with kids, how I wanted to be seen when I saw how I wanted this, how I wanted to act around kids, how I wanted to interact with kids. Those were also compromised because it was a different type of value system in that school. My role had a different type of value for those kids and I just wasn't comfortable. I felt like a service provider rather than what I thought a teacher was. I also felt that I was moving into a different class system. These weren't people that I had a great deal of time with and when I say, these are people, the people within that community, the people who were professionals, the majority of these parents were professionals. The kids were far more traveled than I was you know. It's like the old impostor thing going on like I



didn't want to be going there and hear, "Well, you know, what are you doing here?" I was uncomfortable to say the least, was less uncomfortable in the alternative programs because there's more opportunity to be yourself because of the way you could be with the kids and the value that was placed on the relationships. I really found out who I wasn't, who I couldn't be at Middle School. It was a valuable placement for me to figure out who I was because I quickly saw what I couldn't be or wouldn't be or didn't want to be, you know. I think they are pretty close to the same thing. I knew by the end of that placement where I wanted to teach, that was clear. That I was not going to be going over the bridge very much, you know what I mean. I wasn't going to teach in suburbia. That was not my place.

Gerie begins to tell how the inability to communicate, develop and share who she is with others has defined her teaching vocation to a large degree:

Gerie: It's as I felt out classed so I didn't want to share too much of my life. I mean, I was a high school dropout, I hadn't read the same books they had, I hadn't been to the same places they had. I didn't share their life experiences and I think that's a key part too. I made huge assumptions I guess about what their life was like and my assumptions were that they went through high school, graduated, went to university, got the job, you know 2.5 kids their house in suburbia. I made a lot of assumptions and I was probably right you know a lot of the time, but I didn't share anything of that and maybe going in there with that belief that I was coming so far across the city and coming into this neighbourhood maybe I was prepared to feel those things, I don't know. I was more nervous going into Middle School which is my second year placement than I was going into that inner city school in my first year. I went back over the bridge and stayed.

Gerie continues her thoughts of how she came to define and name herself as an inner city teacher by resonating her teaching vocation with the value she places upon community, a theme that emerged predominately during her construction of her lifestory:

Gerie: What is important for me are the families. Families, defined as parents along with children in some way or another. There was really a sense, that when I opened my doors I, really got that sense of this is the community, the families, the schools, what is both in and also outside the classroom, together. Now, where I am right now, and part of the reason why I'm leaving is because that definition isn't there. The community here, here I have only the students and I don't get a lot of the external community as part of what is going on. I just feel this huge void that I haven't been able to in two years to fill or fix and that's why I'm going to go. I miss that, even though in some way it was a nice break sort of to be away from the consistent turmoil that you have to deal with when you are working in a whole community, here the community is only with the kids, they walk into that room and this is our community, this is us, this is who this classroom is and it doesn't extend outside the walls well at all, not well at all. I think, I mean I'm proud of that program and I'm proud of what I've been able to accomplish there but very saddened that I couldn't figure that out, how to bring us as people in the classroom out in the community more and bring the community into the classroom. It didn't happen. I couldn't make it happen. And again, part of it was dealing with the murders in the community and how former students killed a student of mine and of course they're not aware of those connections to me or them at all. This absolutely devastated me. And then again how current students of mine stood by and watched another student from my old community got killed. There was no sense of community to help with this. It did completely devastate me. By this point parents pretty well had given up on those kids. The community has pretty well given up on those kids, there's just too much damage done, there's just too much of it, it was too late. I don't think I thought that I could actually fix things or them but I mean there's just too much I couldn't bridge, I couldn't, not even phoning parents just to say how well things are going didn't bring parents any closer to the kids in the program. Little things that sort of help you build relationships with people and help you sort of share your classroom and share the things that happen inside the walls was not there. I think I finally realized what was happening and why. I think that, you now what it is, that this program pulled kids from all over and so there was no real connection, we weren't situated in their home community. A lot of kids lived in the neighbourhood but not by far the majority, so

these kids came from all over, but when I worked at other Winnipeg inner city schools, know, they were all around you. This is where they lived, they shopped, they ate, they fought, they really lived, you know, it all happened right there. It was real in a sense that you could cope with. It could be made more real and then you could reach for what the kids needed, when they needed it. To me the ideal school will be open till 10 o'clock at night and there will be a doctor's office and there is a dentist and there was the social service agency that communities have to deal with are all in there, all these schools, my ideal ones, are busy, going places with adults coming and going, it's all integrated into a holistic place, that's what a community is.

Gerie began to sort through why her teaching was not, by her standards as effective as she would aspire to and also to begin to analyze why this had happened:

Gerie: It was very fragmented, and as try as I might I couldn't bring the pieces together. I couldn't get the pieces to connect. For me it must be as I said before, a holistic thing. I mean for budget people like bureaucrats who try to fragment things, to separate it, to chop it up, to supposedly make it more manageable or feasible or whatever the word is. So this is one thing but is it right for the kids, the community? Look at these kids that get pulled out of their community and who was it that put them there, kept them away from other kids, you know, supposedly to keep them separate and so safe you know, those sorts of things. For what, because it's convenient. I sort of fight against fragmenting kids and fragmenting families and fragmenting communities and want to be involved. I want to be part of all of this, so don't separate me from any of it. I'm affected by all of this and when I say this, I also mean the kids and the parents. I don't work well fragmented and I think that's part of me wearing my own skin. I think the kids are the same way when they are separated from what is the realness of their lives, even if the system thinks they are better off away from it or thrown together for whatever else reasons.

Gerie began to speak of how important it was becoming to be able to as she put it, "take her whole person to her teaching practice".

Gerie: Part of me couldn't go there, To Middle School, that's it really. Working in the places that I've loved I had the chance to be who I am. This is all of me, and you know what, all of me has a value and it has a value to the community, to the people I work with, to the kids and if that's how I want to feel, then that's how those kids want to feel and that's how the parents want to feel and that's when I work best. I am not the September box teacher, the teacher that drives up to the lot at ten to nine, brings out her September box, teaches for September, leaves at the end of the day, separates the job from herself, I was going to say separates the job from her life rather than the job being part of her life or her life. I am attracted to that word resilience and how powerful that this idea is and how much energy I get from that, from that resilience from the families with their kids and the resourcefulness and the and how they get it, you know. This works for me with basic needs like health issues, money issues, safety issues but also curriculum issues. I think my sense of resilience, tied together with basic needs leads to my curriculum and my behaviour management that works to take away barriers from kids. An example of that is that I teach the kids the rules for things, so that they don't have more artificial barriers added to the ones that are there going to be there, real ones. Resilience makes me think of real people with their real issues solving real problems and going over those barriers I mentioned before. Its not just talking about those poor kids and how bad they got it and let's design another program to fix it. Seems like this is where we started isn't it? The program that I'm in now that is not part of the community.

So there I was, an inner city teacher who was there not to solve all the problems, to fix things, but just address needs, and sometimes in addressing needs, not sometimes, usually when you're addressing basic needs, people, because they're resilient, because they have goals and ambitions and wishes, they were able then to focus on doing what they needed to do in order to meet those goals. Do you know what I mean? I never, Andrew Street was never about "we're going to fix this community and make it middle class so it doesn't need Andrew Street any more". It was never about that, it was just these are things that people need to have access to, so let's provide it. It's as simple as a telephone where they can get messages, or whether it was the food buying club so they can buy one diaper until their cheque comes in. I mean I wasn't dealing with the fact that their cheque was running out when they

needed diapers. I wasn't dealing with the fact that there wasn't enough money, they should have more money so they don't run out of diapers, but it was just that sometimes your cheque is late or you run out and you have no money and you run out of diapers the day before and it'd be nice to be able to buy just two diapers to take you through the night to the morning, you know what I mean. That's the way I looked at it rather than trying to solve big social ills that people say "plague" the "inner city". It was just down to the basics. I don't know how to get it across. But that was and still is my teaching, how it works or doesn't work, you know.

I think it's down to buying a diaper so that the baby will be dry until that cheque comes in the mail. You don't have ten dollars for a bag of diapers but you have 25 cents or whatever it costs to buy one. The thought that this woman, young woman, mother who needed a diaper was on welfare and was probably going to continue to be on welfare was not the issue for me right then. It had to be first that her basic needs were met and that she could take care of her baby. That's what strengthens communities, that's what's strengthening that women having access to the diaper and not having to worry about it. The important thing is that woman should be able to care for her own baby, not have it taken away or her being labeled a bad mother.

I suppose in the long range there are those people, government people, the suits, that provide the money for Andrew Street to be sustained, you know what I mean? There's no doubt about it. I am not ignorant of where the money comes from, in the end, for that diaper.

Gerie, for the most part does not directly name the issues or circumstances she sees occurring in the inner city. I did not hear her use the terminology related to disparity, deficit model, culture of poverty, equity, social justice and others. Although Gerie does not "name " these issues directly she speaks of them descriptively. The way this unfolds in her telling adds to the credibility and strength of her observations and analysis: to their authenticity. This is one example of this phenomena, unfolding as a discussion of equity without ever using the term directly:

Gerie: I guess I get resentful of waste. I am angry sometimes but maybe I'm not angry enough. But I do resent the dollars spent where the impact of that dollar would

not nearly be as great as had it been spent some place else, you know what I mean? I have trouble with arts funding. I have trouble with hearing people complain about how things are in their rotten life when all their basic needs are met. People coming in here and there and they throw money here like "here's a block of money" and then go away and then feel good when they leave. You know everybody shakes hands and takes pictures and then they go away and then you're left with things.  
for you and your work?

The activist literature relates an increasing tendency for people who are looking for ways to participate in a democracy to be both skeptical and uninterested in traditional political activity. They seek an alternatives in various forms of activism. Gerie has a view of politicians that is based upon her search for alternative ways to "remove barriers and meet basic need of people in the community".

Gerie: We do beg, borrow, we'd say to people, you know that it's okay to beg, borrow and steal for the benefit of the family centre so we'd write to places and be that specific, saying, "We need this, can you buy us this, and this is what we'd use it for." And we got greater response from those sort of letters than saying, "Can we have a donation of you know, can you give us some money?". People feel good going in and then leaving, nothing dirty, nothing and then they go around saying, "Oh yes, I gave my crib to the Family Centre, you know what I mean? I think that's how government operates. They don't get in, they don't get dirty but there's a whole group of people here willing to get in and dirty but they just come in, give some money and then go back out. Even to the point, and I say that now, I wouldn't have said it at the time, even to the point where the evaluation, all the evaluations that that agencies and organizations are supposed to do concern me greatly because the government really, my sense is, really doesn't want to be involved, they just want to hear that the money was spent and it looked good sort of thing so I find that's how the government does not want to get dirty, people don't want to get dirty. They're so relieved that there are people are willing to get in there and get involved. It's like working with my students. I have such a great deal of independence because people are willing to give me the space, the books, the budget. Don't tell us if it's not going

well. How is it going? Great. Oh good, okay, here's your cheque. They don't want to hear things like we're struggling with this. No, that's not what they want to hear. I think it's, come in, here you go, we'll put this on our list of accomplishments for people to see and don't tell us if it's not going well. Make sure the money is spent and make sure you're accountable. I only say that because you see a lot of organizations that are struggling within that organization or the structure or the management and they'll go on like that for years. I mean I can be real specific here, it goes on for years, and years, and years and nobody steps in, nobody wants to do anything about it. Nobody says, "Hey, wait a minute, haven't you strayed from your original intention or wait a minute, have you lost sight of why you're here?"

### The Business of Self Efficacy

The concept of knowing who you are and wearing your own skin warrants theoretical exploration. It is a step along the way in understanding Gerie's activism as part of both of our interpretations. Gerie's knowing of herself appears woven around a sense of self efficacy. Efficacy and self efficacy is situated here in the literature and research of social cognitive theory; in particular the work of theorists such as Albert Bandura (1986, 1997). Bandura's formal definition of self efficacy is "people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). At first, this definition may superficially appear as one of self confidence, that if you have a positive self image and assume the posture of "feeling good about yourself", then you are self efficacious. The literature very soon dispels this. Bandura views confidence as a nondescript word that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what this certainty is about. A person can be certainly confident of failing at something. However, self efficacy refers to belief in one's agentic capabilities leading to the development of various levels of attainment (Bandura, 1997). Self efficacy assessment will have both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief (Bandura, 1986, 1997). This theoretical stance claims that self efficacy that is not confused as self confidence plays a powerful role in determining the choices people make, the degree of commitment they expend, their perseverance, and the degree of anxiety or

confidence they bring to the task at hand. Furthermore self efficacy explains why people's behavior differs even when they have similar knowledge and skills. At this point the question arises quite succinctly: is this why only some of the women graduates who came through the education program with similar backgrounds and a common curriculum of knowledge and skills taught to them, became activists and others did not. Is this an aspect of Gerie is an activist while others in her class are not? Is the level of self efficacy a quality of activism?

Social cognition theorists, in their attempt to understand why people do what they do and how they become who they are, view efficacy and its affect on behavior in several ways. Self efficacy, first of all, influences the choice of behavior. People tend to be involved in tasks they feel competent in and avoid those where they do not. Secondly self efficacy will determine how much effort people will put into any given activity and also the degree of perseverance. Thirdly self efficacy strongly influences individual thought patterns and emotional reactions. Lastly self efficacy recognizes human beings as producers rather than simply foretellers of behavior(Bandura, 1997). The significance of this approach to efficacy is not only that it influenced behavior but that people actively use these beliefs to influence how they behave. Do activists either wittingly or instinctively use self efficacy as a foundation for their activist behavior? Self efficacy may be the force behind the power to make things happen and should be distinguished from the mechanics of how things are made to happen.

Self efficacy, according to social cognitivists, constitutes the key factor of human agency. Agency refers to acts done intentionally (Bandura, 1997). Bandura believes that if people believe that they have no power to produce results they will not attempt to make things happen. Did Gerie's sense of self efficacy lead her away from the suburban school, where she believed that she could not be who she was and as such, unable to teach how she thought she needed to, to the inner city school where her sense of efficacy would allow her to thrive? Gerie's belief of power in this instance was that she had to be who she was in a situation that would allow her efficacy to develop and to be sustained. Perhaps Gerie's self confidence may have been able to develop in the suburban school with a measure of success and kindness but it would appear that a sense of efficacy for her required the inner city and an inner city school. Is this a measure of her activism?



Bandura's theory develops another interesting concept that adds to an understanding of efficacy and why it may be relevant to a discussion of activism. The Bandura definition has stated that perceived self efficacy is a judgment of one's capability to organize and execute given types of performance (Bandura, 1997). Now added to this is the "whereas" that says that this is not to be confused with outcome expectations which are judgments of the likely consequences such performances will produce such as how well they will be able to perform. Gerie's story has many incidents where she struggles with her belief in her capability to organize and execute such as her work at Andrew Street but nowhere to be seen in her description of life and work can be seen what is described by Bandura as outcome expectations where she ruminates over her performance and the consequences of it. I think the why of it is that she knows what the consequences are, they are an integral aspect of her efficacy and I think activism. Otherwise she may have become a leader, a traditional principal perhaps, one that abides by outcome expectations viewing the consequences differently, perhaps expediently, not efficaciously. Her notion of "getting it" and the "beg for forgiveness model" are ways she uses her efficacious ability.

### The Ethic of Caring

Another theme that emerged from Gerie's lifestory and her work as a teacher activist was her view of caring. Caring for children is one of the many "standard issues" of teachers and teaching. People approach teaching, some do, because they love children and want to care for them. Certainly there are numerous reasons for why people choose to teach but "caring for children" will always surface in some form or another during the course of a teaching life. The concept of caring did emanate from Gerie's life story. Listening to hear talk of her work establishing and maintaining the safe house, her work teaching Grade three in an inner city school, her work in the alternative program at an inner city high school, all seemed to radiate around caring, although she never actually used the word until she said at one point "I don't think I care for kids in the way it's usually thought about". She continues with:

Gerie: I don't view caring in the usual mothering way or in a sentimental way. I think how I care for kids is trying to be real with them, recognize what they need, remove barriers that keep them away from doing what they need to do. I like to be honest with kids too, to be who I am. That is how I care for kids I think. If I had a word for it would be respect or recognizing their resilience. I don't know really.

This was no doubt an interpretive moment. Obviously there was something incongruent for Gerie with what she perceived to be the common understanding of caring and with the word caring and all it conjured up, at least for this particular context. To care for, or about, something or someone and how this can be interpreted became another theme, another part of the framework to understand Gerie. The question asked in this study concerns the very public act of activism, one that affects the interpretation and challenges the usual definition of what it means, to care and be cared for. The usual definition of caring when it is used to describe women is one of nurturing: doing for people, sacrificing, being responsible for and responsive to others. Women are at times, thought to have the natural inclination to care for others. Gerie's response to "caring" warrants an attempt at understanding as well as voice.

The issue of caring is both a methodological and epistemological conundrum. Caring and scholarship, learning and making sense, for the purposes of this study need to be "taken out of the closet" and looked at carefully. Gerie's comment "I don't think I take care of kids in that way", at first glance is staggering because her life as a teacher and activist seems to countervene this assertion. It also suggests to me that caring as a word in the language and the subsequent conceptual framework it will develop, will have different meanings for different persons in differing contexts. Women may view and experience caring in quite dissimilar ways and to think that women who are activists care in the same way is a poor assumption. The way caring is often portrayed, is far too saccharine a concept, much like taking a bath in corn syrup.

Methodologically, a study of the nature of this one could become vulnerable to the criticism of the vacuousness nature of caring as steeped in the 1960's, "summer of love", maxim of "love the one you're with" or where an overabundance of concurrence means caring. There are after all, only three participants in the study which suggests a level of intimacy that has not usually been part of the dominant, traditional, male

oriented epistemology. It takes no small amount of courage and conviction, to look hard at the concept of caring, to see what may be understood of it as relative to women activists and whether the sense of caring is that of duty as expected or some other motivational force. Women scholars have tended at times to go underground about their sense of caring when it applied to research methodology or to ignore it and comply to a more perceived, real "scholarly profile". Mayeroff (1971) points out that caring involves promoting the growth of those for whom we care. Nel Noddings (1988,1986,1988) has been referred to in this study in several instances and it was to her writing that I looked again to look again at her conceptualization to begin to see how it may provide a theoretical basis for an understanding of caring and a way to interpret Gerie's sense of what it means to care: a certain opportunity to explore the relationship among language, thought and human behavior and a test for the non-representational nature of semantics, where meanings reside within people not words. At this level of exploration caring does become a thinking activity and more to Gerie's understanding of what it means to care for children.

Nel Noddings situates her understanding of caring as an ethic of caring that is opposed to utilitarian or Kantian ethics where fidelity (caring) is derived from principle and therefore seen as a possible duty. The question then arises: would not most of us prefer to be treated well by another out of regard rather than duty. There is much philosophical debate about caring as duty or caring as regard but it remains that an ethic of caring owes fidelity to duty or the utilitarian principle. Women have been placed on the horns of this dilemma throughout their struggle to be heard and understood. We care because we must or we care because we regard. How do activists view the ethic of caring? Is there a common motivation for caring accompanied with a common pedagogy of caring that operationalizes the caring act? Nel Noddings further states that an ethic of caring is a relational one and varies dramatically from the traditional ethics where the emphasis on duty is turned upside down. Kantian ethics insists that only those acts performed out of duty should be labeled as moral acts, an ethic of caring prefers acts done out of love and natural inclination. Acting out of caring one uses a sense of duty only when love or inclination fails. Kantian ethics were viewed as the liberation of people from the complexities and vagaries of earlier ethics but down the path to heightened

individualism (Taylor, 1991). Nel Noddings thinks that the ethic of caring that she upholds has to return to the relations in which we all must live. She writes:

A relational ethic is firmly dependent on natural caring. Instead of striving away from affection and toward behaving always out as duty as Kant has prescribed, one acting from a perspective of caring moves consciously in the other direction: that is he or she calls on a sense of obligation in order to stimulate natural caring. The superior state, one far more efficient because it energizes the giver as well as the receiver is one of natural caring. Ethical caring is its servant (Noddings, 1988, p. 219).

This sense of caring is often characterized in terms of responsibility and response where the tropism is motherly love. There is little to be gained by arguing whether or not this sense of caring has largely been equated with women portrayed for instance as the placid Madonna or the rampaging she-bear. Women have been struggling with the notion of caring while at the same time the concept was for the most part sentimentalized, romanticized, right brained: unduly tied to the emotionally state, often non-reciprocal, and having a reactionary rather than thoughtful, analytical stance. Women were compromised around the sense of caring: a woman teacher, for example, was often placed in a situation or placed herself in a position where, not wanting to appear to be weak, which is often a synonym for women who thoughtfully cared, oftentimes, would attempt to avoid caring occasions by adopting her pedagogy to help her do this: by lecturing instead of transactional or transformative methods, grading by forensic numbers rather than by qualitative, interpretive forms, responding to the behavior rather to the person and so on. On the other hand those teachers who embrace a thoughtful, ethical stance will use teaching moments as caring occasions employing the pedagogy of modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation (Noddings, 1984). From the ethical perspective caring is manifested where "the legalistic or moralistic temper gives the first-order position to rights, whereas the agapistic temper gives the first place to needs." (Fletcher, 1966, p. 45.) Nel Noddings (1984) and Carol Gilligan, (1982) are two feminist writers who are avoiding the elitism of Aristotelian virtue which is the historical antecedent for any discussion of caring, and the dogmatic,

fundamentalist Christian version. In this way there is a understanding of caring that transcends the shortsighted attitude that conveys to us that characterizes caring as feminine solely because it seems to rise naturally out of women's experience because the blending as described above develops a relational characteristic that when technically elaborated attempts to convert any given relation into a caring one. This suggest that the caring is an active, thoughtful process rather than a simplistic natural inclination. Gerie is neither by definition in any real sense, Aristotelian or Agape. Later in her lifestory she will refer to her suspicion of the Agape sense of activism as characteristically "martyrs and missionaries." Nor does she develop a sense of textbook Aristotelian elitism as the sole basis of her caring. Gerie's sense of caring embellishes both relation and response, when combined creates an alternative view of "caring" based upon what might be termed applied virtue. By nature this form of caring brings meaning to her statement of "I don't think I care for children in the usual sentimental way, I'm more interested in removing barriers by first looking at their basic needs". Relation and response; non elitist and arbitrarily or abstractly applied.

### Community

Gerie's understanding of community and the importance that its development had on her teaching practice and then activism begins with a crisis point she experienced early on in her teaching life. She was booked into an inner city school and by Thanksgiving was thinking that she would quit teaching altogether. In Gerie's case this is the reverse of the first year teaching "honeymoon period". In the classic instance first year teachers often experience several months (Thanksgiving is often the line of demarcation) of initial confidence and euphoria before falling prey to the first unexplained resistance or power struggle that develops in the classroom. If beginning teachers are able to weather this first major struggle they garner an opportunity to develop community and get on with the work of teaching and if not, the struggle will continue and may precipitate the early demise of a teaching vocation. With Gerie the reverse of this experience was true. In some sense this occurred because she was clearly able to see what was happening from the onset. Her classroom was in chaos, she thought that she was "acting" as a teacher ought while believing somehow that the role was not working and in fact she was adding

to the chaos not mitigating it. She looked for solutions and views this critical incident that she shared with her daughter as the starting point of what she now sees as a successful teaching vocation. Her solution was to understand and build community:

Gerie: I got my answer late one evening when I angrily told my daughter to stop doing something that was inappropriate. She burst into tears and asked me not to speak to her in my "teacher's voice". This was to become my wake up call. Teacher's voice? I asked her to explain what she meant. She described my teacher's voice as mean, loud and bossy. She did not like it. My "mom's" voice was not mean and bossy when I was angry or upset. It was that simple. It was not me in my classroom but an impostor, someone I was trying to be because I did not know what else or who else to be. I was so busy playing school that I neglected to let my students know me. I was so busy trying to enforce rules and an inflexible structure that was borrowed from other teachers that I forgot the students and myself. I forgot how I wanted my own children to be treated. I wanted them to learn and I wanted them to love school. I wanted them to have fun and explore. I wanted them to be respected for their strengths and weaknesses. I wanted other teachers to care for them as I did. I was so concerned with treating the children like students that I did not have the chance to know them as someone else's children. Instead of trying to figure out how I wanted the students to feel about school and how they were going to learn, I focused on how I was going to teach. These three aspects were not forming a good fit. I was uncomfortable in my own skin. I had remained in the survival mode I found myself in that first day. I was not using the best resource I had which was myself, what I knew about me and how this related to children and could become an important part of my work. I have come to realize that many inner city teachers remain in the bunker mentality for survival and never leave it. My wake up call became the critical incident that was the beginning of my self definition as an inner city teacher. I was going to crawl out of that bunker.

I was on the brink of giving up on the teaching profession entirely and so was quite ready to take chances. I would operate on the "beg for forgiveness model" which has become the hallmark of both my teaching and later on, my activism. My reasoning was this: if I made mistakes then I was sure my administration would let

me know. If they did I would then say "sorry I did not know" and carry on. I was going to set up the classroom and my day differently. I would use what I knew about kids, believed about kids, and what I felt comfortable doing. I looked at how I functioned at home and decided that I could work the same way at school. I went to school the next day dressed in comfortable clothing that would allow me to get down on the floor and work alongside kids. I went to school as Gerie. I stopped treating the children in my room as students and started treating them like the children in my family. I started to expect from them the behaviors I expected from my own children and used strategies I used as a parent. I advocated for my students in the school and handled all behavioral issues that occurred in and out of the classroom within my classroom. They were not sent to the office. I watched a sense of community and family develop in my classroom. The changes came fast and the rewards came quickly too.

What had happened, I think, was that instead of being the impostor, I began to be Gerie and also to function in the classroom and the community as Gerie. I related to children and their parents the same way I would relate to my children and my extended family and neighbors. I was not the authority on their children, no more than I was the authority on my sister's children, yet I came to know them well and care for them with their parents as my main resource. As parents and children came to know me, I came to know them. We began to trust each other. I made teaching methodology decisions based on what I was comfortable with, what I believed in and what the community in my classroom and the community surrounding it accepted. As a result, I became consistent because I was being authentic to me and not my role. My students responded positively more and more instead of less and less. Not only did my students and I have a wonderful year but my eight year stay in that community further developed my sense of who I was, not as Gerie the teacher but simply as Gerie. Each community, classroom, student and personal triumph and tragedy while I worked there continued to help me learn who I was as a whole person. This affected not only how I taught but also how I did things outside of school hours because I evolved as a person not as pieces: a teacher, mother, and so on. What I learned most is that when I came out of university I did not fully understand who I was because I had tried to separate my past from my present and my roles in life from each other.

When I discontinued this separateness, I started being one person to my students and others as well. When I started being one person to my students I was able to be consistent and they started to work with me. I think they started to believe in me. I felt like I had come home again. I was becoming, by my definition, an inner city teacher.

I felt home again because this community accepted my return and I accepted the community for what it was. The community expected me to treat them and their children respectfully and to do my best as a teacher. Sometimes this expectation is not heard or dismissed as impossible. I accepted that the issues of poverty caused many stresses and prevented many things from happening. I accepted that even good parents break down from the pressures and that at the very core these parents wanted the best for their children even if they were not always able to do that themselves all of the time. I accepted that my students knew far more about the negative side of life and the adult responsibilities in life than children in other communities. I accepted that my students looked after siblings, grandparents and sometimes their parents. I also respected the resilience and the independence that the students had. If they were there in my class, it was because the children truly wanted to be there. In addition, if they were not in my class it was because, rather than a dislike of school, the absence was very likely due to a family responsibility or issue which kept them at home. If it was, in fact, an apparent dislike of school, I could now openly and with confidence deal with the extended absences, not by blaming children but finding ways to teach accordingly. This attitude allows teachers to become very innovative and creative on several levels. It allows us to be thoughtful, assertive teachers because when you see the situation clearly you tend also to be able to find clear solutions. Because I understood this and openly discussed these issues in class and with my parents, my students were comfortable in trying to confront these issues in the classroom setting and because of this were able to understand and resolve some of them. They trusted me because they understood that similar issues affected my childhood and my present life and the lives of their peers. I do not believe that they trusted me only because I had experienced similar experiences but because I understood this without making them feel defensive.



My classroom operated as a community unto itself, yet extended out into the larger inner city neighborhoods. What developed as a sense of community within those four walls was what binds communities everywhere. Communities are defined by what we hold in common. We accepted all members placed within our community. We were different in many ways. Different types of families, different colors, different religions, different maturity levels, different ability levels. We didn't necessarily like how some individuals were behaving at a particular time but we dealt with it, understood it. We began to look out for each other especially if someone outside our community didn't understand or "didn't get it."

The themes of caring for and caring about, efficacy and community are launched in the first of the lifestories. Gerie's lifestory and her understanding of activism in the general sense and her own activism appear rooted in her life at the Winnipeg Education Centre but also in her teaching practice which was in turn connected to her student experience at the Winnipeg Education Centre. She recalls more than once, very emphatically, almost as an impact statement, that WEC was the most important intervention on her life. The themes that she has developed, coupled with the significance of WEC have shed light on how and why she became an inner city activist.

## Chapter Seven

### Grace's Story

#### It Fits Me

In this piece Grace tells her story. The story was given during two tiers of interviewing: the first being when she was solicited to tell her story and the second one being when she was asked what affect the Winnipeg Education Centre may have had on her development as an activist. When a developing theme emerged, it was brought to light as it appeared in her telling. There was a determination not to reconfigure the stories into tidy, linear sense of coherency. Grace's story begins with "I was born and raised" but after that there is no sense of the literary format of beginning, middle and end. The story unfolds as she chose to and needed to and chose to tell it. The themes emerge then, as reasons for why she does what she does and subsequently how she became an activist.

The theme of self efficacy that appeared in Gerie's story reappears with Grace; only in her case it appears as "the fit" between her private and public life. It expands to develop into an understanding of collective efficacy. She also shares with both Gerie and Grace the theme that develops as a sense of community. Grace also shares with the other two women her understanding of the theme of caring for and caring about others. Along with Katie, but with less intensity, she shares her understanding of being an Aboriginal woman. Grace's understanding of herself as a mother is an encompassing theme on the way to understanding her activism and the naming of it. Her motherhood based activism continues to be refined and honed by her development of the "beg for forgiveness model" and her idea of "they got it or they don't get it."

*Never retreat, never explain, never apologize*

*Get the thing done and let them howl.*

*Nellie McClung.*

*It is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education.*

*Nel Noddings (1984).*

Grace may have fit well within the suffrage movement, except for the fact that some of the evangelical religious inclinations and views on prohibition may have been, for her, a trifle suspect yet, women such as Nellie McClung would have found Grace to be a relentless ally in bettering the lives of the women workers in the garment factory treadmills. This would have been an issue Grace could have tied her life to because she would have seen this as a way to improve the lives of these women. There is an audible matrix that forms a net over all of the insights that develop as part of Graces life story. It came to being as an echo of the retort crafted from Nellie McClung: lines that has been hanging over my work place for 20 years along side a handwritten scribble of "Emma Peel, where are you, we are needed".

Never retreat, never explain, never apologize

Get the thing done and let them howl

*Then beg for forgiveness* (this is Grace's line)

The beg for forgiveness model as Grace calls it is a strategy that she has employed all of her life, a strategy "to get things done, to do what needs to be done". She tells of how it "fits me". Grace's lifestory as narrative has the power to bring meaning to the otherwise random vagaries and assaults of daily life. Her life story is a conceptual entry point into an understanding of the choices she made, the practices that shaped her work and spawned her activism. The expression of her lifestory reflects an important way in which people understand who they are, why they do what they do and to whom and what they may be connected. This connection is developed through Grace's story as personal woven into the one that is social. This, I think, is where her activism lives, in the interplay of these two stories. She refers to this interplay as the "fit". Grace begins her story with "I was born":

Grace: I was born into a single parent family, my mom. and my brother and sister. We lived with my granny and grandpa in Point Douglas, which is the inner-city of Winnipeg. We didn't call it inner city in those days; it's a fairly new term. Just the north end. I still refer to it as the north end most of the time because of the work I do, I've sort of adopted that term of inner city, but I still think of it just as

the north end. My brother and sister are older than me; they were children of my mother's first marriage and then I was born, my father is a different father than my brother and sister. I know my mother had planned to give me up for adoption all through her pregnancy and she said at the last minute she just decided to change her mind and phoned my granny and said, "Mom, I'm bringing her home." And they said, "What are you going to call her?" and she said, "Well I'll just call her, I'm bringing her home." And that was that. So I grew up in I thought a fairly – well not a fairly, I think I grew up in a loving home. My granny was there and so there was always an adult's lap to climb on when I grew up. We didn't have a lot of material things but being a little kid I think all my needs were met in terms of affection and I don't remember ever going hungry and I don't remember being severely beaten or anything or maybe if therapist got hold of me they would tell me different, but I don't recall anything like that. It's interesting we're doing this now because we were talking about this on the weekend, people I'm working with, and I was remembering always seeing the bright side of things. I never really saw the bad stuff, I think my brother who is older than me, he saw the poverty and he was quite angry about it, and you know I used to try to convince him otherwise. I used to try and show him as a little kid even, show him "what's your problem". I would try and explain it to him but I remember him being fairly angry about not having a certain toy, or whatever, but I seemed to be a kid that could just occupy myself with whatever it was that I had. It seemed fine to me, maybe it was just that I didn't have a need for a lot of material stuff.

So those are sort of my childhood memories I guess growing up, what I remember. I do remember some incidents like my mom, a single mom and I don't imagine that was very easy. She didn't have much, I think she had about a grade six education and she went between welfare and she used to work at the fisheries when the boats came in and stuff. They used to come to the Alexander Docks at that time, and I mean she could skin anything, she could clean anything, she could, she was very good at that sort of thing, very clean and very precise and that kind of thing, in things that she did. So she used to work at doing filleting and stuff, the fish when the boats came in. I guess if she got enough stamps, I remember even seeing those little stamp books she'd collect UIC, whatever it was called in those days, and but like I said I

don't really know a whole lot about whether that was normal or not, that was just the way life was you know. We had an uncle who used to come and stay with us when he wasn't in jail and he was just a dear man, you know. One of my fondest memories was when my grandmother and I were drinking iced tea out of a container so my mom would know, not like that, germs. My mother was a bit of obsessive compulsive. I suppose cleanliness around food and that, like you don't share somebody's drink and those kinds of things but I always have anyway but I remember my uncle John getting out of jail and us going to the show on Main Street and us walking down the tracks and sharing a quart of milk, chocolate milk out of the quart and that was like the best thing, because I got to drink right out of the quart. It's like such a thrill and that happened not so long ago with me and my granddaughter, drinking out of a can together, and that was just a thrill for her too because her Mom, my daughter is kind of like my mom like that. We're drinking out of the jug eh, all right we're breaking the rules drinking out of the jug. So stuff like that growing up. So that's sort of I guess where it starts. My mom, I think, was a big influence on my life in a lot of ways, I think she'd been in jail and those kinds of things because she used to get in fights. She was pretty tough I think mostly around her drinking and I remember those being really scary times for me as a little kid. Even though my granny and grandpa were there my mom was sort of the main source in the house you know but at the same time she was very tough and I mean when she yelled at you or something she just scared the living heck out of you, like you just froze and I really feared her and it wasn't because she beat me or anything, I don't know, when she yelled I just paid attention. But at the same time she was very loving, like there was never a moment in my life that I thought she didn't love me. So even though she was kind of scary she'd always say things like, "there's no such word as 'can't'". "There is nothing you can't do, you know" she'd say. My mom always reinforced those kinds of things. If you want things done right you have to do it yourself. I think she raised us to be self reliant, to take care of yourself and take care of your family and it was very clear that she valued us kids, just from everything she did, like you know the fish, the back part of the fish, it's got less bones and so we'd always get the back part of the fish, she'd always stayed behind at work and cleaned out the pickerel cheeks, that's before they became popular kind of thing, because there'd be no bones in those right,

so we'd always sort of get the best of stuff and we knew that, so she was a strong force in my life, I think.

At the same time I remember thinking, I won't be cause she was scary to me and I remember thinking, "I'm never going to yell like that when I grow up," so in some ways she really instilled a lot of good stuff and then the other part is I never wanted to be like a yeller or I never – and still to this day I don't yell. I probably yell once every five years, and if I yell I always hurt my throat. I think it's because of the yelling, it used to just scare me, it was just, maybe just my personality or I'm not sure but I was always kind of an outgoing crazy kind of kid, like I'd do tricks and stuff to make everybody laugh and because I think there's a lot of sort of serious. I didn't really realize there'd been a lot of sexual abuse and physical abuse and stuff in our family and like I say I don't know that. Like my mother told me stories about her being physically abused, of course, nobody ever talked about sexual abuse in those days, because my grandfather that lived with us was not her natural father. I don't know if that has anything to do with it I mean if you're going to be an abuser, I guess you're going to be an abuser but it wasn't until later years that she told me this sexual abuse, but she told me a lot and I think it was probably okay to talk about physical abuse when I was younger and so I think as a result of her experience or just who she was, she decided that she would never be physically abusive with us kids. She had different men in her life but they were never ever allowed to ever lay a hand on us or intimidate us in any way or that kind of thing. She was responsible for the parenting of us kids so we were protected, she protected us, she was a good mom.

I remember, there was times things would be really tense in the house and stuff. Nobody told me as a little kid that we didn't have money or I'm not sure what the tension really was whether the tension was between my grandmother and my grandpa, you know, my mother or nobody really explained it to me but as a kid I was pretty sensitive and I remember feeling that and so I think the good side of that, my uncle, granny and grandpa used to bootleg as well and so I guess that was a way of making extra money and stuff for the house, so, I learned to be entertaining, sort of, I think to break the tension because I couldn't stand the way you'd feel it, like there'd be something in the air, which was really there. I realize that my brother and sister were just different than me, you know, like they just seemed to not be like I guess

they just had their own way of dealing with the tension or dealing with stuff that was. They just seemed different from me. They saw it differently and did different things because of it.

### Grace: Motherhood

Grace's story then and the nature of her activism are a fit between her personal life and the living social tradition she has constructed based upon what has been called by some the ethos of care and connectedness (Gilligan, 1982); (Noddings, 1988). Feminist researchers and writers are bringing this ethos of connectedness and caring, out of the closet so to speak, legitimizing and critically exploring the very basic idea of what it means and what affect it can have on women who struggle with caring and what it means to care along with all of its manifestations. There are those who would view the ethic of caring as a finite province of meaning for women and there are those who would argue that together men and women should (this was in the second tier of interviews): "Grace, what is in this for you, what do you get out of what you do?" Her reply was also very direct, "well you know, I care about people". From there we went on to explore what this meant. In some of the more recent literature of the last several years, women such as Gilligan and Noddings have begun to look more closely at the concept and complexities of caring, first through women's work in the professions such as teaching and social work and also from a social perspective revolving around the dissolution of the welfare state and the implications that this may have for women, children, and society in general (Baines et al, 1998). There is a realization that the concept of caring had been theoretically underdeveloped and was left to the media and popular culture to imbibe meaning into it. Now that our health care system is threatened and our population is aging and more is asked of scarce resources the issue of caring appears to be of more and more interest. The concept that was once taken for granted, usually associated with women is now becoming a valued, legitimate commodity: an issue to be reckoned with. The issue of caring is not new to Grace as it has been an aspect of her personal and social vocabulary all of her life. The resurgence of caring as a legitimate and economical alternative that may or may not become a basis to comprehend and rethink the dissolute

welfare state is not news for Grace. Caring has been part of her thinking framework, when the resources and funding were plentiful and when they were not.

The play between Grace's personal and social narratives have configured for her an activism that is envisioned in that of "community care", caring that originates in her personal narrative and lives out in the community. Caring is what she does and community is both where, but how she does it. Her configuration of caring does not have boundaries between public and personal responsibilities and although society may have discounted or ignored caring in the public or professional narrative discourse Grace has made her understanding of it, through her view of motherhood, the backbone of her activism:

Grace: I am more a mother. You know to me, just what wraps it for me is. I just do it because it feels right and I think I'm more a mother than I am an activist, maybe it's both really, like it's just, not a mother in the usual sense but like when Andrew Street had to grow on its own I knew that it was time for me to leave, it's not that I didn't miss it and all that but it's just like, you know, you go through your own growing pains and grow up, right? Maybe that's just from being a mother or something, I don't know. That's an important experience in all of it, because I think if you have kids you're not so damn self-centered anyway, you can't be and survive. Like I think if I wasn't a mother, for example, I probably wouldn't have gone to WEC. There's a good chance I wouldn't have. I would've been God knows where I would've been. I think it was partially having children, being a single mother, wanting better for the kids. Yes, I think that was a big part of it.

The values she brought to, and the experiences she derived from her mother and from being a mother were those same ones she transferred to her community activism. Grace has an understanding of the difference of what it may mean to "care for" and to "care about" (Noddings, 1988) and it is this notion that characterizes the shape her activism would take. The first thought is that there is a distinction between caring for and caring about. The meaning that Grace brings to this stems from being a mother, working with mothers, teaching children. She has learned that caring can be re-valued or devalued in, for example, when a mother in distress is subsequently viewed by, as she puts it " the



system". A mother who the system believes is failing "to care for" her child and decides to apprehend, to remove the child from whatever level " of caring about" there may be between that mother and that particular child. Grace views this as the fundamental failure of the system, the antithesis to her mother model that recognizes this important distinction and acts upon it. Grace will work at preventing another "failed mother" armed with the experience that leads her to believe that " women want or need to be good mothers".

Grace: Who doesn't want to be a better parent? A good mother? People don't need to be told that they have some pathology or something, they need the opportunity to sort of be involved when and where they need to be involved. They're feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood was another high priority and stuff. If there was a washer and dryer they might use it. People talked about running, I mean people's needs were just really basic like not being able to buy like Kotex napkins, like you know you just take things for granted, I do anyway. Not having transportation, just some basic sorts of stuff so we went and interviewed people in the community, now we invited them all to come, I let them know we were going to have this path finding session and we were going to plan for what we want in our neighbourhood, right? So I think we had about 60 community people come and we facilitated this pathfinding process which was really needed because there were about 60 people and I would say maybe a third, 20 people were like social service, public health, school principals, all those professionals kind of and they just couldn't relate to the path process. They didn't get it so the community people really took over in saying what it was that they wanted and really they started sort of taking ownership for it. I think it was the process that was the most important at Andrew Street was really talking to people, getting to know people, inviting them, like in between the pathfinding processes we also had like open houses that we would host and just have like doughnuts and coffee and people brought their kids and we talked about stuff that you wouldn't put on a survey, like, you know, if we had child care would you use it? Yes, but I want to have a window so I can see my kids, right, because I don't know that I trust anybody watching my kids. You know, so we got to talk about real stuff more with people. I think people just weren't doing things about stuff like this because we don't just ask, I think it's just

as simple as that, just like sitting down like a normal person, like you might, person to person, we would certainly ask somebody in our family, we would certainly ask others but for some reason we set up programs and just don't ask and once isn't enough, you have to ask lots of times, because I don't think, I think sometimes I'd listen with a certain set of ears you know so you have to ask and you have to listen and then you have to ask and you have to listen and then you start to get it, you know. You don't necessarily get it the first time you ask.

Grace's talk of "a certain set of ears" is an important aspect of her activist life. Not only listening with this certain set of ears but asking and listening until "you get it", until you know what is needed, why it is needed and how to make it work. One of Grace's ear sets, heard in a vignette above, has to do with her life in her world of being a mother. "Maternal thinking" as understood by theorists such as Sara Ruddick(1980) has had a critical influence on the shaping of Grace's activism. Being, or becoming, a good mother, a responsive, caring mother who cares for and cares about her children, demands adoptive change to behaviour, to circumstance, to crisis, to an ever increasing range of phenomena; often astonishing in the complexity while remaining as an integral aspect of normal everyday, life, or so it would seem. While mothers expect change, women such as Sara Ruddick explains that "change requires a kind of learning in which what one learns cannot be applied exactly, and often not even by analogy, to a new situation" (Ruddick, 1980, p.111). It is pointed out then that maternal thinking differs from most forms of scientific thinking that considers an experimental outcome to be real fact only if it can be reproduced again and again. This might explain why Grace is so reluctant at first to accept my expression of her as an activist; reluctant to be labeled and therefore "found out". Found out in such a manner where others expect her to know what to do because it worked the last time. Her activism is based upon community and community involvement and is intended to help families and women have better lives and therefore there is no last time criteria based upon some role definition but only the needs of those persons she is involved with for today.

Grace does not have an over-sentimentalized view of her motherhood model of activism based upon caring nor does she view caring as solely embedded in the lives of women based upon a limitless, selfless, uncomplaining, pattern of providing and giving.

Grace has understood that a romanticized view of caring disguises or conceals entirely the inhibition, costs and negative consequences that befall the women and families in the inner city. She knows that her ability to make things happen and get things done must undermine the romantic sense of caring which does not redistribute the responsibilities for caring but rather limits funding and therefore program opportunities that she views as important ones for inner city women and children: opportunities and skills to better their lives. This romanticized version of motherhood for Grace disguises a not so subtle form of oppression. What Grace has been able to do and to understand is the ability to integrate the notion of care for and care about into what she refers to as “a holistic way” to as she put it “to be productive in the way I think what it means to be productive”. She has been able to care about out of regard and extend the caring to care for into a sense of duty that is her activism. This stems in part from the time she spent in the classroom. Grace recalls: “the two and a half years I was teaching I was really frustrated. I could see that the kids needed so many things that they weren’t getting in the classroom or from me and I just couldn’t be there any more, I had to leave and get into the community to get anything done.”

Because of these strong convictions Grace does not believe that her activism would thrive in a larger system:

Grace: I think that the larger systems are you know, you could say, inherently racist and class biased and not flexible enough to respond to the needs of women and children in the community, and I don’t think the larger systems can reform themselves. Smaller organizations that are non profit and community based have a lot more power because we’re able to provide that service as people need it and how and when people need it.

Grace does not believe that she can care for and care about effectively outside of the community relationship. Grace speaks of community many ways throughout her life story, each time shedding light on the origin and motivation for her activism:

Grace: Well I think community for me is the inner city community, it’s not like I come from Winnipeg, it’s not like I come from Camperville or I come from a reserve

or something, so community to me is I think partially race, it could be partially I think inner city economic conditions, a certain class I guess, or certain struggles, I think. Like I think it's partially philosophical, people who see the world in a certain way or value certain things about people. And I guess community is mostly about people and about connecting people to one another and supporting this. It's about recognizing people's gifts and strengths and helping support that and to advocate for it. I think a lot of times it's, I could go on about this forever, but, I think a lot of people in the inner city just don't even know what opportunities exist for them. I know they're just unaware sometimes. There may be opportunities, oftentimes there isn't or they just don't see them, or they aren't aware of them or some people need to be convinced that these opportunities are theirs, belong to them. These opportunities need to be more accessible and not so rigid and inflexible. I think, sometimes when systems or programs that are set up to benefit a certain group of people for whatever reason don't seem to have the opportunity, by the time you set up the program oftentimes it excludes the very people that it was set up to be there for. Once all the rules come down and all the it just ends up looking and feeling like everything else the people have experienced. I think it's just being real and having relationships and getting to know people. And you know oftentimes we'll forgive people we work with or you know co-workers or other people that have jobs already. You know we can forgive somebody having a death in the family and not being able to come to work for three days but we can't seem to forgive a welfare recipient for skipping school for three days, you know like there's the rules for the one class when its convenient. So that's my community ethic. It's more of a feeling, it's more of a connectiveness, I guess that's it.

Community is well, I think just the feeling of belonging there or not belonging, like accepting the people for who they are. You know, and not by just looking at them. I don't look at people from the inner city and say, "Well, there's an inner city resident." There's a connectiveness that you feel that you've had similar life experiences and that for some reasons you've been blessed with other opportunities but I don't think I'm any better or any worse than anybody else from the inner city by and large. I mean there are people with more problems, maybe physical problems or, but that it's really, I guess it's just relating to their experiences and just

believing that really believing and knowing that they don't have the same opportunities and knowing if they had the same opportunities, not the same opportunities exactly of my life, but if they had opportunities to explore and develop their talents and gifts and skills which everybody has different. That's what makes a community, the variety of perceptions and skills of everyone and that if they had the opportunity to explore those or even learn what they might be and were supported and treated in a way that encouraged them along the way to, you know, follow those dreams or whatever, that that's what makes a community. It's just so, you know, amazing to me an example is like just creating an environment like Andrew Street and creating an environment of safety and acceptance and that's what we want for everybody, right? It's amazing the stuff that you learn about people and the strengths that they have and that people don't want to be hopeless and desperate and isolated, like they only have social service people relating to their family and that's there only contact with the world, right? They want to have relationships that are healthy, but sometimes, you know, they just need some help to find out what that looks like. But, I don't know, I think in that sense community could be anywhere, but for me I've really lived and worked in the inner city all my life, I guess it's really just home so I think I've gone to other neighbourhoods and other places where I've seen people with the same sort of philosophy and beliefs.

Grace's definition of community, her community is in part philosophical and in some part hard nosed realism. Grace speaks adamantly about how the relationship with the community must be reciprocal. She also works hard to develop ways and means so that individual community members are not separated from the relationships that form the way decisions are made and what decisions are made. When Grace decides to take on a community project, the first thing she will do is initiate a response from the community either through a questionnaire or something she called the "path". A strong characteristic of Grace's activism is her firm belief that people need to be actively involved in their own lives. The first form of involvement Grace employs is to ask people what they need or what they might choose to be involved in. Asking is something she does not see the system being either motivated or skilled at doing:

Grace: You know, you need to ask, you need to ask people what they need and to need to ask them lots of times, people in the North End, Inner City as its called now, don't always know what there is for them. People here seem to not want or need material things so much, or it seems that way anyway, but one thing for sure is that they want to be able to be good moms, good parents. Some time families don't always know how to get what they need or where to get it but you don't just tell them what they want or need or dump it on them, the system just doesn't get it you know. The first thing I did when I got to Andrew Street was to ask the community what they wanted. We did this questionnaire about what would you do or how would you volunteer or get involved in the Centre. The responses were great, people who would teach guitar, help with computers, cook, that sort of thing. We got back 470 of those questionnaires.

### Are You A Feminist Or Something Else?

Grace practices in her activism a form of resistance, resistance to what she refers to as "the system": be it the welfare system, the school system, a governmental agency or any other number of formally bureaucratized organizations. She does not apply this collective resistance to the understanding of community as a collective. Grace's resistance was established in the ways she built community structures or centres that were meant to provide the ways and means inner city women and children, families could have better lives and live to their potential as human beings. Her resistance did not take the form of breaking or chipping away at or in political terms referred to as "reforming", the established system but rather in the building of new ones that she understood would work. Audre Lorde writes of this kind of resistance when she said, "the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p.110). Grace became involved in developing her own set of tools to build the community centres she envisioned. Neither was Grace not about to have her work subsumed and co-opted by the dominant system that she was so mistrustful of. Not happy with the reproduction of system reform, Grace would build her own way to create the changes she saw as necessary. She began the building process with what appears to be a simple gesture but which has within the intricate complexity and thoughtfulness of her activism, she reaches for people in a way that both cares for and cares about people:

Grace: When I first got there I saw that the elevator was shut down between 12 and 1 o'clock so you couldn't get up to the offices upstairs. Another thing, you knew that Ma Ma Wi was in an office building on Broadway which was ridiculous, hard to get there anytime and with no bus fare, impossible. Who was this place for anyway? Another thing was this receptionist wall at the door, a desk at the front and a couple of chairs lined up. What was this? First thing was, the elevator was no longer shut down and we got a fridge put in for juice and stuff for the kids and that desk arrangement went too. It took awhile, you know, but we got back in the North End, we are now in five sites.

Grace's view of efficacy is at times as direct as this:

Grace: Yes, you know, someone came in from one of the offices and complained that the sun was too bright in the office for them to work and she wanted blinds or something. She couldn't figure out how to go about getting them, kept complaining, so at lunch I took her to Walmart or somewhere to get some dam blinds. People were not doing what they were to do, to help the families, kept hiding behind desks and stuff like those stupid blinds.

Grace's self efficacy is rooted in being able to do what needs to be done. Her resistance can not be seen as embedded in strictly feminist ideology either as the sole categorical emphasis or as a major one even though her primary concern has been women, children and families. Nor does Grace talk of a desire to empower women. At no time in our time together did she say "I want to empower people". Grace knows that you can not empower or liberate anyone but you can participate along with them as part of your own liberation. It is this participation that propels Grace's activism, from any notion of considering it as one dimensional altruism into the realm of political awareness. Grace's feminism has many elements of liberal feminism ideology, structural feminism and post modern feminism but there is no evidence that she adheres to any one ideology in the strictest sense. She lives out many of the ideas and tenets of each of the ideologies but none of them to the extreme and often in seemingly contradictory ways; contradictory to the ideology but not to her. Liberal feminism would

see Grace interested in fostering equality between men and women, but this aspect of equality is not her highest priority nor is the issue divorced from the recognition of the nature of power relationships; one that has strongly negative connotations for her which sees men as power brokers in families and within the "system". Structural feminists might see Grace understanding the incompetent, oppressive, power of the system but her emphasis would not be viewed as a primary involvement in overtly changing, reforming or being critical of systems. Her energy and commitment is channeled into creating new alternatives to the system; those of her own making. A post structuralism feminist might perceive her as interested in constructing meaning based upon a sense of herself as a non unified agent whereas Grace views herself as a women struggling for a holistic identity. In no sense is this an attempt to minimize the complexity of feminist theory through reductionism. The taxonomy of feminist ideologies today stretches past that of liberal, structural and post structural trilogy to include among others queer theory, cultural feminism, and eco-feminism.

Grace does not see herself as a bundle of fragments but as Grace; a women who recognizes the fluidity of life's choices but struggles none the less to "find the fit"; to work the pieces towards the construction of what she refers to as "a holistic human being". Her activism is what negotiates her agency: her way as she works at the creation of the "fit". Her view of a connected self does not appear to be linked to what I have seen in the literature as an attempt at the reconciliation to, or perhaps resonance with, a grand narrative such as the discourse on oppression or liberation. Grace has constructed her own grand narrative of possibility and confidence not by trying on or testing the elements of these grand narratives in a theoretical sense but developing her own narratives as lived experience. Grace does not name herself as a feminist. There could be a danger here of over-romanticizing Grace as the rugged individualist, unaffected by the circumstances of her social surroundings, developing her grand narrative in isolation free from all of the restraints of the post modern world. Grace reminded me often that "she has children and grandchildren to support, bills to pay and no answering machine at home". The realities of Grace's life and the effect of her mother seemed to contribute to Grace's avoidance of both romanticism or victimization:



Grace: I remember one other time I quit school, then I'd go back and really I only have a grade seven but anyway, I always read the newspaper, that was my time. But you couldn't touch the newspaper till my mother read the newspaper, so I was laying on the couch reading the newspaper, sitting there, all these volunteer opportunities sounded really interesting and my mom's in the bed, it was like a living room/dining room kind of arrangement and her bedroom was the dining room so I'm laying there. you know, reading and saying "oh I think I'll go volunteer at whatever it was", I can't remember the hospital or something and she said, "like hell you're volunteering, if you're not going to school you'll get yourself a God damn job." That snapped me back into reality, I was a rich kid for a second, I was going to volunteer.

Grace refers to "the fit", "a fit" or "it fits", several times throughout the telling of her lifestory. Each time she begins by relating to "the fit" signals that what will follow will be an explanation, a detailed incident, or commentary that adds to the developing understanding of how and why Grace became a community activist. It also contributed to her sense of efficacy, her own and that of the community of families she works with. The following is, in her own words, her motivation, at times serendipitous, for becoming involved with the planning and development of a large Aboriginal Family Centre:

Grace: The first time. I think the first time I went to the M. was because I had a good relationship with the director there at the time and that was Barbara, you remember. I think it was pretty exciting to be involved with a community based centre. You know I think lots of times I just kind of think I just kind of land on places. I don't think I give it a whole lot of thought. It's not like this is my career goal or something as planned as that. It's more like I have a good relationship with somebody, I kind of connect with them, what they're talking about doing sounds like it fits for me and I t would fit because I think at that time, like it's hard to sort of picture that now 20 years later, or whatever it was, 16 years later. At that time there really wasn't a lot of services for families, a lot of support for families, that were government sort of based programs, you know with little streams, getting financial services and parole services, or to get child welfare service and you're getting health services, you're getting education services. This was support to

families with kids who I think a lot of times once they were involved with systems as they existed in those days, they were labeled as unfit, usually because there was some problem. It was kind of problem focused and a reaction to a problem was that they didn't try to understand or deal with the family in a holistic sort of way, but as a problem. They didn't try developing and using peoples strengths, a strength based sort of way of working with families and recognize this might be a point in time or it may be an opportunity to help people or support people in a different way, or teach people. It was all about weaknesses. It was one separate problem, even the problem was separated from the families. So at that time really I think most of the systems were pretty reactive. So I saw this as a way of working with families in a way that fitted for me, fit for me, so that's why I was drawn to this place. It was using a developmental attitude and it was an opportunity to have some say in how it was developed and how it went.

Grace did not remain in the classroom for long: two and a half years is not an extended career yet, her brief encounter with teaching began to hone in and define the activism Grace began to practice. There would be no teaching career for Grace because she began to see that both the children and the school system were lacking. The children were lacking the things she thought they needed in order to do well in school and in turn Grace saw that the schools were unable or unwilling to provide the children what they needed to succeed. Grace also began to understand her self in a way that predicated her move from the classroom into the community. The self fulfilling prophecy of the culture of poverty drew Grace away from schools to the realities of the children's lives before they entered the classroom. Grace began to see that this is where she could be, "productive in the way I think productive should be".

Grace: I remember when I was teaching how frustrating it was sometimes, because you just saw part of the picture, like you were working with the kids and you were supporting the kids and teaching the kids and getting to know the kids and getting to know their situation, but there wasn't really a whole lot you could do to influence or support their family life. I remember feeling really frustrated about that, like I'd go and do home visits with the families and with the parents and you saw their situation,

their struggles and there really wasn't any place to call or any other help that you could get for the families, like I used to go and visit all the families. In those days, they used to have bursaries for I don't know if it was for Aboriginal kids or for kids who were living on a certain income level or whatever, they could get bursaries, to help them get some school clothes. I used to make a point to visit every parent's home and make sure it was filled out or help them fill it out and I really saw the struggles that the families were having and that kind of lack of support that the families often had and how you know the systems were only relating to them on sort of this little piece, like the little financial piece and so I guess that's why I wanted to do this. I saw it. I saw it where it lived you know. thought that you needed to work with the whole family and the whole community and so that fit for me more I guess than just some other job or even teaching.

Self efficacy is part of the construction of Grace's "fit". Self efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1986, 1993, 1995, 1997). Her "fit" and the efficacy that negotiates this originates in her early childhood and adolescent experiences.

The form that efficacy can develop that sheds light on Grace's identity as an activist is that of collective efficacy. The planning, implementation and sustainability of the family centres, safe houses, and transition centres in which she has become deeply involved and primarily responsible for have been constructed out of an ethos of collective efficacy. The work of social change is a difficult one involving opposition, often turbulent, from the power brokers; funders and person's of influence across many vested interests. Radical opposition is often met with punitive societal sanctions such as some form of subtle ostracizement such as having your funding severed or the more overt punishment of the judicial system or the threat of tear gas and truncheons. Social change is often couched in the language of despair and hopelessness. Indeed, the hopelessness may seem to spawn the social action. There are those who would disagree. In his detailed work on efficacy Bandura explains the significance of collective efficacy:

Consistent with efficacy theory, studies of social and political activism indicate that detrimental conditions do not instigate forceful action in those who have lost hope but

rather in the more able members whose efforts at social and economic betterment have met with at least some success. Consequently they have reason to believe that some changes can be brought about through forceful group action (Bandura, 1986, p. 106).

Grace's sense of personal and collective efficacy could be perceived as evidence to Bandura's theoretical thinking of people like Grace who view their ability to negotiate a version of social activism as part of their everyday reality. Grace does not speak a language of impossibility and hopelessness but one of productivity, positive action and making things happen. Continuing on this vein, several studies that Bandura refers to view those persons who participate in social activism generally have a higher form of education, have a greater sense of self worth, have a stronger belief in their ability (efficacy) to influence events in their lives and will develop subversive or alternative measures to improve their living conditions and that of others in their community. The issue of formal education brings to bear the question of whether the experience of being a student at the Winnipeg Education Centre initiated or was in some other ways responsible for initiating Grace's activism. Grace has a healthy view of her self worth but speaks in terms of "not being any better than anyone else" and that education "can help people see what they need and how they can get it".

The development of the ways and means to influence events is an intriguing aspect of understanding Grace's identity as an activist. Grace has developed and tested strategies that are conducive to building and shaping a positive life for herself and the families in her community of the North End of Winnipeg. With much humour devoid of self consciousness, Grace remembers one of her first "you have to find ways to do things" encounters. At first, it may seem a childish prank, but nevertheless holds the seeds of action forthcoming:

Grace: I remember that there were times things would be really tense in the house and stuff. Like I don't think that nobody told me as a little kid that we didn't have money or I'm not sure what the tension really was whether the tension was between my grandmother and my grandpa, you know, my mother, nobody really explained it to me but as a kid I was pretty sensitive and I remember feeling that and so I think

about the good side of that. My uncle and my granny and grandpa used to bootleg as well and so I guess that was a way of making extra money and stuff for the house, so, I learned to be entertaining, sort of I think to break the tension because I couldn't stand the way you'd feel it. I realize that my brother and sister were just different than me, you know, like they just seemed to not be like me. I guess they just had their own way of dealing with the tension or dealing with stuff that was there or they just seemed oblivious to it, you know, like I'd be like saying to them, like, do you see what's going on? Like for example, later on, I'll jump around here but one time my mother went and got her tonsils out and I must've been about 12 years old and she was living common-law with a man, actually she married, him but they lived common-law for like 18 years and then got married and then split up after a year. Anyway, he was a pretty decent guy to us and stuff but this but anyways one time when my mother was in the hospital and she had left her welfare cheque and he was supposed to buy groceries and stuff for the house and my mom had, because she grew up in the inner-city of Winnipeg, a lot of friends that she grew up with, that oftentimes, I guess for lack of a better way of saying it and I hate these kind of labels but they were like rubbies, like they were street, I guess. So from time to time she'd let them live in our basement like in the extreme winter and stuff like that and the rule they could never come upstairs into the house where us kids were. Like they could stay downstairs and she'd give them food and stuff and they'd have their beds down there and stuff somewhere along that line, and then of course we were told we could never go downstairs and of course once she went to work I'd go downstairs to see what they were doing, what's going on down here, and my brother just never did, you know it just didn't seem to affect them like I don't know, I was just dying to know, I was waiting for her to go to work. We won't go downstairs mom, we won't go downstairs, yes, as soon as she was gone I was down the basement, you know, and these guys were marvelous. They did magic tricks and they showed me how to mix rubbing alcohol, like they made like a magic trick you mix it with water and then mix it up in this clear jug and then mix it with a spoon until it clears, like it's all milky and then it all clears and stuff and it was just like amazing. They even made me a little voodoo doll and stuff. These guys are really interesting but I was not allowed to go down there I know but you know. Anyway this one time mother went and got her

tonsils out. I've always had this, and I don't know how to explain it but to this day I have this sort of sense of something's not right and it'll just bug me from the inside out and then I have to kind of walk around and sort of try and figure out physically what it is that's bothering me internally, and so anyways I come downstairs and my stepfather, my mom's husband is not there, you know, where's Donny? But everyone is in there watching T.V. like oblivious to it all. Well you know he had mom's cheque he was supposed to get groceries. There's no groceries so I'm thinking, like what's up. So I go and look around, right, go downstairs to where these guys are living in the basement, and there's I think three guys and one woman, and you know I go downstairs. All the guys are there but the woman's not there, so what's up, right. So I'm walking around and I sort of got this feeling, there's something up here, I just don't feel right about this and go upstairs, go to the back and they're there in Donny's car, so I go back in the house. Well you know where he is, he's out in the back in the car and what are you guys going to do about it? Yes, well they're not really sure what they should do about it. I'll show you what to do about it so I went and got one of those big family size 7-up bottles, they used to be glass at that time. I smashed the window, pulled him out of the car, got my mom's money, what was left of it, that was the other thing those guys were drinking whiskey downstairs. Well where in the hell did they get money to get whiskey.

Putting the clues together, there's something wrong here and so I got whatever money was left and then sent the two of them packing so then a couple days later my mother gets out of the hospital and she's at my granny and grandpa's because my granny and grandpa were not with us then. We didn't live together after I was about 10 I think and it was just my mom and Donny and us kids and so of course they made me come down there and tell me what all had happened and here I was the youngest kid and still had to spell it all out for them.

Let's see what else. So those were sort of my teen years. I remember I'd always been kind of a loner, you know, like I'd just kind of always do my own thing whatever it feels like, that's the right thing to do. Sometimes it doesn't turn out to be the right thing to do but often it does, when you think about it.

Grace has tried several times to work within as she speaks of it "the system". Grace did so in an attempt to affect the change she saw as necessary for the positive lives she envisions but this has failed for her as a strategy because Grace found the system incapable of reforming itself and nor did she think she would relinquish control of her capability and level of understanding to the vagaries of bureaucracies and technocrats. This awareness continued to develop as did her skills and the analysis that propelled it. Grace was not interested in fictionalizing the community(ies) in the inner city for the purpose of resisting or fighting the "system". What Grace was interested in was working in the community with the community being the unifying force. Grace was not much interested in lobbying, complaining and subverting bureaucratic policy but rather her concern was in the construction and sustaining of her idea of family centres and women's transition centres as positive alternatives to the systems; the welfare system being the major impasse. The challenge to unify a community towards effective, positive action takes more subtle skills than it does to hive off a group to dissent. This attitude of dissent may be dramatic, and fashionable attire for international summits, but not useful for the activism Grace practices. The collective efficacy developed in this instance is often not highly visual, not patrolled by the media, takes much time before results are seen and when they do happen are often a seamless part of everyday activity. The activity in this form of collective efficacy is perhaps not very loud but is very long. It takes a person with a very clear determined purpose to recognize this and to continue to find ways to keep the level of collective efficacy high and functioning, low to the ground, in a way that propels the activism and does not stifle or undermine it. The skill that Grace has developed revolves around her ability to sustain the interest of the community by maintaining and sustaining a high level of collective efficacy through cogent means of relating fictional interests to the shared purposes of the community. She has also learned that planning and building a family centre has one set of stipulations and to sustain it has another. She perpetuates the sustainability by sharing, sponsoring, sometimes creating contiguous successes; small victories for everyday along the Path she has created with the community. She also develops a shared irreverence among the staff that levels the playing field at times when "the system" seem insurmountable. The "beg for forgiveness model" is one powerful example.

## A Good Fit

A significant aspect of Grace's activism is her ability to maintain the high profile that her work demands while at the same time remaining steadfast in her conviction of what this work is meant to accomplish: no one will say of Grace that "this is about her and not the families in the inner city." This phrase appears often when you listen to those who work in the inner city. It is a way, that inner city residents communicate that they suspect a particular individual and their motivation may be less than sincere. When the motivation is not solely about personal aggrandizement but rather about the families, the women, the children then the commitment is considered to genuine and therefore meaningful and the resulting plan of action is more easily trusted and will be perceived to work. This is an important aspect of Grace's activism: to keep it real, to keep it authentic. Part of this reality is the attitude she portrayed upon winning an outreach award: "It was really affirming, but there is a lot of people behind me. I represent all that work, but I'm not the one that's done it all". Grace has found work, a way to support herself and her family but also a way to live this work life that fits her sense of who she is as a whole person (Grace uses this term incessantly). Her activism has been the glue that has held this fit together.

A prime example of this sense of Grace fit of self to activism is in her ability to get things done. This is finely honed in the "beg for forgiveness" model which has been the mainstay of her activism:

Grace: Well you know, I and others, we have this beg for forgiveness model. I teach this as strategy to my staff, we use it all the time and it's part of how I think about being productive, getting things done, listening to people, finding what their basic needs are. How it works, is simple really. It is not only a way to get things done but to get it done, you know, when it's needed, not six months later after you've written a proposal, fought with the system and then maybe you get what you need or are told it can't be done. So I find ways to do what I need to do what is needed and then later say to those who I needed to ask or get permission from, something like " sorry I didn't know I had to do that or couldn't do that". Like sending a mom and her two kids to the Holiday Inn for a couple of



days because they need it for whatever reason, need it now. I find some way to get the money and they go. Then I beg for forgiveness.

This is the "positive attitude" characteristic that is often applied to Grace and those who do the kind of work she does. For Grace having a positive attitude reaches well past the superficiality of "I am successful because I have a positive attitude" to one of a positive nature meaning that success comes not only from my positive attitude but how we make this attitude positive together. The beg for forgiveness model is a strategy she has developed that supports this. It has some variation but more or less develops in the same manner. When she sees that something needs to be done, for example, that a small group of women from The Native Women's Transition Centre appear to her and the staff in need of respite from the complexity of their lives for whatever reasons, abuse, fatigue or depletion, and they need it now, not two months from now, or after a fiscal review, or after seeking permission from who so ever, she will set about to do it and then explain or defend her actions to whatever jurisdiction she need be accountable to. This occurs after the fact, after the women have been to the Holiday Inn with their kids and the waterslide and a few days of renewal. The "get the thing done" for Grace has a very significant dimension added to it. "Get the thing done" becomes "get the thing done when it is needed". I see that when needed is added to getting things done Grace's work transcends caring for and caring about into the work of activism. The beg for forgiveness model is a skill she has developed to actualize this behaviour in herself and others. It has become a strategy that she teaches her staff and community people. It has become a shared code language that you may hear when you talk to those women who work low to the ground in the inner city as Grace does.

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I ?*  
Rabbi Hillel (Loeb, 1999, p.1).

Grace, at one point, in her work history, worked for the provincial government as a policy analyst for The Ministry of Child and Family Services. She explained that it was not a success on any count:

Grace: I was working with the province and I absolutely hated it, I don't do systems very good, you know. I just felt, I didn't really feel like I was very productive or that my understanding of what productive is was happening so I really felt that I was a Minister servant not a civil servant, that I was there to just be a political bit of a token and a bit of a political hack, you know, someone to smooth things over so it wouldn't blow up in the paper kind of thing. I was a token, Aboriginal woman, yes and one Aboriginal person in that system, and really you weren't allowed to make any decisions or you weren't really allowed to affect any decisions or influence decisions. They just wanted you to go there and deliver their decisions which you knew or maybe you didn't necessarily believe that they were the right ones.

Grace explained that one of the reasons for attempting a stint with the government was because she was concerned about the lack of pension and general security afforded her by the way she had been making a living. The need for a pension and benefits was replaced within two years by her need to return to the inner city community:

Grace: So I was looking to get out, you know and I needed to be employed, so I was looking to get out when I heard about the Andrew Street neighbourhood initiative, they had some developmental money to sort of look at exploring some kind of resource in that neighbourhood, so I took it. It was a five month contract and I thought, "all right, I'm out because now at least I could understand what I'm doing, and at least you felt that you had some purpose in life. The first day on the job there, there was I think sixteen or something committee organizations all represented, you know, the school and health and they were all there and everybody had an idea of what it should look like and I thought, well you know it really sounded like the same kind of stuff to me, so you know my head was spinning a bit and so I talked with some community people. We had somebody do a community survey, so we hired a university student, you know and some community people, sent out applications with the kids from school and we hired eight community people, we paid them like 8 or 10 bucks an hour, or something, to do the surveys with their neighbours. We broke the neighbourhood up in areas and we had them just go talk to their neighbours and then invite them to participate. We had a list of questions, like, if there were a resource

would you use it. I did a little bit of review on this. Andrew Street to me was more of what not to do in an organization and I don't really think I had a clear idea of what to do rather than what not to do in terms of setting up a neighbourhood organization. Like don't have the reception area when you walk in the building, don't have the receptionist there to cut you off from the rest of the building. The receptionist can be there, you can have intake or reception in all kinds of ways, not as a barrier. This had to be voluntary, people had to be interested. You had to meet people's needs where they were at, if people just needed to use the phone. A lot of people, like welfare system doesn't allow you to have a phone. It's called a luxury, you know and here you've got all these families with little kids in the neighbourhood with no telephones. So here people could use the phone, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with them, they didn't need a service, or need to be counseled, they didn't need to have someone dial the phone, right? They needed to have a phone. So just need that to be available, so it was more about what, what you didn't want to recreate I think. So then we had neighbourhood people go out and talk to their neighbours about if there were a resource centre, you know. we did a little brainstorming about what kinds of things might be needed, like I noticed there's no laundromat in the neighbourhood, like would the people use one if we had it? Everybody's got dirty laundry, let's face it, right? We had something more of a philosophy I think came out of these sort of discussions, what are the concerns about living in the neighbourhood? If you had a problem where would you go? Who would you talk to first? If there were workshops available, if there were child care available would you use it? What might you use it for? If there were some programs what might you want to have in the community? Like everybody was astounding, not astounding but people want to have better relationships with their spouses. That was like at the top of the list, that and parenting. They want to be better parents. They're feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood was another high priority and stuff. If there was a washer and dryer they might use it. People's needs are just really basic came, you know and people not things for granted, I did anyway. Not having transportation, just some basic sorts of stuff so we went and interviewed people in the community, now we invited them all to come and let them know we were going to have this path finding session and we were going to plan for what we want in our neighbourhood, right? So I think we had about

60 community people come and we facilitated the process which was really needed because there were about 60 people and I would say maybe a third, 20 people were like social service, public health, school principals, all those professionals kinds. They just couldn't relate to the path process and so the community people really took over in saying what it was that they wanted and really they started sort of taking ownership for it. I think it was the process that was the most important at Andrew Street, it was really talking to people, getting to know people, inviting them, like in between the pathfinding and the actual development, we also had like open houses that we would host and just have like doughnuts and coffee and people brought their kids and we talked about stuff that you wouldn't put on a survey, like, you know, if we had child care would you use it? Yes, but I want to have a window so I can see my kids, right, because I don't know that I trust anybody watching my kids. You know, yes, so we got to talk about stuff more with people. I think people just weren't going to know about things if we don't just ask, It is so important, to ask, to ask again. I think it's just as simple as that, just like sitting down like a normal person, like you might, we would certainly ask somebody in our family, we would certainly ask others but for some reason we set up programs and just don't ask and you have to ask lots of times, because, I think sometimes I'd listen with a certain set of ears you know, so you have to ask and you have to listen and then you have to ask and you have to listen and then you start to get it, you know. You don't necessarily get it the first time you ask or even listen with the same ears.

One of the most interesting things was we did I think it was the 720 surveys, it might be 740 families we interviewed in the neighbourhood, and we got something like 450 people to sign up to volunteer. I think it was just because nobody ever asked them before, like if we had a centre and you know what kind of things do you think you know would you like to come volunteer. What kind of things do you think you'd come and help with? Or did you want to come and help, or whatever. I mean everything from people who could play guitar to computers, come and help teach computers or all kinds of and it was just amazing, like the range of skills in the community. If you look at it in that sort of way as kind of a skills inventory rather than whether just the needs assessment, it was sort of a balanced, holistic approach. So I think that people responded probably because it's the first time anybody asked

them what do or could you do to help the situation. So that's really how it came to be, we just had community people and we just listened to them and we did the best we could with the resources we had. Like we only had I think after the \$60,000 ran out which ran out pretty quick because you know we were hiring people and stuff. Then we got like \$150,000 or something but we had this whole marvelous plan that the community people had fed into about what they wanted in their neighbourhood and so then it was like a management plan or strategic plan about what we needed and so then we just went after it and it was amazing how in a very short time we had like a million bucks for the inner city and we hired community people and we supported, like all of us that originally signed on, the original staff, Jane, myself, Clare, we all signed up with the understanding that we would be gone in like one or two years but we were to train a community person to take our job, that we weren't there for the long haul, we were there to set it up, support people, help people get training and supervision or support or whatever they needed to take those jobs away and that's what we did. But then in two and a half years I was gone. That's it.

Grace thinks about her relationship with the government people, the programmers, the teachers, agency personnel: those people who migrate from across the bridge. Her activism requires her to know if or when they ever "get it right" or if can they know what people need, can they ever get it right, or is it by the very nature of the way it's done, impossible? Can they be directed in the right direction?:

Grace: It's a little bit of both, like I guess if I'd work in government for a hundred years and then if I came down to the inner city and asked people I would be listening with a certain set of ears, you know. Even if I had a suit on or I didn't have a suit on. I think that's what I think, you know, because like even when I was talking to families first of all, I sort of got it, the inner city, I grew up in it, I know all those back lanes and now I know that I get it. But I lived in the inner city, don't forget, for a long time, I've learned how to listen. I think it's the process that's important. I think I would talk to people, I would listen. I think I'm the type of person who can say, "Now if you think that's bullshit what I'm saying then you need to tell me this." Like I think I can relate to people in a way that lets them know that really when I say that,

you're not going to hurt my feelings if you say, "No Grace that's not what I'm saying we need here, this is what I'm saying." Like it an investment in making sure it's whatever we set up or whatever is right for the people using it, not for me, you know, it's not to meet my needs. I can get a job waiting tables. It's not about me. it's not about me, yet I tell you I need to get paid for this, I know that, but, yes, it's not about me getting, "Oh, look at me, I did this or something." Like it's about just getting really immersed in it and getting to know the people and understanding and checking and being productive in the way I think productive means. This is how it's about me then not that other way.

Being productive is a lot of things but when I was at school teaching with the kids, I was there, like I was there 100%. I'm here to do whatever it takes to get connected to the kids, you know what I mean. That sort of comes from teaching though, it comes from teaching but when I mean to show them a different way, like I'm there. I'm not here to socialize with the teachers and which happens but is pretty stupid but you know really I'm not here to need anybody's approval, I'm here to meet the kids approval, I'm here for the kids, that's why I'm here.

So when I was at Andrew Street I'm there for the community and it was amazing like, I guess, like one year after we did pathfinding, which was a really amazing thing for the professionals in the community because they didn't really have the lead and their voices were kind of lowered and the community voices were really louder and a year later we had pizza and soft drinks and we put the plaque on the wall and we started checking off everything that we'd accomplished. You could just see it. I was amazed at the community because I didn't really think that even though I saw it and I had it my mind, I had it, you know, the vision there, this is where we're getting to and these are all the parts. But I don't really think I thought about it hard until literally we all sat in a room and we put it on the wall and it was amazing. Like the sense wow, we really pulled this off. I think there's a little bit of, maybe it's because I was raised in the sixties, hippy stuff in this. I have a little bit of a value base that says, we don't need a big fancy building, we don't big fancy stuff, we need stuff that provides opportunities for people to get to know each other and for people to grow and be together and to learn so we don't disappear. Very little money at Andrew Street goes into administration like with big salaries or whatever, it goes into the

community. Like this year their budget was I think they're at \$1.3 and it kind stabilized at 1.2 kind of so I mean that's \$1.2 million that people in the community have really decided how they want to use it. They really got that money, you know. Like they really took ownership of it, they were the best PR, they were talking to people on the street "well come on over to Andrew Street". They got people to come there. Actually it had been a Winnipeg Child and Family Services site at one point and so a lot of people wouldn't go in the building because they thought they were still there. So they really just felt so good about what they'd accomplished. Like it was amazing. That's my kind of productive. Okay?

### Naming Mother, Naming Feminist, Naming Activist, Naming Grace

Grace has, in the telling of her story, given herself shape, a fit. Bakhtin writes of this shape as emerging " I give myself shape, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong"(Holquist, 1984, p. 214). The significance and character of Grace's activism is recognized in the shape that the convergence of the themes creates as her lifestory is constructed. There is much to learn about Grace's activism from the care she can give to the children and families in the inner city community, the outrage she expresses at times because the community is not heard from and does not have its basic needs attended to, and when the dignity and resourcefulness of the people who live in the inner city is ignored or misrecognized. From Grace's activism we can learn how she has dared to understand and use what limited power she may have. I began Grace's chapter with a quote from Nellie McClung extolling the virtue of outrage and resistance. Grace like Nellie McClung views activism as life and has found a way within her activism to propel her work past, as described in the writing of the activist and journalist Serge Schmemann, as those known moments when doubts and differences are suspended and people come together in a single minded quest which propel us to the harsh aftermath, when the hangover of the heady days is felt. Her activism in an integrated part of her everyday life, not fragmented as isolated moments of great triumph and great defeat. At the same time Grace has strategies for carrying elements of success and failure as part of her activism, living each day as she finds it.

Grace speaks of her life as a student at the Winnipeg Education Centre but without the intensity of Gerie or the interest of Katie. The themes of efficacy, community and caring are rooted well and deep in Grace's story but the strongest impact on her activism is her motherhood.



## Chapter Eight

### Katie's Story

#### Connections

In 'Wearing Our Own Skin', Katie tells her story. Her story develops around several themes. The theme of self efficacy appears almost immediately and develops around a series of, and a sense of connections: to herself as a woman, to her Anishinaabe culture and to herself as an educator. Throughout her telling, a version of caring and self efficacy is woven, couched in her role as an Anishinaabe woman educator; still reluctant to name herself a feminist. There are moments in her telling where compelling insights are glimpsed such as her insight in how creativity has sustained and nurtured her activism. There is the insight forming a significant aspect of Katie's story that tells of the startling implications of adolescent cultural, racial recognition and misrecognition. It forms the hallmark of her activism as she matured into adulthood. As with Grace and Gerie, community is an important and integral condition of Katie's activism.

*"My work is to inhabit the silences with which I have lived and fill them with myself until they have the sounds of the brightest day and the loudest thunder."*

*(Lorde, 1980, p. 46).*

*"Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. If you're lost, you really start to look around and listen."*

*(Metzger, 1986, p.104)*

Katie and I met for our first time together late one afternoon in early summer. After some catching up on what had been happening of late to both of us, we set to work. As with the other participants I reviewed the purpose of the study, why I thought she was a good choice for the study and how I thought our research relationship would develop. Katie had

one or two questions that related to her interest in the methodology, after which she signed the consent form. A summer storm was stirring.

From the onset Katie's story developed as one of connections. It is a predominate theme of her lifestory; one that marks the pauses and unfastens her experience and insights from wherever she has them moored. Each time she used the word "connection", it released these experiences that, for her, are now memory. These experiences took us somewhere: to link an event, to frame a thought, to summon a reminiscence, to construct an experience. The significance of Katie's "connections" became quite clear and began immediately after I asked Katie the question that frames the lifestory: "tell me your story, tell me about your life". Unlike Gerie who began her story as she entered WEC, Katie began her story chronologically: naming herself emphatically, and then situating her life with "I was born and raised". Although she began her story with the chronological format, she very quickly removed herself from it and let it go. Her lifestory became the connections she wove in and around her, which created a series of circles looping in and about one another. The first of the loop connections was constructed immediately after she named herself and then immediately spoke of the legacy she received from her parents. Her understanding of the importance of maintaining the connections to family, community and the Saulteaux language is an attitude that loops throughout her lifestory, taking on various shapes in differing contexts yet remaining as the all encompassing theme: that of searching for and trying to form wider and more intricate connected loops and how they eventually linked one to another. Katie's genealogy began to develop early in the construction of her lifestory and here in part is the first of the connections:

Katie: Okay. Well my name is Katie and I guess I'll first start where I was born and raised. I was born and raised in Winnipeg, and interestingly enough too is that I was born and raised in Winnipeg but my life has been that of living in the inner city and so that's all I've known in terms of living on a daily basis. But what I'll do is I'll first start off with where I go back and tell a bit about how my parents landed in the city and why I was raised in the inner city.

My parents, in the late fifties, moved to Winnipeg as part of assimilating. My father had heard about employment opportunities in the city and there wasn't as

much economic development back home other than living off the land and so my father moved here with three children and my mother and lived in a small house on Alexander on the second story of a house across from Dufferin School.

The family grew. I was sixth of nine and I happened to be the youngest daughter which I find is somewhat significant in terms of my culture because normally in my culture my older sisters and my mother and aunties would have taught me a lot of the traditional ways. We weren't a "traditional" family in the sense of attending ceremonies and that but my parents maintained a lot of the cultural ways in terms of medicine and having respect for the land and for the people and so in that sense that's what I call traditional and they did have a way of life even though my mother says we don't have a culture.

Anyhow, I was, in growing up I was very much nurtured by my father even though he worked full time. He worked for the city driving big garbage trucks, my father was also a leader in the church and so we grew up seeing my father working very closely with the community and working very closely in a sort of organized, if you want to call it organized, religion and so in that sense that's what we grew up and that's what we saw, but interestingly enough too, is that my parents really stressed the importance of community and so growing up even though we lived in the inner city we would take weekend treks out to home and we'd go and visit my grandfather and we'd go and spend time with him and we'd visit family and just spend time in the community and that's what I grew up seeing, and even though we were a large family, it didn't matter, my father still took us in a pick-up truck and we all piled in the back and my mom and dad and whoever was the youngest at the time would sit in the front and the rest of us just sat in the back and just drove for 3 1/2 to 4 hours back home on weekends. So that's what I grew up seeing and when I look at that now as a woman and as a mother, what my parents, what I interpreted that was my parents were teaching us the importance of family and the importance of community and to maintain those connections with the community and with the family wherever they maybe. And in this case it was not in the city because there was very few at that time, very few Aboriginal families living in the City of Winnipeg and so going back home was keeping the connection. So I see that now as valuable and really grateful that my parents taught us that. That's how my father and my mother landed up here in the

city which was to in their words, in my father's words, to have a better way of life for his family where he could provide for them on a more stable basis. I was fortunate too, there was no alcohol in my family and all what goes with that. I am fortunate, not all my peers have been. I am grateful for that.

So, I then attended schools, obviously in the inner city and before I would go into that I should mention this is that one of the other pieces that my parents maintained with us was the language. My first language is Ojibway which we also call Sauteaux, my parents will say Sauteaux but we also say Ojibway and my parents at home always spoke the language to us and we answered and we talked back in the language, but what was interesting once we entered school the younger ones would speak the language, but as soon as we entered school my parents insisted that we learn English and that we speak only English back to them and so as we entered school we would talk English and so in that sense for me my language, even though I understand it fluently. I can read it and write the language and speak only semi-fluently. That's one of the things that I really feel bad about because of the fact that I've lost the fluency of my language but I'm glad that I can understand and I'm really grateful I can understand the elders, understand my parents. My parents still, amazing to this day, they still talk to me in their language and I answer back in English so this is just something that we learned. So the language was stressed upon in this way and was, I see now, as really important.

Working towards interpreting Katie's lifestory had me listening in circles. Having learned from the Inuit storyteller, and informed by the theory of the interpretive hermeneutic circle, I saw reason to listen patiently, avoid the impulse to intervene and prompt, until the telling looped around again to bring with it the meaning to be gleaned. The writing of the interpretation of Katie's story as with the listening became the way I heard and then actually began to see a sequence to her life. This sometimes awkward stumbling about, in turn, began to establish a cause and effect in her life. The small connections began to take on the recognizable shape of Katie.

#### An Anishinaabe Woman: Connected Knowing

This study has acknowledged on many levels that it is responsive to a heightened gender awareness meaning that women and women's issues are deliberately prevalent throughout this inquiry. It is this awareness and the developing theme of "connecting" that lead to a revisit to the work of Mary Belenkey et al and Carol Gilligan. Belenkey et al(1986) talk of women in relation to what the authors refer to as "connected knowing" as opposed to "separate knowing". Referring to the impoverished relations of separate knowing that is equated with a public language used in public performances for an audience of strangers, Belenkey et al,(1986) understand that the purpose of the public performance is to manipulate the listener's responses, see them not as allies but as potentially hostile judges. Carol Gilligan adds to this notion by telling us: "we can recognize the voice of separate knowing because it conforms to expectations of what external authority sounds like, and this is frequently what masculine authority sounds like" (Gilligan, in Witherell, 1991, p. 54). Belenkey et al, (1986) discovered that "connected knowing" is a less codified procedure in which knowledge about truth emerges through care, mutuality and reciprocity. Neither Belenkey et al, (1986) or Gilligan (1982) understand connected knowing to be exclusively feminine but that their data has lead them to look at connected knowing, based upon the observation that more men than women move towards separate knowing and more women than men tend to move towards connected knowing. The voice of connected knowing (Gilligan, 1986) seeks to create continuity between the private language of self reflection and the formal design of public speak. Connected speak happens when you train the ear to listen for particular clues or tags such as references to the self, a semantics and vocabulary of feeling, a recognition of temporal flux and change, and often, a sense of internal dialogue being brought out into the open. Katie spoke in terms of a connected self, one who is essentially in relationship, connected to others. I did not hear her voice in terms of separateness but rather her voice characterized the experience of being in relation as a response to others.

The exploration of Katie's use of the term or word "connection" immediately transcended the representational aspect of the word and became the epistemological focal point for the construction of her lifestory or as she referred to on several occasions "her journey". Katie spoke of a "crossing point", spoken as the legacy from her parents. Her use of the term " crossing point" was one of the semantic tags that alerted

me that Katie was about to tell of an important insight or transition to her life story. The tag became the "crossing point" and signified its importance:

Katie: So the one piece that I always say is the crossing point for me of how I felt about my upbringing and what my parents taught us, because my parents they taught us that you are Anishinaabe which means Ojibway people in our language. My father said that must always be proud of who you are, not proud in a sense where you have ego and you think you're better than anyone else, but he meant proud in terms of being confident and he said, you always be proud of who you are and you never let anybody tell you any differently. He said, you were born Anishinaabe and you'll die Anishinaabe and he said you always remember who you are, so I grew up hearing that constantly from my father and him instilling that pride in us. So my turning point and I should talk a little bit about the home situation, is that my parents didn't drink so we had a relatively peaceful home and that when I talk to some of my other colleagues and peers is that that's one of the things that I didn't have to experience is alcohol and drugs in that sense. So I didn't experience that growing up. Home was semi-peaceful, you can imagine with nine other siblings.

The theme of self efficacy appears as it did for Gerie and for Grace. In Katie's lifestory her self efficacy is rooted in the Aboriginal culture and her emerging identity as an Anishinaabe women. She grew to adulthood in a stable, loving home where she was encouraged to be proud of who she was becoming. Her sense of efficacy was based upon being connected to her family and to her extended community family in the Inner City of Winnipeg and her home reserve. Katie was not aware of any ruptures in the connected loops of her life until they were given a jolt during grade six during which she experienced an all too familiar event: that being the racial "put down" of her teacher who referred to "barbaric Indians":

Katie: As I said, home was semi-peaceful, you can imagine nine other siblings it could be quite a busy place, so I didn't have that experience but one of the things I remember, I'll go back to my grade six experience I always call it, I remember sitting in the classroom and I remember the teacher explaining to us and telling us

that we were going to be studying this unit about Indians of North America. I got all excited, I thought, "Oh great" you know, she's going to be talking about our people, the people here in Manitoba. I thought, this is great, my ears just perked up because it would've been the first time that I had heard this being explored in school so then she began her intro and she began talking about how the explorers came to Canada and discovered the land and so I was listening attentively and then she said: "and then when they came to this land they came upon these savage and barbaric people", and I remember sitting there and I thought, I'm really curious. I was listening and she said, " these savage and barbaric people who we call now the Indians". I sat there and I was really puzzled, I could feel my ears, and sometimes when I tell this story, depending on the intensity and what I'm talking about I can feel my ears burning because I go back to that place in the classroom and I could feel my ears burning, I could feel my heart pounding and I thought, she's talking about me and she's talking about my family and my grandparents, my ancestors and I sat there puzzled, because I thought, this is not what I had heard and what I experienced in my growing up years. And so, part of that as well too is my parents had taught us never to talk back to teachers or to challenge them, and so I sat there and I remember feeling really humiliated because I looked around the room and there was no other Aboriginal person, of course, in the classroom and I didn't question, I sat there and I just let her continually talk about "Indians" in this way. And not talking about like the contributions, the history, other than that of which was portrayed in the textbook that we were learning from and probably from part of her own understanding. So you can imagine I was gravely disappointed, hurt, and that experience really had an impact on me because I remember going home and I was thinking, "You know some day what I want to do is to change and to help change that attitude that teachers" because teachers have a lot of influence and what you say and do can really impact a student. And in this case it really did have a long standing effect on me because it was then that I decided that I want to help change this attitude in my future work and so I left it be, and interestingly enough in that school there was only one student that actually made fun and mimicked after that lesson but everyone else was sort of like passé and he would do war chants and that and I just basically ignored him. So anyhow

that was my what I call for me is my dramatic experience in school that really influenced what I wanted to do in the future.

The curriculum example is not an uncommon experience lived through by Aboriginal children in schools. Katie's self efficacy connections were shook but not severed because of the support afforded by her parents legacy. Upon reflection, Katie knew at the age of 12, that this incident that marked her connections, also threatened them. She knew this to be crucial, not only to her but all Aboriginal children. Katie did not act upon her 12 year old decision until many years later, but eventually her resolve to change what she saw as an untenable situation, placed her on a path towards activism and this awareness may have been a first step.

The theme of culture in relation to community is emerging as one of the significant connections in her lifestory. She refers to " my culture" often and in differing ways in various shades and nuances but always in ways that tell of being connected to something: being connected but also recognized as being connected:

Katie: I wanted to talk about my high school. I missed something here too in terms of my high school. When I was in grade eleven I met this one gal and we were so happy to see each other in school, in high school 'cause when I was going to Tech Voc it was quite a mixture of people. It was quite a diverse population again but there was a small group of us and I think this is really significant in terms of high school. I had met this one gal and she was talking about this resurgence of people going back to the land and going back to the ceremonies and the reason for it. I wasn't sure what she was talking about and she was talking about Stoney, Alberta and how all these people were going back and listening to the teachings and learning about the old ways and participating in circles and it was all so new to me, and so she said at that time, she said, "Let's get some kids together here at the high school. I notice there's quite a few kids, looking around the hallways, let's get them together and let's see if they're interested in learning some of these things and get some people and look at videos" and I said, "Sure". So we formed this club in grade eleven and we went for two years until I graduated from high school and we called it "The Native Club", and the principal we had at that time was very supportive. He was very supportive, he said,



“Sure” he said, “you know we’ll give you a room if you guys want to do whatever you want in that room, invite people in, guest speakers” so that’s what we did. We would meet once a week and there was a small group of us, about eight of us and we would just meet and sometimes we would just sit and talk, then we actually became a support group for each other and between my pal and I we organized guest speakers to come in and we would look at films and we would basically just talk about what’s going on in our studies. So that was a real highlight in terms of looking at my education system and in terms of my education. It was where I began to see how I can contribute, how I, even though it was small, how we organized ourselves, our little group, and supported each other and welcomed new ones that came in. How we really educated ourselves because it didn’t happen in the classroom so we educated ourselves. So you can imagine with my grade six experience and then with my high school experience, I saw that they should be doing this in classrooms, with all students.

Katie’s connected efficacy was both challenged and nurtured with these important critical incidents. Although she chose not to list them endlessly, the two incidents she did remember and chose to tell were succinct: the curriculum incident as the tag for the time she realized the importance of identifying and developing her connected self and the video club experience as the time she realized that she could maintain her sense of efficacy by creating her own connections as well as preserving those she inherited or were given to her. The teacher with the “barbaric Indian curriculum” did not curtail her need to be connected but rather created the realization of how the incident made her think and feel, which served to nudge her towards an activist identity.

Katie’s first awareness about racism that erupted with the “barbaric Indian” was one that was inflicted upon her and the impact of it developed a sense for her of what it felt like, sounded like and as significantly what it thought like. To Katie the impact of racism was that she was being misrepresented, distorted, misrecognized; those valuable connections that she had been experiencing were being abused and devalued. Katie left little doubt that this form of misrecognition inflicted harm upon her and became a form of oppression that could have imprisoned her in a false, reduced form of being. Katie’s initial reaction at the age of twelve was “to let it be for now”. One of the characteristics

of Katie's development as an activist was how she went from "letting it be" to acting upon her misrecognition and the distortion that she saw as racism. Perhaps at first it was instinctive but later on as she developed as a person with her own identity, Katie began to be aware of the close connection between her developing identity and recognition. Bahktin dialogism (Holquist, 1990) has appeared many times throughout this study. In Katie's lifestory it took the form of her connections as she began to define her identity, who she was becoming. She did so by expressing herself and her behavior through the use of language; always in relation to the other.

The fact that Katie sees the importance of language to express herself is evident as she tells her story but its importance develops into a theme of its own, because she uses language in a much broader sense, not only as words to speak but also a way to construct richer concepts of languages of art, of music, of gesture and so on. One such example was Katie telling, several times of her need for and search for creativity. She spoke of this creativity not as a collection of words but as a language which makes "creativity" into a sensitizing concept for her activism. When she did so, Katie was in relation to activism which was connected to the expression of creativity. It is what made this expression meaningful and how it connected her to who she is:

Katie: So anyhow when I was working, while I was working at Fort Rouge School I've always been fortunate to have leaders, if you want to call them that or bosses or whatever you want to call them, that really had allowed me to be creative 'cause I think that's one of the things that I was missing in my schooling years and so I had this boss, this supportive principal who saw that I worked with kids in the classroom but he also said, "You know I sense that you could probably do more" so he said, "Would you like to do more with the kids?" and I said, "Sure" so he says, "What would you like to do?" and at that time I was crafting and what not, so I said, "I wouldn't mind getting kids together and teaching them some stuff like leather work and that" not that I want to perpetuate the stereotype that we only do leather and beadwork but I thought this was a good time to sit and talk with kids and actually do some of that work, so that's what he did and he was actually the one who taught me how to write up my first grant proposal and so we got a little grant from the school division and we began working with these kids. Stayed there for three years.

Creativity appears as a focal point of her lifestory on several occasions and forms a discrepant event for those who would misrepresent her; to those who would be racist, to those who would teach her insensitively, to those who would have her be less a person. It is one of the layers of skin developed by Katie on her way to becoming an activist. It is a significant aspect of becoming an activist because the creativity developed in ways that sustained her self efficacy even when threatened by incidents such as the "barbaric Indian" experience. This theme is idiosyncratic of Katie but important enough to be included in relation to her story and her sense of efficacy.

### The Ribbon Dress

Katie identifies herself as an Anishinaabe person sometimes as an Anishinaabe woman and sometimes as an Anishinaabe teacher. As she constructed her genealogy that formed the heart of her lifestory the main thread was the continued reference to and her connection to her Anishinaabe culture; when and how it became important to her and how she lives in it as part of it. One of the connections that Katie's lifestory reveals is the thread of herself as a woman and an Anishinaabe. This connection brought to light the issues of "recognition" with reference to a link between gender politics and issues and those of multiculturalism. It also brought to bear the issues associated with what is sometimes referred to in the literature as the politics of difference (Young, 1984). The link or the extent of the link between gender and culture maybe an important issue for Katie as she constructs her lifestory. For Katie it may be that the importance of each of these aspects of her identity may be of significance individually, or the relationship between them may be significant. The Ribbon Dress story that follows is where Katie lives and reflects upon this extrapolation. The Ribbon Dress is one of the connecting loops of Katie's lifestory linking herself as a woman to that of an Anishinaabe woman which leads into a third one, that of teacher. Katie told the story of the events leading to her understanding of her identity as an Anishinaabe women teacher with a sense of wonder. Before she began this story she was quiet for a few moments, then quickly changed her posture from a comfortable slouch to that of sitting bolt upright. She was preparing for an important event. We have come to call this the ribbon dress story. The

ribbon dress has become a metaphor for her own recognition of her Aboriginal inheritance:

Katie: So I was fortunate to work with someone who was very like-minded in the teaching approach and very much like-minded in our philosophies of how we viewed education and so we were both as what some people called us, radicals. They thought we were two loony tunes and so we taught grade nine for that year. I didn't actually begin teaching in September. I started in January but I was there to help set up the classroom and what not, and then I had my baby so I would go and visit, that's one of the other things I did was I'd go and visit as well throughout my maternity leave, go and spend time with the students, take my baby with me as well, and so it was actually the R. B. experience as well too there was also another shift, I don't know if shift is a good word. I'll call it maybe that a transformation occurred for me and so as a person I had changed. When I had come back, the students were well into the circle because we used the circle every morning for our students because we knew that many of them were coming there with issues that I couldn't even comprehend and experiences that I hadn't even experienced and here they were these young people coming and so we had a circle every morning. We didn't call it a sharing circle or it wasn't a real formal talking circle but it was a time for them to sit in a circle and we would have newspapers and various kinds of magazines and what not available for them and so what we did was we got them to do some reflection first thing in the morning and they would cut out articles and they would come and sit in a circle and if they didn't have anything they wanted to talk about specifically we asked them to talk about whatever they had picked in the article or newspaper clipping, so we got into some real fascinating discussions with our students and they really valued that. One of the students I had met in the classroom said to me, "My mom would like to come and share sometimes" because we were going to our science unit, we were going to geology and rocks, and this young girl in our class said to me, "You know my mother, she knows a lot about rocks, she knows a lot of the teachings" and I looked at her and I said, "Oh," and she said, "Yes, she says, my mom knows, if you would like her to come I'm pretty sure she'd be happy to come." I said, "Oh, okay," and I said, "What do I have to do?" and she says, "Well," she said, "You buy some tobacco and we'll go

to my house and we'll go and see and we'll go and visit my mom." I said, "Okay," so for me even though I had grown up, my parents had taught me many important things about who I am as Ojibway woman, as an Anishinaabe woman to respect the land and to respect the people and to respect ourselves, I had not seen the more ceremonial part of my culture and so when I met this woman I was just highly, highly intrigued because when I went and met with her she was wearing the ribbon dress, I have forgotten that no she wasn't wearing it then but when she came to the school. That was what made it so important, was that she wore it to school.

Well we did go meet with her and I took tobacco and this is my student, teaching me what to do. That's why I was saying earlier that we often think that teachers are the ones that are full with the knowledge but oftentimes what I found throughout teaching is I learnt more from my students than probably what they learnt from me, and this was one of those incidence and one of those situations, so we went and she said, "Yes, I'll come and talk about the rocks but what we call them is we call them is we call them our grandfathers" and she said, "We call them grandfathers because they have been here for as long as anything that has survived on this land", and she said that "they have seen and observed and so they have a lot of knowledge and so we call them our grandfather because we respect our elders and our grandparents." This learning from my students and others has directed my life you know, my teaching and my work now, what you call activism too I guess.

So the grandmothers are the crystals and so she said, "I can come and share those that teaching, that understanding with you and your students," so she did that. I remember the day she was coming I was standing down the hallway there at R.B. and she come walking out of her vehicle and she's wearing this magnificent ribbon dress, I thought, "Wow" and I was more interested in her wanting to talk about the ribbon dress than the grandfathers and the grandmothers and I was just like in awe and so she came up and she spent the whole afternoon with us and talked and I think she saw the curiosity in my eyes because she did end up talking about her dress and all the colors and what all the colors represented and so for me that was what I called my awakening and she took me under her wing over those next few months, her and I just made a connection, it was incredible. It was like people that come into your life for specific reasons and she did that. She came into my life both her and her husband and

they both taught me a lot of things over the next couple of years, and so anyhow when I met them I thought, you know I really feel that I want to know and understand some of this as well to my own life and so I thought then in terms of my traditional way of life respecting the way I was raised but for me in terms of the traditional understanding and understanding the way of Aboriginal life began for me at that point.

So one of the first things I did was I sought my spirit name and so I had my first experience going out to the land and participating in a ceremony to receive my spirit name and that spirit name is significant for us in our culture because not only we use that name for communication to the creator but that name and within that name it also has who you are, your roles and your responsibilities, and so for me that name is very sacred and special but it also tells people who you are, and also names your clan, your family medicine, so for me that was the beginning. It was for me the beginning of understanding a lot of the traditions and history of my people in a connected, very real way.

Katie refers to herself in one of three ways; her referent reflecting what role or particular aspect of her identity is surfacing. Susan Wolf, in her commentary of Charles Taylor's treatise on Multiculturalism: the Politics of Recognition (Taylor, 1992) points to the danger of trying to unify the concepts of gender and culture past the importance of recognizing difference to the point where "we failed to recognize the differences among different failures of recognition and among the harms that ensue from them"(Wolf in Taylor, 1992, p. 75). This cautionary note from Susan Wolf is a ponderable issue in relation to Katie's life story. Her way in relating to herself is always pivotal to Anishinaabe but sometimes as a women, sometimes as a teacher. Katie's lifestory portrays her desire for recognition as her response to racism in many different ways. In general, the listening of Katie's story as she works to develop recognition or dispel the misrecognition, is based upon some theoretical underpinnings that filter throughout Katie's telling. Support for these underpinnings can be found in the work of Taylor (1992), and Wolfe (in Taylor, 1992), who describe the failures of recognition and the harm it does in this two fold way:

...a failure literally to recognize that the members of one or another minority or underprivileged group have a cultural identity with a distinctive set of traditions and practices and a distinctive intellectual and aesthetic history and second, a failure to recognize that this cultural identity is of deep importance and value (Wolfe, 1992, p. 75).

It is not a long stretch to see that the harms reaped upon persons bereft of this recognition could be sense of emptiness and loss; that a basis for community is unclear, and that the potential for self efficacy could be viewed as unretreivable. At the very worst this misrecognition could appear as fostering less of a person or even annihilation. Katie does however, not experience her self as separate from her community but sees herself as predominately connected to it. Her connection to her community both defines and sustains her activism and her complexity as a person:

Katie: I remember of the weekdays we went to school in Winnipeg and then on the weekends my father would put us all in the pick up and we would go out into the country to be with our relatives and friends out there. My parents worked at keeping us part of the community both out there and here in town. I am very grateful for that, I have come to know how important that was in how I came to be who I am. I see lots of people who have lost it-hard to get it back or find it again once its gone. For me it's still there, community.

There are philosophers and theoreticians who to one degree or another believe that people who view the self as largely separate tend to espouse a morality based upon impersonal procedures for establishing justice (Belenkey, 1986; Noddings, 1984; Lyons, 1983). These same philosopher theoreticians believe that those persons who experience the self as predominately connected tend to espouse a morality based upon care. Taken further, Belenkey et al (1986) posit two contrasting epistemologies linked to their understanding of connected and separate selves. First there is the separate epistemological orientation that is based upon impersonal procedures for establishing truth and a connected epistemology in which truth emerges as care. Katie's caring transcends the saccharine image of caring so often portrayed as the stereotypical image

of a caring woman to one of intelligibility. This is understood as the integrative force of caring for and caring about. Nel Noddings supports this observation: "In the intellectual domain, our caring represents a quest for understanding" (Noddings, 1984, p. 169). Katie's caring is a habit of the mind as much as it is of the heart. It is a mainstay of her activism. The thinking aspects of caring brings with it an uneven reciprocity between an idea of caring and the relationship that the idea of caring is being addressed to because the idea of caring cannot reciprocate the care given to the thinker. It is a characteristic of Katie's activism to understand this in the way that Nel Noddings responds to this imbalance: "When we understand, we feel that this object-other has responded to us" (Noddings, 1984, p. 169). This is the form of reciprocity that is the basis of Katie's activism, the need to understand provides the reciprocity for her caring for and caring about others. Katie's need to develop and share this understanding in tantamount to her activist life. It is the understanding, one of the connections, that creates the level of reciprocity that is as important as the intimacy of caring for those we are in close relationship to. It is this thinking the connected self with the accompanying voice that encourages Katie to speak to and to teach relative strangers about the horrors and pain of racism and the damage it can do to children and families and to do this to change negative attitudes to more positive healthy ones. It is a reason, a purpose for her activism. She is able to do this by being herself: she needs to be herself in order to be effective at what she does. She teaches, she acts, she organizes, without having to "weed out the self", (Elbaz, 1983, p.171) and consequently be left with only sole reason. Katie's activism is an integrated activism of heart and mind, passion and reason. The following story that Katie tells is a powerful one relating Katie's life to this extrapolation of connected caring and to activism:

Katie: And those stories we hear from the children, the Aboriginal people, are filled with our experiences, all of the experiences we have had and then you have something to share, with people sometimes that want to hear your story and sometimes people that don't want to hear your story too, you have both eh? And what I find is for me, I know people call me crazy, but I like working with the people that don't want to hear the story, and it's not because I find them a challenge but what I appreciate and what I've come to appreciate working with people like that is that it's, what's the word,



it's not subtle but it's like blatant, blatant in your face and I really like working with those type of people. One time I had one time a young man challenge me in a presentation I was doing at the university and I was talking about mascots and I was telling him about how I find the mascots offensive, like the ones named after baseball teams and that, like the Atlanta Braves and those. But I told him what I had found even more offensive is when I was watching the world series two years ago, I forget, Cleveland Indians, anyhow. They were showing all these people going to the game and there was Paul and I watching the last final games like that, there's a little bit of sports buff in me, but I was watching and I saw these guys, they had their faces all painted red and they were carrying drums and they were pounding on these drums and their buddies were doing this chomping. They were an ax like chomping and I sat and I took offense to the red face because not all Aboriginal people have red faces and I really took offense to the chomping but what really I said in this class is what I really found disturbing was the drum, seeing the drum, and this guy pounding it and I said, what I found disturbing about that is that he saw it as a toy and this young man in the class he put his hand up and he stopped me at that point and he told me, "You know" he said, "you're an Aboriginal woman" and he says, "You come here to talk about Aboriginal perspectives and stereotypes and bias" and he said to me, "You should be honored that sports team want to show you respect and honor Aboriginal people in this way" he said, "I'm surprised at your reaction to that" he said to me. And I said, "Oh goodness" and so I acknowledged his comment and I told him, "Thank you for being honest" I said, "but I'll explain to you why I took offense to the drum" and I said I'll use others as an example for you. I said to him, "I've been given that responsibility to carry a hand drum" and I said, "It's not that I asked for that responsibility but it's because I had a dream" and I cited my voice at this one place in the ceremony when I told him about this dream I had where I was singing the song. I had a drum stick and I was singing a song and there were young people around me, "so I was gifted with that hand drum, that I would use with young people and with all people but primarily with young people" and so I said, "I take that responsibility very serious and carrying that drum, learning the songs" because I certainly have learned a lot of songs in the last few years", but I said, "I also learned a lot of songs from girls and the young women and the young men that I've had an opportunity to sit

with" and so I said, "I take that responsibility seriously and the sacredness and the teaching that we have behind the drum, I said to him, 'I can't really go into that, but I'd be happy to spend some time with you to help you understand what that is and what that drum means to us symbolically because that skin has a teaching and that rim has a teaching and that skin has a teaching". I said, "but the drum to us is sacred" and I said, "when I saw that on national and probably international television and him playing with it like it was a toy" I said, "I took great offense to that" I said, "because for me the drum is something to our people that is a gift to us and that we use in our ceremonies, in our pow wows and our own personal time" and I said, "it would be like something that is sacred in your culture" I said, "it would be like somebody taking" you know like in a church when you have those scepters I think they call them scepters, I said, "It would be like somebody if you were to watch television and you saw somebody swinging one of those around" and I said, "Imitating and making fun of that" I said, "you know" I said, "that would show the disrespect they have for that" and he looked at me with amazement and he said, "Okay" he said, "now I understand" and see for me with that piece and with the understanding is that he didn't see it. He thought that I should be honored that these sports teams named their cities and the name of the Atlanta Braves or whatever, he thought that I should be honored but in essence what it's doing is it's perpetuating a stereotype and in that stereotype there comes those actions based on whatever, in this case it was the drum and that chomp, and I said, "What has happened here is that people have not understood have not understood the significance of who we are and what we are", and so I said, "in that comes ignorance that's sometimes not intentional" I said, "because sometimes people do things because they think it's nice or it's romantic" I said, "so they don't understand" so I said, "part of the work is that we have to help people to understand", and he stayed after the class and I finished the rest of the presentation and he stayed after that class and stayed and talked a bit more and it triggered something in him.

And that's part of how I see, I think, too why when we talk about activism and when I see my friend who is, she call herself an environmental activist, who lives by example and I see her like a mentor, when I see her traveling and I see you know her tired eyes and when I see her worn hands and but the work that she does like this

young man might impact and help one and that's how I see it too is if you can help one, I know you want to have big goals but if you can start with one then you've done something, and that's how I see her work too and that's how I see the work that I do. If I could impact and influence or help someone understand something that I feel that I've done part of the work and that's and then it makes you feel good, it makes you feel good, because you helped someone understand and in effect how I look at it too is that one person will then go out and will affect another so it's that layering, again it's that people call it ripple effect, that one person will help influence and understand and to help create some understanding with someone else.

Around the time of the ribbon dress story Katie began to look at the concept of feminism and the significance it may or may not have on her development as an Anishinaabe, woman educator. At first she reproached the representational nature of feminism, as she put it "that word, feminism". Then again her posture changed, her voice cleared and she began:

Katie: And it's interesting we talked about words this afternoon in class and it's one of those things like when I think of feminist I think of women's spirit who is wanting to be acknowledged because woman's spirit woman has qualities, has gifts, has strengths, has things to offer and those things will not be understood or acknowledged by even other women or by male or male spirit and so when I think of feminist I think it's having that voice and bringing understanding and knowledge and wanting to be acknowledged and I don't even know, maybe not much in terms of wanting to be acknowledged but I think in terms of it in terms of respect, wanting to be respected and because for us and how I have come to understand woman's spirit because for us we have both that woman, we call that woman that female, we have that female spirit within us and we also have that other spirit that male spirit and people don't acknowledge those two that balance and we all have it, be it male or female, we both have those two spirits within us, and so when I think of it, when I think of feminists I think of that so I don't know if I belong and I still don't know if that is feminist. I see it is as helping people to understand and appreciate and respect woman's spirit and we're taught that in the teachings in the lodge where we've lost a lot of those

teachings where everything is balanced. We talk about we both have that male and that female spirit within us and in our ceremonies and in our lodges that's acknowledged because we're told that in that lodge, like a lot of people think a lodge is a physical place, and it is a physical place like the sweat lodge, or the teaching lodge, but we're taught that we with our body, our spirit is a lodge as well, that's the first teaching in the lodge, who we are and so we have that male and that female spirit in us. Same thing when we go to the sweat lodge, we're taught that the lodge half is half male, half female, and in that lodge, in the centre of that lodge is that fire and it doesn't matter what lodge you go to you'll always see that fire in the centre and you'll see that acknowledgment of male and female spirit and even within us as well too, in our body, our lodge, we call that, that's what we're taught because we have a fire too, it burns here and in the pit of our stomach by our sternum, we're taught that that fire is there too.

And so when I see and what I've come to understand is that even though I'm woman I have and receive certain teachings about woman, about what my roles and what my responsibilities are as a woman, not only in the lodge but also outside of that, we bring what we call to the real world, to the outside world because when we're in the ceremony there's a certain protection there eh, but then we're told that what you learn and what you experience here is you take it out to your outer world and that's where you're going to use it for yourself and for others around you and how it will influence that and so what I found, what I have come to understand is that as a woman I received some of those woman teachings and I know what some of my responsibilities are, I know what my role is and I'll know how to help others but part of also that understanding is that we also have to understand male spirit and understand what their role and responsibility is and so that I'll have a clear understanding, not that I have to know all of the male teachings, not all the men teachings, but so that I know that I will have a better understanding and respect for that and if we have that balance then that understanding is there.

As woman we're taught that woman we have that responsibility for water and that the male, that males have that responsibility for the fire and we see that, we see that responsibility that we have for water because each month as woman we have that natural cleansing and as well too when we were carrying children, children are in

that water as well and even when we're going to have our child when you're ready to bring that child into this physical world, what happens is that water breaks and so as women we have that responsibility so what I found is that with feminism, being if I'm a feminist or not, I'd have to think about that, but it's helping, again its understanding that people ignore or use for power, not for meaning and we need to take the time to understand, to live those things and if we have that we'll have that appreciation, that respect, that knowledge and so that's that much that I'll share about woman. So I see that responsibility as a wife because for me as a wife I've had to assume what western, what the western world view would consider more of a man's responsibility in terms of being the primary bread winner in the home and so I've always had that responsibility but then I've also had the responsibility for carrying and nurturing my children as a mother and so I've had that complete responsibility as mother. I've had that responsibility as auntie for taking care of nieces and nephews not living under my home, but having that responsibility. Yes, and all the other types of woman spirit that a daughter, you know, caring and taking care of my parents who are still here and so there's all that responsibility that we have as woman spirit, as woman. And so if people don't understand that, that's where my woman spirit says, "Okay, I need to be heard, and I need to be understood, and I need to be appreciated," and so that's where I see feminism, be it radical or be it subtle, it could be either.

#### Heard, Understood and Appreciated: Women's Spirit

Katie's lifestory contains the themes found in the two other lifestories; efficacy, community and caring resonate throughout. An emerging theme in Katie's telling is that of her understanding of feminism and what effect it may have had on her development as an activist. "Okay, I need to be heard, and I need to be understood, and I need to be appreciated...that's where I see feminism, be it radical or be it subtle, it could be either" is the provocative declaration that Katie developed very near the end of our discussion of activism. Her view of activism appears as rooted to a large extent, in herself as a woman, an Anishinaabe woman. Her view of herself as an Anishinaabe woman is what, in the end, or in the beginning, connects her sense of caring, community, and

culture to her development as an inner city activist. The theme of efficacy is more elusive in Katie's telling and appears more as the recognition of the need to honour, learn from and live through her culture as an Anishinaabe woman. Her understanding of the need for creativity supports the other major themes.

Katie also tells in her lifestory that her activism is reciprocal by nature and as such thrives on what she calls "the generosity of spirit". Katie refers often to the need to "give back to the community". The generosity of spirit began to take on considerable depth as reciprocity took on a clearer definition, one that went past simple give and take. Katie began to be thoughtful about what shape her generosity of spirit would take:

Katie: So I taught at Children of the Earth for two-and-a-half years and it was in the early 90's and it was at a time when there was a lot of hype in the Aboriginal community and the school was really looked at under a microscope, that's what I found, was as if everybody was watching every move we made, and it was interesting too because I also felt like we were on stage because we'd get all these visitors from all over the place and all over the city or the province wanting to come to see this Aboriginal school and I would also say that too. I'd invite them in because they would just stand at the door and I'd say, "Come on in, don't be afraid, we don't bite, we're here for you. I'm a teacher here and these are my students and I'm helping them learn. We're helping each other learn and you're welcome to come and sit with us." And because I felt more so we were on stage and I was very awed and peculiar feeling was for the first couple of years, so and I was always one in staff meetings to speak up. I was never one to be quiet and so finally I said at one point, and I did this throughout my career as well too, my teaching years, is to make my voice heard if anything that I disagreed with but also in disagreeing was giving some recommendations on how things could be different and so I remember that third year where I had said, "You know I really feel like I'm in a fish bowl, you know we get all these different tours," like that's what they called them, they called them tours, and I said, But really what are they seeing when they walk through our hallways, yes, they see some nice pretty pictures and yes they see some hand drawings and you know yes they see the artwork and the writing but I said, "They can walk through any school and see

that, what's different, what makes it different" And so I said, "I think it's important that these tours and these people that come by actually sit and talk with us," I said, like, "I think it's enough of these tours, let's talk with these people and tell them why we have these schools and why it's different from others." So they began that, they said, "No more tours," and they said, "If we have tours they're going to sit and talk with us." So I was really glad for that, that change happened because it's important that people understand why the schools were established and that they do have a distinct purpose, you know.

Well, I think for me in terms of context of language, the Aboriginal language, you hear all these rational kind of pains and the elders crying that our children or grandchildren, our grand children don't even speak the language, can't even understand words you know, so I know this one lady was sitting with all these directors in the department and was trying to convince them. When I work internally I have to convince them a lot of times, and so I remember saying to them, I said to them that the elders stressed that the language, more than important, because if our language dies our people will die. "Because", I said "language is a strong part of our culture" and then I said, "Yes, there might be only 20,000 people that speak the language" but I said, "we have to have language curriculum in schools for those who want to learn, for those Aboriginal and for non-Aboriginal students" and I said, "We need to have Aboriginal languages developed in the curriculum everywhere" and I said, "No, it can't wait till next year and it can't wait till next fiscal period or treasury submissions" I said, "We have the means we can do it now", and I mean I was near tears. Like I cry if I have to, I put the tears on and I just have to just make them see it and I said, "We have to do it." And they did. I mean I laugh about it now but now I can say that I practically had to cry out but I mean we have a consultant hired, we're participating in projects with Western partners and this and that but a lot of people don't see that. You almost have to sell your soul to get things done and that's part of it, that's what I was saying about influencing change. Why am I sitting here having to sell that we should have Aboriginal language curriculum in the public school system or First Nations schools or

whatever. I said and still say that, "I shouldn't have to, I shouldn't have to sit here and advocate for it, cry for it. It should be there as a need for surviving and thriving as Aboriginal people." Why is it that people don't see that? Why do you have to act out in order to get things done? Giving back is not easy always. Not like you'd think anyways. You have to work at it. That's more than advocacy now that I think about it.



## Chapter Nine

### Friends of the Mind

*She is a friend of my mind, She gather me.....The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me all in the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind..... I think I want to put my story next to hers."* (Morrison, 1987, pp. 272-273).

This chapter will look at each of the themes, caring, community and self efficacy that have been developed during the solicitation of the three lifestories. Each of these themes developed to a greater or lesser extent, in each of the life stories of Katie, Gerie and Grace. These are considered as the major themes, common to all three of the women. The minor themes that emerge that are idiosyncratic, are brought to bear incidentally here and throughout the remaining work. The themes are gathered together in a way that identifies and explores these themes from each individual lifestory and then as they reappear as unifying connections for all three activist identities. The threads that wind in and out of the main themes are school and family socialization, and their views on feminism and subjectivity. This is a transitional chapter, one that looked for common theoretical, conceptual underpinnings that supported or shed insight, one to the other, and the major themes that developed.

Tony Morrison, the author of the novel Beloved, writes about the participating in the construction of a lifestory as the process of gaining entry into the inside of another's interior self: "a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (Morrison, 1987, p. 12). Katie, Gerie, Grace and I have been on an archeological dig of sorts over the duration of this study. Our datum point<sup>1</sup> has been a search for, and an understanding of, how these three women developed activist identities. The purpose of the this chapter is to determine what can be learned by the three activists as they compare and contrast to one another, and using the datum

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<sup>1</sup> A datum point is the constant point of an archeological dig that serves as the reference point for the location to the context of the found artifacts

point, to organize the themes that emerge from each of their individual life stories as they reappear in one or more unifying concepts that form many connections for all three. This understanding develops around several themes. The first of which, develops as the beginning of their understanding of subjectivity and how each of the three research participants approached their genealogy.

### The Genealogy Conveyed: Ordering Subjectivity

A genealogy is a way people frame their belonging and their identity. It is the framework for connecting and linking their lives to those who have gone before and for those who are to come after. It is a display of a person's titles, names, the important marks of themselves and their lives: birth, death, marriage. I have been taught by a Maori elder of the *whakapapa*, which in the Maori language means genealogy, lineage; how they lay one on another. For the New Zealand Maori, the *whakapapa* is the traditionally established framework for the order of their identity. Before a Maori speaks formally to a group of people during any public or ceremonial function, he or she will recite their *whakapapa* as a distinction of who they are. When heard in the Maori language the *whakapapa* sounds like lyrical poetry and the translations are no less powerful. A Maori elder, Paraire Huata, as part of a korero (teaching), taught me the idea of *whakapapa* in this way:

*Whaka* means towards or more of, *Papa* means solid or firm. *Whakapapa* therefore means to give more solidity to one's present presence. It utilizes the symbols associated with tribal lands such as mountains, rivers, ancestral meeting houses and ancestral gathering places. It names ancestors that a person can directly link to. It sometimes includes more pertinent lineage such as parents. The whole idea is to make evident that this person has substance and potency. I suppose it's a Maori way of defining self esteem. It's linked to what we call *mana motuhake*. Translated loosely, this means spiritual prestige, set apart. Anyway, it allows someone to claim themselves with dignity without boasting (Huata, 2001, Auckland, New Zealand).

Katie, Grace and Gerie each had a genealogy that emerged as the framework of their life story. Albeit not presented in the lyrical frame of the whakapapa the genealogy was never the less there; perhaps not yet an established format but a genealogy that was developing, none the less, one that was looking for a framework for the ontological landscape. Each of the three women approached their genealogy in different ways and expressed the order of their marks and patterns in ways subjective, and in distinctive ways. They were telling who they were in the order they created for themselves.

There were similarities in the marks that these three women chose to place in their genealogy and there were some that were unique to each of them individually. It was also evident, during the solicitation of each life story that the temporal aspects and the order that was placed upon them were not always chronological or sequential. They began the telling at a place and time that made sense to them and continued until they believed that their story had taken shape.

Grace began her story with "I was born into a single family, my mom, granny and grandpa in Point Douglas which is the Inner City sort of Winnipeg. We didn't call it the inner city then, its a fairly new term". She followed this declaration quickly with this: "I am going to tell my story from when I was born because that is how I think". Gerie began her story with her application to the Winnipeg Education Centre and brought her story around until it met this incident again. Katie began her story with a version of I was born and raised. Following this Katie began to draw a series of loops, linked one to another, back and forth across her life, any chronological references disappeared after grade school. The way these women chose to begin their stories, to tell their stories was, the way that they were constructing their own genealogy was to frame the significance and meaning and order of the events of their lives. What I was asking of them was to consider their identity as activist as part of this genealogy. Did they see themselves as activists? If so, what did they think may have lead them to activism? I also wanted to know if and how activism was relevant to their lives as a whole.

These varied responses occurred because of the open ended nature of the first question that was asked: tell me your story, tell me about your life. The risk of an open ended, unguided question such as this is that the participant in the life story may not provide the aspects or the data that the study is seeking but in this study what was thought to be significant was what the participants wanted to tell and in the order and

with the intensity of their choosing. During the initial solicitation of each of the life stories none of the women mentioned the word activist or overtly told of themselves in any way as being an activist. At first, the dominant aspect of Grace's genealogy appeared as motherhood, Katie's as an Anishinaabe woman, while Gerie's remained at first, undefined and elusive.

Although activism was not, at first, told or named by these women, their lifestories were embedded in the character, the plot, the language and grammar of the notion of activism. At the completion of the literature review activism the working definition of activism was related to that activity that improved the quality of the lives of inner city children and families. Activism, however, did not become a spoken word until the second series of interviews developed and the question became: "I think you are an activist, tell me how this may have come to be so". Activism was now named and we began working towards developing a vocabulary through the participation in the construction of their life stories which drew upon Bakhtin's dialogism process. The dialogic process has been reviewed in several instances throughout this work and has been approached as an epistemology " that seeks to grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language" (Holquist, 1990, p. 15).

The first thought from Gerie was that "she was embarrassed, activism is a dirty word". The first thought from Katie was "well, I never thought about it actually, maybe sometimes I will say that I am an advocate, activist I don't know yet". Grace's first thought was that "I don't know what it means to be an activist, makes me uncomfortable, I need to read something, give me a book or something". It would be fair to say that at the onset of the second tier of interviews none of these women had placed activism on their ontological landscapes or even considered them to be part of their genealogy or their identities.

Their identities are the issue, what they are, how they were constructed, who, and who other than themselves or myself as the researcher for this study, would have a vested interest in their development and understanding of how they came to be and the importance of the becoming. The literature contains works related to identity politics and identity formation. Identity politics often forms the basis for the development of political theory and political action. There is of late, a growing critique of identity politics that has been of considerable interest in the development of an understanding

directed towards the activist identities of these three research participants. The criticism is based upon an impasse that is occurring among the social construction and identity politics theorists (Gergen, 1999). This critique has taken the form of shifting the direction of identity formation from identity politics to one of relational politics. Those who espouse identity politics are at times directly described, at times, as one kind of political activists. Gergen explains:

A marginalized group generates a self designated identity that is instantiated by the individual identities of the constituents. It differs from many social movements such as left wing activism in that the constituents of the former, such as women, gays, are politically marked as individuals. Politics and personal being are virtually inseparable. It is largely by virtue of the natural condition of its members that the groups lay claim to certain inalienable rights - equal opportunity etc. This analysis is what forms the backdrop for a kind of activism, mentioned earlier (Gergen 1999 p.87).

Identity politics is steeped in the rights rhetoric resulting in what Mary Glendon (1991) describes as the polarization of debate that tends to suppress moral dialogue and consensus building. The vocabulary of identity politics, according to critics, such as Gergen and Glendon, has of late, far too often, deteriorated and resorted to dump and blame, victimization and hopelessness. Glendon says of identity politics and what it contains as, " the unexpressed premise that we roam at large in a land of strangers, where we presumptively have no obligations towards others except to avoid the active infliction of harm" (Glendon, 1991, p. 36). Gergen bemoans the fact that only is the dominant rhetoric of identity politics divisive in its effects, there are important respects in which it has lost its efficacy by virtue of its profusion (Gergen, 1999). The black intellectual Patricia Hill Collins, who has been discussed in the literature review, attests to this by cautioning that from her focal place, identity politics needs " a critical posture toward mainstream, feminist and Black scholarly activity" (Collins, 1990, p. 12).

A non critical view of identity politics was not a good fit for what the construction of life stories and the developing genealogies of the three activist participants was

revealing. As stated earlier the literature expresses a level of criticism in the sense that identity politics has within it the possibility of becoming a trap for victimization but these women, with unique and complex identities, who often experience difficult and stressful life circumstances, do not identify themselves as hapless victims, or without self esteem. Victim as it is usually defined, is not part of the genealogies of these three women. Gerie, Katie and Grace's understanding of the source of sexism, surpasses the one dimensional notion of the patriarchal disposition, nor did I hear them silence the voices of women of color in order that their own voices be singularly heard, nor did I hear them use exclusionary language that expended lesbian women. Nor did I hear in their stories, what Christine Battersby describes as the pessimism and the despairing epistemology of deconstructive postmodernism. (Battersby, 1998). Instead their lifestories and the telling of them is epitomized with an epistemology of hope. A politics of confidence. At this point it might well be stated that this positioning is naive: that Katie, Grace, and Gerie were ignorant of the events, circumstances and politics that were distorting their identity formation. In fact, it is evident from their lifestories that each one of these women are aware of the events and issues that were part of a struggle to determine who they are. They know and have lived the effects of racism, family violence, poverty, single motherhood, failed marriages, gender related inequality, a school system that failed them, adults that neglected, betrayed or violated them. They talk of these issues not from a sense of oppressed victimization but from a sense of "something has to be done about this". It is this attitude that contributed to the generation of activism in each of these women.

This idea of an epistemology of hope is discussed in the literature as relational politics; a way of understanding identity formation that is focused upon the re visioning of self and other, rhetorical practice and social action (Gergen, 1991). The construction of these three life stories was the revisioning of self, a study of narrative leading to the meaning of activism based upon a sense of hopefulness and confidence: a better fit for these particular women and the lifestories they construct.

## Community

*Whatever the future may have in store, one thing is certain. Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself.*

*(Dewey, 1927, The Public and its Problems, p. 56).*

*The Indigenous Women's Network works in rural and urban communities applying indigenous values to resolve contemporary problems. Each of our communities has our own instructions, our cultures. Our cultures, like minobimaatisiwn, a term in Ojibwe, talks about the good life. An alternative translation is continuous rebirth.*

*(Leduke, 1999, Being Left: Activism Off and On the Reservation)*

A significant aspect of the genealogy of Grace, Katie and Gerie was and is community. It was a word used by each of them several times, accompanied with thoughts on its importance to them personally and how integral it is to their work and their lives generally. Although each of them approach and realize the concept of community somewhat differently, they share community as an important basis for the development of their activism. Community is discussed in the activist literature in many varied ways and there is a form of activism that is described as community activism. A discussion of community sometimes falls prey to sentimentality and nostalgia when the strident effects of modern community life are seen in a more intimate and manageable light of days past. In this light they are described as communities of memory or "a community of longing, driven by remembrance"(Mere and Furman, 1997, p. vii). The women I worked with did not speak of community in overtly romantic terms yet in important terms, tending towards a more practical view that spoke largely of a relationship, a relationship with community. They told of the need to develop community as a strong, appropriate context to countervene the stresses brought about by the very real disruption of family life and the fragmentalization of school life, work life, and social life. For these women the need for community was, for each of them, brought about by the tenuousness of their parental and marriage responsibilities. Grace was a single mother, Katie viewed herself as the major breadwinner and Gerie lived with the idea for

sometime that she would eventually be a single mom and the major provider for her family. The development of community was the way each of them saw as a way to establish the connections needed to sustain family life that had been fragmented in one way or another from the tradition marriage- kinship model. They brought this awareness to the development of their identities as activists.

Classical sociological theory starts an analysis of community from the distinction of Tonnies (1957) terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: the former defined as society based upon rules and the latter defined as community based on effect (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994). Community means various things to different people. In some sense it means place or a geographical connectedness. Coleman (1985) writes of community using the term "functional community" describing geographically cohesive communities in which children attend school with the children of their parents associates, a characteristic he calls "intergenerational closure". These functional communities are defined by characteristics such as place, work, church, recreation, and kinship. Educators will often define community as the world external to the school. Sometimes community denotes a group of people whom together share values a sort of social capital used to rear children, dispense justice, practice religion.

In the 1979 Community Schools Policy Paper I, the Winnipeg School Division # 1 defined community as:

The term community shall be defined as those individuals or groups which may be involved in the education of the students in the Winnipeg School Division. Specifically the term refers to parents and guardians, parent council/home and school associations, social service agencies, ethnic groups, special interest groups, taxpayers within the Division who do not have children in the school system, local businesses, employees (Winnipeg School Division # 1, p. 29).

The literature addresses the issue of research communities. For example Ristock and Pennell, in Community Research as Empowerment work at being able to use the term empowerment as a verb, to empower, by developing the concept of inclusive communities which they define as "bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and social positions while at the same time constructing a firm identity



as participants in a process based on respecting separate identities"(Ristock and Pennell, 1996, p. 18). The concept of community when turned inside out may and often does contain negative aspects. When communities are created or develop as either elite organizations with exclusive membership or organizations bordering on the fanatical such as cults or rigid religious or secular communes can be destructive. When communities become intolerant or inflexible they are thought to destroy the positive effects of individualism. An understanding of community is used by many people for many reasons, sometimes a code word for togetherness, a rationale for belonging, a locus of control, and in the case of the Katie, Grace and Gerie a site for their activism. Gerie began to develop her understanding of the role that the deaf culture in the deaf community had on her identity as an activist. It is the first time she begins to talk of activism and herself as an activist. Gerie recalls that, although not realizing it at the time it occurred, she has come to understand that being a hearing child of deaf parents, often left her feeling separate and alone:

Gerie: You know, I remember having this conversation about the deaf community. I thought about it afterwards and I think maybe that's what I bring with me from that experience is that culture, that deaf culture crossed all sorts of classifications that is in terms of race, in terms of class, in terms of occupation, well in terms of everything. The predominant, the connecting factor was people were deaf, it was the language that was spoken, it was the rules, the social rules of deafness. I mean it was all there and I was unaware for the longest time until someone or somehow the pieces came together and I came to realize that deafness was a disability, that my parents were disabled, it was just you could've knocked me over with a feather. Disabled people were in wheelchairs, you know, they were blind and it just blew me away when I had the realization that my parents were disabled. It was just amazing to me, it was a definition of who I was, who my friends were, who my parents were.

And I got to see people's reactions to them in a lot of ways. Not in the early years, looking back I think, that you know, I didn't pick up those social cues but I realized that some of the situations that I was in must have been pretty interesting for the hearing person involved to see what was going on, but, I mean, I was there you know, brought along to interpret whether it was the bank or the doctor or the mechanic or

the grocery store or the teacher to interpret for each other's parent teacher interviews so I would interpret for my sister.

Gerie began to speak now of how the responsibility of translating for her parents became more than a service. She began to see how this activity became one where she was integrating her parents lives, keeping them connected and giving them much of their shape and direction:

Gerie: It was my job, most definitely. It's interesting because I say this a lot now. But, you know, I hired an interpreter for my wedding, not as a gift for my father or anything like that but as a favor to my sister because you can't participate and interpret at the same time. So I didn't participate on things with my parents but I most definitely was there interpreting for sure.

Reflecting on this observation Gerie begins to view her reaction to translating in a broader way, perhaps as an understanding of her activist identity:

Gerie: I think there has to be a connection to how I look at this deaf culture and what I do and think about now. I think out of that experience I think my view on who my people are, whatever that may be, came out of there. I think from a very young age becoming very aware of inequities I think probably had something to do with that. By inequities I mean seeing how other adults treated my adult parents and realizing that adults didn't treat each other the same. I always knew adults treated kids differently, you know, like that's sort of a standard way of doing things. Adults get these set of rules and kids get these set of rules, well I learned very young that no, no, it's not adults and kids, it's something different because my parents, because of the experiences that I was interpreting was that my parents were treated differently. So I think I saw those inequities amongst adults I think far earlier than most if I had been born into a family that everyone spoke and heard. I think there probably is a lot more to this but I think those two things maybe started me out of the different point of view, like I said. Maybe this does in some way point me to activism as you call it.

The significance of community to Gerie takes on the character of reexperiencing the ordinary in an extraordinary way. The deaf culture that was an everyday occurrence for her while she was growing up became a powerful insight when today as an adult she thought about its significance. The importance of community to Katie is a vibrant series of connections: to her culture, to her schooling, to the decisions she makes as an adult and to the role that activism will take in shaping her identity. At one point early on in the construction of her lifestory Katie says:

Katie: My peers were from a very diverse population. There were Portuguese and Italians and Ukrainians and Polish and you name it, we had every type of nation you could think of that I went to school with and so from the early ages I really began to appreciate the diversity in my community that I lived in.

Grace's understanding of the importance of community is a constant thread throughout her lifestory, beginning as a young child in the inner city, or North End as she prefers to call it, and continuing on unto adulthood and her work as a community activist. She recalls the importance of community in this way. After marrying at sixteen she left the inner City. She speaks of the negative effect it had on her:

Grace: We lived on Erin Street in a house. That was really lonely for me because it was so far away from the north end, from my family, from my friends. My husband was an abuser, like physically abusive, and so you know I'm guessing now, well no I'm not actually guessing, he always wanted to get me off sort of by myself, kind of isolate me from everybody else, either psychologically you know, put me down, what I cared about, what mattered to me. You see, I know now how important being connected to community is to people, for safety, to get what you need.

Gerie, Grace and Katie do not convey their understanding of community in romantic terms. Their sense of community is an honest, balanced assessment of their lives in relation to their community. They do not approach their sense of community from a stance of saving people, or what Noddings (1996) refers to as redemptive community. Noddings(1996) further explains that communitarians bring to their understanding of

community a stance based upon individual rights that she believes is running amuck in today's politically correct society. To her mind this image creates a false sense of security which develops people who put aside their own identities, do not know who they are, to what traditions they belong and negate the ability to develop personal characteristics such as "am I a risk taker or am I more cautious". Katie, Grace and Gerie have been able to transcend a romantic or liberal view of community, and because of this create a site for their activism that works in a substantive way to address the needs, make changes that better the lives for the children and families in the inner city. It is the core of their activism that says that they will work "with" people and not "for" them. To some extent this occurs because community does not eclipse or overtly define their individual identities but helps to comprehend their identities and render them active.

#### The School Experience: Efficacious or Not

Each of these women recall vividly an experience towards the end of their elementary school experience, at the onset of adolescence that had a significant impact on the development of their identities, self efficacy and the subsequent nature and direction of adult life. The experience as student carries an interesting weight on each of their genealogies. Grace tells of this experience in this way:

Grace: Up until about grade six I was like an A student, I always got honors every year and all that sort of stuff and then once I sort of I don't know if it was puberty that hit or, I just couldn't put up with the nonsense, I think after grade six, like I experienced a lot of racism in school as well and as I got older I thought about what that was about because I remember, well anyway as I got older I kind of thought it maybe had to do with teacher stereotypes, they just didn't like me doing that well, because I remember I in grade six stuff I'd get 100% on my spelling and I remember teachers saying, actually up until about grade five I was fine, but once I started getting older in grade six I remember the teacher saying, you know, someone had stolen a spelling test. I always got like 98 or 96. It wasn't like I usually got 30% and all of a sudden I got 100,% right. And he was just like in front of the class saying

that someone stole the exam and only one person got 100% on the test. So obviously it was me and I remember feeling like really embarrassed on one hand because I didn't like to be singled out, I was a little bit shy, at least in that kind of environment. At home I wasn't shy but in that sort of a formal environment I was, and at the same time I remember being really angry and I think I actually did get up and say, "are you trying to say that I stole the test?" I really got in a big argument with him but I didn't swear at him, I was only 12 years old or something, but I was thinking it, like how the hell do you know if I stole the test. Actually in grade six things started to come apart for me in school. I think up until then I'd had, I hate to say it, but all female teachers. I don't know if that makes a difference or not, but they seemed to relate to me well and I seemed to relate to them well. But, this male teacher, he seemed to really have it out for me and I'm not really sure why. I remember one time my friend Gary moved into my school. I hadn't seen him for awhile, we'd been friends when we were little kids and he threw a bunch of tacks at my chair. We were both sitting at the back, we were both talking and I sat down on these tacks and I screamed, and I was jumping around like these tacks were stuck in me. He said, "What are you doing, your rain dance?" The teacher, he was just an jerk so that was sort of the beginning of my distaste for school I think. Racism was there like that, related to other kinds of put downs but was there all the time. I don't think I would have called it that at the time but the effect was there anyhow. Then by grade seven it didn't get a whole lot better, there was only about three Aboriginal families in the school and we really got it, like it was always something. If something was stolen, or something was wrong, it was always we were getting hauled in and you start getting this feeling of hopelessness. Because until then I don't think I really experienced racism, I was pretty much close to home I at school and you know so there really wasn't, in fact, any reason to go too far away. In grade 6 was the first year I'd gone out of my little neighborhood school. We had to be bussed to school because they shut down the little neighborhood school that we were in, and started bussing kids to a bigger school, so that's when I first started, I think, coming apart in school. Eventually, I just sort of left it somehow. I just was not there most of the time. I just didn't go to school a whole lot in grade seven and then I got exemptions on my exams and sometimes they made me write my exams, because I'd missed so many days. Well, you know I had to

go the odd day because in those days they used to do the truancy thing. I got thrown into Vaughan Street which is I guess like where the wild kids are kept now at the Youth centre. In those days it was Vaughan Street Detention Home. They threw me in there for truancy, for two weeks when I was 12 years old because I was skipping so much school and that was really an awful experience you know. Used to go to the pool hall, my mom worked so I had a key for the house because she worked till like 5 or whatever. By then she was working full-time in the warehouse and stuff, so we would sneak back in the house or go to another friend's house whose mom worked or you know, we would just hang out. I was 12 years old and I was a drop-out. Then they made me repeat grade seven even though I passed everything again.

Grace continued relating her school experience and her view of the rules attached to it:

Grace: I know the reason for the bad school experience. The rules didn't apply to me, they didn't help me you know. It was because I missed so many days and it was the policy, it was the rule, even though you pass everything, if you missed so many days you were out. Never made sense to me, ever. Because I read the books, so okay so I get it, so I'll just write the test and that should do it, right? Get a mark, but that didn't do it, so then they made me do grade seven again next year and then I think I went to school even less the next year. I was 13 then and then I didn't really go past grade seven. Labeled because of the rules. The rules said I was a this or a that. School was not for me after that. Then I was pregnant. I was 15 and then I went to the First Alternative School I think. Come to think of it there was no more school until WEC. The rules there I could handle or so I thought anyways.

Katie had a Grade Six experience that she remembers as being a "turning point" to her life.

Katie: Home was semi-peaceful, you can imagine nine other siblings it could be quite a busy place, so I didn't have that experience but one of the things I remember, I'll go back to my grade six experience I always call it, I remember sitting in the

classroom and I remember the teacher explaining to us and telling us that we were going to be studying this unit about Indians of North America. I got all excited, I thought, "Oh great" you know, she's going to be talking about our people, the people here in Manitoba. I thought, this is great, my ears just perked up because it would've been the first time that I had heard this being explored in school so then she began her intro and she began talking about how the explorers came to Canada and discovered the land and so I was listening attentively and then she said, and then when they came to this land they came upon these savage and barbaric people and I remember sitting there and I thought, I'm really curious I was listening and she said, these savage and barbaric people who we call now the Indians. I sat there and I was really puzzled, I could feel my ears, and sometimes when I tell this story, depending on the intensity and what I'm talking about I can feel my ears burning 'cause I go back to that place in the classroom and I could feel my ears burning, I could feel my heart pounding and I thought, she's talking about me and she's talking about my family and my grandparents, my ancestors and I sat there puzzled, because I thought, this is not what I had heard and what I experienced in my growing up years. And so, part of that as well too is my parents had taught us never to talk back to teachers or to challenge them, and so I sat there and I remember feeling really humiliated because I looked around the room and there was no other Aboriginal person, of course, in the classroom and I didn't question, I sat there and I just let her continually talk about "Indians" in this way. And not talking about like the contributions, the history, other than that of which was portrayed in the textbook that we were learning from and probably from part of her own understanding so you can imagine I was gravely disappointed and it really had that experience really had an impact on me because I remember going home and I was thinking, "You know some day what I want to do is to change and to help change that attitude that teachers" because teachers have a lot of influence and what you say and do can really impact a student and in this case it really did have a standing effect on me because it was then that I decided that I want to help change this attitude in my future work and so I left it be, and interestingly enough in that school there was only one student that actually made fun and mimicked after that lesson but everyone else was sort of like passé and he would do war chants and that and I just basically ignored him. So anyhow that was

my what I call for me is my dramatic experience in school that really influenced what I wanted to do in the future and even as young as I was and so we actually moved back to the inner city.

For Gerie several of her most profound experiences occurred around the onset of adolescence and as it was with Katie and Grace, it happened in school. This has come to be known as the "art room incident" and is told in some detail in the account of Gerie's lifestory. In essence the art room was the homeroom Gerie was sent to at the start of Junior High. It was the room where the "bad kids" as she referred to them congregated. After initially being horrified at being placed there she relented and became one of those "bad kids", picking up the role very quickly. When we talked about the art room incident many months after the first encounter Gerie spoke of it as:

Gerie: It must have been a clerical error that I was put in that room. I see that now but then I believed that even though I knew I had the marks they must have known that I belonged there and maybe I was wrong and I had made the mistake. It set me on a path that took until I got to WEC to fix or understand. It was yet another example of how I did not challenge anything. I think now why is that it wasn't part of the deaf community to question things.

The art room has become a metaphor for Gerie's school experiences. This incident embodies a whole analysis of the failure of adults either to intervene positively on one hand or to intervene inappropriately on the other and her inability to ask for or challenge the results of which ever form the adult intervention would take. Three dramatic incidents, occurring around the same age and all involving school, all concerning some form or other of each of them remaining silent. Silent, but resistant.

#### Against the Grain: The Beginning of Resistance

Most of us have a some history of resistance or "going against the grain" but may or may not remember it as such because the resistance is often interpreted or coded in the language of the persuader or perhaps oppressor. The resistance may have taken the shape



of sociological terms such as dissenting behavior, inappropriate actions, rule breaking or the development of precarious attitudes. These histories of resistance do have an impact on the control and development of our identities. Grace, Gerie and Katie are no exception. Gerie drank rum from a pop bottle in the girls washroom during junior high and speaks of her entire school experience past elementary school as one long "bad attitude". Grace tells a story of her resistance as a child and how it recycled itself again with her granddaughter.

Grace: We had an uncle who used to come and stay with us when he wasn't in jail and he was just a dear man, you know. Like he would – one of my fondest memories was when my grandmother and I were drinking iced tea out of a container, like he could never do that, my mother was like a bit of a – she was a bit of obsessive compulsive I suppose cleanliness around food and that, like you don't share somebody's drink and you don't you know all those kinds of things but I always have anyway but – I remember my uncle John getting out of jail and us going to the show on Main Street and walking down the tracks and sharing a quart of milk, chocolate milk out of the quart and that was like the best thing, because I got to drink right out of the quart. It's like such a thrill and that was just so good and that was just a thrill for S. too because L. 's kind of like my mom like that. So me and S. we're drinking out of the jug eh. all right we're breaking the rules drinking out of the jug. So stuff like that growing up. So that's sort of I guess where it starts.

#### To Be or Not To Be: Subjectively Speaking

It has come to this. Katie, Grace, and Gerie are three women living in a context containing researchers, theoreticians, administrators, and managers, principals, husbands, partners, students, children, parents, who have, each for their own purpose and values with a vested interest in interpreting and utilizing in one way or another, the ways and means of how these women, the participants, mothers, wives, and teachers, and now activists, came to be who they are. I have wanted to know, for instance, if, how and why they may have developed identities as activists. Knowing self begins for all three of them, and myself included as an understanding of subjectivity, defined initially as the

"tendency to consider all things only in the light of one's own personality" (Webster Dictionary, 1975, p. 1814). Subjectivism defined from this same dictionary is the "philosophic theory that states that all knowledge is subjective and relative, never objective". These two seemingly simple, straight forward definitions of subjectivity based upon representational definition of language and the words subjectivity and subjectivism do not convey a simple concept. The issue of subjectivity is an enormous one, well past the meaning behind the naming of the self.

The controversy around the definition of the subjective is currently being argued in the literature, although all sides pivot their argumentation around the importance of knowing who you are as being of prime importance in living a self actualized life, they convey opposing ways of what the self is and how the definition determines how it is established. All three of the women expressed concern and an interest for knowing who they are and how they got to be who they are, each working continually at developing a language to reveal the meaning of it. They did share one other characteristic. None of them overtly spoke of the development of their selves in terms of what child psychologist Erik Erickson referred to as negative identity which develops primarily through opposition to others. The characteristic they developed was a form of resistance, not to be confused with adolescent rebellion.

There are two major points of view established in the feminist literature looking over the field of subjectivity and how the issue is of special interest to women. Traditionally, subjectivity was and is viewed as "a unity of instincts and physic structures and sought to objectify knowledge of the self through the analytic method." (Noddings and Witherell, 1991, p. 86). This traditional attitude is equated with none other than the likes of Freud and his followers. The master narratives of theoreticians such as Freud based upon unified individuality are currently been given short shrift by postmodern feminists who view unitary subjectivity as "multiple, conflicted, complex fragmented, and in constant flux". (Henriques et al, 1984 in Noddings and Witherell, 1991, p. 2). Petra Munro describes the women teachers she interviewed experienced gender for instance as being "multiple, situated and contradictory" (Munro, 1998, p. 124).

The reason for the perceived need for this change in the grand narrative of the unified self appears to be the reluctance of postmodern theorists to believe or see that

human beings have " an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and what makes her what she is" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). There are numerous other feminist epistemologists (Smith, 1993)(Battersby, 1998) who support the need for a refuting of unitary subjectivity and replacing it with a version that is non unitary. Taken to extremes unitary subjectivity is seen as a western idealized autonomy relishing in individualism while avoiding conflict, contradiction or ambiguity. The seamless unified self is held at least suspect by post modern feminists. On the other hand from another point of view, Kathleen Casey writing about women teachers working for social change, shares her belief that women are not only creations of discourse but makers of discourse and as such provides this caveat to postmodernity and its concerns:

Unlike the alienated personas of post modern discourse, this self is not a jumble of fragments; she can articulate her own coherence. Acting within the limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power. (Casey, 1993, p. xv).

The three women who participated with me in this inquiry did not appear as three transparent people spinning around as if propelled by some centrifugal force, grasping for fragmented bits and pieces of what makes them human, in an attempt to construct for each of them, a self. Nor did I see a single, immovable, solid, human being, whole and complete. What I heard was three women who were "becoming". After listening to their stories and how they have struggled to make sense of their lives, I am concerned that the postmodern criticism of these subjectivities as being ambiguous, messy, multiple, unstable, but persevering may not be the list of adjectives I would ascribe to the grammar of the lives of these three women. The lexicon for Grace, Gerie, and Katie reads as distinct rather than ambiguous, tidy minded not messy, purposeful not multiple, non acquiescing but not unstable, and confident not persevering. Perhaps the central essence as viewed by Weedon is not fixed but it is certainly coherent in the desire by these women to locate or construct this centrality. Each of them speak of the struggle to be whole, it is a major focus for what they do and who they are becoming. Activism expresses itself as significant to this thought.

The idea of a women's identity on an outward centrifugal force spinning away from the essence or heart of who she is, falling away, leaves me with a picture of that which falls away becoming less than distinct persons developing as a result of the spin. What remains is an essence with little or nothing to sustain it because all the parts that make us human are alluded having been flung away. The women I heard who were constructing their stories were women who may have been spinning but the force was used to draw the pieces of what makes them human closer to the essence of who they were, not to spin out and spawn a series of incomplete fragmented selves but an attempt to construct and work towards a unified whole self. Gerie on many occasions referred to her need to be a "whole person". Grace spoke of her self "holistically" and Katie used the term "integrated" to describe her identity.

The strength and power these women understand and use comes as a result of each of their selves is in fact a process, a process that has within it the possibility of transformation. This is the significance of subjectivity for Katie, Grace, and Gerie. It may not be that the development or locating of the individual essence of one's identity that is important. Reconfiguring the notion of essence as the centre or core of a person is not how I began to understand their lifestories. What I was beginning to hear was not the articulation of a centre or core site or space but an energy, a continual steady energy. In thinking about their subjectivity in this way the binary opposition of relational subjectivity to individualistic becomes less of an issue. These women at times have displayed autonomy, at times they have displayed relational subjectivity but not in the sense of endless and reified multiplicity and fragmentation. The lack of a demarcation between autonomy and relation has provided the impetus for these women to work within the figure-ground reconfiguration that occurs as a result of the synergistic energy created between the shared and opposing characteristics of individualistic and relational constructed subjectivity. In this way they have been able at crucial times to avoid become immobilized and as Sidonie Smith observes that this endless fragmentation and multiplicity make the feminist an elusive being and notes "It is hard to coalesce around a call to political action around a constantly deferred point of departure"(Smith, 1996. p. 188). May it be impossible to be an activist, a legitimate one, if you are continually trying to decide who you are, which fragments you will pick up today. Moreover, in the interplay and sometimes collision of relation and

individualism subjectivity the possibility of transformation arises. Transformation defined as the praxis between public and private, personal and political, not binary oppositions but a wholeness, one very large connection.

#### First Person Plural: Speaking Subjectively as an Aboriginal Woman.

Katie and Grace are Aboriginal women. Katie calls herself Anishinaabe; she understands the Saulteaux language. Her spirit name is Clam Woman which brings with it responsibilities, among others, during the Sun Dance ceremonies. For both of these women, being Aboriginal has become a significant mark of their genealogy. Neither of these women can ever hold a mirror to their face without their Aboriginal nature reflecting back upon them. Katie said to me at one point when she began to talk of being an Anishinaabe woman. "no doubt what I am, just look at my dark skin and my dark hair". Neither of these women have adopted a color blind attitude. Grace often refers to herself as an Indian and to other First Nations people as Indians but only those she is fond of, knows or cares for: otherwise they are Aboriginal people. The ways in which they understand and live their Aboriginal-ness are similar in some ways and different in others and in the end share a fundamental motivation for their activism. To begin, Linda Hutcheon, contributes this analysis of subjectivity, relative to the understanding of Aboriginal women:

The current post structuralist/post modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post colonial discourse, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses (Hutcheon, 1992, p. 130).

Neither Grace or Katie have ever looked into the mirror and been able to ignore the fact that what was reflected back to them was Aboriginal skin. When Gerie, who is non Aboriginal, looked in the mirror the color of her face may or may not have been of significance on that particular day. Taken further a white male has the luxury of looking in the mirror and forgetting about his skin and his sex and can expend energy,

often enough, on the enterprise of his choice. How Katie and Grace have recognized, reconciled or resisted the image formed in the cultural hall of mirrors is an interesting and perplexing conundrum of each of the life stories.

The scarce literature from Aboriginal women relating to identity formation and the experiences of developing subjectively; relationally or individually contains these perspectives. Patricia Monture-Angus in her book Thunder in My Soul provides an analysis of growing up as a Mohawk woman. The nature of her identity is characterized in this way:

I am not just a woman. I am a Mohawk woman. It is not solely my gender through which I first experience the world. It is my culture that precedes my gender. Actually, if I am the object of some form of discrimination, it is very difficult for me to separate what happens to me because of my gender and what happens to me because of my race and culture. My world is not experienced in a linear and compartmentalized way. I experience the world simultaneously as Mohawk and woman. (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 177-178).

This is a woman who is affirming her identity, not fragmentary but simultaneously becoming a whole "herself". Hertha Sweet Wong writes of subjectivity and Aboriginal woman from a point of view of non oppositional subjectivity. She takes the idea further by saying that Aboriginal women have an additional pattern to contend with; that being the notion that indigenous persons have a notion of self as communally relational while living oppositional in a dominant culture that is autonomous and individualistic. Her answer to this develops what she refers to as "non opposition relationality". (Sweet Wong, 2000, p. 170). Her concern for this is because she observes that as women and Aboriginals, women when forced to choose between gender and culture will choose Native identity over female identity as the either- or choice. Sweet Wong believes non oppositional relationality will avoid the travesty of Aboriginal women becoming tragic modern imperial selves or tragic imperial postmodern pawns. Sweet Wong is looking for alternative choices for Aboriginal women, choices that are genuine ones and serve the needs of Aboriginal women in the quest for identity.

Sweet Wong's second major issue with regard to Aboriginal women and their identity is that of community. Her fear is that community is too often invoked as the monolithic centre of life and as such used to legitimate its membership rather than become a genuine source of subjectivity to flourish in conceivably alternative ways. Iris Young is concerned that community has become an ideal of community because it perpetuates a "normative model of social organization"(Young, in Sweet Wong, 2000, p. 320 n.1). For both Grace and Katie community has to do with having something in common. For Katie it the search for community has been and continues, after her grade six revelation as a conscious strategy to understand and reclaim for her self and others, what over two hundred years of colonization has managed to disassemble and outright destroy. She is working at resisting the grand narrative of the tragic, vanishing Indian and working towards composing her own life and developing a narrative of her self: Katie, Anishinaabe, women teacher, activist.

Winona LaDuke is an Anishinaabe woman, an activist and the president of the Indigenous Women's Network. Her work, her writing, and her activism is shaped by an interchangeable view of community as a political and poetic narrative. In All Our Relations (LaDuke, 2001) she brings forth, in a lyrically written circle the meaning enveloped in a phrase that appears often in her work: return to where you were native or make native where you are. The Anishinaabe woman makes clear that community is not a romantic idealism but an essential force for indigenous persons, especially women who are bent upon a journey of self determination based upon ecological transformation. Her many dimensional form of activism can be heard as she comments on a Minnesota Land Recovery Project she is involved with:

It's a small community -based effort to recover our land, culture and environment believe that everyone should try to do something in their own community, You've always got to keep your eye on the big picture though. People make bad decisions sometimes that affect you, but also you make your own community a good place to live, because that's who you'll be related to for the rest of your days (LaDuke, 2001, p. 40).

Distinct, Tidy Minded, Purposeful, Non Acquiescing, Confident, Activist

Grace: When I get the smoke break I was thinking back to just before my husband beat the hell out of me and I ended up finally that was it, he had taken off. I had \$40.00 between me and starvation and two kids, right, so he'd stolen my last \$40 and he took my car which was a \$50 car in those days, probably a \$200 car now but it was my car, I could get around in it and he had taken my car and taken my last \$40 and taken off. I remember just feeling so destitute, like I was just so depressed. It wasn't that he had left or you know, I suppose I was upset about that as well but he had taken my car and he had taken my last \$40, to hold me for food for the kids until God knows when. I remember sitting there thinking, "I will never be in this position, never will me and my kids be in this position again."

This is Grace telling of a very important time in her life. She initiated this thought by interrupting what we were talking about with "you know, when we were outside just now talking I was thinking about something, it seems important right now". The passage above does perhaps not sound distinct. This could be any one of a million women who have suffered physical abuse this year alone. What is significant about this statement is that Grace, upon reflection, is realizing, she says for the very last, first time, how she came to make a decision to do something to improve the quality of her life and that of her children, the first thing being to save her own life. The primary force of Grace's genealogy was her motherhood and when that was threatened by the means to be a good mother being removed from her she decided that "she would do something". Women's autobiographies and biographies are filled with the ruptures that Grace has described which are painful episodes left writhing on the pages or left with saccharine resolutions, where they become cannon fodder for victim theory or emancipatory theory, depending on how you read it. What is significant about Grace is what she did, how she did it and why she did what she did. How would she begin to ensure that she and her children would never be in this position again. She became an activist on her way, and then as her way to support her family.



## Feminism: Insight or Oversight?

Recently, myself, along with two women colleagues from the University met with one of the several new principals, who is an Aboriginal woman, working for one of Manitoba's largest school divisions. Together we participated in a formal discussion, the purpose of which was to formulate ways and means to increase the attrition rate of young aboriginal women attending university. During the two hour meeting, cultural, political, sociological, policy and academic issues were brought to bear. At one point to illustrate a point, the principal related an incident where she found herself in the position of defending to the media, the segregated girls program that is part of the curricula for her school. As part of her response she explained how it was important to make it clear to that reporter that "she was not a feminist." The comment was quite adamant and because of that and because it struck me as an important comment to be made in relation to the maintenance of an all girls aboriginal program and because I have heard similar comments from our women graduates for many years and because it coincided with the nature of this study on activism I paid more heed than I might have otherwise. I think that this incident may have been an example of language as action or an event. My first thought after hearing the comment about the principal not being a feminist was to question if what I had heard was that the segregation of the girls into a separate program was not a feminist action and was not to be attributed to feminism. After this meeting I thought of why attributing the foundation of this program to feminism would be deemed a negative rather than a positive enterprise. If an all girls program could not be attributed to a feminist analysis then to what may it attributed to. A comment such as the one about not being a feminist within that particular context appeared to convey a negativity towards the nature of feminism as connected to the girls program. Was the principal viewing feminism as the radical rupture that the literature often speaks of: the often perceived political radicalism than is often associated with feminism? Was this what the principal wanted to disavow herself of? If radical feminism was perceived as a rupture, was the principal, in dispelling any association to it, relaying the notion that this program was not meant to be viewed as a dramatic, tear in the curriculum, an overtly political act, but rather as an integral part of everyday curriculum that transcended the need for, or sought to avoid and be protected from an overt political association be it

feminist or any other stripe. Was the need to separate herself from a feminist stance a way of segregating her views of being an aboriginal woman from that of her perceived understanding of feminism and in this case white feminism?

The above incident is interesting documentation introducing a close look at feminism as it reflects upon Grace, Katie and Gerie. As with the words activism, feminism was never overtly named by any of the three women unless I asked them a direct question such as "are you a feminist?", "did this occur because of your feminist politics?" or "did you see this as a feminist issue?" All three women responded to these questions with one or more of these responses, "I never thought of it before or I don't know what a feminist is" or "they did that in the 60's didn't they?" When I asked Katie about feminism her response after the initial negation, was a lyrical account of what it means to be an Anishinaabe woman which she ended with "maybe feminism but as a woman, I want to be heard, understood, and appreciated." Gerie point blank said I never thought about it, was "something from the 60's, has nothing to do with me." Grace allowing it could be feminism "if it was like good mothering, maybe".

In pursuing the issue of feminism with these three women it became abundantly clear that there would be no consensus of how feminism was to be defined or how it hindered or contributed to the formation of their identities. Their genealogies, in all three instances, contained the significance of woman but not overt feminism. In the case of the Aboriginal principal there was a denial or abdication of feminism, in the case of each of the three women it is absent at first, absent in the overt sense. It was not that they were anti feminist but rather that they did not name themselves as feminists. An absence of feminism in several facets of political and intellectual life would mean that these women are then missing a significant accessibility to the ability to understand who they are, how they came to be so, and how best this may continue. These women would not and did not, view themselves in opposition, for example to men, to patriarchy, or to the dominant male society and because of this may not be seen as part of the struggle for emancipation or equality or making a difference or any number of causes, some that are difficult to distinguish from sloganeering. What is important to bring to the surface at this point in the discussion is, that after working with these women for many months, after having them as students in the past, it is my understanding that they are feminists. What is of much more importance however, than my believing that they are feminists is

the question of why, considering the work they do, the lives they live, they do not consider themselves to be feminists. The three of them did become interested in the idea of feminism, only after they each named it for themselves..

During my tenure as an educator at the Winnipeg Education Centre I have observed a strident resistance among the majority (not all) of women students to being named or naming themselves as feminists. I have documented countless women students who characterize feminism as: "It has nothing to do with me." "Feminism is something you can do when your kids are fed and the man is not hitting on you". "I need to get things done, not play around with blaming men." "Equality, that's for middle class women and I need to survive." "Aboriginal women can't be feminists because our role as mothers is a traditional one." "Feminism is a threat to Latino men, I would never bring a book like that home". "Feminism is for white women who want to help us, makes me mad, I don't want their help". "Why is it that university professors want us to be feminists, its like we are supposed to bleed all over." "What does it have to do with teaching, it'll probably just make the principal mad any how, you've got to be careful". "Feminism is only for those women who already have everything." "I would be a feminist but I don't have time to go to meetings". "I read an article once about feminism, nice idea bit it's too late for me". "Feminism is not going to get me a job, or paying the bills is it." "Some day I'll be a feminist, not now though." "I don't know what it is, we don't learn about it here." "I want to get out of the inner city and have a better life, not be a feminist".<sup>2</sup>

In the three lifestories feminism shapes each of the documentaries whether alluded to or actually named. While the feminism in the stories appeared at time invisible or elusive there was always a sense that if it did exist just below the surface. The resistance to being named as feminists was a form of feminism in and of itself. It is important for an inquiry such as this one, that is involved in close order low to the ground social change, to recognize what propels these women to do what they do. Linda Briskin suggests "the need for an additional framework that is situated more concretely with in the activist map of the women's movement and which theorizes feminism in practice." An understanding of Grace's, Katie's and Gerie feminism as non feminism may be uncovered in the argument that Briskin presents as feminist practice theory. It seems

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<sup>2</sup> These comments are from a journal I have kept since contemplating this research study. (1987-2001)

an appropriate fit in this instance. Briskin argues for the need to analyze the complexities of feminist theory from the standpoint of practice as a counterpoint both to the standpoint of theory and also to the standpoint of experience. It appears that Briskin is searching for a method to integrate theory, experience and practice which is what this inquiry has also set out to construct. To this end Briskin sees her form of feminist theory as an intersecting, albeit contradictory whole. She goes further with by suggesting her strategic orientation, one that develops a framework for theory of feminist practice:

All feminist practice struggles two poles of attraction-disengagement and mainstreaming. Disengagement which operates from a critique of the system and a standpoint outside it, and a desire, therefore to create alternative structures and ideologies, can provide a vision of social transformation. Mainstreaming operates from the desire to reach out to the majority of the population with popular and practical feminist solutions to particular issues, and therefore references major social institutions, such as the family, the workplace, the educational system and the state.

Both approaches, mainstreaming and disengagement are necessary for a complete feminist vision. There is an effective tension between the two and the goal for Briskin's vision is to understand the tendency for feminist practice to be pulled towards one or the other pole, each carrying with it their own risk; disengagement leading to marginalization and invisibility and mainstreaming leading to co-optation and institutionalization. It may be that the reason that each of the activist research participants were reluctant or uninterested in acknowledging the importance of feminism or naming themselves as one was because they experienced in a very real way the tension between the push me pull me of disengagement and mainstreaming. If one or both of those aspects were thought to be feminism defined, these women by the nature of their lifestories and their developing activism would have disregarded this theory or the vision the theory was based upon; partly due to the tension of disengagement operating from a critique of the system from an standpoint outside in opposition to mainstreaming with the desire to reach out to the majority with reference to social institutions and partly because if an either or choice had to be made it would have been to do neither. Or on the other hand an attempt to take what was needed from each approach may develop in a way that could enable a new attitude towards feminism based upon an understanding of

transformation. Transformation is part of the basis of their work as activists. Linda Briskin supports this idea of the risks attached to disengagement and mainstreaming with the belief that, "these strategic risks can be countered by an integrated politic which creates a bridge between disengagement and mainstreaming" (Briskin, 1991, p. 31). This integrated approach is what these women, all the while, have been constructing and living as activists. It is an integration of their making and is not based upon a reaction to the either or choice but to one of the creation of possibility. The lifestories that the three women construct both overtly and covertly recognize both the tensions and risks of feminism and because of this are practicing a form of feminism that is non feminism, refusing to be named as one because it may label their intentions to the world, as ones they do not embrace. The result of this non feminist feminism is what I see emerging as the politics of confidence. It became politicized when they constructed a method of application to their sense of feminism.

## Chapter Ten

### Naming Ourselves

#### Experiencing The Winnipeg Education Centre

This chapter looks at the Winnipeg Education Centre and the perceptions of each of the three participants on the impact that it had on the construction of their identities as activists. This piece was based upon a collaborative dialogue between each of the women participants and myself, a dialogue which developed around the shared and embedded context of the Centre. The first part of this portion of the inquiry was woven around the themes that emerged and were shared by each of them, some more intensely some less so. The themes were based upon: learning about WEC, deciding to apply, entering the Centre and the selection process, early orientation, struggles as a student, the WEC ethos, field practicums, the WEC curriculum, the WEC staff, leaving WEC and the first teaching job. Some of the vignettes, also appear in the life story and then again here, either as a repeat for emphasis or in the form of a reference. The fact that the participant reflected upon and chose to tell or refer to the same event twice for two aspects of the inquiry was considered integrally significant for the construction of the activist identity and as such were, documented as given, when given.

*Women will starve in silence until new stories are created which confer on them the power of naming themselves.*

(Gilbert & Gubar, 1979)

Grace, Katie and Gerie have been educated to be teachers, having graduated from the Winnipeg Education Centre, Education Program. At the time they earned their degrees the Centre was under the governance of the University of Manitoba. Gerie has taught and continues to teach at various alternative settings in the Inner City of Winnipeg. Katie has taught in several inner city settings and is currently working for the Provincial government as a curriculum consultant for the Native Studies Department. Grace taught for two years in the inner city before entering into what she refers to as "community

work". Each of these women graduated during a time period when the Centre was experiencing its halcyon days; the days before the upheaval created by the termination of student funding and when there was a full complement of resident staff. Their reflections are based upon their experiences of an Education program that was relatively stable during the time they were students. Stable in a structural sense that the funding was secure and the staff was sufficient in number and were able to address student needs, not only academically but socially as well. Each of the three women have a version of how they came to the Centre and why they found their way there at the particular time they did. Katie and Grace speak of how they discovered the program and were subsequently selected to enter the program but their accounts are less emphatic than Gerie's and express a different focus. Gerie chose to begin her lifestory at the time she entered WEC:

Gerie: I think that WEC had a huge impact on my life, WEC gave me confidence, WEC gave me the opportunity to try on different roles that I never had the opportunity to try before. WEC automatically assumed I had something to say, which was thoroughly, I mean it was just – to have that opportunity to have that sort of assumption or affirmation that what I said had value. I mean in the short time that I was there, in the three years that I was there, it was like this accelerated making of me, I don't know what you'd call it, I just worried so much about who I was and what I can do, what I had to offer, in that short time I learned so much. You know where it all started – in the selection process. I mean I told the story about the selection process a few times before but I think it fits to talk about it again, now. I remember one point where, and I think I've already told this story but I'll just – in case I haven't – it was during the selection process that two-day thing when we were talking about a New York inner city educator.

Katie talks of her entry and time at WEC as well as her first year of teaching from the encompassing theme heard throughout her lifestory: the theme of connections:

Katie: So I'd heard about the Winnipeg Education Centre and I was really encouraged and supported by the staff at the school I was working at and they said, "You definitely have to go and do teaching because we've seen the work that you've done

over the past three years and the connections you've made and how you've really assumed responsibility in caring for children and helping them learn, assisting in that whole process." So, I went with that attitude and I made an application – for me to enter as a mature student at the university - at the time when I was applying for the program– to be admitted into the centre I was still 20 but I would have turned 21 throughout that year so that's kind of my first concern because I said on the application form I am 20 however will turn 21 during that first year of study and so I went. I got called in for an interview and I remember walking into the hallway at the facility and looking at all these interesting things on the wall that students were doing and I thought, well this looks great. I want my stuff up on that wall too, so anyhow, I went for the interview and we went to two different interview teams and one of the questions that I remember that I was asked, and I think it's a real critical question to ask is, "Why do you want to go into this field? Why do you want to go into education?" - and so I had told them that I wanted to go into this field because I really felt and still feel that I can contribute you know, to whatever area I was going to be working, either in the classroom or more generally throughout the school, and I said, that's where I want to make a difference with learners because there's a lot of work that has to be done and so –plus making connections with students and certainly there had to be more role models, be it Aboriginal, be it woman, or even in my case be from a certain community, that being that I am from the inner city and so there had to be more role models, positive examples, if you want to call it that, because I really don't like the term 'role models' either but examples for students to encourage them in their work. So I was accepted into the centre and I remember one of the first things we did, which I was really, really happy about, was before we began our studies was we went out to, I can't remember where it was but it was out in the country some place.

Both Katie and Gerie spoke of the importance of the early on, positive imprinting process that the Centre afforded new students. Grace spoke more of the negative situations she saw that bewildered her. Gerie in her life story spoke of the selection and her early days as a student as a mixture of excitement, heightened awareness of what



was occurring along with determination and apprehension which for her seemed to occurring simultaneously. Katie's story reveals this about early days at WEC:

Katie: So we went to Gimli and that was so, so different, like in how I thought that teacher education was going to be. I was really, really intrigued and impressed because one of the first things we actually had was we sat down and I remember, I remember clearly sitting outside and I don't know if you were there, but, because I can't remember, but I remember we were sitting out there and we were asked to read a book April Rain Tree, In Search of April Rain Tree, we were asked to read that book and come out there and be prepared to talk about it, and it was so interesting sitting out there, I thought wow, this is great, they're asking us for our ideas and what we thought about the book and in a sense when I look at it now I see it was a talking circle and I was really impressed at that point and I thought this is going to be really great if the learning continues this way because I always figure that learning should be relevant to what you're going to be doing, whatever capacity it is, and I remember we also did, I remember at that time, the orientation, I guess it was called, the orientation where we participated in these activities and they were activities on trust, and I remember we would have to stand, eyes closed, arms at our side, someone standing behind us and we would fall backwards and that was an exercise of trust because you weren't sure if the person behind you was going to catch you or if they were going to let you fall. So here's these people that we didn't know, and we asked to think about trusting each other and you know you have to trust that they would catch you, and I really, I can really see the relevance of that because that whole activity, that exercise had deeper meaning because a lot of these people that you would be spending your next four years with you would have to trust them be it a student or the staff at the Centre. So that was, to me that was a real interesting and challenging time for me to actually go and actually live this. It was a couple nights we were there and we lived with the people that we'd be spending the time with. So that was quite an experience and that was my introduction to the centre and one that I'll always remember and I should also mention because it's also had an impact in terms of my work. At the time when I first came to the centre, I was also engaged to be married so not only was I entering and embarking on a new journey in terms of furthering my

education at the university but I was also entering another part of my womanhood, I was entering into a relationship with a partner, life with a life mate, if you want to call it that, and so I was married in my second year. But I want to talk a little bit about my first year at the centre because I found it really challenging. What I really enjoyed about the centre and its philosophy and the way in which they practiced and the way they taught was that it was very much community based, everything was relevant to our experiences even in the English courses we took be it English literature or whatever, everything was always related back to your history, your experiences and how you tied those to what you were learning and as well too, the way we learned was very experiential. For me that was important because for me I'm an experiential, visual learner and I really found that in my first year and that was really nurtured and it was encouraging to me because I was able to be creative and to begin thinking in a different way about education and so I thought long and hard and I remember the Math classes we took as well. We learned all of these different concepts, very complex but also a very challenging way of looking at mathematics and science if you want to put it that way too, and actually having a concept or a theory explained to you but you're also experiencing it, touching it, you know through manipulatives and helping you to understand learning that way and so for me that really mattered. That's a Math course, but it happened as well too in other classes, but for me that was what really changed learning for me. I wouldn't say changed easily but that's what really facilitated I guess in me an innate way of teaching and learning that I always wanted and here I was in this place that was facilitating that and nurturing it and so I thought I'm going to take advantage of every opportunity that I can to learn and to soak everything in, and so I did that.

I remember we would go out into our practicums as well too. We were encouraged to go of course into inner city schools because that's where what we'd been trained as inner city specialists and I remember the first school that I went into. Part of the exercise in going into the school was to do this big massive book, and I still remember that book and I kept it book up until I don't know how many years ago, it was just falling apart, it got so tattered. One of our assignments was to create this book about me and that you would go and share this book with students. I thought, "Wow, this is really, really interesting." Like to be able to tell my story, put it in a

book and go and share it with students I'm going to teach, and that for me too was a real eye opener because back to that exercise of trust, here is these kids that are going to be in your care and they should really know who you are as a person but more so as their "teacher" and so I found that really interesting and we had to present these books. It was so important for me to see that the people here, the instructors thought that who we were was so important that you would actually find ways to share that with the children. I think Charlotte that was actually in your class.

And it's interesting because it really made me think that it's important that you make that connection with your students and that they see you more so as a person that you don't live within the confines of those walls and that they see that you are really a person, so we learned that there and it was a great process for me because in my work now that I do, I do that, that's one of the first things that I do is make that connection with the people doesn't matter who I'm working with I will always make that connection so I learned that there and that was a great lesson to learn, and at the centre the group we started off with, I think there was about 18 of us, around there, and what I really liked as well too is that when we traveled together through these courses in the time frame of either half a day or a portion of the day and that was for me a critical piece because I find that when you bounce around, like I'm thinking about the university now how they have one-hour classroom, 1-1/2 hour there and it's broken up. We had this concentrated time to focus on a course or on a topic and for me that was really helpful because the continuity and having the ability to challenge each other, and to challenge your instructor, to challenge thought, it's important that you have the time to do that in an atmosphere that's comfortable, in an atmosphere where you can trust and so I really, for me that was a critical piece in terms of real learning as and as well too having that continuity of staff, teachers and then I remember a couple of other highlights. I remember when we had to develop our first teaching unit and where we had to take a theme and build upon that theme what we would teach the students and I remember doing mine on rainbows and taking the beauty of the rainbows and how you can get students to help understand they're more than just something beautiful but that there's a reason why they are there and I remember doing my one lesson plan in the unit on the white light and the significance

of that and even just doing fun stuff. I remember we did fun stuff in that unit, but I remember too in there that thought about taking that theme and tying in these what we call subjects together and tying them in and integrating them and making the connection for students and for me I really learned that there too was how you can make learning important and fun, interesting, challenging and so that was for me a highlight and really what for me there was also the turnaround was that it was modeled for us and that's a critical piece too is that if you're teaching a concept that it's modeled for you as well and I remember we had that modeled for us so that we could really experience it. I remember that big integrated project as being okay, now I get it, now I understand and so there was for me a lot of support in those classes and in that area of curriculum when I was beginning to really understand what it was to be a teacher and to really help your students understand that learning can be fun and that it can be challenging and that you can test them and that you can test yourself and really tap into their creativity and their strengths and their gifts. And that's was really nurtured for me at the Centre because for me it's really where I grew up, educationally speaking and where a lot of my thoughts that were so trapped inside were really released and I'll give you an example in Math. In high school I was horrific at Math, I just didn't understand. I remember my first WEC Math test that I got, I scored at an 86% and I'll never forget that because I remember getting back the test, and it was like 86% and the rest of my peers, my fellow students a lot of them got like 50's some failed, some 60's and they said, "How did you manage to get an 86%?" And for me it was, I finally understood how to make connections and because I need to see and learn from connections, really I was able to excel in that particular area, so for me the centre really nurtured that and as well too when we had our practicum we had that concentrated block of time. If we were going to our visits monthly but then when we went there we were there for a block of time for those six – eight weeks. These things have become part of my life now, WEC was that for me. I think I've said before that I could have probably made it on campus, with marks for sure, but I would have missed out on this other stuff I'm talking about which is much more important in making me who I am.

Then the fourth year came along and I'm missing out a lot of things here, but my fourth year came along and for me it was a time where we could get out there, okay,

here you've had all this knowledge given to you, you've soaked it in, you've done papers, you've done units, you've done field practicum now you're going to go out there and you're going to actually work for a whole year and then put this theory into practice or into action, and so I decided to go back to the school actually that I had gone to for my industrial arts classes when I was in junior high school so I went to Aberdeen and I wanted to go there and I was really fortunate. I had a lot of fortunates in my time at Winnipeg Centre. I went into a situation where there was team teaching occurring and there was three teachers I worked with as opposed to working with one which was different from the other three years, so I worked with three teachers and it was incredible because we had a group students that we would keep for the whole day as opposed to them bouncing around and it was a time where there was much, in the 80's, much experimentation and help in some of the approaches to education, so at this particular school they had set up team teaching situations where a group of students would stay with this group and so I had that experience in my fourth year and to me that was a real highlight. It was for me and what I believe is education needs to be seen in terms of the environment that we create for students. This for me was all there and like I really believe in keeping your students with you awhile instead of having them bouncing around all over the place because they're already at that time in their life where they're bouncing around enough in many ways, so we don't need to facilitate that in a place of learning, and actually I'll make a side point here is that even with my son, with my son when he went into junior high school I still upheld that belief and so he's been in a junior high school now where he's been in one stationary classroom with two teachers and that's just the way I believe that for me anyhow how students learn best. So my son doesn't know about floating around in the school, he knows staying in, one solid, stationary place where he can learn in a holistic, supportive way, so I was fortunate to be able to work at Aberdeen and to work with this group of teachers because the students that were attending the school were primarily Aboriginal students. At the time there was I would say at least 75 – 80% of the students were Aboriginal students and I was also at the beginning to of my teaching life. Because what was also exciting was seeing the Education Centre students from previous years who were now some of the graduates working in the system and

so I was seeing some of them in the field and it was encouraging to see that possibility for myself as a potential teacher. This modeling support was critical for me.

So I graduated and in a sense leaving the Centre and the learning for me was sort of okay because here you're going on into the real world now and you're going to have a group of students where you'll have responsibility for. And I remember before graduating being offered a contract with Winnipeg School Division and I was so happy because when we went for our interviews and they asked where you wanted to teach, I said, I'm going to teach in the inner city. I was born and raised in the inner city, my teacher training has been specializing in inner city teacher education and I said, that's where I want to be. I want to make sure that I'm placed in an inner city school, so my first school I taught at was William Whyte. I taught the grade six class and I remember going in there in August and my students I remember I went in there and I thought, okay take a good look at this classroom and this empty space and all those things there and how we can really put the theory into practice with all the experiences you've had. And that's what I did. I set my classroom up in an atmosphere that some of my other colleagues in the school at the time said, "Wow, is this ever different, how you've set up your classroom." I had all of my desks, we didn't have tables, my kids had desks, but probably desks and I put them in groups, in clusters and having the space even though I was going to be teaching grade six having a space where we could sit and have meetings with the students so I had a meeting space. I had a different learning centre set up for the students and so I remember the students walking in the first day and being quite amazed at the set up because I think for many of them it was simply that they were not accustomed to. And the first thing that I remember that I did with my students was that we sat down in a circle and I shared my big me book. I took that big me book with me and actually there was a lot of empty pages, I should mention when I first took it in I think it was second year, there was a lot of empty pages at the back so we could add on, and I did do that throughout my year. I think I ended up with the birth of my son I think that is where I ran out of pages, but I would add on to the book and so I'd take this book and I shared a lot of my upbringing and as well too part of my experiences in school and I remember taking my me book and sharing that with the students. It was real. I remember looking at their faces and I think for many of them probably caught them by surprise because

they weren't used to someone being so open and so honest and so for me that was making that connection with my students, making the connection to them of who I am.

Grace's entrance to WEC took a more circuitous route. It is important to point out that this circuitry was also present in Gerie's lifestory. Approaching WEC was a significant marker for both these women, an indication that life somehow needed to be different. This took time, conviction and courage:

Grace: I had this wonderful social worker, can't say this too often in my life, I think I really had nothing ever to do with the system so I had to go on welfare then because I was alone with the kids and then I went over to a little clinic by the development I lived in and there was the doctor there. I went to see the doctor and I said, "You know I can't sleep, I was an insomniac. I would stay awake for like three days at a time, I was just like a wreck. And in fact all my skin started peeling, it was like I wasn't eating and I wasn't drinking and stuff, sort of dehydrating or something, so I said, "You know I really think, like I knew eh, of course I had friends, so I knew about all this stuff, and I said, 'I think I really need some Valium or something so I can sleep at night at least.'" I really as starting to bump off the walls and so he said, "Well, I'll give you 5 Valium, that'll give you 5 nights sleep, he said, but then you're going to have to see the social worker". Oh no, I have to see the social worker but there came this neatest little person. Sandra or something, this little Jewish social worker and she just looked like the stereotype of a social worker, like she had a little suit and she had a little haircut and she had a little briefcase. So I walk in to see her and I, think, now what eh?" I don't need this little social worker who doesn't know anything about me, telling me anything, but she just really seemed to care, you know what I mean. She was just calm, like once I sort of got passed that cynicism, I mean you could sit there and dwell on that I suppose but if you just listened to her and she was just straightforward. She was more like a mother than she was a social worker. She was just real you know and she listened, really listened. I went to see her because basically I just wanted some Valium eh but I said, okay I'll go see her but then I started to kind of like her and then she would drop by with her little social work suit and her little social work brief case and God knows what she wrote down

about me. She started connecting me with other women in the community that were sort of in the same situation and we'd start to get together for coffee. Then one day she brought me this application for a job at the school for a teacher's assistant, so she brings it over and said, "You should apply for this." And I said, "ya right", so I put it on top of the fridge or wherever it was I left it there, and then about three days later or something she comes over and she says, "Did you fill out that application and take it in?" "No, it's on top of the fridge." or whatever. " Well, I think you should just fill that out". So she just made me fill it out, she wasn't giving up, she was kind of a pest too, like she just wouldn't go away, she just kept at me you know. She said, "I'll watch the kids, you take the application in." So I took it in just from my house to get her out of my house. It was sort of a funny kind of relationship. In one level I knew she kind of cared and in another level it was like she was pesky, you know, because I think I hadn't been an adult all that long either, so it was like I didn't want some adult telling me what to do, but anyway she was kind of a neat little person. So anyway I went and took in the application and lo and behold I get the job, right, and so that was pretty good, so I started working as a Teacher's Aid at the local community school. Tina went to day care and John was four already and went to nursery half days and day care, which was all in my little neighborhood which made it kind of handy and then they were offering night courses. U of W used to offer night courses in the community which I think like was the best thing because in my whole life I had never known anybody that went to university, right. I can't even really say that I knew anybody who even finished high school then, my brother, I guess, finished high school. I knew one person, and but I thought like you had to be really smart and anyways a bunch of us got up the courage in the group to go. This made peer pressure and we were going to sign up for this course, or else, and we didn't even have to pay for it. They gave a bursary and stuff. I was probably only making minimum wage or whatever. I think I was making a living but just making a living and so anyways we signed up for this bursary and next you know you're in the course and actually I did quite well in the course and I quite enjoyed it. It was this kind prof, he looked like a little dope smoking, somebody I could relate to, like a little hippy kind of prof you know and I think part of the hook was, one of my favorite movies is One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and that was one of the books he used for the course. And I knew



everything about that book because I read the book and saw the movie. So yes, I did all right in that course and then somehow I heard about the Winnipeg Centre Project, they called it then.

Grace talks about her entrance into the Centre and her first year there as "an eye opener". It would appear from her telling that WEC did not ingratiate itself to her immediately. She found the particular version of the selection process that the Centre was using at the time she applied as odd and even though she was accepted into the program, it remains a disquieting experience:

Grace: It was bizarre, like Gary or whatever his name is, was sitting beside me and I can't even remember who else, there may have been four or five of us and then ten of them or something. I don't know, it felt like it was ten it might've been three or four, I'm not sure. It was just that they'd ask a question and you'd feel like you were supposed to compete for the answer. It was just the weirdest thing and the other thing is like just me or my personality but I don't like to cut people off usually, so it was very hard for me to be interviewed that way because unless you directly ask me I'm not really just going to cut somebody else off just to be more noticed or whatever. Anyway I got in, I don't know how but somehow I got selected, so that was a really good thing for me and this is also a recurring sort of theme in my life was that first year we had some really spirited people. I wouldn't have said it so nicely ten years fifteen years ago, but anyway they were kind of cuckoo actually, and like some of the stuff that went on like with the profs, how the profs let themselves be treated by these students and let this stuff go on. These students were acting out something weird, like rebels without a cause or something, you know, and then you'd get caught up in the middle of it all and the tears and the screaming and I remember, I guess this is a reoccurring theme of almost every place I've worked, or anything I've been involved in, say after two or three months, you'd say, what the hell kind of jackpot have I got myself into now, right. I had a good job, I was making a decent living, close to my kids in the neighborhood, you know like why not. So that first year was kind of interesting. Opened my eyes a bit to the world.

Grace's first response to WEC was like holding up a mirror, a mirror that reflected her observations back on herself and how she was perceiving the world at that time:

Grace: Yes, I've never seen people really act that immaturity before. Well yes, that was the first thing that struck me was like I don't know what I expected but I thought we were all adults and I was a lot younger, actually when I think about it, than a lot of the people there. For the most part, like they were probably 30 or something, oh they were older than me, most of them, and there were some that were my age, around my age but these were like second year students and I was just blown away by the level of anger. You know it kind of blew my mind a bit, like there was the racist anger mostly, or we perceived this as racist anger I'm not sure. I didn't really remember personally experiencing a lot of racism by the profs or by the people you got to know but there was like a mood, an attitude. There was anger from their experiences with being Indian. It was quite hypocritical, maybe hypocritical wasn't quite the word. It was quite, I'll just say mind boggling because I can't think of the word for it but it had these Aboriginal women who were very angry and if the prof would say anything, they would counter it with some kind of Aboriginal racist spin on it and I just didn't get that spin. At the same time most of them were married to non-Aboriginal men, right, and they would just be down with the whites. When I looked at it I thought that this it was just so crazy. "Like you guys are crazy you know." I don't know what I quite expected but I thought we'd all be adults and we'd all be struggling and stuff but with real concerns not this. This was not real to me. It was not important.

For me really I had to struggle because I couldn't write a sentence. This was real. I remember also the peer pressure of my friends, my friends before I went to university and to WEC. Like I've never had any difficult adjustments around them sort of putting me down for trying to study. They did phone me and they'd say, "Want to go for a beer?" and I'd say, "No, " because I have to read things like 10 times to get it, like it to sink in because it was just a different way of reading for me although I'd always been a reader, it was a different kind of reading, like study skills and stuff like that, like I didn't have those skills. They'd say, do you want to go for a beer or something and I'd say, no. Oh, they'd say, you're too good to go for a beer with us now

that you're at university so you know. So on a lot of levels I was having, I don't know, doubt, feeling like, what the hell am I doing this for. This was just coming at me from all kind of directions. And then my mom and my family didn't understand why I was in school and on one hand I think they were proud of me and on the other hand it was, you know, because they come from a working background where you worked like hell during the day, but when you're finished, you're finished, right, and so here I would be they'd be getting kids into bed and I'd be studying. It was pretty heavy there in the beginning for me because I was really having a struggle getting the stuff and wanting to get it and wanting to do well. So my family would say, "What are you doing this for? You got a job and make 15 bucks an hour now in some kind of abattoir or something and you know you're wasting all this time in school", because they just didn't really understand, like they weren't, I don't think being purposely unsupportive, I think they just didn't get it. Why would you put yourself through this, right? So, yes, I was sort of getting it on a few levels, you know.

Grace's focus on her motherhood as the basis of her activism also surfaced as she talked of entering the Education Program. Her sense of mothering and motherhood is the hallmark of her activism and the reason that she eventually found her way to WEC. These views of mothering as the basis for her approach to life were not born at WEC but it was there where it was encouraged to thrive and connected to other aspects of her life. In that way WEC did encourage her activism even though it had already germinated along with her motherhood, before she arrived as a student:

Grace: You know, I may not have come to WEC if I wasn't a mom. I really needed to find a way to earn a living. I needed a way to provide for my kids. I'd heard that WEC was a place where single moms were not only welcome but it was positive way to get in. If I wasn't a mom, maybe I would have kept on with being an aide or some kind of low paying job or something like that. I think WEC really gave me, no, reinforced a lot of things that I felt. You grow up with the people who worked there and came to school there. I don't want to stereotype, but, a lot of times people don't think about or ask themselves, is that true, and I always thought about it and I'd say, "Hmmm, or why is that? Why do you think they did that?" You know what I mean, I'd always try

and sort of figure out what was underlying this or what was behind that. WEC was a place I could do that, you know. I need to do that. I grew up in a lot of ways at WEC. There it was my natural way of relating to the world for what it is, what it really is. You know. What's going on here? And so WEC sort of gave me that and it gave me support, I would say that people like you and Howard reinforced that for me. Because I think I felt different at points in my life and wondered sometimes why do I have to ask those questions and the other thing is why do I ask so many questions? It reinforced that for me and I think that was good for me, it sort of strengthened my identity as a person, that it was okay for me to be like that, you know, and then of course you had other profs who shall remain nameless who didn't really want to know who I was and asking them questions was like some kind of questioning of their credibility or questioning their authority or that kind of thing and I didn't get along with those guys too well. But you know I did that questioning with everybody, it wasn't just them. But there's enough of the good stuff and enough of the relationships and experience with people that helped me strengthen that, and that outweighs those other ones and it gave me also the strength to tell those other ones what I needed to say, like in my fourth year there was that white prof that I said this to, "if you don't really want our input just tell me". Of course the rest of the class didn't even back me up, the lone voice. Does everybody feel that way? "No, not me. Of course in the coffee room they all felt that way but they didn't in the classroom. I guess they were afraid it would reflect on their marks and it did reflect on my marks as I found out later, but anyway for me I guess it sort of was for the inside of me, who I am, I have to act out on the outside pretty soon or else I can't live with my outside or inside, it has to come together. I get really anxious. I have to do something not just feel it you know. Tried things out at WEC you know, what fit, what didn't. Was a good place for that.

Grace's thoughts on teaching as a career followed:

Grace: Well, you know what, I'll tell you this was not maybe the best attitude I had. Maybe it's my bad attitude before I went to WEC when I was a teacher's aid I used to have the classroom, a lot of times the teacher would leave me like for three days and I

would run the entire classroom by myself, grade 3 classroom. So when, I wish I could remember this lady's name, said to me, "Why don't you apply for WEC?" This was the sort of thought that went through my head: Well, half the time I have those kids myself anyway, and I run the classroom myself anyway, I might as well go to school and get paid for it." Right, because I was only making like minimum wage or something. So, you know I would make arrangements with a friend. I'd meet friends at the Friendship Centre and my brother worked at the Friendship Centre, you know, so I would take the kids out for field trips. So I was doing some stuff as a teacher's aid that was probably not even legal, now that I think about it. So, did I want to be a teacher? I think I thought I did, I really think I thought I did. You know?

But then you know when I went back to the classroom after graduation, when I started teaching, I had no problem relating to the kids but you know what, I hated school more or less, once I hit my teens or whatever. You know what I hated it as an adult. I never learned to like it or care about it much. Schools are not good places a lot of them anyhow. It stayed, it stuck, how I felt about schools, I really thought that if I came back as a grown-up that I would feel different. I didn't like the bells, the buzzers, the people telling me I shouldn't do this with my kids. I don't really like people telling me what to do. The teachers like the shops teacher that did a program for the kids, I would take them all down there and he would just treat them like imbeciles and not be real or do something, stupid so I get really angry about that.

Grace's tenure in the school system lasted two and a half years. Her reasons for leaving are a significant marker leading towards her activist life:

Grace: Well, I don't think it was like that all the time, but there were a lot of things uneven about the classroom. It seemed like I didn't want to be there. Yes, and then feeling like why should the kids have to be there. If I'm feeling like this obviously it's showing up in my time with them and why should the kids experience that? I don't want them to feel like it's them, you know what I mean, so it was that. My mom was very sick at that time and I was very stressed about that. I think my home situation was fairly stressed and I think that decision was the only thing within my control at that time. I think it was a lot of things, I don't think I can pin it down to

one thing. But I do know that I remember looking at the clock at five after nine one morning and thinking, "I just don't want to be here." Like just that feeling inside and so like what are you going to do about it? If you're feeling like this, and really try to put it out there for the kids, at the same time feeling like you didn't want to be there, and so that I don't know, for me I feel like that's just phony and it's crazy so then I worked at leaving. I really began to think that I had to do something real for these kids, because the way they came to school was not good, something had to be different. I felt that, you know. I think you have to leave by November, you have to give your notice by November or something.

Grace, Gerie and Katie: The WEC Piece:

The experience of WEC that these women shared as part of their life stories was neither an epiphenomenal event or the preeminent experience of their lives. The WEC experience varies for each of the women to some degree, but the one understanding that they all do share is that WEC was the place and the time when "who they were becoming" was of considerable significance for each of them. The intersection of the Centre upon each of their particular circumstances was important in the first instance to their development as students and later on as beginning teachers and later as inner city activists. The Centre provided each of them access to an opportunity to acquire a professional degree and provided a place where who they were was not considered as a deficit but rather a fundamentally valued, and a sought after asset.

In Gerie's case she was able for what she believed was the first time "to be who I was, not only that, but you people recognized me for who I was, and I was let in and wasn't thrown out, my life experiences were valued, and I was allowed, even encouraged to talk about it and even disagree about things". For Gerie WEC provided a haven of legitimization: "for the time I was a student I could wear my own skin". It was also the place where she was able, for the first time, to come to terms with her own negative school socialization, a socialization that had hindered and immobilized her development as a person significantly. She likens her negative Junior High experience as being similar to First Nations people who had been placed in residential schools. It is her ability to relate, learn from, and fully comprehend these experiences, many of which

she equates to accumulating or uncovering during her time at WEC, that have contributed substantially to her life as an activist. The major theme throughout the solicitation of Geri's lifestory has been her perceived need "to be real, to be who I am, and to know who I am". It seems that WEC provided a place for this to happen. At the end of the study when we spent some time reviewing out work together Gerie added an insight regarding her time at WEC:

Gerie: When I thought about this more over the summer I realized how important the timing was for me, going to WEC I mean. If the Centre hadn't been there when I was ready to go I would have definitely done something else.[ Gerie, in her lifestory tells how when she was "ready to do something", she could just as easily gone to Red River to be a plumber as go to WEC]. A year before or a year later and I wouldn't have gone. Another thing is the funding, I hear now that people have to take out student loans and that there are only a few access bursaries. This has got to make things competitive and not in the good sense either. If there was no funding when I was ready to go I would never have applied, never have applied. There was no way a woman in my circumstances could risk taking out loans, not even to try for one year. I'm thinking that this funding cut off has got to mean that the program is getting a different kind of student than when we were there. Most single moms, or those in bad relationships could never risk loans when there is no guarantee of getting the degree; the self esteem or confidence to take that risk is probably, for most women not there. Back to the competitive issue, when I was a student funding was fair or at least perceived to be fair. We were all on a level playing field. We didn't compete with one another in that way, we were able to use the energy to help one another in our year group. Our year group and how we dealt with things was almost the most important thing about the Centre, we were able to support and learn from one another and the life experiences we were allowed to bring. And more than that was to have our lives validated by you people. Don't get me wrong, it was no love in, we fought, it was hard to be at WEC, but it was that we were learning to know who were and be who we were. I remember having a big disagreement with Ken. I think now that he was a sexist, racist person. I worked this out. I saw it for what it really was. I saw what it had done to me before. I was learning how to confront this sort of thing for the first time

rather than letting it destroy me or find some other out that was not me or who I wanted to be. I spoke out and you know, we've talked about this before, this was not part of my deaf culture upbringing.

Katie's theme of connections was quietly developing before she came to WEC and became much more open, mature and vivid while she was developing an interest in curriculum development and implementation. This passage characterizes her interest and enthusiasm for the possibilities she envisions resulting from this particular aspect of her teacher education program and life at WEC:

Katie: Was it eight, eight weeks, of student teaching I think. Anyhow we were there in school placements daily where we had specific tasks, but the real highlight for me in terms of my time at the centre, the last two years and the third year was the development of our big curriculum project. The first one we did was a mini unit but in the third year we did that huge unit plan and for me that was a real test for me because I thought about how at the time all of these ideas of what we had learned and how we can bring them together under this one thought and I did mine on signs and symbols and we were asked to think about our conceptual framework and we were asked to think about our philosophy on education and how we would take this thought and how we would organize it and make those connections based on that theme, so I did mine and actually I did mine in a way that was different I guess, not really different but I built mine based on where I focused my unit on me and then my community and then the global, the universe.

Yes, and so I based my unit on that and I remember having, it was interesting, because I remember have to almost like defend, not defend, I guess defend would be overdone, but almost like defend where you went to present it orally to the committee and I remember the one I did as so important to me. I don't remember half the things I talked about but the one thing I do remember is the one question I was asked was, "How do you make the connection? How do you connect those three; yourself, your community and the universe into this theme?" And so I was able to explain to them that, because everything starts and your experiences start with who you are and how you expand and how you take that outward. So based on that conceptual frame that I



had developed I used that as well too and the development of this unit and I still have that unit and I have it safely stored down the basement and I actually go and visit it once in a while and along with some papers that I have kept and some other things in a box from my years and I've kept some papers that I've written and I visit them to remember that process and that time in my learning. I remember most, that curriculum project and the connections, thinking this is me, this is how I see the world, integrated, connected. Being at WEC and this being how we learned to teach students really did a lot for my confidence, my self worth.

It would seem that Katie's philosophical sense of self was finding a way to actualize pedagogical as part of her studies and her early teaching practice. The theory- practice relationship that Katie honed during the time she was a student remains an active focus for her work today and does form a significant hallmark of her activism. The particular theory - practice connection that Katie is expressing here is one of knowing and then acting upon that knowing. She is speaking here of a Cree woman educator, a colleague and friend, who names herself as an environmental activist. Katie is not as yet naming herself as an activist:

Katie: So when we talk about activism and activist persons and right now, thinking about that because I was thinking about that over the last few days, since the last time we talked, and I was thinking about some of the activists, what we would call activists that I know who actually do call themselves activists and they're not shy to call themselves activists. These are the ones that have been the ones that have been the closest to me, one that I know personally and I know really well, and she's also an educator, and she'll call herself by whatever work she does, she's an educator but then beside it is that first of all she's Cree, okay, she's Cree, she's an educator and she's an environmental activist and then what I see and what I observed is about her activism. I have known her over the last, it's going on ten years now, and what I see in her work, in her activism, is her work that she does with the environment and with the land. What I see there in terms of her activism is that she really believes in something, she really believes in caring for the land and she models that and so part of the work that I see that she does is creating that awareness and helping people to

understand what the reality is and that's what I see in her work. She's going about feminism in a subtle way. Sometimes some of the work she does is very subtle be it through an article she might write or talking on a program, a radio program, or doing a workshop because people I think, I think part of it for me is that, when I think of activist I think of somebody who's out there living the values and that's the picture I have, not the image that the media portrays of protesting publicly. She might do that sometime, she does actually participate in some of those rallies or walks or whatever you want to call them and so she participates in those, but that's only part of that work. But what I see in her activism is that she really believes in what she talks about and what she understands and she helps others to understand that and raises that awareness, raises that consciousness and helps people to understand and so I think that when we're talking, I think where we're going with this is that activism is something that we really believe in and you have a passion for it, passion, and where with that passion you have to be authentic, there's no better word I can think of right now but maybe it'll come, it's like living by example, because many people say role model. I hate when people say role model. What I see is living by example and that's what I see with my friend is that she lives by that example but she is still real, a human being not some saint or something. And she travels all over the globe and I've lived with her, I've lived in her home for awhile and when I pass by her place I stop and I see that how something as tangible as recycling, for example, I see that in her home, I see that in her workplace, and that's even more in your face. So that's how I'm beginning to understand what it could mean to be an activist.

Yes, she is comfortable in her own skin, like we have been talking about, and not afraid to go out there and take risks and to inform, to help people to understand and to live it and to practice it and base it upon who she is. Yes and so if you know who you are and have all of that, then you have a message and you have a story because what we're taught that is that we all have stories and that's her story. There is in activism an element of teaching like living by example, it's teaching I think. I think that's why I'm interested in understanding more of the possibility of a teaching activist, as it seems like it's living your story based upon what you have come to know.

And those stories are filled with your experiences, all of the experiences you had and you have something to share and with people sometimes that want to hear your story and sometimes people that don't want to hear your story too, you have both eh? And what I find is for me, I know people call me crazy, but I like working with the people that don't want to hear the story, and it's not because I find them a challenge but what I appreciate and what I've come to appreciate working with people like that is that it's, what's the word, it's not subtle but it's like how I told you the story of the mascots and the young guy who challenged me or I him. At WEC I learned how to translate these ideas around racism and develop curriculum that could help children learn about Aboriginal culture in a real, positive way, useful and all that. At WEC I explored big goals. I knew pretty early on that academically I could have probably made it on campus, but I knew too that the community, the connections I wanted were not there. I know you should want to have big goals but if you can start with one then you've done something, and that's how I see my activist friend's work too and that's how I see the work that I do. If I could impact and influence or help someone understand something that I feel that I've done part of the work and that's and then it makes you feel good, it makes you feel good, because you helped someone understand and in effect how I look at it too is that one person will then go out and will affect another so it's that layering, again it's that people call it ripple effect, that one person will help influence and understand and help create some understanding with someone else. I had successes at WEC that made more successes. My year group were people from all over the world, that was when WEC was getting more immigrants.

Yes because you know, as we have been talking about activism, I was thinking about how I was telling you that there's that subtle and there's the one where things become huge, in your face.. One of the things that really shook up a lot of those involved in environmental activism, many of them are indigenous women not only in North America but throughout other parts is that one of the women who was in South America two years ago was mistaken for someone else, and she was murdered and a lot of the women at that time, my friend included, were really devastated and I had to go and spend a week with her because she was just really torn apart because this woman was going out there to do good work and because she was mistaken for somebody else she was tortured and murdered and so it's not that when I think about

activism, and when I looked at it afterwards, my friend included, we don't have to go out there to and risk our lives physically, take risks yes, but not where we put ourselves in dangerous and potentially fatal situations in order to be activists. I think that is something else. What I learned at WEC was that, if I am an activist like you believe I am, then I would be a reciprocal activist, I would give back but not with my life. I learned that what I had to give was worthwhile and in some ways was my life I guess, my tears and voice, energy anyways. I can get passionate about this too you know, especially when it comes to the curriculum, the language issue for Aboriginal people.

Charlotte: I wonder why many women activists are reluctant to be named as activists even though their behaviour would attest to the fact that they most likely are...

Katie: Yes, because you know, I got questioned one time when I said advocate and then someone said to me, "You better be careful who you're saying that too and who are you advocating for." On my resume at the top I had, educator, mentor, advocate. I'm cautious now. I was told to be careful even though my first responsibility is to the people. I'm accountable to so many eh and there are all these rules and policies. An activist would have to live in that. Advocacy is different, I see that.

Katie is thinking about activism through her connected knowing. At this point in her life she is still reluctant to call herself an activist even though it is apparent that she is interested in what being an activist might mean and that I believe that she is one and have freely expressed this belief to her throughout the second tier of interviews for this study. During our last scheduled time together, at the end of the summer, she shared this thought concerning activism:

Katie: I think about activism a lot lately, since we've been talking. I think that, I already said this to you the last time about being an activist, that you have to be passionate about something, maybe passionate generally. But I think too that you have to have a generosity of spirit. But maybe that is still an advocate, helping, supporting, speaking on behalf of persons. An activist, to be an activist, an activist

has passion, generosity of spirit but that too has the need or the reason to change things, to see the need for change and be prepared to take some kind of direct action and maybe for a long time. I think that WEC was the place where this began to be like that for me, sort of like trying it on, you know.

#### Taking Stock: The Winnipeg Education Centre:

The three women participants have, to one degree or another, relayed the significance of their teacher education to the formation of themselves as activists. Katie's understanding of herself to her teacher education continues as a series of connecting circles, herself to curriculum, herself to community and herself to her Anishinaabe culture. Grace's relationship to her teacher education was more pragmatic and connected to herself as a mother and her need to be more self reliant. Gerie's understanding of her teacher education developed as an impact statement; as comprehensive to her identity as anything of significance has ever been in her life. Although each of the three women brought to their lifestories, a varying level of intensity in terms of the significance WEC had on their lives generally and more specifically in becoming activists, each story, in addition to sharing the same context had other similar characteristics. Katie, Grace and Gerie were all concerned with community, and with culture in one form or another and with knowing who they are. They are also concerned with the relationship that formed as individuals in relation to their community and the culture within. Each of them told as part of their lifestory, the way the intersection, interplay or connection of these aspects played upon their lives and their identities as activists. Their teacher education program was one place, one time period where all of these aspects were intensified and ordered around learning to become a teacher, an inner city teacher. The sensitizing concepts that developed emanated as a result of this particular trilogy are those of self efficacy, an understanding of self and subjectivity, and resistance and resilience. If their experiences were to be represented as an equation it would read as (resilience x resistance) + subjective awareness + self efficacy (community + caring) + politics of confidence = activism.

In the chapter of this dissertation that is directed to the background to this study teacher education is traced through the historical antecedents that parallel the life of the

Winnipeg Education Centre. The timeline extends the pendulum that swings from reform to change, from an emphasis on practice such as mastery learning to the development of a critical pedagogy, paralleled with the return of the conservative restoration and the threat of globalization. The very nature of Winnipeg Education Centre and the schools and community it set about to educate teachers to teach in, has created a natural site of resistance. Although neither of these women speak emphatically of being overtly taught how to resist the societal, political or reformation aspects of the world of schools that waxed and waned around them, they were aware that they were part of something important. This was expressed in Gerie's words "progressive", in Katie's words, "WEC impacted upon me" and in Grace's words, "WEC reinforced for me the need to ask questions, to get behind what is happening, to get real".

Another significant aspect of the WEC experience was that for these three women, for some degree, it provided a place for them to develop a level of confidence stemming from their self efficacy. Gerie spoke at considerable length about this:

Gerie: I think again it comes again from confidence, I sort of had a struggle with self-esteem issues and I know that I really had very really low self-esteem, very low belief in what I was, could do. I knew I was a good mom, that's about it, and so I struggled with all these other things that I was, that I thought that I was good at but never was able to do all that. I mean WEC let me be me, gave me first what I saw as the permission, then the confidence to say what I believed, to do what I believed was right. It was the perfect environment for me to develop at. I'm curious how other people found it, I'm really curious and I do hear people speak negatively and positively about WEC but I've never sat down and sort of talked on that level of what did it do for you, never mind about giving me the job. What did it do for people and I'm curious about that because I know what a huge impact it had on me, now I'm curious what it did for other people and whether it changed other people or not. But I think the other part of WEC is, getting back to it, was the sense that we were all some kind of activists in some way. There was a sense that we were all progressive. I thought I was getting a much better education at WEC than I could've gotten anywhere else like the U of M regular program or anything like that but I felt that we were getting, and this may have been the message I may have heard of WEC before I went

there it or it may have been the message from the staff or from the building or whatever, that we were progressive, we were holistic, we were going to be better teachers than anything that was out there in the inner city. I believed that. I truly believed that. Now I don't know where that came from. I don't know if it came from individuals, the program, or whether it came from the other students, or whether it came from the staff but I mean I believed that it was there collectively and all around in everything that went on there. Now in hindsight I know that we didn't really all walk out the same way and do the same thing. I know that it wasn't the same on the other end but when I was there and when I first graduated from there, I believed that strongly and would automatically assume when I met another WEC graduate that we were on the same wave length.

From the chapter on the methodology that is being developed for this work, social constructivism has been traced from symbolic interactionism, critical theory and to critical hermeneutics. Social Constructivism contributed the sensitizing concepts for the interpretation of why these women (and others) do what they do. Social Constructivist theory has assisted in developing a way of addressing practical realities rather than comparing people from a sense of prescriptive ideals or a stance of "high ground" morality but rather has taken the stance of seeking to understand ordinary people who are living extraordinary lives. It has also contributed to a method that does not need to judge people in order to appreciate and understand them which has been crucial for the ethical sensibility that was brought to this study. This method supported the construction of the meaning of activism as it grew within the exploration of the realistic contexts and contingencies of their work lives. This is an attempt at searching into selves; insights that at times, tend to be overlooked in policy or reform research efforts. Social constructivism does alert researchers and participants to the fact that not all activist persons are responsive to even common interests such as caring, feminism, or commitment to culture in quite the same manner. Social Constructivism has allowed the circularity of this dissertation to occur much in the same pattern as these three women's life stories have been told as held to be evolving and whole simultaneously.

Critical theory has contributed to the acknowledgment that the three lifestories, although highly individualistic in one sense do unfold in a macro context especially in

terms of social class, racial relations and gender sensitivity which becomes formidable when the uneven distribution of power intersects with the human interaction of these three women.

Trends in teacher education have evolved, matured and receded for several decades, one central tendency often eclipsing another. These tendencies usually mark a "solution set" to the question of "what is the main purpose for teacher education". There appear to be two, possibly a third, major ideological camps: the first is characterized as overtly and inescapably political as read in the more recent works of (Zeichner 1991; 1993; 1995; 1996). Zeichner's position is opposed by critics such as Fullan (in Zeichner 1993) who places moral purpose as the centrality of teacher education. Zeichner and Liston (1991) have developed an agenda for teacher education that supports strong democratic teaching and learning environments which will be responsive to issues of social justice in schools, the community and professional organizations. The retort from Fullan and other critics of politicized teacher education is that, "taking on society is too ambitious. We cannot expect the vast majority of teachers and teacher educators to engage in political work, establish better democracies and reduce social injustices, even in their own bailiwicks...it is too daunting, too ambitious" (Fullan, in Zeichner, 1993, p. 110). To what is usually presented as a bipolar argument of morality versus politicization, with the corollaries of education or training, professionalism or vocation, I have added a third direction. Nel Noddings (1997) in her recent work The Challenge to Care In Schools, has issued a challenge for teacher educators to contemplate a disparate purpose for teacher education: to establish simultaneously an all encompassing understanding and a method, for enabling teachers to "care" about and for children, teaching and schools. It is the addition of Nel Noddings' ideology of caring that has lead me to my current understanding of what is the purpose and how the purpose of teacher education has developed at the Winnipeg Education Centre and for this particular study how this purpose has contributed to the activist identities of Katie, Gerie and Grace.

In the very simplest sense the purpose for teacher education that has been developed and lived at the Winnipeg Education Centre, Education Program is an integrated one involving all three ideologies. There was no need to "take on society" which in part, is Fullan's opposition to politicized teacher education. The "taking on of society" was already there, with a large part of the student population that found their way to the



Centre and the Education Program. The program and the people who taught and administered to it never made a decision to take or society or avoid taking it on because society came to the Centre in the form of students who brought it with them: the poverty, the uneven distribution of power that students had experienced as welfare recipients and as unemployed workers: the racism students experienced in the schools and in their community: the gender insensitivity and the family violence: the drug and alcohol abuse, the affects of political and social alienation: the marginalized family, single parenthood: the inadequate education and the indifference and betrayal of adults when they were children, the inaccessibility to education and training as adults, and the inappropriate social welfare system throughout. The "society" that the students of teaching brought to the program immediately came into the arena of becoming a teacher which for most of the people who came to be students at the Centre meant being one of the breed of teachers that would promote and provide an education for inner city that would be effective, based upon their own experiences, both from their own school experiences and continuing to live in the inner city.

Effective education for inner city, minority residents, meant coming to terms with those issues of society in two ways; one being through caring for and about the children and families of the inner city community and another through a process of politicization that brought about a way to get things done, for events to unfold in a meaningful and productively useful manner. During this process the first step was to address each of their own individual socializations, the level of victimization that had resulted, the damage that this had inflicted, and pointedly, the understanding of how important it was to know who you were as a person before embarking on a teaching career that asked that same question of children, inner city children with complex needs. In the process of determining what sort of teacher they were becoming, the process of finding out who these women were was intensified.

This process of "identification" was more and sometimes less of a successful experience for each of the students that came through the Education Program at the Centre. Gerie, Katie, and Grace came through the Centre coupling their own identity formation along with the identities of inner city children and their families. This process formed an indelible impression on these three women; one they took with them to their teaching lives and later on generated their activism.

A significant reason for the success of these three women in becoming teachers and later community activists was for each of them, their resilience. A resilience that enabled each of them to transcend many of the perceived negative aspects of the lifestories they brought to the Centre. There were many roles for these women to contend with: mother, welfare mother, single mother, abused child, dutiful daughter, abused wife, wife, student, failed student, teacher aid and unemployed woman. For the three women participants, coming to the Centre was the first time that the negative aspects of the various roles that were attributed to them or which they acknowledged themselves were not considered as deficit, but as positive attributes. It was their ability to recognize this openly, to surpass any anger and resentment and to deliberately and thoughtfully choose and use the physical and psychological safety net of the Centre to explore alternatives. Alternatives that could relinquish the negative aspects of these many roles and responsibilities: to look at this identity as Gerie says constantly "in my own skin that I don't keep in a drawer", as Grace conveyed as "holistically" and Katie as "my connected, whole self". This created an ethos of possibility at the Centre, that when successful, was one of respect, reciprocity and reconceptualization. This ethos also provided an opportunity where the possibility of transformation existed. The ethos at the Centre contributed to transformative activity as they developed an understanding of what constituted real rather than illusionary choices. The success that Gerie, Grace and Katie experienced was transformative experience, experience that encouraged the development of their activism.

For all its complexity the teacher education program at WEC was successful for these three women because it created a place where the human quality of generosity was able to flourish. This sense of generosity began with a spirited politicization, nurtured with caring and being cared about evolving around the struggling for the moral ground, which was interpreted at WEC to mean "real" ground. This activity was not always pleasant or comfortable; nor was it always successful. Many people left the WEC program unchanged, and remained angry, victimized or indifferent to what was happening there, both to themselves and others. People were not always in agreement and out of necessity began to discover and use a model of consensus. There was open confrontation at times. Many times those of us who worked there felt we "were going to

the mattresses". The cohort grouping at WEC was most times however both a supportive and a learning experience:

Gerie: We were on a level playing field, there's nobody in there that was above it all, we all had to have common backgrounds generally. We struggled with the same issues outside of school whether they were family or relationships or money, we had this common ground that we were all in our group, I think without exception, so grateful to be there. My year group when I think about it now were just all so grateful to be there. I couldn't have thanked anybody enough at that time. Maybe to you people it didn't always see that but it was. I had this running argument with Frank, he was chauvinistic as you could be. Even though we fought, in the library, the parking lot, anywhere it came up, I never ended up by giving up on him. When he had problems I helped, we all helped. WEC was a safe place to try and work these things out. I had experienced sexism all my life but this was the first time I learned and understood what it had done to me. Until then it was, you know, my fault.

The "level playing field" that Gerie has alluded to several times during her lifestory accounts, began at WEC as that part of the Selection Process which ensured that everyone came to the Centre with similar needs and similar resources. This carefully orchestrated aspect of affecting the mandate of WEC, afforded the student body the opportunity to avoid the often initial forms of competition that occur at other and more traditional learning institutions. With a perceived sense of financial and resource security based upon equity, students were able to expend the time and energy to addressing issues such as racism, the gender bias, and to seek solutions to classist privilege through the development of Social Justice principles. These women were especially adept at understanding these issues: no need for text book examples of the poor and oppressed or code words for racism, sexism or class bias. They had lived these issues as integral parts of their lives. They named what they did but did not use the labels that others attribute to

the kind of activity they were involved in. For example, womanism<sup>1</sup> might be a better description than feminist for who they are. Grace's feminism was named when she referred to herself as a mother. It was only after many months of work and collaborating that any of these women were comfortable with the use of the term activist when referring to themselves. They were, however able to understand the terms, albeit not always named directly, of racism, sexism, classism, when it referred to their work with children and families and their own life experiences. The politicization and their activism occurred when they began to link the issues to their own experiences to the children and families in the inner city community. I have to come to understand that this is why they do not, at first, if ever, name feminism: they do not see the link. Gerie's experience with lived out overt sexism was thought of by her as an integral experience at WEC. It was not named as feminist activity because there was no need to label it at the time, only the need to live through it and understand it.

In constructing the lifestories to determine how they had become activists, the pieces that were their lives were told, some experiences named, and then to Gerie assembled as "knowing who I am" and to Katie as "being connected" and to the more elusive Grace "getting whole, getting real". What became abundantly clear as time went on and our work became more intense was the resistance that Katie, Grace and Gerie demonstrated at being named when they did not understand what the name meant or if they disagreed with the implications that the name or the naming conveyed. They did not use the term feminist because they did not understand what it meant to be a feminist, yet each one of them had strong conceptions of what it meant for them to be women. It took many months before they were responsive to the use of the term activism. Not until they each understood what it might mean to be an activist were they able to call themselves activists. The use of the term to be empowered was never used and I think was eclipsed by "being real" "knowing who you are" and "getting connected". The way that the Centre evolved as a learning community disallowed the notion of "here at the Centre we are empowering people". Most of us who worked at the Centre during the time Katie, Grace, and Gerie were students had learned that you cannot empower anyone, each individual can only do that for themselves: what is possible if for each one to work

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<sup>1</sup> From Alice Walker's book In Search of Our Mother's Garden comes the term womanist described by her as meaning traditionally capable as in "mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of

towards their own liberation as part of the empowerment of others. This we learned first hand from Paulo Freire and reinforced daily throughout the life world of WEC. This reciprocal notion was forged in the selection process and continued to shape and be shaped as the life experiences of each student were validated and valued; and for the most part uncompromised but often deeply challenged. The intimacy of the WEC community created an environment where ignoring or avoiding life experiences became virtually impossible. It was an integral part of the ethos of the Centre and the people who came there to teach and to learn.

The resistance<sup>2</sup> to name or be named before understanding what this naming meant is what enabled these women to be "real" "connected" and "whole". It meant that their activity as activists would be purposeful, reciprocal and highly productive. They are able to as Grace told more than once "to be productive in a way that I think is productive, that actually does what is really needed for people; not in that professional way but in a way that's real". They did not accept the naming of activism until each of them understood the meaning of activism that was conveyed by the language, language that exceeded representation. They were confident. The resistance was justified. I have come to understand that the premature naming, or naming of these women in any sense as activists could have become a repressive or romantic myth making exercise. More to the point I would not have learned nothing of significance about who these women are, or how they became so. The spirit of difference and diversity that these women convey, may have slipped away or become lost with the premature naming as a misguided sense of empowerment.

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slaves with me" Reply is "well it wouldn't be the first time "

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Ellsworth has a critical take on the issue of resistance and empowerment.

## Chapter Eleven

### Making Connection: The Problematics of Activism

#### Pulling the Thread

Gerie's all encompassing lifestory theme of "knowing who I am" wove into our last formal conversation together as she began to comfortably talk about activism. This narrative piece pulls together Gerie's views on activism and the role WEC played. We worked through this discussion together at the very end of the summer, just before she was to return to work. At this point she leaned into the conversation:

Gerie: Okay, what I think activism is. I think it's the ability and willingness, it's a combination of the will and the ability, the ability to see what the issues are, to be able to see, to look at a situation and recognize the needs to be addressed and just willing to go and do what needs to be done and not be defined by some label or other like missionaries or martyrs. I think martyrs wallow in sort of the negative aspects of wherever they are and then go out back to their environment and go "Oh, it's horrible? Isn't it horrible and aren't I wonderful to be willing to be in such a horrible situation?" And then they get their pat on the back from the people who are on the outside looking in and then they'd go back to do it all over again, you know, for them they're validated.

Charlotte: So what did they see, do you think?

Gerie: I think they always see the negative aspects, they don't see the strengths, they don't want to. Maybe they don't need to. That doesn't suit their purposes. That's exactly it. It doesn't suit them, wrong fit. I mean if they were to say that they love their job or that these were wonderful people or anything like that, for them then it sort of takes away from their purpose because then there's a reward, there's benefits to it, there's personal rewards, there's benefits to working in that sort of community. The martyr can't have that. I see martyrs sometimes when I meet

people, I have zero patience so we clash, I just find that the more terrible their day is I find myself just reacting in the opposite way because it leaves me with the more wonderful day. I just don't have the patience to join in their soul patting. I'm not patting anybody on the back either. No, they're not activists.

Charlotte: So your phrase "willingness to see" what does an activist see? I get the idea what your definition of what a martyr sees, they see the dirt and the pain and the lack of food and the lack of resources, those kind of things; everything is a deficit, a lack of, so that is how they might view people, children?

Gerie: And I think the activist sees all that too but also sees what's positive and good and sees potential in people. The martyr sees a vacant lot and sees weeds, and sees broken glass and sees danger. An activist sees an empty lot and sees weeds, and broken glass and sees a park, and sees a community garden and sees people working together to fix it, to make it better. I think that's the difference and then there are some activists with the sort of seeing that wants to be addressing all the vacant lots by addressing the issue of abandoned properties. Activism has different levels, don't know if that's the word I want, but something like that. I think of Lori addressing the issue of absentee landlords and vacant lots and the city's responsibility and then there's activists who sort of see the lot across the street from the school that could be better used. Lori's form of activism allows her to do this. She can be at the Legislative Building in the morning with the suits and making perogies with the women at the Family Centre in the afternoon with, you know, the beg for forgiveness model which sometimes keeps it all going. The not an activist would say "Isn't this horrible, look at that eh? I almost cut myself walking through there". That's the martyr. I guess there are other words for that, maybe missionary.

Charlotte: Right now I'm following a group of articles from the New York Times related to their Teach For America where they have a program where they're taking people who are established in other careers, like chartered accountants and paralegals and nurses, people who are established in other careers, they're offering what they call a fellowship and they're going to take them into what is like a boot

camp for the summer. They give them a crash course on inner city teaching then send them out to teach in inner city schools and while they're doing that they will have their tuition and expenses paid so that they can get a masters degree in education based on inner city teaching. I've been following this now for a year-and-a-half, these articles, and the first crop is out there doing it, and what I think is that they're wanting them to be activists, they're thinking that they are making activists. They're deliberately taking them, and what I want to do is get my hands on the curriculum for that boot camp, because what they're doing is they're deliberately trying to recruit people by believing and selling the idea, "Because you're already successful and all of the implications of that" to come and take a term at making a difference that so instant inner-city teaching activists can created. I should show you those articles. I'll give you the website so you can look at it yourself. It's being sold like kids in the 60's who went to CUSO; exciting challenge, make a man out of you idea. What do you say to that? They do this deliberately, there's a big campaign, "Come in and work in the inner city. Make a difference." So these people are from all over New York City, all over, and they're dropped to inner city after boot camp with a promise of a Masters Degree. What do you think this huge school division is getting with that? What's the tactic?

Gerie: I'm bothered by it, I'd like to read the article first because I'd like to find out why they feel this is a good thing. Because my gut reaction is, why wouldn't they take whatever resources they're taking to try to create these activists and take people who are already active in that community and make them teachers? Like that would make much more sense.

Charlotte: I think the idea is built upon already successful people. I think the notion is for them to be effective and for them to make a difference and be active their sense of efficacy and self-reliance is already there. That's the only thing I can think of.

Gerie: And how they're defining success. I think if they were smarter they would be looking within the communities and saying, "Who is successful here? Who is active? Who is trying to do things? Who are the leaders?"



Charlotte: Is it perhaps easier to spot somebody by the traditional way that people are considered to be active or who are successful like a paralegal because the sort of criteria what makes a successful paralegal, it's easy to spot, whereas if you were going to go and try to look in the Bronx or Harlem and look for successful people to take them to be activists, it might be harder to identify them?

Gerie: I think harder to identify but I also think it would be harder work to turn them into teachers than people who are already a success at something. I mean you're right if someone has become successful, had some sort of successful job and are doing well in their field, then a lot of sort of their personal issues have been dealt with hopefully and you know they're able to focus on becoming teachers and I think whatever issues prevented a person from being successful outside their community those have to be dealt with as well. You saw it at the Winnipeg Education Centre all the time. I know going in there I had a lot of work to do. There was a lot of issues that I sort of had to sort through personally while I was learning the nuts and bolts of teaching. There was a lot of hard work personally and you saw that amongst people, I saw that happen in relationships with themselves, with their families, with their kids, with their spouses, there was a lot of work that people were doing personal work and I think more messy.

Charlotte: Let's go to back to that thing of willingness again, so these people were recruited and then said, "Yes, okay I'll do it, I'll give it a try." Does that mesh with your definition of willingness in terms of your definition of activist?

Gerie: I guess the motivation is part of it but what is the motivation? When I say willingness it's sort of willing to go in and the motivation is just because you're willing to get the job done or you're willing to address that issue or you're willing to do your part. I would imagine that these people that they're finding they're willing to get their masters, degrees or they're willing to get through this in order to get their masters. It would be interesting to find out how many of those people stay once they

have that degree. This is almost like transparent activism, you can see through it. Not real.

Charlotte: The other thing is, we've talked a lot about your teaching inner city over the bridge, now these people are going to be coming from over the bridge too but like from places like the suburbs of New York or wherever, coming over the bridge to teach in places like the inner city and the assumption is that these people, to use your phrase already "get it".

Gerie: I think so, it's less messy.

Charlotte: So, does that mean that they're going to be activists, or does it mean that the greater New York School Division is going to have a bunch of people there who are fairly healthy people, maybe, already a good sense of efficacy, if they've been successful in our jobs, mature, or are they going to have people who are strong enough that they can put them in the inner city and say, "Here, we want them to do this curriculum, do it this way using this standard test and get the numbers up kids."

Gerie: I think you're right, that sounds exactly like these are people that have demonstrated, they're able to do what they're told in a sense, if they're able to be successful then you should be able to perform, a performing activist, still not real.

Charlotte: What might be different if they were going to recruit somebody from The Bronx to teach in The Bronx?

Gerie: That person is going to assume that they didn't know more about The Bronx than the New York School Authorities and so there's going to be a lot of, never mind you I know what I'm doing, never mind this, or they'll nod and let them do their own thing. I think if they were conformists in the first place then they would've been one of those people being pulled from the outside in. I was thinking I would assume that the people who are making these decisions and the New York School Authorities that

they have successful people from outside the community coming in, so they're defining success differently than I think an activist will.

Charlotte: Okay, how do you as an activist define success?

G Positive change, anything that can result in positive change.

Charlotte: How might that be different from the martyr?

Gerie: I don't think the martyr wants conditions to change, I think that if things do change positively then they can't be that anymore then. It's another version of "this is all about them". A martyr is the one that goes in the staff room and said, "I took this child who was living in horrible poverty and no supports at all, all by myself I taught this child." Like that, despite all of the things working against me I taught this child to read. Yes, well I'm sure those teachers I call martyrs want kids to learn but they see any influences outside of themselves as interfering, do you know what I mean? Like anything they're trying to do with the child, if anything external were added sort of, interfering with the child. The parents are a problem, the neighbour is a problem, community is a problem because I'm trying to do this. I'm trying to do this for you, and all this is working against me. I think an activist just acknowledges that this is all there, looks for the supports, tries to elicit the supports around the student. I'm just trying to think when I'm working with kids, I mean if I'm struggling with the student, the first place I go to besides the student is the student's families, the student's own support network, you know what I mean? I'm working with families, I'm working with the student's community whereas I think martyrs are trying to do their job in spite of it, that's the feeling sort of thing. Activism is the ability and willingness to see the whole picture for what it is and work within that environment to affect positive change I guess. I sort of think the positive change aspect-however that's measured. It's not about the activist or martyr or the principal or whomsoever, it's about the kids, the inner city.

Charlotte: What does this positive change look like?

Gerie: I guess it usually depends on the individual. I mean obviously I would have goals for things that I would want to see happen. How they're defined would probably be a real combination of what I bring, what baggage I bring when I go to work but also I would hope it would reflect on what people around me are saying, what people around me are doing and seeing. Getting back to the sort of a vacant lot thing, seeing people work together, seeing people do something about it, seeing people willing to help me do something, people letting me help them clean up the vacant lot. I don't know, just sort of a working together.

Charlotte: How do you begin to situate your own activism?

Gerie: I think some of it comes I think from a very early age, seeing the disparity between how some people treated other people.

Charlotte: When I was reading over your life story the other, last night, you said, "We got these hampers and I thought we got the hampers because my parents were deaf. It never occurred to me until I was much older that apparently we got them because we were poor." So your disparity that you're talking about was or was not material disparity.

Gerie: I think typically children sort of separate the world into categories of adult and child, and adults all do this and kids all do that. I think for me for a lot of reasons I saw that there are categories of adults and some categories treated other categories worse than others and some behaved better. I saw the disparity up close. I didn't see it with my friends at all, but I saw it in bankers, clerks, restaurants; people that worked with my dad, I used to go to work with him in the summer. I saw that, I mean I saw how my parents functioned in the deaf world. Because I was so young and dealing with translating for my deaf parents I saw disparity very young: between adults and kids, and like I said bankers and the rest. The point is that the deaf have a very strong community.

I saw that and was most comfortable there than anywhere else. When we were doing things in the deaf community, I was free to be a kid with kids who were deaf or who had deaf parents. They were all just who we were and my parents behaved as parents, how I felt parents should behave. I wasn't doing anything for them, I wasn't interpreting, they were talking away and other people looked out for other people's kids. We all knew each other, this was a community, we all spoke the same language and these were people who knew my parents forever. They went to the same residential schools, they socialized together forever so I mean I still get that feeling if I go into the Deaf Centre and go sort of with the older crowd like my parents' age, I get that feeling as a kid. Comfortable, and these people know me and it's sort of this extended family feeling, this extended community thing. It's a strong, strong community. Outside of that I was and am still when I go there, totally different, my role is different, my parents' role was different, my parents interactions with other adults was different, my interactions with other adults was different. It was a different world entirely. You know I had this same thing happen at WEC, only this time I knew more of what was going on and that I could learn, change things, speak out away from WEC as well as in it.

Charlotte: The disparity you're talking about is it relational, how people were in relation with others?

Gerie: Yes, I think so. How people viewed my parents, I think that it wasn't conscious until I began to remember specific incidents that had me thinking, "Oh, oh my God" that sort of made me realize what was really happening. But before than it was just unease and until I sort of was old enough to sort of to name it or think it. I didn't realize for a long time that my parents are what? My parents are disabled? That was what was making the disparity came as a great shock. Now nothing upsets me more than seeing that disparity between communities, between schools, that bothers me, that makes me angry. My Junior High experience is an example of this. I know I've talked about it before, it was awful.

Charlotte: It seems to have brought an indelible mark on your whole sense of teaching and...

Gerie: Oh it has, it has because I remember how I felt. I felt the affects of this until probably my WEC days. It still had an effect on my confidence really but I mean probably my WEC days I was able to look back and sort of see that this was probably a clerical error, like it was just oops that nobody had any idea what kind of impact it was going to have. I left school you remember, I've talked about this before but you were asking about how I think an activist would deal with this. To begin with it would just take somebody to say, "No, no." Which is probably why I spend so much time and energy convincing my students to come one more week, please don't, you've gotta stay. I beg my students to stay. And it doesn't always work but I mean that's probably why. I think deep down inside, like I said before, if one person, a teacher, my parents, anybody, an aunt, would have said no I would have stayed in school. See it was about them not me. To say that there was value, that I had value, that I belonged, that there was a reason for me to be there, that's all I needed. I know that for a fact because I waited, I mean I don't know if you remember me telling you or not but I went to the guidance counselor. I didn't just drop out, I went to the guidance counselor to tell her I was quitting, you know. At WEC it was not always about you guys, it got to be about me in a way that I needed it to be when I needed it to be for what I learned were legitimate reasons like what I've talked about.

Well I think a martyr would've went home that day I dropped out of school saying "poor thing", a martyr goes home and said, "Gee, another one dropped out." Where an activist would be saying "Why are you doing that?" and then she's say, "I have to change what is happening here one way or another". You have to do something, you don't just give them a hug. I remember once this summer I may have said that I don't care for kids in the usual way its thought of or the ways some teachers do. I think this is what I meant, not that sappy stuff, what I care about is that they get what they need to be who they are, who they can be, what matters, what is real, anyone can hug kids or say they do. I want to remove the barriers that keep them from knowing who they are and who they have to be. My daughter works for the Fairmont Hotel and they've got a binder that if there is a problem and they go to that problem, they flip

it open and they ask some questions and the responses make them flip the binder, sort of thing. It's not that formula thing I do, it's not just, my daughter calls it problem solving. It's not a hat that I wear when I get into a place, it's not a binder that I go in an say, "Okay, you want to quit school? No, don't quit school." She said, "Okay". "Good, we'll see you Monday." It's nothing like that, it's "Why do you want to do that?" This is an honest question and I truly want to know why do you want to do that? It's what makes me see the need to change things too you know. It's honest, it has to be honest, real, authentic to the situation, whatever.

Charlotte: Maybe it's a stretch, but you talk a lot in your life story about how important it is to know who we are. It's not only who you are but in the knowing of who you are you know that allows you to see this and.....

#### Define or Be Defined: The Naming of Activism:

It was during this time in our conversation that was developing around the activist project in New York that Gerie named her activism. It came quite clearly and succinctly as she began to articulate activist activity that was related to her.

Gerie: It's about me.

Charlotte: It's about you, it's finally about you. Now we get to say, it's about you.

Gerie: Yes it's understanding. I think my response is sometimes a result of buttons being pushed, you respond in a certain way and I've got all these buttons based on my life experiences so when I hear something or respond in a way because I know that I've been there. It is about me in a sense that if these kids want to quit school, I ask why? Not like don't be so stupid, what's making you say that? But, what's really happening to you? Who are you that this is happening? I'm going to change this. I've been there, I know what can happen if no adult listens. You know saying it's about me, that's true but if it's about me then it's about WEC too. If I am an activist, WEC has a big part of that responsibility. Whether I was one already, but I don't think so,

or not is not as important as the fact that WEC brought it out of me or I developed it while I was there. It's why I wanted the alternative field placement at The Native Women's Transition Centre, to test this, not sure how aware I was at the time but anyhow that's what was happening.

I don't have me all figured out, there's so much to think about. This sounds so stupid when I think about it, it sounds so stupid, but I think each student I've encountered has helped find little pieces of myself that I didn't know I had, or I'd forgotten that I had or really didn't have to use, unless I'm simplifying it a little bit, but kids or the people that I've worked with sort of helped me figure out who I am because of how they made me feel and think about certain things that they're doing or certain that they're saying, or certain things that are happening. I really see that people in this age group I'm working with now really have a sense of that. They help me define myself more as an adult, I think, these kids. The younger students I work with tell me to define myself as mother, and as a nurturer, you know those components of who I am, working with the 16, 17, and 18 has really helped me define who I am, not define, well maybe help figure out who I am as an adult, as a grown-up, working with other adults trying to figure that out the life mystery in a different way, making it all come together in one me with one skin.

You know after awhile it almost seems okay, activism I mean. It is no more a dirty word. It is not one of those badges that I'm so uncomfortable with. Now after you and I talked last time John and I were talking about what we've been working on and I said to him, "She's calling me an activist." And he said, "Well, what does that mean?". So we started sort of talking about what it could mean and now I think it could mean me. It is not advocacy, it's more or it's different I don't know. It's not just helping, supporting or standing by or speaking out or for somebody. I know, there's people I admire who are definitely activists, very definitely. I think there's calibers and different kinds of activists. For me, I don't march. I clearly say I don't march. No placards. No calling home to arrange bail money. But I think now it may be a way of having all of me revealed under one skin. I don't think you go to camp for the summer and become an activist. It takes time, WEC was a major intervention on my life but was not camp in that way. Time I spent there was long enough to test this out,



who am I. Remember my train idea, WEC was the station where my engine dropped stuff off, took on more fuel and then when on its way.

By the end of the summer Katie and Grace were beginning to talk of activism, they were beginning to name activism for themselves:

Katie: I think, too that activism is genuine. For me anyhow it means that you do the work for or with the people, you know, at least I do. Because its about people and that's what makes it real, that connection to what you could call authenticity. How I sort of see myself is like Martin Brokenhead talks about that the circle and how that first circle needs cooperation and he sees it is that everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging, like you have to belong to a culture or to something. In this context he talks about in terms of learning and then he goes on to talk about once the student or the learner feels they have a sense of belonging, they feel welcome, they feel part of that community, then they're prepared to learn what is there to learn. We call that mastery, and on the next piece he says once you have developed the skills and the knowledge, the tools if you can call it that, then you're independent. You can more or less. it would be like us, we've acquired some knowledge so we were going to go out there and be teachers, so he called that independence. But then that last piece and that's where I see myself is what he calls it generosity and where you go and give back to your community, whoever that may be, and that's how I've always seen myself as having the spirit of generosity. Maybe that's activism. It doesn't mean in a monetary sense but in terms of spirit and so in that sense I sort of see myself, the work that I do, and what I do is part of me and part of it, activism I mean. In terms of, for me, I believe that a person is born an activist because we're taught anyway in our traditions from our grandmothers that before the child was going to be born, you know the water that comes out, and they would see the water and they would see the gifts and they would see the strengths and the talents, if you want to call it that, that this child would possess and so within that water the child's identity was somewhat known or predicted in terms of how to rear and how to guide that child and so for me, in terms if you're talking about activist and how we're trying to define it, it's not deliberate in that sense but it's got purpose and so I think that it is then activism

when people have that spirit, they have that as a gift then as we would call it. Activism is a gift.

Grace's late summer thoughts on activism still were somewhat less elusive. She still refers to activism as "it". "It" is the understanding of what needs to be done and how it can be done for those children and families who need it now so they can have a better life. "It" is how Grace named her activism.

Grace: I think it's legitimized somewhat in Winnipeg. Maybe I'm getting carried away but I think when I started what I call community work that there wasn't seen to be a legitimate way of doing service. It was like I was undermining some big professional code or something. I said, "Gee things got so much better for families since we've been doing this." Let's try something else again, build on this. Simple eh? The staff do all the training, they do all the research. We don't bring in outside people and because of this we're learning as an organization too. They talk about levels of relationships and they talk about highly successful families but making it relevant to what we're doing, like what are the principles of that. What's our value base? I guess it is activism in the sense that before Andrew Street I think, I mean there's lots of people that "get it" all over and did "get it" all over but they never had a chance to really do "it" and I think Andrew Street now legitimizes "it" somewhat. Activism may be the part that gets "it" real and then does what needs to be done for the people that need "it" now. But before Andrew Street I don't think it was a legitimate way for people to serve families. If you weren't counting the heads and you weren't doing your appointments between one and four and you weren't doing therapy, and you weren't having someone deal specifically with the alcohol problem. If you didn't do all that, the negative and identifying work on all the negative things that people have then you were not a legitimate professional organization, then you weren't really real. It was considered soft services, you weren't really serving anybody in the so call professional legitimate way. I think Andrew Street, for Winnipeg, I think Andrew Street changed a lot of that. But we knew that. I think what might be seen as activism legitimated that, put it in a way that people could recognize, you know.

## I Think She Got It

Each of these women, at some point in our time together, spoke about activism by deflecting the term onto someone else they thought may be activists. The examples they gave were both women and men from the community or known to the inner city community; people that were admired and respected for getting things done. Gerie thought Grace was an activist. Katie thought her friend was an environmental activist. Grace spoke too of the American Anishinaabe, Winona LaDuke as an activist. They were reluctant however, to identify themselves as activists until they were able to name activism on their own terms. The naming of activism was a process. It took time. When Katie, Grace, and Gerie began to think of the possibility that they may be activists was when the language began to change from "but" to "and". In its very simple sense it means that each of these women in their individual way were expressing a common characteristic. As they constructed their life stories the use of "but" was a tropism for why things had happened to them. When they began to use "and", they began to construct ways they were making sense of what had happened to them and what affect this could make on their own life and how the sense they made of this, contributed to their work and the influence it had on the lives of the children, families and the community of the Inner City of Winnipeg. It was the use of "and" where activism began to be understood and named for Katie, Grace and Gerie.

## The Telephone Room:

The telephone room, similar to Katie's ribbon dress has become, like a sunflower turning to the light, the tropic exemplar of Grace's activism. It is the example in which Grace adds the word "and" to the "but" of her narrative construction.

Grace: The telephone room, it's the first room you see when you go in there. As soon as you go in, there's a telephone room and there so you don't have to come into the place, it's just right by the door, close the door and you can use the telephones, it's for people who don't have access to telephones. For people who didn't get it, they go,

"Oh nice, there's a telephone for the poor people to use because they don't have one at home but how come it's not in the living room. For people who got it, they would understand what I meant when I said that you don't have to walk through the building to get to the telephone, that you can just come in, use the phone and leave, according to your comfort level and that the privacy was a sign of respect. With all the other things that went on, it wasn't simply just a telephone you know, we just didn't let people use the telephone, there was something more to it. The people who didn't get it, were the people who were saying, they let you use the phone, they let the people in the community use the phone because they don't have a phone at home. It was much more than that, it was equal access, barrier removed, it was by the door so that people if they weren't comfortable walking into another environment they just had to come in and leave, they didn't have to ask for permission, it wasn't behind a desk. Well, they didn't get it, most people who came. They thought the door should be taken off and that the phone should be bolted to the table. Well when it was stolen once or twice, we just replaced it. It was that important to keep at this, you know. People kept wanting to give us TVs for the common room. The common room there, wasn't a waiting room with couches, you know the kids are right there, there's a classroom work area there, a kitchen there, sort of like the hub of the whole building. It's a common place and the washing machine was right there, not locked up in a room but right there and the idea was the chance for people to find situations where they could interact with other people. If you put a television into that room then people no longer have a reason to interact. They're stuck with the television, they're attracted to the television. People who got it understood when we said, "No, we don't want a television, thank you very much. No pacification, we wanted talk and sharing. " No, we don't want cable thank you very much, we'll take diapers though". We laughed about having t shirts that said "I got it at Andrew Street". You know this goes back to what you asked about what affect WEC had on me. Well you know, the telephone room, it was like that at WEC, at least when I was there. I remember that we could come into the staff office and hang out with you guys, argue and fight about stuff. Like the phone you know, people got it at WEC, not everyone, but most people there. The phone was there for a real reason and so was, for the most of it, the staff offices at WEC.

The Business of Caring, Authenticity and Activism: The Politics of Confidence:

Caring is an elusive concept. Even though it has appeared in various forms throughout this inquiry, it remains elusive, often implicit, sometimes camouflaged, and at times apologized for or metamorphosed into something entirely foreign to the original overture. It was certainly one of the first considerations of the young teacher standing on the steps preparing an answer for the principal of what real teaching may be. It may well have been her first defense of her teaching practice. Caring is often inexorably linked to being a "real" teacher. The discussion of the ethics of teaching often does begin with the language of caring, but it does not define authentic teaching in any substantive sense. I would define caring not simply in the sense of "I don't care" as the signal of frustration with a conceivable bad day or series of days but rather in the sense that not caring genuinely meant that people consistently do not care for children appropriately nor for the work that is done with them as teachers. The language of caring and the concept of caring are used freely among educators as the first line of reasoning for what teaching is, why they teach or how they appear to perceive their practice. Put even in the very simplest terms, the complex perception of caring seldom is accompanied with a logic or reasoning of what it might mean to care in the authentic sense that emerges from a construction of meaning rather than as a measure of feeling. The young teacher standing on the step will need to look past a simple rhetoric of caring to understand what real or authentic teaching and learning may be. The issue as it relates to this inquiry concerning the formation of activist identities is what significance Katie, Grace, and Gerie place upon caring as a reason for their activism as well as how they conduct their activist lives. This notion of caring for these women is embedded, albeit with varying degrees of interpretation, to a sense of authenticity. Authentic in the sense that each of these women is concerned with naming their activist activity as their own. They are not involved in any overtly partisan political activity that would define their activity, their motivation and the strategy for doing so. They choose to define their own behaviour, staying low to the ground so that they will be able to do what they believe they need to do without the restraints of political partisanship. They are authentic in the sense that they are true to the constituents they are involved with. The energy and commitment is spent with the families and children of the inner city and not to political machinery and party mandates.

The question is whether the activism of these women is any less political or is the caring the women portray any less political or is caring a way to avoid political activity or is authentic caring in fact political?

What does it mean to care and why would this be an interesting question for activists and part of an exploration of authenticity? Nell Noddings (1983) establishes criteria for a definition of caring which conclude that someone cares for someone or something if one has a regard for that someone or something. Moreover if as a activist, I have regard for you I will want to be with you, and it will matter to me how you think, and what you want and moreover I will want to protect and maintain our relationship. At first this may seem like a simple straight forward proposition, either you care or you do not and being able to articulate the caring process, present or absent from activism should be equally simple and straightforward. This may or may not be true. Something is missing which seems to create a considerable dissonance when activists try to articulate their practice solely from a position of caring. This dissonance can have a positive or negative affect depending on the events which shaped it. Katie, Grace and Gerie come from a tradition of the classroom teacher where the language and concept of caring is often synonymous to teaching. Classroom teachers tell of how they "run a child centred program", "use developmentally appropriate practice", state that "my classroom is geared for the individual needs of the child", and that "I am here for my kids," and so on. These statements are classic teacher talk meant to convey a caring practice. Would this dilemma apply to activism that was spawned in the classroom? Caring in some measure contributes to what was coined by labor activist, Dorothy Day (1997) as the "concept of witness". (Loeb, 1999) Authentic caring focuses on issues such as inequality, inequity. It is impossible for a caring person not to recognize these attributes as they reflect upon the lives of everyday people living in poverty and the disenchantment of the inner city. Caring persons become witness to this. When this caring becomes active, when it transcends the concept of witnessing, it becomes a form of activism which brings with it the need to refute myths that justify the unfairness by reproducing the behaviour that perpetuates the inequity. This witnessing needs to be authentic if it is to spawn activism that works to stop the reproduction of these inequities. As such both witnessing and authenticity are linked to what it mean to be a caring individual. Katie, Gerie and Grace are in this loop of witnessing, caring and activism.

Several years ago I was involved in a year long ethnographic study, based in a large elementary school, for the purpose of trying to ascertain how immigrant children were assessed, and placed within the school. I did manage to determine some interesting and useful topical information but in no way were the results of the study as significant as the question I was left with when the study was over. This question has been the focus and direction for my work ever since. In this ethnographic study, I used participant observation as a major portion of the methodology and because of my long time involvement in teacher education and familiarity with teachers and schools I was fortunate in being able to maximize my observation time by establishing "insider" status quite quickly. The teachers soon became comfortable and at ease with my role in the school and I was able to integrate my activity into everyday school life. As the months rolled by I became increasingly aware that a contradiction was developing in teachers who for all intent and purposes appeared externally to be decent, thoughtful people as they busied themselves with the events of school. Some of this activity included the acceptance and placement of new immigrant children into their classrooms. The teacher informants made it quite clear in several encounters that they wanted to be recognized as caring teachers. However, this attitude of caring as they perceived it was often absent or heavily deflected during the intense, language driven, interview process. I had to continually focus on the task at hand which was to query the teachers about the placement of immigrant children when what materialized as being much more important was "why do these seemingly considerate people, going about their business, getting the job done have so much difficulty in articulating what they do in a way that is consistent with their teaching behavior?" The teachers would articulate that they cared about immigrant children, it was what made their vocation real to them, yet the behavior observed was otherwise. One of my informants told me during the interview that standard tests of any sort were culturally irrelevant for immigrant children and as such were capable of irreparable harm; yet a few days later I watched as she administered a closed, standard language test to an immigrant child so that she could determine what the child's reading level may have been. The caring behavior observed in classroom was inconsistent to what was articulated during the interview. There seemed to be a constantly poor fit between the caring articulated and the caring observed. The caring lived, worked and understood by the three participants differs in its expression but remains as a tight fit of lifestory

to activism. For each of them the caring, if it was to be authentic, had to work, it had to be for a reason.

It was the dissonance observed that led me to believe that teaching was more than caring for children, which in some sense I already understood, and that what I was seeing in fact, was inauthentic behavior exhibited by the teachers I was observing and interviewing. The question became this: which behavior was inauthentic, the interview situation or the practice the interview was seeking to understand? From the onset I viewed the inconsistency I experienced as having an ethical relationship because of the moral dilemma it posed. The research was an attempt at understanding practice and making sense of what teachers do, of seeking truth. Then why did there so often exist a great gulf between what was said and what was done, or what was done and what was said? This dilemma seemed to define itself in both ethical and moral terms because I see ethics as the science of morality and morals as the products of the ethical process.

Many years after this experience I see this inconsistency clearly as an ethical one directly related to inauthenticity which in turn is revealed in what Charles Taylor theorizes as the malaise of modernity (Taylor, 1991). He begins by relating that even though our contemporary society continues to develop rapidly, people are experiencing a sense of loss or decline. This is certainly evident in schools where advanced pedagogy and educational technology have not alleviated the cry of "my child cannot read". Charles Taylor skillfully outlines three central themes that exemplify the malaise he sees happening around him. The first of these "worries" as he calls them is heightened individualism. Even though many would view individualism as the jewel in the crown of our civilization, Taylor eloquently places individualism in a differing context when he believes in principle, that people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them. (Taylor, 1991) By this I think he means that we can shape our lives in ways legally, morally, socially that our ancestors could not even comprehend. But this hard won individualism did not come without a price to be paid. In order to experience this degree of freedom we were wrenched away or at least absolved from the larger cosmology complete with its rules and hierarchical order. For good or ill this allegiance to an ordered cosmology gave meaning and purpose to our lives and explained to ourselves and others who we were and why we did what we did. This discrediting of this ordered cosmology has led to what Taylor calls "disenchantment".



Simply put in the most dramatic sense it means that there is nothing that is real; nothing that is authentic external to ourselves. Our lives are increasingly narcissistic, self indulgent and riddled with the lament of "what have you done for me lately?" The rise of the freedom loving, rights driven, individual is reduced to a flattened and narrow grasp of the world with no sense of what may be important past the care and maintenance of self.

Another worry for Taylor is the adherence to what he calls the "primacy of instrumental reason" which has, he fears, become the all encompassing method for addressing the complexity of life (Taylor, 1991). What I believe he means by this is that the best method is the one that provides the most economical means to a given end or in other words maximum efficiency. Taylor points out that once there is no longer a universal "sacred structure" all that was once held as true can itself be interpreted and redesigned to suit the one individual, a sort of designer morality, if you will. In this way there is the loss of the consensus of the governed. Individuals with personal moral agendas that meet the need of the moment will continually be chafing against the next individual doing the same. There would seem to be little incentive for group development in a process such as this.

While it is true that this individualization can be seen as personally liberating it can also be seen that the independent ends that may be influencing our lives will become eclipsed in the madness to maximize output (our lack of concern for the environment is a good example). Taylor also points to this theme of malaise and the frenzy for maximum output as being responsible for the rigorous application of technology as a solution when something quite different is or could be needed. Taylor chooses as an example a manager who may be forced by market conditions to adopt a maximizing strategy even if it is felt to be destructive in other areas. I will add as my own example from the world of school a teacher who may be forced to use computerized standardized tests even though they are culturally irrelevant and will seriously damage a child's potential as a human being. Weber called these dilemmas "the iron cage". It was the dilemma I saw in these classroom teachers that lead me to look more closely at the social relationship between theory and practice. It lead me to an inquiry on activism, an inquiry that began with what I saw as the discrepancy for what teachers did and what they said they believed in and how they actualized these beliefs.

In the personal politicization of self there is a stage where we learn that the way to handle these cages is to entirely overthrow the institutions that harbors them, those being the state (schools) and the economy. We see this in schools where educators find themselves continually in the tumult created from the massive changes to curriculum, which develop as a result of the social hegemony of the moment. This overthrow, large or small, Taylor believes, has not happened successfully nor is it likely to. So, he implies with some passion, what on this earth may we be left with? We are left, it would seem, with more individuals continually adjusting to the treadmill action and reaction of the overthrow and reconstruction of the state and the economy. But what sort of individuals will we be; ones who have acquired what I described as designer ethics or the ones that the philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (first read in Taylor's work) saw in individuals who are "enclosed in their own hearts", remaining as private citizens with no wish to be part of the activity of self governance. This leads to what Tocqueville calls "soft despotism" or what could be categorized as paternalistic, self seeking, or "tutelary" as it was called. I might call this a guardian angel government. This individual, this teacher, who is being taken care of in this way, once up against the massive bureaucracy, will be rendered helpless, left with illusionary choices and little ability to make real ones, causing ultimately, I think, the loss of personal liberty and dignity. Was this Katie, Grace and Gerie have come to understand?

As the antidote to the malaise of modernity outlined as the worry of individualism, the primacy of instrumental reasoning, and the feared consequences of the withdrawal of political life, Taylor succinctly and without apology for how trivialized the concept might have become states the remedy. The remedy as he defines it is the moral ideal as expressed by self fulfillment. As he begins his treatise Taylor gives credit to the work of Lionel Trilling (1973) who summons the modern form of the moral and ethical ideal as being *true to one's self*. After acknowledging Trilling, Taylor uses the term authenticity as synonymous for this moral contemporary ideal. This for me, is where the dialog becomes real for the twenty year old teacher, standing on the steps. *Authenticity then is the search for the moral ideal. Teaching becomes a moral art.* Morality, not in the traditional spiritual sense, but rather a concerned respect for the life, integrity and flourishing well being of the self in relation to the other. The art is the sense and sensibility brought to life that values teaching as an act worth doing well. The struggle

which ensues is the moral quest requiring teachers to transcend traditional forms of motivational behaviour to interact in the pursuit of moral aims, debates, and interpretations of teaching practice. In the end it demands thoughtful negotiation through the necessary tension created when creative originality and self definition (through the dialogic process) collide and begin a process of change. This attitude towards teaching predicated the activist identities of Katie, Grace and Gerie and developed into several of the reasons why each of them, in whole or in part, left the classroom to become an activist. For Grace it was an abrupt and complete departure, Katie took a different road, and Gerie, after traveling on a more winding road, is back in the inner city classroom.

By the authentic, moral ideal Taylor does not mean solely what is our natural inclination or what happens to be better or higher at the moment, but rather some universal standard of what we ought to want or need. This provides I think, the link of individual needs to those of the other or what is often referred to as a community. Clearly then if authenticity is the moral ideal, the articulation and retrieval of authenticity will help restore our collective teaching practice and also activism. Did this promise of collectively form a basis for these women's activism?

The first consideration of how authenticity may do this is by realizing that we need to know individually who we are in the process of our teaching practice, what our identity is becoming and how it translates and relates to others. We could conceivably begin with what Taylor and others call the fundamentally dialogical character of human life. (Habermas, 1987a, called this his theory of communication or ideal speech). In its very simplest terms dialogical means the shared exchange of thoughts and ideas between people, in opposition to monological which means speaking alone or to oneself. All three of the research participants identified community as the source of their fundamental understanding of shared communication as a significant aspect of their activism: who they are, why they do what they do, and the value they place upon it.

There are those theorists such as Bakhtin who have developed richer dimensions to the first layer of definition for the meaning of the dialogic process. Bakhtin believed that what a person said was meaningful to the degree his or her articulation answered a question, which in turn paid attention to Socrates' injunction "know thyself". Know thyself is the expression, all three of these women, conveyed over and over again. Knowing who you are became a criteria for activism both in the sense of understanding i t

and being able to share this understanding with others. This is what made activism a real, authentic, important activity for each of them. In his final years the question for Bakhtin became, as a result of his dialogical method, the one of "How can I know if it is I or another who is talking?" Bakhtin, it would appear, was also looking for authenticity. I see that Bakhtin's method would relate to the teacher on the steps in this way and if we can return for a moment to her and the principal facing each other, we recall that although they share an external space and time, inside each of their heads they see something that the other does not. If we can visualize them confronting one another we can agree that there were certain things they both could have perceived, such as the stairs between them, the children that may have passed by, the book that fell from his hands to the floor. There was however, things in the same event that they both did not see. The young women could not see her own forehead or what was behind her back for example. Each of them could see only what was available to them as a result of their position in space. Bakhtin calls this a surplus of seeing and that by recognizing the surplus of self combined with the surplus of the other you can conceive or construct a whole out of different situations we are in together. In Bakhtin terms I author a unified version of the event of our joint existence from my unique place in it by means of combining the things I see which are different from (in addition to) those you see, and the things you see which are different from (in addition to) that difference. This dialogic method was available but not recognized by the teacher and the principal. The exchange remained as an exercise of power and authority. Is the activism explored here the result of these women's ability to construct a whole out of the different situations as a society are in together. Their lifestories would attest to this, seen time and time again in their relationship of their own experiences as they relate to those of the community they are active in.

Habermas (1987) developed a complex narrative explaining his version of the dialogic process or theory of communication that he called "ideal speech." The basis upon which rational consensus is possible (ideal speech situation) must ensure not only unlimited discussion but discussion that is free from distorting influences such as open domination, conscious strategic behaviour, or self deception (Habermas, 1987). The privilege of one sided norms are excluded and formal chances at equality can be practiced. This speech, Habermas (1987a, 1987b))believed would lead to genuine

consensus through a process of conceptual theorizing of the traditional ideas of freedom and justice in which he believed passionately and states eloquently about the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life. I would argue that this conceptualization of ideal speech (almost 900 pages of text) contains the language of authenticity and the search for living and teaching as a moral art.

Theorists who espouse the dialogic process believe that it is through the acquisition of the languages of expression, including those Taylor calls the richness of art, gesture, and love. We cannot acquire this language of self definition on our own but only in an exchange with others. We can begin to see that the search for authenticity is not a process separate from others; we may accomplish it on our own but only in a process dialogically with others. In fact an individual identity depends crucially on the dialogical relations with others so in no way can the search for the moral ideal be a heightened individualistic enterprise expressed as one of Taylor's worries of post modernity. Moreover each of us can only discover our identity by articulating it as if we had invented ourselves. It is a new experience, each time for everyone.

In this way authenticity involves creating, discovering, constructing, and originality in such a way that cannot help but create some tension between the self and other in the larger society. The recognition of this tension and the comprehension of its origin will help make a difference to practice because it can help to free us from the primacy of instrumental reasoning and the locked in nature of heightened individualism. Also the dialogic character of authenticity will need to seek the political arena and encourage the process of participatory democracy. Authenticity could then point us to a more self responsible form of existence, albeit a more differentiated one because life will be seen as becoming our own or perhaps being appropriated as our own. If nothing else an authentic orientation is an alternative view to that of a hard line positivist to whom authenticity is seen as a unobtainable, vague, ephemeral term or for those cynics who may view authenticity as a lapse or decline in the prescribed, legislated, or moral attitude currently dominating our culture.

This attitude of modernity Taylor describes is the one in which the teachers I was trying to understand were working and living within. The dissonance I was seeing occurred because we (teachers and myself) were continually experiencing the tension resulting from the contradictions of, on the one hand, what I think or believe I am, what

I believe I should or could do and what the situation expects of me on the other. Rarely for teachers is there synchronicity in these dilemmas. Believing themselves to be caring people they will often find themselves doing things for the sake of efficiency or expediency that are uncaring and even damaging to children. Pedagogy that is time honored and thorough and often wise is thrown over for what may be perceived as today's technological wonder solution even if it suspected to be a poor fit in some or all cases. Teachers continually fall prey to being hovered over by a bevy of recipe toting, quick fixers, who fly in and out with solutions for individual teachers to perk up their teaching practice rather than as a group, spending their teacher time and resources learning how to govern their own professional development. Taylor's worries of the malaise of modernity certainly find themselves active in the world of teachers and children, the landscape for activism. It could conceivably be a reason for why Katie, Grace, and Gerie developed activist identities. They have and continue to develop ways to construct ways and means to confront the lack of synchronicity which then becomes not a dilemma, but a basis for their activism.

The last word for this portion of piece will be given to Hannah Arendt (1959). When she speaks of the malaise of modernity and the search for a moral or authentic life she said "the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they are produced" (Arendt, 1959, p. 83). Activism may be more permanent than the malaise it could redress. The young woman teacher on the steps of the prairie school in the 60's and the researcher-teacher she became 20 years later are both looking for authenticity and if Taylor is right, for very good reasons. Recognizing that the quest for activism can be legitimized, how can this be done every day? One answer may be found in the stories of Katie, Grace and, all three women teachers who through their activism are redefining what it may mean to be a teacher and who through their teaching are defining activism.

## Chapter Twelve

### Conclusions: Occupying Space in Good Company

And Polo Said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be: if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live everyday, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space." Italo Calvino (1978) Invisible Cities, p.126.

If telling a story requires giving ones self away, then we are obligated to devise a method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that told, and the self that listens: a method that returns a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains her self in good company. Madeline Grumet (1991) Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education, prologue.

### The Face of Activism

In this study I have explored the lifestories of three women and how each of them constructed their identities as inner city activists. The resulting lifestories offer an alternative to some of the images of the pragmatic sloganeering, activists portrayed in newspaper headlines and the popular culture of today. Headlines that appear one day and are gone the next, often defined by overt sentimentality that may undermine any significant ability to act in the immediacy of the present. Katie, Grace and Gerie's activism is portrayed as activity that is integrated into what they do with their lives, everyday, and how they choose to live those lives. What the lifestories hopefully do is to contain and develop the plot lines of their lives as they try to make sense of why they do what they do. Along the way of this plot line development, I think they became activists. The why and the how of this idiosyncratic plot line development is the heart of this

inquiry. Each of the participants have shared their plot lines and together we have uncovered some of the "why" and the "how" of their development, revealed as the extraordinary lives of ordinary women. As this inquiry came to fruition and the web was brought together, new questions began to emerge; questions that will form the basis of further study. The first of these questions was directed to teaching and learning; foundations for the business of teacher education and the Winnipeg Education Centre. This final piece attends to the issues of so what and then what: both of which are interwoven, interdependent and interrelated, one to the other.

One of these interwoven questions has become, could a teacher education program such as the Winnipeg Education Centre teach students to become activists? Could a curriculum be developed that would teach Katie, Grace and Gerie and their classmate peers how to become activists? The effect that WEC had on their activist identities is contained in their lifestories but was activism taught to them either overtly or as part of the hidden curriculum? Was the activist development for these three women an anomaly? Could this, if it were an anomaly, become the norm? Could becoming an inner city activist become part of the regular curriculum, an expectation among many others of what defines a good inner city teacher and how this can become a successful outcome.

Both the press and the general media continue to popularize activism. Recently I looked at the book entitled Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminism. (Rundle, Mitchell & Karajan, 2001). This work presupposes that there is a connection between feminism and activism and the way to affect feminism for very young women is through activism. Activism therein is defined as the taking of direct action for a specific purpose and is viewed as a tool or a device to accomplish a prescribed or prespecified objective such as rain forest preservation, animal rights, abortion rights and so on. Activism in this sense becomes a noun, something to acquire and use for a direct purpose. In these terms activism is not unto itself.

Katie, towards the end of the construction of her lifestory characterized her connected understanding of activism as the acquiring of a gift along with the idea that you may be born an activist. Activism was a gift that would allow you to practice reciprocity by providing a way to give back, to celebrate the generosity of spirit. Gerie after a considerable time had passed, saw activism as the ability to remove barriers, to know who you are in relation with the families and children coupled with how important it is



" to get it". Grace called activism "it" and "it" she believes now, is what both legitimated and gave shape to the low to the ground work, the activism, she has gathered together in the inner city community for nearly 20 years. Can this be taught? Nurtured? Can activism be recognized at first, to the extent that it can supported and developed through years of study at a teacher education program that is meant to develop good teachers? Winnipeg Education Centre retains an ethos of an alternative teacher education program, specifically sustained for inner city children and families and inner city schools. Would this provide a rationale for actively and deliberately recruiting those candidates that have activist characteristics or display the possibility of developing activist tendencies? Would a longitudinal study reveal activism as a life long activity or one that waxes and wanes throughout life or at some point metamorphoses into some other type of behaviour, perhaps retirement?

The second series of questions to emanate was the way in which the activism lived by these women was or was not viewed as being "political" (Elshtain, 1981,1997). The themes of self and collective efficacy, community and caring that emerged from each of the life stories developed initially without political scrutiny and although the political nature of activism was not a covert issue for this inquiry it is one that was there on the periphery, always, and as such warrants further development. A corollary to this thought became: if the activity could be viewed as political to what extent was it political, and what mandate was at the root of the politics portrayed. Politics, for the purpose of this inquiry is defined as the exercise of power, authority and influence, usually at the level of social relations which can be sustained or altered by political activity. The sensitizing concepts for the organization of the thinking for this look at political activity as it related to activism are power, authority and influence (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950). Power is viewed as the ability to make someone do what you want them to do whether or not they choose or want to do it. Authority is thought of as legitimized power, for example through laws or other acts of the state. Influence is the ability to affect a decision by someone holding or perceived to be holding power or authority. These definitions are classic working definitions and act as organizers for a discussion of what is political and the extent to which each of the organizers could be extended and interpreted. In this instance the issues surrounding the question of whether the activism developed in this inquiry is political is deemed as important as the answer

to yes it is, or no it is not. To this end these definitions are in fact durable and workpersonlike.

Bonnie Dill speaks of the personal, political issue in this way, " when we have reached a point where the differences between us enrich our political and social action rather than divide it, we will have gone beyond the personal and will, in fact, be political enough"(Dill, 1994, p.54). In attempting to understand political activity as separate from other kind of activity I began to review the experiences and accounts drawn during the solicitations of the life stories. I chose one incident that was not included in the initial lifestory construction. In reviewing the transcript Grace and I constructed together, I heard again the story where she tells of a job experience she had when she was a young women and heard this story in a new way which shed light on this issue of the relationship between politics and activism. Grace was told by a male superior at this particular job placement that she was going to be passed over for a promotion that would have involved a raise in pay that Grace believed she had been entitled to. According to her hiring stipulations she was next in line for the raise, her progress report had been favorable and the promotion period was approaching. Her boss of that time, told her that he was going to overlook her and give the promotion and raise to someone else, someone of his own arbitrary choosing. She continued with the telling of this incident by saying that she waited for an opportunity to " let him have it", after which she left her job, him and the entire situation. Was this a political act on her part? I think not. It was an acting out of the frustration she felt at being passed over unfairly. Had Grace gone to the Union or sought legal assistance in order to bring redress upon her boss; would that have been political activity on her part? Asking for help in either case is approaching political activity but still remains as a private act. If Grace had acted upon the unfairness lobbed upon her by using the supports or advice from the Union or Legal Aid to begin to take the issue into the public arena where others are affected by a similar unfairness as that exercised by her boss upon her, and if she became intent on making the issue public and seeking change that would conceivably prevent or alleviate this form of unfairness from reoccurring, not only to herself but to others, it could be viewed as a political act. Once it could be determined that the activity was political the shape that this activity may have taken and the way it could have been carried to fruition is yet another issue and will depend on the stripe she may or may not have been wearing or if

the activity was entrenched in and interpreted by any number of ideologies such as Liberal Democracy, Marxism, Democratic Socialism or on the other hand developed from the perspective of partisan, party politics. The issue of significance becomes another issue related to political activity in the sense that once defined, one version of political activity, can be thought of or understood to be more important than other political activity. This concern becomes enveloped at this point, in moral and ethical motivation of whether to do the "right thing or do the thing right". This warrants further inquiry.

Through their activism are Grace, Katie and Gerie involved in political activity? I think that to some extent each of them is. It is political activity when the activity these women conduct in the inner city reaches past the "let them have it" aspect of their resistance to a concern and direction towards the ways and means with which to rectify the situation, to improve the lives of the children and families in a way that it affects social relations and has a substantive affect on peoples lives other than their own. Katie's curriculum development which propels her activism is political because she believes that she has found a way to positively affect the lives of Aboriginal children through the development of non racist curriculum through the preservation and teaching of the Cree and Saulteaux languages. Grace's work in the safe houses of the inner city is political when her own issues regarding mothering, family and child welfare become those of the community in which she chooses to work and where she creates change and affects social relationships. Grace's work in the many inner city classrooms is political when she chooses to conduct her work as part of the community in which the children live, affect strong relations with the parents to affect the change she sees as needed in order for the children to be successful in school. The resistance that the lifestories conveys is not one of ignoring, rebelling, sloganeering, retaliation. The resistance that these women portrays is rallied around "something has got to be done, done here in this community". What was to be done invariably involved some form of change. More than that I see in their lifestories an urgency attached to the issue of getting things done. It may be one of the reasons these women do not easily avail themselves of the alliances afforded by either a particular ideology or the party politics. Their silence in this case is not a characteristic of oppression but covert, strategic activity. Is it political? Does it matter? Why or why not?

This piece began with the naming of three sensitizing concepts coupled with a working definition of politics: the exercise of power, authority and influence, usually viewed at the level of social relations which can be sustained or altered by political activity. The political activity that these women are involved in is part an important aspect of their inner city activism. Their view of exercising power is not whether you can force or beguile someone do what you want them to do whether they want to or not, but rather that the use of power will be directly related to what the women, children and families believe and say they need and want, in order to have self actualized lives. What is of significance is the way in which these women use the limited power that they have.

The authority that each of these women exercises is rooted in their own experiences related to poverty, betrayal of adults, lack of self efficacy, ruptured familial relations, abuse and violence. It is not rooted in membership in a political party or any one particular ideology. It is the process that interests these women and not the affiliation. There is in fact a suspicious avoidance of any affiliation to any card carrying group associations which also includes feminism. It is this attitude that brought about the "beg for forgiveness model" when others may have chosen to deal with the issues from the route of partisan politics. While this is so to some degree or another, the avoidance of affiliation is in fact political as it is part of collective action.

The influence that these three women affect is influence that is affected by their own authority. It is not designated to them by persons outside the experience, it originates in the activity they generate. It becomes not only political by definition at this point but also important political activity. It becomes important political activity when they name it for themselves, when they define rather than be defined. Unlike the Turbo Chicks their activism develops as a verb and not a noun.

What I have learned from the experience of gathering and participating in the lifestories of these three activist women is that, depending upon the vantage point, they can be seen as working at political purchase in a new way or an old way renewed. They are not waiting for history to provide issues and circumstances that would be favorable for the change that would be needed to improve the lives of inner city families, women and children. They are actively pursuing that outcome now, they are not waiting, they are intervening now, everyday. The question that emerges from this is, "does it mean that the approach these women take could be interpreted as everything they do, involving

the community, is political or has to be political or matters one way or another?" It may be that the political is everywhere and while to some extent, this may be so, the activity and behaviour of politics is diffuse; people are involved in differing ways as is the case of Katie, Grace and Gerie. Each of their transformative or political activity is rooted in their individual contexts: social relations, level of efficacy, community, sense of caring, and culture. This in turn is related to the sense of who they are and how they associate this understanding of themselves to others. The issue of activism in relation to politics will be the basis for further study.

### Make Room: A Transformative One

The concept of politics has at times become trivialized in some sense since the concept originated with Greek society as *polis*. Trivialized, for example, as the staffroom politics that exists in schools that spawns contrived conviviality rather than authentic collegiality. Trivialized too as organized charity that could be responsible for eclipsing a genuine and real concern for people; ignoring a sense of equity based upon principles of social justice. In the space in which we live that we believe to be a society based upon democracy, where each of us as its citizens and by using our voice, can determine the direction and spirit of that society, there is a place for Katie, Grace and Gerie. A place to practice their form of activism as an integral contribution to political activity. The subtitle of this work is "the politics of confidence". This idea assumes the responsibility of heralding the activism of these women as important to both their own individual development as persons and to the community in which they choose to serve. The notion of confidence brings with it a sense of possibility, of hope. Confidence that is meant to convey positive social results based upon an understanding that these results are viable for the children and families in the inner city. Theoretically, the confidence reflected in the activist faces of Katie, Grace and Gerie finds a credible space in Transformation Theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1995). Transformation Theory and the accompanying Transformative Learning methodology of constructivism is a firm fit for the theory - practice, action reflection, nature of this inquiry and the shared and embedded context of the teacher education that each of these women experienced at the Winnipeg Education Centre. The concept of transformation has appeared directly in the methodology chapter

and has also been an underlying concept throughout the construction of the life stories and the theoretical framework that supports this work. It is appropriate at this point to draw upon the figure ground phenomena and shine a more intense light on the meaning of transformation and how it contributed to the development of activist identities in relation to the Winnipeg Education Centre.

Traced through a history of adult education, Transformation Theory appears to have been conceived in the work of Dewey and his contemporaries, and then found itself reaching through the concept of Freire's *conscientization*, extending to the contemporary work of Jack Mezirow and others. In essence Mezirow believes that individuals can be transformed through a process of critical reflection (Mezirow, 1990, 1991). Freire's influence as conscientization is developed as the sense that adults achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it. (Freire, 1978) There is a now classic example of this transformation seen in the realization of an illiterate migrant worker when he sees for the first time the relationship between his wife's name, Nina, and as it appears as text, and woman he knows and loves (Starting From Nina, NFB). This act was for Freire the basis not only for learning to read, becoming literate, but the basis for transforming the world. The worker had been actively involved, through learning to read, in "naming" his wife. Freire's work and others brought to light the idea that a defining condition of being human is our need and desire to make sense, to understand the meaning of our existence.

### Define or Be Defined

It has been previously stated in this inquiry that society came to the Centre with the students, they brought it with them. There was no place to send the issues away to or hide from the racism, the sexism, the bias of all sorts. Nor was there any need or attempt to code these issues because they came as direct experience, as real and intense as it was possible for them to be. Racism, sexism, class appeared, not as separate entities but as a large package, there to be reproduced or transformed. These women did not enter the Centre based upon a deficit model. Those characteristics deemed by some as deficit, upon entry to the program, were seen by those involved with the Centre as valuable

qualifications. Facilitating and supporting learning through participation and teaching became the mainstay of what is viewed as one of the cardinal mainstays for adult education: learning to make meaning through our own interpretations rather than acting on the belief, judgments and emotions of the other. The fact that individual interpretations were developed in concert with others, the school people, the Centre teaching people, and student peer people allowed understanding to form as consensus or resistance. The Centre became a site for transformation. It allowed Katie, Grace and Gerie a place to work at naming themselves, to define who they were rather than being defined by others. This in part, was responsible in part the construction of their identities and their activism.

Catalysts for transformative learning (theory) are thought of as "disorienting dilemmas"(Mezirow, 1990, 1991). Mezirow's theory of transformation has a central tendency the idea that, "perspective transformation begins when we encounter experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that fail to fit our expectations and consequently lack meaning for us, or as we encounter an anomaly that cannot be given coherence either by learning within existing schemes or by learning new schemes"(Mezirow, 1991, p94). Maxine Green (1986) called these experiences "dislocations." Both Mezirow and Green believe that these dislocations or disorienting dilemmas creates an ethos where the inherited ways of doing things no longer works and that the failure of these recipes will lead to a graduated approach to transformation based upon first content reflection, then on to premise reflection and finally towards perspective reflection. Mezirow provides this explanatory delineation of reflection: for example being aware of negative feelings towards John is introspection, deciding that John is bad is a thoughtful action, and making a judgement based upon prior learning becomes content reflection. Process reflection is an examination of how we perform these functions of perceiving, feeling or acting and an assessment of our efficacy in performing them. The act of premise reflection leads us to question whether good or bad is an adequate concept for judging John. Now we become involved in determining why we perceive, think or feel or act as we do and for any processes that will be in error in judging John. This becomes a theoretical reflexivity and may cause us to become critical of our epistemic, social or psychological predispositions. This becomes perspective reflection.

These dilemmas associated with transformation are characterized as situations which do not fit a person's preconceived notions. In curriculum and instruction terms they are called discrepant events or as I view as "making it real by making it strange". Both Mezirow and Green believe that these dislocations or disorienting dilemmas create a sense, a space where the inherited ways of doing things no longer works and that the failure of these recipes will in fact lead to premise reflection and perspective transformation. These dilemmas will prompt premise or critical reflection and the development of new or renewed ways of interpreting subjective experiences and lifestories. Transformative learning (theory) involves a process that actively seeks a way of reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes. (Mezirow, 1991). Katie, Grace, and Gerie's lifestories contain many of these disorienting dilemmas Mezirow describes, but what is of further significance is that they did not start developing at the Centre, they began long before, as far back as school socialization and childhood family life. What followed was that during their time at the Centre these dilemmas were understood in relation to the ones that the Centre harbored during their student lives. In a way the Centre became the inter connecting circle forming the dialectic of action and reflection aspects of the formation of Praxis. Maxine Green (1986) calls this circle I have named as a sphere of freedom, authentic spaces in which the dialect of freedom may be achieved. This transformation emerged from an understanding of the dialectical movement within the relations of reproduction and production that made it entirely possible for social and historical change to be initiated within the social relations of reproduction (O'Brien, 1981, 2000). It is within this space that Katie, Grace and Gerie created their activism. Mezirow continues his analysis of Transformation Theory by explaining that:

In short, education is the handmaiden of learning, not politics: but significant learning, involving personal transformation, is a social process with significant implications for social action. When adults learn to correct the distorted sociolinguistic assumptions that have constrained the adaptation of more developmentally advanced meaning perspectives, learning to take social action-often collective social action- becomes an integral part of transformative learning. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 208).



What the Centre experience was able to do for each of these women, to varying degrees, was to help them comprehend rational personal meaning and from that meaning determine political goals that were coherent to the emotional and intellectual commitment that motivates action. In other words it provided the space for their activism to take shape even though the naming of it would come sometime later. The Centre did encourage introspection, content reflection, and process and perspective reflection both in the curriculum it taught and by the way it was taught. The Winnipeg Education Centre did not have as its primary focus the making of inner city activists rather, the prime focus was to take persons from the Inner City and educate them to become good inner city teachers which in turn would improve the lives of those who lived there. However, because the program was involved in education and not simply training, it followed that through the ordered University curriculum involving the instrumental learning of History, Mathematics, Literacy, Science and Teaching Methodologies, students were provided with the tools and skills for enabling the transformation, reflection process an opportunity to develop. From each of these disciplines students were openly encouraged to examine assumptions, assess the consequences of these assumptions, look for alternative assumptions, test these assumptions through critical dialogue and then finally, explore the possibility of appropriate social action.

All of the students who came to the Centre were presented with a critically based curriculum, partly because of who they were as students, and partly because of where they had come from. The nature of the teaching staff, who for the most part advocated for social change, were attracted to work at the Centre because of the critical pedagogical ethos of the program and the setting which housed it both physically (off the main campus) and philosophically (an alternative program). Not all students who experienced this ethos became activists, some were unaffected by the nature of the environment of the Centre and left with a Bachelor of Education degree and little else. Some students became, by community standards, excellent teachers. Grace, Katie and Gerie became teachers and later I think, activists.

It comes around to this. Katie, Grace and Gerie may have become activists, in some part because Winnipeg Education Centre gave them space for their activism to develop, to

examine the disorienting dilemmas and dislocations of their lives and move towards transformative experiences. This, however, in itself did not make them into activists. Those of us who worked and taught at the Centre probably may not have taught them to be activists, but we could have provided them the opportunity through the curriculum and the life at the Centre for the action-reflection praxis to develop. Katie, Grace and Gerie became activists in their determined effort to become real, complete human beings: for Katie it involved being "connected", for Grace it was becoming "whole", and for Gerie it was "getting it." For them the realization that they were to change the grammar of their lives was for each of them their "dislocation", their "disorienting dilemma". It is the tension between the familiar and the strange that provides the space for the transformation to happen.

The reluctance that I both saw and heard from these women when at they did not want to name their activism, was part of this process. They would not name their activism until they could define it for themselves; they did not want to be defined by it. They did not capitulate to the oppressive aspects of essentialism in this way; political, psychological or pedagogical. Each of these women in their life stories share a belief and an understanding, that being real involves a self with a central, unified agency. This belief has formed the backbone of their activism. From learning theory comes an understanding that outlines some level of continuity and self coherence, which the Centre afforded, as a precondition for resistance to oppression, and dominance. Oppression and dominance being synonymous with disorienting dilemmas, dislocations and what postmodern feminists call ruptures. It envelopes Freire's conscientization. It is the whole, situated self of these women that allowed them to develop the alternative discourse that was to become their lives, to right the dislocations and construct a new orientation to their dilemmas, where much of these lives were in relation to the dilemmas and dislocations of others in the inner city community, which would in time, form the extent of their activism.

The single most profound aspect for me in this inquiry has been my witness to the way in which these women defined their own identities, refusing to be named by others until they were able to define themselves. This refusal to be named allowed them, encouraged them, perhaps, to develop a non essentialist articulation for who they were becoming. I first saw this with Gerie when she spoke soundly about how she did not care

for kids "that way". That way, it turned out for Gerie was caring characterized in an overtly sentimental, stereotypically mothering way. Gerie, while developing for herself a definition of caring, brought to this definition a set of developed and tested, essential and non essential criteria. These criteria were meaningful to her and for her they "worked" and were. In exploring her sense of caring her essential criteria for caring was "removing barriers". In turn, the removing of barriers, became an essential criteria for her activism, which in turn named not only her activism but also the extent of this activism. The politics of confidence began to form as the extent of this definition. It was the confidence that arose from the defining of their own activist identities that made their work important. It allowed them to do what was needed for the children and families of the Inner City of Winnipeg. It advocated for transcendent change. It became activism.

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### APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

13 June 2001

**TO:** Charlotte Reid  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Lorna Guse, Chair  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** Protocol #E2001:044  
"Teachers as Activists: The Winnipeg Education Centre Teacher  
Education Program and the Shaping of Teachers' Identities as Inner  
City Activists"

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Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.