

**A Framework for Imaginative and Caring Schools:
A Better Way Toward Serving the Needs of Adolescent Girls**

by

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Abstract

The educational needs of adolescent girls have never really been met by schools leading to a variety of social, emotional and aspirational problems for girls and women alike. In this speculative inquiry I have explored the work of care ethicists, imaginative educators, critical theorists and groups outside of schools to develop a new framework for educating girls based upon the needs that I have identified as critical and unmet for far too many girls. I have surmised that girls' needs for belonging, identity, competency and caring spirit could be better met and could lead to voice, agency and freedom for girls if schools were to implement the ideas contained in my critical framework.

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Dedication

For Anais and Nico

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Chapter 1: Because We Are Girls

Only know what I'm told, only know what I'm told
Fast asleep daydreaming
Start to push, break your own glass ceiling
Can't count, can't catch the pieces falling

Who let it end up on the ground
How am I gonna know you're letting me down
How did I end up on the ground

Only do what I'm told, only do what I'm told
Last to leave cold calling
You're gonna lose your arms, amputate plasticine
There's no knight in silver armor shining

Who let it end up on the ground
How am I gonna know I'm letting you down
Who let it end up on the ground
How did he end up on the ground
Face down on the ground

Only go where I'm told, only know what I'm told
Inch to inches crowding
We can't leave, it's the last road open
Every speed on our knees is crawling

(Haines & Shaw, 2005)

Preamble

My reasons, my motivations and my views have evolved so much as I have sought to write this thesis. Whereas once upon a time I was convinced that I could clearly and confidently speak for girls, I have been humbled and sensitized to increasingly complex ways of thinking about the problems that I have identified and about the people that I seek to represent. Before I go any further, I wish to take on the challenge of using the label “girls”.

As I speak about girls, I do so with much reverence and with the mind that the term “girls” refers to a group that is diverse and hard to define. One thing that can be said about girls is that regardless of their diversity, they have been marginalised and perhaps homogenised, or more positively, united, not entirely by virtue of their own qualities, which are too varied to do justice, but by their various experiences and varying degrees of (mis)treatment by dominant society. Because of this, I hope that I can justify my conversation about girls.

Introduction

I begin, or go back, then, to what I think I know best. My interest in girls and their needs is as old as I am. As a young girl growing up in small town Manitoba, I learned numerous life lessons about my place in the world. For both good and bad, I internalised many of the lessons that experience offered. Before I went to school, I was vivacious, hilarious, smart and full of life. All that began to change with my appearance in kindergarten. In kindergarten, Mrs. J. taught me that to be a good girl meant quiet acceptance of others’ opinions of me and my abilities. I learned that if I wished to protect my fragile heart, I needed to save most of my great ideas and my sense of humour for the safety of home. When we moved to Winnipeg, I learned that because I was a girl, I needed to be protected and that for girls and for boys, the same rules do not apply. Even though he is almost three years younger than I am, my brother enjoyed certain freedoms that always eluded me.

I had many wonderful teachers throughout my school life and some of them were allowed to see pieces of me, but mostly I reserved the important parts for the sanctuary of home. The unconditional love there made it possible for me to hold on to who I was, even if it could not protect me entirely from the Mrs. Js in my life. As a rule, friends were carefully

screened but the ones that I loved, I loved wholeheartedly. When slighted, I always took responsibility, although in hindsight it wasn't always right. In any case, life was pretty good. I was still kind of funny. I was no longer brilliant but at least I could get by without much attention, negative or otherwise.

The next big change happened in Junior High School. Many extraordinary things happen during that magical time called adolescence. Whereas my body had shown some signs of changing, all of which I interpreted as getting fat, some girls had changed overnight, transforming from girls to young women who were barely recognizable as my classmates. I felt no envy towards those girls, however. In grade seven they began to receive attention that others would not be subjected to for many years to come. I would watch them dancing with boys at school dances with a good deal of unease. My young mind and body were nowhere near ready to be touched that way. This does not mean that I believed that those other girls were necessarily ready either, it appeared that their bodies had most likely outstripped their emotional and mental state, and perhaps a few of them lacked some kind of internal compass that had been instilled in me at home. It is difficult to say.

Despite avoiding the kind of sexual attention that I feared so much, I did not escape the tyranny of 13 and 14 year old boys and girls. Luckily for my parents, I was not really aware of the concept of home school at this point of my life, because surely during one of the many outbursts to which I subjected my mom I would have promised that I was not setting foot outside until graduation. The sadness and the isolation that I felt at this point in my life were extreme. I was no longer funny, smart, or cute. And yet if you had asked my teachers at the time, they would probably have said that I was simply a shy or reserved student.

High school came with a new set of challenges but thankfully these were accompanied by the occasional joy and triumph. In high school I was able to form the kind of lasting friendships that had eluded me in junior high and I became very involved in the life of the school. I see these changes in my life as being pivotal, and I am forever grateful to my friends, my Chemistry teacher, and my running coach especially for making me believe that there was something to value in me even when I was not at home and even if I wasn't the best.

Life was not without difficulty even then, though. I and a few of my friends were on a constant quest to lose weight and a few of us actually spent a lot of time with the guidance counsellor who was concerned about the potential for eating disorders. I still sometimes wonder what that was about for me in particular but perhaps the answer is that it was and is not really about me in particular.

In some ways I continue after all these many years to identify strongly with my adolescent angst. Despite the fact that my mom promised me that once I was a mom and a teacher, I would lose some of my insecurities, they haunt me still. When I look at the people that I admire the most I would say that they exude confidence, that they take risks, that they act rather than simply think about it, but I have yet to escape from those feelings of teenage uncertainty. I prefer to continue to think that there is still time.

And even as I tell potentially humiliating parts of my own story, and even as I worry about my daughters and their futures, I am increasingly aware that we are located in a position of privilege relative to many other girls and women. For despite the fact that it is a man's world, it is at the same time a world where being white and middle class affords many advantages.

Schools, it would seem to me, should be both sanctuaries from the meanness and “typicalness” of the world as well as “centres of revolution”. But my observations as a teacher have led me to conclude that little has taken place to set schools apart from what is wrong in society or to spark any sort of revolution. It does not appear that much educational change has taken place in schools. From my own experience watching the transformation of one Canadian high school for many years now with a particular interest in what this looks like for girls, the changes in schooling seem unsettling and unhelpful – and seldom educational. Whereas at the beginning of my teaching career, I was accustomed to seeing one or two girls in a term that seemed really to be in difficulty, now it is not abnormal for the majority of girls in the class to be desperately unhappy or struggling in any number of ways. Most people are likely to understand that extremes in moods are a relatively standard part of any adolescent girl’s life, but the difference that I have become aware of has more to do with the duration and severity of the discontent. The girls who I would tend to categorise as “at-risk” exhibit a range of issues. One group is chronically sad, down, and struggling; another group exudes a kind of frantic “confidence”, an aura of self-assurance that thinly veils feelings of meaninglessness and shallowness; and another group is trying to figure out how to fit into a society that has been much less than welcoming.

There are various societal issues that give way to girls’ problems. I believe that the problem with schools is that they have failed thus far to seek to understand and to name girls’ educational issues, much less address them. Hence, by schools’ “apathy, (they) become morally complicitous” (Schott, 1997) in the objectification, sexualisation and oppression of girls.

I need to grapple with this problem for the love of my students as well as the love of my daughters who are arriving at their own versions of adolescence. I believe that if the world does not take better care of its young women, everyone is going to feel the effects. I think that we have entered a cycle that will perpetuate itself until it is interrupted by people who recognize that we can imagine a different future and then work on making it happen.

Some of the girls in high school today seem lost or empty. The attachments that they form seem incredibly superficial and too fragile to be of any real help or comfort. For these girls if adults are acknowledged at all, they are seen as no more than means to some end. Many of the high school girls that I observe are holding steady jobs doing meaningless work that provide the income necessary for maintaining their cell phone contracts and the steady flow of articles of clothing that would have been deemed inappropriate and probably banned until a short time ago. While there has always been a portion of the high school population that has been employed, students are working more than ever to the detriment of not only their studies but their personal growth and development as well. While I am sensitive to the fact that many students work because they need to, the fact remains that many others work because they want more material *things*.

It seems highly unlikely that the source of the attitudes and behaviours of adolescent girls is intrinsic. The internal struggles of adolescence have not changed that much in the last few years, although their onset may have begun to happen earlier. External forces have transformed in the so-called developed world, however. Is it possible that adolescent girls are the canaries in the coal mine? Are the effects of our diminished culture and augmented consumerism coming to bear on our girls with extra force? Is it simply more noticeable in girls than it is in other parts of the population? Does something about adolescent girls make

them more susceptible to the influences of the media, of society, of their peers and their family dynamics? If this is so, what role do teachers need to play helping adolescent girls to become well-adjusted, strong, happy women? How can schools help to ensure that the emptiness might be filled with meaning? Can we nourish the spirits that have been fed a steady diet of soulless information about the importance of appearance, of sex appeal and of unhealthy attention? How will our society cope if we continue down this path?

And what of the girls who are irrevocably sad? How have they become convinced that they are of so little merit? How have they determined that the low expectations they hold for themselves and their futures are justified and irreversible? For some of these girls, circumstances far beyond their control have led them to believe in their diminished self worth. Others have internalised messages from various sources that life holds little promise for change.

The Challenge: Girls and Their Educational Needs

How can we meet adolescent girls' educational needs in high school? I am seeking here to develop a new framework that revolves around needs that I will identify as being of particular importance to adolescent girls and generally neglected in schools. This new framework will be based in the ethics of care and imaginative education as viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy in order to ensure that issues of power will remain in focus. The remainder of my introduction will provide a brief summary of the problems of adolescent girls' psychology followed by an introduction to the subsequent chapters in order to lay out in more detail how I will proceed with the study in order to address my research problem.

I am confident in claiming that there are sure to be people who will say that this paper and all of my speculation is an exercise in futility for a number of reasons. Some of my friends who have boys and girls in school have asked why I would focus on girls when boys are having far more trouble than girls are in school. Others will say that while this may have been pertinent in the past, women should consider themselves lucky to have come all this way and they have no concerns left worth voicing. Still others would wish to return to “good old days” when men were so obviously in control and the world was simpler and ran more smoothly. At least this is the way that I interpret reactions that I still hear to many issues of women in the workplace. Still others blame girls for any problems that they may face and claim that girls get what they ask for.

On December 11, 2013, I attended a memorial service for Nelson Mandela. I was moved by the many stories and firsthand accounts of people who had encountered Mandela or who had been touched by his good work. There were a few themes that ran through the course of the service but the ones that resounded most frequently were the enduring need for hope and the idea that there must be no rest as long as there is oppression in the world. It is easy to feel overwhelmed at times. I understand well that the domination experienced by women is but one small piece of the problem but we all have to start somewhere if we are to remain hopeful.

Listening to the Munk debates (2013) a few weeks ago I was struck by the many positive qualities that were attributed to girls and women by way of positioning themselves in relation to males. Included in the list were nimbleness and the ability to adapt, the fact that girls are now doing better than boys in school and that more than half of the college degrees earned in Canada currently are earned by women. Unfortunately these facts are tempered by

others that reveal that there is much left to be done. Despite positive strides, women are still underrepresented in public positions of power and underpaid in the workforce (Carnevale, Rose & Cheah, 2012). Statistics show that one in four girls is sexually assaulted by the age of 18 years and one in 17 women is a victim of rape (Rape Victims Support Network, 2014). The statistics are even bleaker for women of colour and those who are found in the poorest social strata. It has been shown that rape cultures are borne out of overall attitudes toward women that begin with objectification and end in violence (Miller, 2008). While it is not possible to expect that schools can singlehandedly reverse centuries of subordination, it seems to make perfect sense that school is one place that needs to take a piece of the responsibility. The only alternative to taking responsibility is inaction and this is the equivalent of complicity in the oppression.

Reflection upon the aims of the critical framework for the education of girls will enable me to describe some specific ways in which schooling should change in order to better serve the needs of adolescent girls and students in general. In addition to the ideas described in the framework I will examine the work of some organisations and programs that are taking the lead in addressing the educational needs of girls with the intention of learning from their most effective approaches. Among the major contributors to girls' success are sports teams, girls only schools, social media sites and organisations like *Girls Inc* (<http://www.girlsinc.org>) that design programs specifically aimed at responding to girls' evolving needs.

While I have made an attempt here to outline some of the troubles that I witness on a regular basis, girls and their experiences can hardly be well defined and placed into neat categories to be examined and dealt with in concert. What I do believe to be possible,

however, is to define girls' needs that they might be addressed more effectively. It is in the realm of needs that I begin my study. I have identified four needs that are of particular urgency for girls. This list, inspired by Brendtro, Brokenleg and VanBockern (1990) includes the need for belonging, the need for identity, the need for competence and the need for caring spirit. Drawing upon the work of researchers like Bettie (2003) and Miller (2008) who have spent a great deal of time studying adolescent girls in various circumstances I will make an effort to connect the issues that girls face to the needs that they often seem unable or ill equipped to meet.

Identifying girls' psychological needs only begins my journey, however: Some young women meet their needs for belonging, identity, competence and caring by becoming attentive leaders of bullying cliques (or worse). I must therefore also consider *how* those needs are met and in consequence, my argument is normative and therefore educational. I follow Elshtain who explains that education "always reflects a society's views of what is excellent, worthy, necessary. The reflections are not cast in concrete, like so many foundation stones: rather they are ongoing, refracted and reshaped as definitions, meanings and purposes change through democratic contestation" (1993, p.82). Such a conception of education is in continuous tension with the institutions called schools. Education, after all, has to do with engaging live human beings in activities of meaning-making, dialogue and reflective understanding of a variety of texts, including the texts of their social realities. Growing, becoming different, becoming informed and articulate: all of these are involved in the project called education, a project that must be chosen by persons intentionally and cooperatively (Greene, 1997, p. 305).

My aim is to contribute new educational ideas that can help girls make meaning of their lives now and in the future, ideas that might be institutionalised in schooling.

The fact that current schooling practices often fail to meet the educational needs of students (and especially girls) does not mean that wonderful ideas do not exist. In the spirit of seeking alternatives to current practices that have become accepted sometimes by misguided ideals, others by default, and still other times by good intentions, I will briefly describe some educational ideas that hold promise and hope for new beginnings.

Hope and imagination. Of particular interest to me are the ideas of educators and educational philosophers who recognise the importance of connectedness, relationship, thought and reflection. One of the keys to deep understanding of these aspects of our humanity is the imagination and so I will spend some time exploring Egan's (1997) imaginative education which recommends completely rethinking the way that schooling and education should be approached. I became attached to the idea that hope and imagination are two essential components in helping people to overcome difficulties a number of years ago as I listened to a news report about repeat offenders in the juvenile corrections system. One of the people interviewed explained that when people lose hope, there is little chance for rehabilitation. As I reflected on this, and later as I read *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah (2007), a former child soldier, I was struck by the strong link that exists between hope and imagination and the potential for change. The ideas of Greene and Egan have helped me a great deal in describing ways in which imagination might become an integral part of education that would make it possible for girls to envision new paths leading to more promising futures.

Caring

After having discussed needs and educational aims and approaches, I will turn my attention to the ethics of care with a focus on the work of Nel Noddings along with some of her proponents and some of her critics. I will explore the role that the ethics of care might play in contributing to our understanding of how, why, and for whom we educate, placing emphasis upon the centrality of relationships in all of our moral decision making. The ethics of care will be found at the root of my new critical educational framework, informing all of the choices that are made and actions that are taken.

A critical framework. All of the ideas that have been discussed will become components of my construction of a new critical framework. I will begin the process by describing how the various ideas offered by Noddings and Egan could be connected to meet the needs of adolescent girls all the while viewing these ideas through the lens of critical pedagogy as explained by hooks (1994) and Freire (1970) – who will contribute to my understanding of the role of class and power struggles that affect issues of gender in important ways. I will attempt to gather all of the most helpful pieces of the ethics of care and imaginative education into a framework that remains cognisant of the realities of domination and oppression that can threaten to undermine the good intentions of addressing needs if they are ignored or glossed over.

Finally I will attempt to put the new framework to the speculative test to determine whether in seeking to meet the educational needs of adolescent girls it is able to demonstrate a contribution to the kinds of attributes that I would hope to observe in girls. I will spend some time reflecting on the work that would need to be done prior to and alongside the new

framework and I will finish with a letter of “truth and reconciliation” aimed at beginning the transformative work necessary to helping girls to become all that they could wish to be.

Chapter 2: Adolescent Girls and Their Educational Needs

Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour, Rains from
the sky a meteoric shower Of facts ... they lie
unquestioned, uncombined. Wisdom enough to
leech us of our ill Is daily spun, but there exists no
loom To weave it into fabric.

–(Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1939, p. 140)

My earliest attempts at describing problems faced by girls convinced me that approached from this angle; the topic is far broader than one work could ever do justice. Thus began my quest to define something that girls in all of their diversity of culture, race, class and orientation hold in common. Over time I came to understand that one important thing that unites all of humanity across time and distance is our needs. While the line between wants and needs is often blurred in our society, Max Neef (1992), a Chilean environmentalist and economist, helps to make the distinction between wants and needs clear. Needs are defined as few, finite and classifiable whereas wants are infinite and insatiable (pp. 199-200). Max Neef's list of needs remains too broad for the scope of this project, however. The needs upon which I wish to focus will be psychological needs that have the potential to be addressed by schools; they are the needs that society tends to neglect or worse; and they are needs that are of particular importance to the flourishing of young girls and women (and education aims at helping people live flourishing lives).

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1990) provide a compelling starting point for the discussion of needs. In their book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* (1990) the authors found that contemporary research, findings of youth workers, and native philosophies of childcare could be combined to design a model of youth empowerment based

upon four encompassing needs. These needs include belonging, independence, mastery and generosity, and are described as contributing to “shared values” that “must exist in any community to create environments that ultimately benefit all” (<http://www.reclaiming.com/content/aboutcircleofcourage>). I note that Brendtro et al. seem to valorise community, that is, they fail to deal with the normative-ethical and political- dimensions how particular groups of people live together. For example, how might we decided what “ultimately benefit all” means? Or how might we adjudicate conflicting claims to benefit across the range of communities that comprise pluralistic democratic societies? In consequence the needs that I shall describe are very similar to Brendtro’s but they are further informed by relational theory which recognises ethical concerns for mutual, empathic, creative and powerful connections in women’s lived experiences. The four needs that I will discuss are therefore: belonging, identity, competence and caring spirit. I will describe each of these in turn, justifying my reasons for their inclusion, along with the societal norms that stand in the way of having each need met and suggestions for more effective response by schools.

Belonging

Ella Deloria, a Lakota anthropologist, instructed that one should, “be related, somehow, to everyone you know” (quoted in <http://www.reclaiming.com/content/aboutcircleofcourage>). She understood that powerful social bonds are the key to the survival of culture and that it can only be through the nourishing of each new generation that true belonging can be achieved. A sense of belonging and the multiplicity of our connections to many people and groups are imperative to our human experience, and they are of particular importance for girls because there seem to be so many obstacles that stand in the way of

healthy belonging. Adolescent girls will often seek to meet their need for belonging with little attention to or perhaps understanding of the implications of potentially harmful or dangerous choices (Miller, 2008). Miller's study of African American urban youth concluded that where girls go, with whom, in what context and how they interpret everyday behaviours matter in fundamental ways for well being. To me this suggests that belonging and well being are indelibly linked. If we wish for girls to become well adjusted and capable, we need to help them to figure out how they belong.

Passivity. Especially for girls, the societal problems related to belonging are vast, and blame for the problems is frequently misdirected. I might begin with the positive reinforcement that girls receive for demonstrating passivity. According to Freire (1970) this is the normal course that oppression takes. Passivity is encouraged in the oppressed and consequently a fear of freedom is instilled. He explains that an individual's concrete situations condition her consciousness in the world and condition her attitudes and ways of dealing with reality.

Many of my own experiences and my observations in school have served to confirm that girls receive frequent and strong messages that if they wish to be appreciated and celebrated, they should choose to be compliant. I began to hear from my very first day in kindergarten that it was never, ever proper for me to speak before spoken to or called upon, much less express an idea or question a teacher's authority. All the way through school I heard that my opinion was much less important than my compliance. In my grade 12 English course, I continued to receive the directive that the teacher's rules were the final authority, that regardless of his inability to explain the reason for and apparent arbitrariness of my

marks, my teacher held the power and I could meekly accept my “fate” or I could fight and risk lowering my marks a great deal further. Even as I worked on my undergraduate degree, the message persisted from a number of professors that my opinion, however informed by reading and collected data, had no place in Ethics. In order to perform well (i.e., get an A), I needed to regurgitate only that which had been fed to me.

The students in my school do not seem to feel terribly differently about the way school works. The girls who have learned to play the game most effectively are the ones who are labeled “good”. They know how to please the teacher and will make every attempt to do so without the slightest hint of wonder or worry at reasons or motivation. Other girls learned long ago that they can never aspire to be “good” because their experiences are too far removed from those of their teachers and so they have ceased to try. These girls are often the ones who are considered apathetic and hopeless. Bell hooks (1994) would probably argue, however, that class, along with race and gender, has shaped the values, attitudes, and social relations that inform the way that knowledge is formed and developed. Without any consciousness of this, teachers may at first get angry at this kind of “troubled” girl, but they are soon apt to fall into their own versions of indifference toward them and the cycle of passivity is perpetuated. Our educational ideology, so similar to competitive economic ideology, sets girls up to be lonely, scared, isolated and at odds with their teachers and one another.

Choices. Girls’ abilities to fulfill their needs for belonging are also affected by poor choices and apparent lack of available or evident choices. Among the most prevalent problems that are seen in school are peer orientation and cliques, relational aggression,

residential mobility and anonymity. One of the ways that schools contribute to these problems is by sustaining the myth that all students come to school with equal opportunity for academic and social success. There is a commonly held assumption that individuals individually choose their membership in a given group (hooks, 1994) and furthermore that cliques along with corresponding styles organised along lines of race and class identities have little impact on individual futures. Bettie (2003) observed that in fact cultural performances of students reflect “habitus”—unconsciously- acted, socially-learned dispositions that are produced by class inequality (p. 49). These dispositions inform group acceptance and placement and they are reliable predictors for curricular and extracurricular choices. Most often, apparent choices are closely related to cultural constraints, obligations and coping mechanisms (McIntosh & Style, 1991). In adolescence, girls begin to perceive barriers to their full participation in society while at the same time they are exposed to poverty and related societal ills such as poor health conditions, problems related to psychological and emotional welfare, the potential for homelessness, stress, and very often diminished cognitive abilities (Hirsch, 2008). The resulting cynicism, anger, alienation and despair increases the risk of engagement in anti-social and self-destructive activities such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and suicide.

It is easy to feel helpless as a teacher faced with such a wealth of issues and ill-equipped to even name the structural and systemic nature of them. This year at my school’s graduation dinner, there were three young women who are all expecting babies within a couple of months. Many teachers question how this still happens when girls, upon whom all the responsibility seems to fall, are provided with a wealth of information about birth control and alternatives; but it seems to me that this question completely misses the point. I wonder

how we failed these girls. I wonder how they have come to decide that this is the best or only path for them. I wonder how well they will be able to equip their own children for a hopeful future.

Marginalisation. Part of the answer to the question of how we have failed girls lies in their marginalisation. When people are perceived and treated as abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world (Freire, 1970), girls suffer disproportionately. With little encouragement, girls will readily accept that any supposed inadequacies result from flaws of personality (Bettie, 2003). Coming from a social space that is already highly gendered, most adolescent girls experience increased self-consciousness and sensitivity to others' perceptions of them (Miller, 2008). When we pretend that not only is gender invisible, but also base our teaching and learning on essentialist ideas or assumptions that the inequality faced by women and girls is somehow uniform, we fail to name and acknowledge the additional marginalisation that is a result of class, race and orientation difference. The resulting social maladjustment, insecurity and self blame contribute to the apparent complicity that girls seem to display with regards to objectification and victimisation. These regularly inform their identities and contribute to a wide array of problems.

Ideas with educational potential. Hooks's (1994) radical pedagogy offers a good starting point for considering how to address girls' needs for belonging by insisting that everyone's presence be acknowledged. Much as this might seem to be obvious, it is very rare in a high school classroom, much less in a school, that each and every student feels

recognised and celebrated. A genuine interest in one another deeply affects the ability to generate excitement and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Educators have an enormous role to play in addressing the needs of adolescent girls. Well-trained and well-intentioned staff responsive to their educational needs must provide stimulating educational experiences and opportunities for self expression and self governance (Miller, 2008). This is a very challenging requirement to meet since it demands first of all that personnel be aware of the evaded curriculum that threatens to reinforce racial, class, and gender inequalities by pretending that they do not exist (Miller, 2008). Understanding that schools should be concerned with the education of children and adolescents means in part that we must be very conscious and cautious about unswervingly and unquestioningly perpetuating society's norms. The evaded curriculum is all about the things that we neglect to acknowledge and that we normalise. When we do not speak about the systematic inequalities that exist in society and in our schools, we perpetuate the evaded curriculum. Unfortunately, oftentimes the most pervasive and enduring effects of our educational practices are ones we don't intend but also ones we don't inhibit. Further it requires that schools accept increased accountability and responsibility to protect the young women that they are charged with, and to recognise the importance of their belonging. This requires stable relationships with numerous caring adults who are committed to offering girls healthy alternatives to understanding their place in the world (Miller, 2008).

Perhaps even more challenging is the role that schools need to play in the broader community. Bettie (2003) noted that through the simple act of telling children stories of their lives and their histories, mothers were able to transmit a positive disposition toward schooling and their future to their children and this in turn functions as social capital. It

seems that schools could play a part in imparting this understanding to families. If schools can help people to generate positive social ties, they are much more likely to feel connected and compelled to remain in stable environments. Miller (2008) describes this as a part of collective efficacy or social capital that refers to the ability to generate positive social ties and mechanisms that serve to protect girls and families. Collective efficacy allows people to generate mutual trust and shared expectations that might contribute to lasting remedies that attend to the root causes of disadvantage and the resultant consequences. Schools must provide support for challenging gender and other inequalities if they might ever aspire to strengthen girls' belonging and as a result, their efficacy.

Identity

Identity is a very meaning-charged need for adolescent girls. More meaningful than simple independence, identity is the very definition of self, and while independence plays a part in her identity, so too do her connections, and both of these contribute to her ability to find her voice and her place. Brendtro, Brokenleg and VanBockern (1990) explain that respect is a precondition to being human as opposed to something that must be earned. The prevailing attitude in our society remains that power is dominance and that subordination precludes respect. Hence the challenges to a girl determining her own identity.

Silence and invisibility. Again wisdom comes from Freire (1970), who explains that the oppressed internalise the image of the oppressor, adopt the guidelines of the oppressor and thus become fearful of freedom (p. 29). Freedom means responsibility and implies constant pursuit of a fuller humanity. For girls it often feels like the path of least resistance is

more desirable and to remain the victim less of an effort. When girls quietly accept this fate, the inequalities that are required to meet the demands of capitalistic, male-dominated white supremacy are seamlessly reproduced (Bettie, 2003). Girls often see their two choices as quietly resisting school while avoiding actual confrontation, or they become educated in romance and competitive heterosexuality. Either of these supposed choices results in silencing girls' voices. Girls are too often invisible in school where there is no sense of legitimacy given to "girl talk" (McIntosh & Style, 1991) and where there is little if any recognition offered to the social construction of gender (Bettie, 2003). Alternately, they are seen as sexual objects who are neither seen nor heard in any intentional, positive manner. Hooks (1994) quotes Anderson (1984) who calls silencing "the most oppressive aspect of middle class life" (p. 180). Girls are controlled in school explicitly and implicitly by that which is rewarded and that which is not. School teaches a sense of entitlement by endorsing power relations that honour high achieving people who come from the "right" sort of places where home matches school and teachers match parents (Bettie, 2003), and serves to bolster the inequalities formed by informal peer hierarchies while conversely blaming single mothers and others in lowly positions for their poverty by suggesting that it is nothing but immorality that has placed them in these positions. Pregnancy and motherhood continue to be identified as resulting from immoral behaviours and blamed as principal causes of vocational schooling, low wage jobs and poverty. Hereby the myth is perpetuated that each person starts out with the equal opportunity to make her way in the world and determine her own identity (Bettie, 2003). A rap song by the Dignable Planets does an excellent job of succinctly describing the disparity that exists between poor, disenfranchised women and men in

positions of power. Here in *Femme Fetal*, they use the issue of abortion and pro-life to illustrate the problem:

Well our love was often a verb and spontaneity has brought a third
But due to our youth an economic state, we wish to terminate
About this we don't feel great, but baby, that's how it is
But the feds have dissed me
They ignore and dismiss me
The pro-lifers harass me outside the clinic
And call me a murderer, now that's hate
So needless to say, we're in a mental state of debate"
"Hey, beautiful bird" I said, digging her somber mood
"The fascists are some heavy dudes
They don't really give a damn about life
They just don't want a woman to control her body
Or have the right to choose
But baby that ain't nothin'
They just want a male finger on the button
Because if you say war, they will send them to die by the score
Aborting mission should be your volition
But if Souter and Thomas have their way
You'll be standing in line unable to get Welfare while they'll be out
Hunting and fishing
It has always been around, it will always have a niche
But they'll make it a privilege, not a right
Accessible only to the rich
Hey, Pro-lifers should dig themselves
Because life doesn't stop after birth
And to a child born to the unprepared
It might even just get worse
The situation would surely change if they were to find themselves in it
Supporters of the H-Bomb, and fire-bombing clinics
What type of shit is that? Orwellian, in fact
If Roe v. Wade was overturned, would not the desire remain intact
Leaving young girls to risk their healths
And doctors to botch and watch as they kill themselves... (Butler, I., 1993)

Complexity of identity. Another challenge is to recognise both the fluidity and the multi-faceted nature of identity. No person is simply victim or victimizer, oppressed or oppressor in every situation. It is both unhelpful and harmful either to fail to recognise that identity is informed by class, race and gender or to reduce and essentialise people's identities

by those same categories (Bettie, 2003). This means that first, we must learn to see class where it lives: in the unfair discourse of success, values, intelligence, and gender, race, and youth subculture. It is also important to never accept the fiction of an essential, real self because this simply reproduces inequality (Bettie, 2003). Here is where feminist theory has failed girls most grievously. By reducing girls' identities to their gender, their relational and contextual narratives of race and class identity have been obscured. This is so problematic because it contributes to impressions of uselessness and helplessness that arise from stories about missed opportunities and poor choices that just are not true. Girls need to be able to name the numerous axes of social organisation that are bound by the context of history and culture if they can ever maintain hope of defining themselves. On March 7, 2014 (which happened to fall on the eve of International Women's Day) the federal government rejected requests for an inquest into the murders and disappearances of over one hundred Aboriginal women in Canada once again sending the message that there is something inherently less worthy about women in general and women of colour in particular.

Objectification, victimisation, violence. With a materialistic concept of existence as a guide, it is possible to turn everything, including other people into objects of commerce (Freire, 1970). When this attitude is combined with notions of male superiority and dominance, it naturally leads to victimisation. For adolescent girls, the pronounced shift from an almost asexual albeit already genderised childhood to a gender system that is hypersexualised (Miller, 2008) has a tendency to connect their objectification and victimisation to their sexuality. How can it be anything but a losing situation for girls? At the age where they are suddenly confronted with a multitude of physical and psychological

changes, when they might well be at their most vulnerable, they are thrust into an uncertain and unforgiving culture of domination (hooks, 1994).

The highly gendered social world of adolescence places boys and girls in opposition to one another. Boys are encouraged to “play” girls in order to gain status and prestige (Miller, 2008) and they are more likely than anyone else to look favourably on attitudes of violence against women. Meanwhile, girls are faced with becoming victims of gender based harassment and violence and mass culture, or to become creative users of it (Bettie, 2003). Regardless of the so-called choices that girls make, the promise of continual victimisation and reputational degradation seem often to be their fate. Schools provide a ripe context for sexual harassment and when only abstract discussions of gender and other complex matter take place, it leads only to impasses and isolation (McIntosh & Style, 1991). Teachers and administrators will even regularly go so far as to quietly define sexual harassment as a natural part of the shift from childhood to adolescence rather than as a “dress rehearsal for the reproduction of gender inequality” (Miller, 2008, p 39). When girls discover that their mistreatment will only be met with indifference or dismissal, they quickly learn that schools and the adults therein cannot be trusted to help. It is not surprising that girls’ primary response to victimisation is attempts at self-help. Girls may change their style of dress, stay indoors and avoid being alone. Unfortunately, this response does nothing to eliminate the threat of violence that comes from deeply embedded stereotypes.

The threat of sexual violence functions as a powerful mechanism of social control in women’s lives. It places systematic constraints on their behaviour and participation in public life and it reinforces by implication the conceptualisation of violence against women as a women’s problem (Miller 2008, p. 216). For working class women in particular, the body is

often seen as their only capital. This means that for working class girls being looked at may offer one of the easiest and most readily available means of escaping routines of poorly paid work and domestic drudgery (Bettie, 2003). Upon this unequal playing field, women are frequently seen as property. They are excluded from decision-making and their dependence upon men who see themselves as superior is maintained. At the same time, young people tend to view girls' victimisation as a problem of individual character as opposed to a product of structural and situational contexts and these inequalities fuel further victimisation. In the court of law as well as the court of public opinion, young women are "culpable participants" (Miller, 2008, p. xv) and "no means no" only when there is no evidence—however obscure or misleading—that can be construed as an indication of consent. It wasn't two years ago that a Manitoba judge determined that a Thompson man was not guilty of rape because the female victim had dressed provocatively. It is no wonder that so many girls have a hard time negotiating such an unforgiving landscape that becomes ever more complex with the advances in technologies that have led to high incidences of sexting and online harassment.

It is not uncommon to hear stories of girls who have sent explicit photos or of others who have been threatened for refusing to do so. Here again girls are extremely vulnerable. If they decide to participate in sexting or photographed sexual activity, their photos and videos are often viewed by huge numbers of people and the damage to their reputations can seem beyond repair. Girls who reject participation are still labeled and more often than not they are accused of activities that cast doubt on the content of their characters. Where is a girl supposed to find and assert her identity amongst so much turmoil?

Ideas with educational potential. Bell hooks (1994) suggests that if the goal is to abolish silence and eradicate invisibility, people must be taught to come to voice, that is, to claim their dignity as people. People need to learn how to really hear one another, to debate and discuss ideas without fear, to know one another in all the difference and complexity of experience that we bring. Schooling experiences do not need to be subtractive or colonising because if all feel heard, the social relations, emotions and politics begin to resonate differently and trust and understanding might be established until the classroom could be filled with people who are ready to lead (McIntosh & Style, 1991). Once again, this requires strong teachers who are willing to nurture and care for each individual, to offer feedback and to listen and to respect every voice.

In the struggle for self determination, girls need exposure to discussions about the role of class, race and gender as structural inequality. This may well be the best way for them to see their status as something other than a flaw of self or family (Bettie, 2003). Teachers should be there to guide girls in their attempts to understand and rise against exploitative relationships because it will be through critical discourse that girls might be able to locate and identify themselves more clearly. Girls should be encouraged to tell their family stories and through them break the links between low achievement and potential for the future. By challenging fatalism and channeling the resilience that often come from living with oppression, girls might come to know a new and vital sense of self worth (Miller, 2008).

As for the need for every person to be subject as opposed to object, young girls need to be afforded the necessary resources to engage in oppositional identity work that allow them to identify and question cultural assumptions and uphold and reproduce gender inequality (Miller, 2008). Girls need to be invited and allowed to think critically about the

messages and images that they receive about gender and sexuality. Equipped with the ability to name and see the structural and systematic inequalities for what they are, girls have the potential to individually and collectively develop recognition of rights and boundaries in relation to men and to resist the voices and images that have dominated their lives and identities (Miller, 2008).

Furthermore, boys should not be excluded from the discussion since their omission can contribute in yet another way to the notion that problems of victimisation and objectification are girls' problems. Boys and girls need more opportunities to relate to each other as equals and as whole people. Opportunities for constructive cross-gender friendships and engagement in meaningful cross gender activities could well produce a reduction in coercive sexual behaviours as they foster more egalitarian relationships.

Beyond this, in our quest for responsible and affirming behaviour on the part of boys, schools should provide boys with alternative ideas about forms of status and prestige. Miller (2008) recommends that young men be educated about the harms that are inherent to the kind of normative masculinity to which they are exposed. One suggestion is that boys might more readily develop empathy and egalitarian connections with girls if we would capitalise on their care and concern for female loved ones. Miller postulates that the possibility exists that this concern could be translated into empathy and care for all girls and women. She does caution, however that this approach is not without risks since there remains a chance that this might simply contribute to certain boys' conceptions of male superiority.

Competence

The idea of competence as a need for girls rather than mastery as the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg & VanBockern, 1990) proposes comes from the way that I hear the word and the way that I believe it might be interpreted. The term mastery conjures for me a certain sense of domination and competitiveness that I wish to wholeheartedly avoid. Words are powerful and important and my concern is that they might inadvertently pose some of the very problems to which I am seeking solutions.

I believe that of all of the four needs that are being addressed, competence is the one that schools in general would claim to fulfill and yet for girls its achievement can be elusive. Humans are predisposed to learn. They have an innate drive to become competent and to solve problems (Brendtro, Brokenleg, VanBockern, 1990) and yet girls are not all able to meet this need. There are things that stand in the way of competence; things that convince girls that they are not worthy of competence; ideas that we help girls develop when we tell them that they will never be good enough and therefore that there is no point trying.

The messages that girls receive as a challenge to their competence are related to those of passivity and invisibility. Less privileged students in particular habitually find themselves in positions of submissiveness where they take on the role of victim and from which they retain only the capacity to accept or reject the norms that are imposed upon them. The only possible outcomes become disappointment and failure (hooks, 1994) and these perpetuate themselves in cycles of helplessness and frustration. Girls hear that the way to survive school is to be silent, to do what the teachers ask, to ignore incoherence, to accept school-based strife and to embrace the arbitrariness of assessment (McIntosh & Style, 1991). When girls become convinced to accept the fragmented view of reality that school and society afford,

they are led to adapt and they become easily dominated as they lose the capacity to exercise skill and to care (Freire, 1970). In addition, girls must surmount the insidious messages that arise out of objectification. Until girls are convinced that there is more to them than their appearance and their appeal to men, the struggle for competence might be hard won. Girls need to believe that they can accomplish great things and that the possibilities that exist for them need not come from sex appeal which society and the media too frequently associate with simple-mindedness (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Ideas with educational potential. If girls are to overcome the challenges that stand in the way of competency, they must accept some responsibility – that is exert their autonomy- in the struggle for their humanisation (Freire, 1970). This will pose some problems for girls who have decided that accepting the role of victim or object is the easiest way since it allows them to avoid accountability for their place in the world. It falls again to the responsible adults in a girl’s life to help her past this way of perceiving her limits. Hooks (1994) recommends that conflict should be presented as a potential catalyst for new thinking and growth that can lead girls to true freedom, the kind of freedom that requires constant autonomy, responsibility, and competence.

In order to empower young women, teachers and other responsive adults need to provide safe spaces in which conflict can occur without devastation. They must provide opportunities for girls to recognise their collective strengths and interests so that they might be willing to support one another as they challenge inequalities (Miller, 2008). When girls are encouraged to understand that they are both worthy of respect and responsible for offering respect, they can come to recognise a communal commitment to learning (hooks,

1994) that has the potential to transcend their differences. For girls in particular, deemphasising competition and attending to cooperation and permanent relationships of dialogue is the way to restore the natural predisposition to learn and to solve problems. Cooperation leads dialogical subjects to focus attention on the realities that mediate and challenge them (McIntosh & Style, 1991). Whereas competition can easily lend itself to opposition and avoidance and feelings of inferiority, cooperation is much more likely to lead to new understandings of self and others. It allows those who might otherwise be quieted to identify links between their situations and their struggles to external forces. This might well allow those who would otherwise silently accept their 'destinies' to identify new ways of breaking down old barriers. Working in concert with others meanwhile tends to strengthen one's resolve, fuel creativity and nurture change.

Miller (2008) suggests that this might be accomplished if we would draw on the strength, resiliency and independence that emerge in response to legacies of oppression to create positive gender identities and a "climate of creativity" (McIntosh & Style, 1991 p. 26). The positive qualities that uphold black women who deal with sexism and racism could be shared to help girls develop strategies for survival and resistance (hooks, 1994). Critical witness would become possible where students would come to perceive themselves as mutually responsible for the development of their learning and their learning communities (hooks, 1994). Students would learn to fulfill the requirements of consistency between their words and actions. Boldness and radicalisation could become catalysts for action. This can in turn lead to the courage to love, to have faith in people, and to dare to run risks (McIntosh & Style, 1994).

Caring Spirit

Finally, nurturing a caring spirit is integral to developing whole people. By a spirit of caring, I mean a proclivity for care that informs all action and shapes thinking in ways that are beneficial to self and to others. While the term generosity may again be misconstrued and limited to material generosity, caring spirit implies in addition generosity of spirit. It requires a sympathetic nature and an empathic heart.

Young women are exposed to so many manipulative, domesticating and imposing messages. That which is often interpreted as charity and generosity on the part of the “oppressor” is in fact selective good deeds and disinterested aid offered only as a way to maintain relationships of inequality (Freire, 1970). Girls are exposed to repeated objectification, victimisation and violence. This can increase the possibility of aggressive behaviour or of emotional and psychological distress which in turn increases personal victimisation, desensitisation and becoming uncaring toward others (Miller, 2008). What once might have been considered extreme cases are becoming the norm where women adhere to ideologies that hold female victims responsible for male violence. This response might be a way of psychologically distancing themselves from risks they perceive but the result is that in another way women are alienated from one another. Relationships are not allowed to flourish, and weakness and isolation remain.

Scenarios that involve a lack of caring spirit and that place girls in opposition to one another can be observed frequently in schools. Girls are very quick to label and to blame one another rather than to seek common ground. Rather than seeing each other as potential allies and as persons with common lived experiences and feelings, girls are predisposed to think the worst of any girl who isn't a close friend and even sometimes of their own friends. Girls

obviously need help and support if there is to be any hope that they might overcome problems that pit girl against girl and contribute to weakness and sadness.

Ideas with educational potential. The nurture of caring spirit requires intense faith in humankind, hope and critical thinking. As Freire points out, trusting the people is an indispensable precondition for revolutionary change (1970, p.42). To authentically engage with one another is to be radically open (hooks, 1994). It allows people to see the multiplicity of connections that we share and it requires that we help girls to see themselves as complex characters who are capable of seeing and respecting many points of view, and living civilly with many kinds of people (McIntosh & Style, 1991). If teachers and students could begin by asking themselves bell hooks's question, "Why do you think there is not enough love to go around?" (1994, p. 199), and if the answer could be, "but there is always enough to go around," we could build solidarity among and enhance efficacy of women and girls (Miller, 2008). Schools must be akin to fields of possibility that offer girls the opportunity to face reality as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond the boundaries of inequality with open hearts and minds (hooks, 1994).

That We Might Know It's Working

From the perspective of adolescent girls' taken in this chapter, it is possible to name the criteria by which I will be judging the educational worth of programs and ideas that have a part in addressing those needs. I will try to reiterate them here more explicitly so that it might be possible to refer back to them later on.

First, every student must be known, seen and heard. There needs to be some recognition of individual and collective strengths and genuine interest in one another. Each person should feel respected in her diversity and should feel safe coming to voice. Interactions must never descend into colonising or subtractive ones. It is in part through voice that identity is allowed to shine and belonging can be garnered.

Next, students must be provided with ample stimulating experiences and exposure to self expression and self governance so that they might express their individual identities and display their competence.

Also, competition or competitiveness should give way to cooperation and the reciprocal building of relationships based upon equality and care. By this we can observe that the needs for caring spirit and competence have been attended to.

With open hearts and minds students should accept mutual responsibility for themselves and others. Faith, trust and the courage to love should allow them to act on one another's behalf and to take risks that allow for creativity and imagination to grow. Responsibility and responsiveness must extend to the teachers and other caring adults in their lives as well. All four of the needs are demonstrated when this deep understanding of responsibility is achieved.

Good programs and good ideas for girls should generate social capital and collective efficacy. Every aspect of a students' life should be enriched because of her life at school. In order that through her own competence she is permitted to belong and identify herself.

Furthermore, authentically educational programs will raise awareness of the complexities involved in the structural inequalities that can be attributed to race, class and gender. Constant dialogue should keep this awareness at the fore and should equip students

to deal more effectively with the evaded curriculum. This is another way in which competency might be manifest.

Responsible adults need to take the lead here as well. The evaded curriculum will remain hidden until teachers begin to teach about the inequalities to which we are constantly subjected. Teachers must push students to think critically about the messages and resist images that they receive constantly about gender and sexuality in addition to race and class. In this way competency might be celebrated as part of girls' identities.

As well, girls need to feel an increased sense of self worth. Good programs will allow girls to feel hopeful and optimistic about their futures as they learn to abandon low expectations and limiting ideas about their potentialities and thus embrace their competence.

All of these ideas can only work if boys and young men are involved in the discussion too. They must become aware of the role that they play and the potential harm or good that are available to them so that they might become a part of the solution.

Finally, girls and young women must learn to practice freedom and autonomy and to make their lives their own. In this way, through belonging girls might finally be allowed to feel the confidence in their competence that is necessary to define their identities and make their way in the world.

We will know success when we can say that in girls we have observed voice, self-expression, cooperation, responsibility, social capital, awareness, self worth and freedom.

Chapter 3: Education and Schooling

The discussion of needs from the last chapter does not appear to be entirely consistent with current educational aims and resulting school practices. With this in mind, I wish alternatives to widely held notions about education as offered by various educators and scholars that might be in keeping with the needs and criteria outlined in the previous chapter.

What's Past Is Passed

The conversation about education and schooling has ironically been dominated for a few centuries by a number of myths and deceptions. One myth – that of universal education as the “great equaliser of the conditions of men” —is described by Horace Mann in the nineteenth century. His portrayal of education as “the balance wheel of social machinery that gives each man the independence and means by which to resist the selfishness of other men” (Mann, 1848) immediately demonstrates with its exclusionary language that “universal education” excludes at the very outset half of the population. Beyond this, the promise of universal education was made at a time that coincided with the rise of capitalism, child labour, competitive and brutal free markets and the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the common school (Greene, 1997). The misguided ideas evident in Mann’s education for all include but are not limited to the distorted concept of humanness and who is excluded from it. While it might be argued that here in the 21st century we are more liberal-minded, the notion that some people are more worthy than others based on race, class and gender persist. Indeed, there is nothing innately equalising about education: After all, education “always reflects a society’s views of what is excellent, worthy, necessary: (Elshtain, 1993) and

societies differ about what is “excellent, worthy and necessary”. The social situation with which one enters school tends to be the one that is supported and maintained by school. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer has been an ongoing trend (Isaak, 2005).

The first myth arises at least in part from the second: the myth of the unanimity of opinion of the rational man. Eighteenth century thinking about the ordered universe persists to a great degree today. Many hold on to the conviction that the universe is predictable and knowable and adherent to the standards of white, middle class men. The reward for grasping it is to be convinced of unerring human progress and the ultimate attainment of freedom and equality for all “believers”. What Lyotard (1979) would name the “grand narrative” of American history (but that extends throughout the Western world and beyond) is the individualistic notion that man is born into the world with the right to conquer, exploit and use it as he sees fit. “Rational man” maintains the impression that he is entitled to dominate every cultural conversation, persuaded as he is that dignity is indelibly linked to independence as merit is linked to material success since he is simply a beneficent follower of the laws that govern the universe. And if his self assurance remains even the slightest bit incomplete, he leans ever more heavily upon the authority of empirical science and advances in technology to lend credence to his position, leaving no room for multiple ways of understanding and making meaning that should have the right to exist. One need only look at the environmental devastation so common throughout our world to recognise that this myth is not sustainable. Less than one fifth of the world uses almost ninety per cent of the world’s resources (Isaak, 2005). Perhaps reliance on our good will and beneficence has been too great. And this is but one manifestation of the problems that are wrought by the myth. In schools, the myth of the rational man continues to silence and exclude large portions of the

population almost as effectively as ever. Many ways of seeing, saying and representing the world are ignored as existing hierarchies and insistence on compliance with one way of knowing are upheld. The ascendant social class determines a large portion of the morality of a country to making certain to keep that class's interests and impressions of superiority intact. These two myths and the accompanying fallout ensure that schools remain "factories of failure" (Osborne, 2008, p. 23). According to Osborne (2008) schools are designed not with the aim of expanding minds and enlarging the capacity for thought and reflection but rather of socialising, training and indoctrinating. Extolling the rightness and virtue of standardisation and accountability for students and teachers actually has the effect of dehumanising and marginalising and leads to further thoughtlessness. Arendt (1958) blames standardisation for the needless recklessness, hopeless confusion and complacent repetition of "truths" that leave people unsatisfied and empty. And while the media promises that the alternative to the resulting gloom and feeling of pointlessness is consumerist acquisition, it evidently has no good effect on the body, mind or soul. What should be taught in schools, what should be placed in textbooks and what should be learned is all informed by materialistic ideals and a worldview that does not adequately recognise alternative (e.g. indigenous) notions of an interdependent universe and the importance of relation and place in societies (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2008). After all this time the question remains: How might we more effectively respond to the educational needs of all people?

Getting It Wrong from the Beginning

The responses that we observe in schools so far have not been helpful. According to Egan (1997), schooling problems stem from attempting to institutionalise incompatible and

contradictory ideas about education. Socialisation, academic mastery and individualisation are all spoken of as equally meritorious and thus equally deserving of the time and effort that they should be afforded in school. This is a huge discussion of course and I wish to return to it later, but for now, I would like to look at the way that these aims are approached currently.

As far as socialisation is concerned, it might seem clear by now that in large part the problems arise from essentialist standpoints or identity politics that take experiences and thoughts of the materially privileged to be normative. The rule of the white middle class male is the law against which all other ideas must be measured and inevitably rejected since there is no place for personal experience and different ways of knowing in our education systems (hooks, 1991).

Freire (1970) explains that schools as a reflection of society support a number of myths that oppressors use to maintain subjugation of the oppressed. Among these myths are that the oppressive order of things is in fact a free society where all people are free to work where they wish and with whom; that this order respects human rights; that anyone who is industrious can be successful; that equal and universal education is a right; that individuals are all equal; that the elites are charitable and generous as opposed to selectively beneficent; that the elites promote the advancement of all people; that rebellion is a sin against God (or at least the god of materialism); that private property is fundamental to human development; that the oppressors are industrious whereas the oppressed are lazy and dishonest; and that the oppressed are naturally inferior. As a result of all of these myths that are so ingrained in our collective psyche as to be accepted as truths, most schools leave children no better off and no more powerful than they were before (McIntosh & Style, 1999).

Our apparent inability to recognise repression as political and intentional is an indication of how “we act unconsciously in complicity with a culture of domination” (hooks, 1994, p.176). In school it is not necessary for the rules of conduct to be stated explicitly; they are taught by example and reinforced by a system that rewards silence and obedience above all else. Amidst an obsession with maintaining order and a fear of losing face, there is no room for constructive dialogue, or for any kind of authentic participation. If students are trained to become disempowered, and socialised to cope only with the mode of interaction that is based on middle class values, there is no hope for empowering them. Here again it is possible to demonstrate that teachers’ attitudes and the climate of school mirrors society. The teacher teaches, knows all, thinks, talks, disciplines, enforces, acts, chooses, and confuses authority of knowledge with personal authority. The student inevitably becomes the object of teaching. The student is taught, knows nothing, is thought about, adapts, and loses all chance at freedom. The passive student is perceived as the success story and her willingness to accept a fragmented view of reality is seen as positive adaptability (Freire, 1970). The passive person is likely to be apathetic and unresponsive to new possibilities (Greene, 1997). She is predisposed to the kind of fatalism that gives up any hope of control or responsibility.

The problems that schools face arise in large part from all that remains unsaid. In her study of adolescent girls using their own photo journals, Bach (2000), concluded that “the evaded curriculum within the lives of girls, (is) a curriculum that abstains from lived experiences, one that distorts and avoids a commitment to life by disconnecting dimensions of our told stories, a curriculum that silences life” (p. 11). So far, girls have been taught that their experiences with discrimination or harassment or domination are of little to no consequence. Because these aspects of their lives are either completely avoided in school or

perhaps worse, talk of race, gender and class are superficially dealt with in the curriculum (hooks, 1994), girls are ill prepared to participate as full citizens in a democracy (McIntosh & Style, 1991). What they need is to be equipped to recognise the origins of those voices in their heads feeding them messages of inferiority. Through the multiple layers of their identities, girls hear that their gender is one part of the reason that they are set up to be lonely, scared, isolated and at odds with one another (McIntosh & Style, 1991). It is hardly surprising then that we so often complain about the ways that we see girls trying to make a place for themselves in school and in the world. It too often amounts to over sexualisation, low expectations and alienation.

The next educational aim, that of imparting the kind of knowledge associated with academic achievement, suffers from the narrow definition given to “appropriate” and “worthwhile” knowledge. When education supposedly became universal in the 19th century, the change in audience was not considered to be overly important. Reality as “static”, “compartmentalised” and “predictable” (Freire, 1970, p. 52), as defined by rational man, is much easier to manage and control as it obviates thinking. At best this approach might be understood as carelessness, but for Freire, it is evidence of the intention to indoctrinate in order to adapt students to a world of oppression. By stimulating the credulity of students and anaesthetising them, we remove their creative power. What Freire refers to as a “banking” approach to education resists dialogue, inhibits creativity, domesticates, and limits students to mere objects of assistance. The efforts that are often made to give fair play to diverse forms of human expression, to give voice to the silenced and to acknowledge multiple perspectives through alternative forms of education are dismissed time and again as so much relativism that “erodes” the quality of “standards” (Greene, 1997). Our high schools in particular are set

up on a model of compartmentalised knowledge. “Experts” in their field are often proud that they only know one thing and one way of teaching it and in so claiming, they give credence to the idea that knowledge is fragmented (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2008), that our interconnections, like those of knowledge are inconsequential and that our relatedness is nothing compared to our individual understanding and desires. Students’ experience with learning is reduced to preparation for certain kinds of tests and exams that are mandated by accountability measures (Osborne, 2008) and teachers too often become convinced that their job is to prepare students for these tests. By neglecting and discrediting the work of the imagination, schools and society limit the possibilities for genuine change and ensure that programs and systems that oppress large portions of the population can persist and be celebrated.

Finally, the ideal of meeting the needs of individuals in schools has been modified into the infinitely more controllable streaming. With classrooms that are often of an unmanageable size for engagement and curricula that fail to take students’ needs into consideration, educational policymakers are persuaded that the best way to deal with their “clientele” is to place them into educational groupings that not only fail to inspire but limit their options for the future. Those students who are often called successful in school are the ones that are able to stockpile information with little need for critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). The dominant mood, says Greene (1995), is one of passive reception that freezes imaginative thinking. Everything becomes reduced to its utility as the focus becomes preparing workers for world markets (hooks, 1994). And as youth are considered human *resources* rather than people who are “centers of choice and evaluation” (Greene, 1997, p.57), they feel locked into circumstances that are defined by others. They receive the message that

only that which is testable and easily measured has merit and that all there is to strive for is economic competitiveness, technological mastery and so-called higher level skills. To experience low achievement is to feel helpless and hopeless about a future that they rarely have a role in determining.

There has to be a better way to meet the needs of our students. Girls in particular suffer from systems that demand passive reception because they are more likely to be deeply and lastingly affected by messages of conformity and compliance. The reasons for this can come from girls themselves who often appear to have a tendency to seek to please the teacher and from a good number of educators who have preconceived notions related to expectations for girls and for boys. When girls behave in ways that are deemed “boyish”, reactions can be swift and damaging. Just this year, a friend of our family received a letter by mail informing her parents that she has been labeled “at risk” for what appears to be speaking her mind and refusing to conform to “girlish” expectations. The time has come to imagine a better way.

Imagining A Better Way: Some Considerations

Egan (1997) suggests that education (and subsequently schooling) could be approached from the conception and nurture of kinds of understanding. I am very intrigued with this idea but I remain convinced that there must also be some discussion of what education means and should mean before we proceed with this concept if we wish to avoid falling back into the pattern of the evaded curriculum.

Socialisation. From the perspective of Coulter and Wiens (2008), education involves both the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the formation of character in order

to live a good, worthwhile life in concert with other human beings (p.11). As such, the educational challenge is one of helping more people to become the kind of people with the character, knowledge and understanding to listen carefully to others in order to figure out how to create a common world together (p. 17) or as Freire (1970) expresses this idea, the realisation of full humanity is a condition, obligation, situation and project (p. 75). Appiah (2008) adds that in this age, the educated person is one who is a citizen of the world, one who demonstrates openness to others, while Osborne (2008) reminds us that education must be about inviting students to the never-ending conversation about what it means to be human and live together on a finite planet (p. 33). Appiah explains that we need to care about all of our fellow human beings, not simply those who have the most in common with us. We are all connected now. Advances in technology have signalled a different kind of era in which we can all know about one another. Education in this era needs to evolve in order that the educated person might come to understand that anyone she knows about is someone that she can affect and thus to all people she has a responsibility. A more highly developed respect for diversity and love for our fellow persons is crucial in making this evolution a possibility.

The socialising aspect of schooling has never been more complex nor has it ever held as much potential as it does now, but this does not mean that we must ignore the lessons and ways of understanding that are already out there waiting to be shared. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2008) insist that a great deal of the groundwork has already been done by traditional aboriginal cultures that understand that education is deeply rooted in the complexities and interactions associated with one's place in an interconnected universe. We must be sensitive to the inevitable changes of nature which are meant to provoke change in

our conduct but what must remain constant in the relationship. Attitudes of caring, sharing, cooperation, harmony and interconnectedness are to be nurtured and maintained always.

hooks (1994) describes how schooling might change if it were informed by educational ideals rooted in the complexity and connectedness of people. She insists that it is essential to teach in a manner that cares for and respects the souls of our students. Only then can we hope to create the conditions necessary for learning to deeply and intimately begin. She warns against despair in the face of conflict and recommends instead that teachers must be committed to change so that diversity can inform every space of learning. A classroom should be a place where we find solidarity in a shared belief in the spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in a collective dedication to goodness (p. 33). These are the kind of ideas that need to be visited again and again as we meet our students each year and in the times where we feel like we don't have the energy to go on. Teachers should aspire to "live, teach, and work" in a manner that "reflects joy" in diversity, "passion for justice, and love of freedom" (hooks, p.35).

Part of what it looks like to care for the souls of our students and reflect joy, passion and love is making dialogue central to the learning space. It means that a teacher must demonstrate a constant willingness to be critical of her own pedagogy and to accept criticism from others without feeling that to question how I teach is somehow questioning my right to exist on the planet (hooks, 135). hooks suggests that when school is a place of challenge, of dialectical interchange and growth, part of the work involves making a place with others where every voice is heard, where all become concerned with hearing the thoughts of others and where each one can associate these with her own personal experiences. In this way,

people become more acutely aware of one another and respect, recognition and communal commitment to learning can flourish (hooks, 1994, p. 186).

For students school could hold the promise for becoming a place where they might perceive themselves as mutually responsible for developing the learning community. Giving students authentic power to speak, to choose, to come to feel like “masters of their thinking” (Freire, 1970, p. 76), has the potential to change the very course of their lives. Freire (1970) understands that in this endeavour, dialogue is an existential imperative that cannot exist without humility, an intense faith in humankind, hopefulness and critical thinking on the part of all participants. If students come to believe that they can create the kind of world in which all people would want to live, they will be far more inclined to participate in the “transforming labour” (p. 149) that connects word and action. They can begin to envision and eventually insist upon a climate that is conducive to creativity and imagination that can open the doors to further action and change.

When we are able to witness the school as a caring community in which teachers and students are willing participants who are emboldened by their faith in one another and courageous enough to speak and to run risks in the name of equality and freedom for all, we will know that we have arrived. This is no small project but it is the only one that has the assurance that true democracy is possible.

Knowledge and understanding. Probably the most widely accepted conception of education concerns the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. What we have done with these ideas has not changed significantly or not significantly enough over the last few centuries. Too often knowledge and understanding are thought to be finite and stagnant; the

products of a limited and limiting imagination. One role of education is to break down these restrictive ideas. We must learn that education as a reflection of that which is excellent, worthy and necessary does not remain consistent across time and space but is constantly changing as our definitions, meanings and purposes change. We must also recognise and acknowledge that much of what has been done in the name of education has come out of fixed and unstated assumptions about who gets to decide which knowledge is of value and which understanding holds sway.

Greene (1995) has contributed to our growing awareness of multiple meanings and the importance of seeking alternative ways of representing what is known, and what youth are expected to know and to understand. As imagination is released, one-dimensional explanations no longer suffice and final answers are no longer the goal. Instead of knowledge being primarily a matter of determining the one right version of reality that results from empirical inquiry, knowledge and understanding can reveal realms of meanings that are wider than true or false; more urgent and fertile dimensions of experience that reveal themselves in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways.

In schools the lack of imagination has largely translated into a banking system as described by Freire (1970). In the name of superficial achievement, benchmarks, accountability and standards, students are told that to be fulfilled is to stockpile those cold, hard “facts” that have been deemed important enough; hardly the stuff of radical change. However there is still hope. We can still move the young to imagine, to extend and to renew. If we are able to connect with students and their ideas, we can release their imaginative capacity. This requires thoughtfulness and care. It requires an attentive approach to the

illusory realities that are presented by the media and openness to much that has been neglected or rejected as relativism.

Teachers will need to go on the journey of discovery with their students. Together they must learn to be reflective, to think what they are doing and to engage in transformative dialogue. By opening possibilities to students we can help them to become conscious of meaning making and its place in shaping identity, developing a sense of agency and committing to praxis (Greene, 1997). Students can come to understand that knowledge emerges through invention, reinvention and restless, impatient, continuous and hopeful inquiry (Freire, 1970). Liberating and problem-posing education involves constant unveiling of reality that lends itself to the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality (p. 62).

Individual needs. The idea that education holds a responsibility to each person as an individual with a particular set of needs must also be reconceived if education is to be transformative and good. The approaches that have been taken and applied to students in high school in particular have had entirely the opposite effect than meeting individual needs. Instead it has grouped people, often according to race, gender, and class, even as it claimed to help each person in the act of becoming. If we are truly interested in meeting students' needs, it might help to begin by acknowledging that students have memories, families, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinctive and valuable voice (hooks, 1994). Every student has a story that she needs to hear and that needs to be shared if she is to become visible and in order that she might be allowed to move beyond the boundaries of those same stories that can liberate her or keep her bound. Interpreting all of the knowledge that we offer

up against the background of their lives can allow students to broaden their horizons, to perceive the world anew, to question and explore all that they have been told. We have the potential to awaken more people to see and to feel and experience in unexpected ways. Greene (1997) calls this “cognitive adventuring and inquiry” (p. 6) and encourages us to set our imaginations moving to confront learners with the demand to choose between the desire for harmony with easy answers and a commitment to the risky search for alternative possibilities. She recommends keeping alive images of everything we love so that we might be able to create classroom atmospheres that encourage individuals to have the kind of hope that inspires us all to continue to become who we are.

The educational ideas that have been shared here are consistent with the criteria that were set out in the last chapter. It would seem that they are well equipped for meeting the need of girls so that they might find voice, self-expression, cooperation, responsibility, social capital, awareness, self worth, and freedom. I believe they might benefit also from a different way of approaching teaching that takes into account the way that people make sense of their worlds.

A Better Way to Educate

Drawing on the cultural recapitulation theory of sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer, who believed that “education should be a repetition of civilization in little” (Spencer, 1861, p. 76) as well as Vygotsky’s psychological assessment that “we make sense of the world by the use of mediating intellectual tools that profoundly influence the kind of sense we make” (Egan, 1997, p. 29), Egan suggests that cultural and educational development need to be considered together so that we might come to see that the parallels

between cultural history and education lie in the mediating intellectual tools that we have at our disposal.

As I have mentioned already, for Egan, the problem does not necessarily come from school but rather from what we expect schools to do. Recapitulation theories that attempted to explain the causal connection between past cultural development and present educational development were more prominent in the nineteenth century but they quickly fell out of favour when mass schooling was called upon to prepare students for participation in the industrial world that was growing and developing so quickly. Because recapitulation theories were not sufficiently convenient to society's urgent need for skilled workers, they were largely ignored in the twentieth century. Egan's return to recapitulation theory is enriched by Vygotsky's idea that, "Learning is more than the acquisition of the ability to think; it is the acquisition of many specialised abilities for thinking about a variety of things" (Vygotsky, 1978). By combining the two ideas, Egan asserts that children can acquire the intellectual tools for thinking in a similar pattern to the way that people acquired these tools throughout history. Unique to Egan's conception of education and learning is the recognition that it is simplistic to conceive of development through his five kinds of understanding as progress. He implores us to recognize the inherent value in each kind of understanding so that we might be cautious to preserve as much as possible the attributes of each phase. Egan recognizes that within each gain there must also be some loss. Just as most children at four years of age are more capable than university students at using and creating appropriate metaphors (Winner, Wapner, Cicone, & Gardner, 1979), so every new development engenders some loss of use of prior intellectual abilities. To mitigate the losses is an important and completely ignored part of the process of education.

While he seems loathe doing so, Egan (1997) divides his types of understanding into five “indistinct” stages for the sake of communication. Somatic understanding is defined as the period that precedes language; mythic understanding grows out of increasingly flexible oral language use; romantic understanding moves students through alphabetic literacy toward rationality; with the development of philosophic understanding comes the notion that the world can be defined and the truth found in general rational schemes; and finally, ironic understanding recognizes the complexity and incompleteness of all understanding.

Although Egan’s stages begin with somatic understanding, the discussion here will be limited to the kinds of understanding that can be more directly associated to schooling.

Mythic understanding. Most children come to school at a mythic stage of development but little is done in schools in general to recognize the potential that this stage holds. To embrace mythic understanding, one must reject the notion recommended by Piaget and by child-centered curricula that in educating young children, we must begin with what they know. Accommodating children’s needs with a Piagetian approach is perceived as telling them about the stuff that is relevant to their lives rather than that which is of interest to them.

If we were to take our cues from children’s interests, we would recognize that children’s understanding at this stage resembles myths in many ways. Just as children at the mythic phase search for intellectual security, myths offer absolute accounts of things. Also, children tend to absorb everything around them into their vivid mental life as myths require a certain suspension of disbelief. Young children’s thinking and myth making both deal in binary opposites as well. There is no room for ambiguity, only for good and evil, love and

hate, courage and cowardice. At the mythic stage, children's primary intellectual tools are emotional and moral and if we do not allow them access to the world through these abilities, their "learning" will be largely meaningless and unable to contribute to their understanding of the world and their own place in it (Egan, 1979, p. 27).

This idea offers teachers of young children a very different and fresh starting point. Egan suggests using fairy stories and soap operas as kind of templates for the way that we teach young children because they allow for binary structuring and fantasy: representations of the kind of abstract thinking which is far more prevalent than the concrete at this phase. In addition, metaphor allows for the mind to generate its own meanings through language, rhythm and narrative and images which all aid in memory, stories and humour. All of these tools of the imagination are within our grasp but they are also at our mercy. The goal of tapping into mythic understanding should be to make language understanding as rich as possible while maintaining as much as possible our natural somatic understanding. We should be intent on giving children the ability to express their unique perceptions through fluid and flexible language, we should help children to recognize the power of language and we should encourage children to use language in as many varied ways as they can so that they can both live and express their lives to the fullest (Egan, 1997).

Romantic understanding. Just as alphabetic writing opened up a new historical period, alphabetic reading and writing opens the human mind to another form of understanding. At some time around the end of primary school, children begin to develop romantic understanding. In parallel to romanticism, people in the romantic stage of understanding are faced with a new perception of reality that requires them to develop a

distinct identity within it. Unlike the mythic learner, the romantic has gained a sense of the world that insists upon some degree of reality while searching for extremes therein. The romantic mind is characterized by a fascination with extremes giving rise to a desire for stories of transcendence and heroism over nature or other people or events. Romantic learners need their egos to be supported as they seek to associate with noble and powerful forces that achieve success over the threatening world. And while inside, the romantic learner's sentiments are wild and seemingly out of control, their outward appearance is most often a defensive one of excessive conformity.

If we wish to engage romantic learners in education, we should recognize their enjoyment of books, television shows and films that deal with the exotic or the extreme. Engaging students romantically means engaging with realistic heroes who exhibit transcendent human qualities. Students need to have their sense of wonder nurtured if they are to engage successfully with their learning at this stage and if they have any hope of moving effectively through it.

While we nurture and support romantic learning through story form and intellectual games that stimulate the romantic imagination, we should be ever mindful of what we risk losing. While literacy stimulates and helps with romantic understanding, to some degree it alienates characteristics of mythic understanding. Rational language will weaken a child's intuitive relationship with the world and to some extent learning to interact with written text will lead to a certain careless forgetfulness and very often negatively impacts a child's metaphoric fluency. It is only by stimulating and engaging students' imaginations that we can hope to keep the losses of mythic understanding under any control. Valuing imagination is not always done well if at all but it is crucial to the maintenance of our intellectual tools.

Philosophic understanding. Philosophic understanding begins with the idea that the truth is out there. Around the beginning of high school, students begin to perceive the world as a unit and themselves as a part of it which determines who they are. Like the philosophers of Ancient Greece and the thinkers of the modern world, philosophic learners strive for rational generalities using much more abstract intellectual tools to explain broad concepts such as science, society, culture, and evolution. Thucydides's general history is a good example of the cultural development of the philosophic phase. He believed that his own personal interest needed to be entirely suppressed and that he should remain detached and dispassionate as he explained the Peloponnesian war as if it could be generalized to all wars everywhere. Scientific writing often upholds much the same ideal as it seeks to discover generalisations.

Regardless of their degree of sophistication, students at this phase seem very confident that they have now grasped the meaning of everything and that they can easily organize it into the simple general schemes that they have developed. If students are to effectively move through the philosophic stage they need to have a great deal of knowledge at their disposal. They also require teachers who are sensitive to their overconfidence and even potential intellectual contempt to move them to gradually recognize that there are always anomalies that will require greater knowledge and eventual flexibility to change their general schemes. The appropriate result of education at the philosophic stage is the flexibility and willingness to revise and revisit the general schemes that students generate at the beginning. More common is the fitful and partial development of philosophic understanding

that is at least unsupported and at worst undermined by public discourse, by the media and by education itself.

More students than not on this intellectual journey are dragged down by the stress and emotional turmoil that comes with the recognition of the inadequacies of their general schemes. We witness their emotional crises in their youthful angst, tears, depression, self abuse, substance abuse and suicide. Educators have an enormous responsibility to sensitively encourage more and more sophistication in students' general schemes while buoying the students up by the excitement of discovery (Egan, 1997, p. 131). Again this requires a conscious effort to preserve as many tools of somatic, mythic and romantic understanding that will help to give the philosophic energy and life, nurture the imagination and fill out new understandings.

Ironic understanding. To achieve ironic understanding is not to destroy or replace all of the previous structures that have been developed but to use them for more mature purposes (Egan, 1979, p. 84). The mind that achieves ironic understanding is not threatened by the chaos of the world but can at once harness vivid imaginativeness and deep seriousness, artistic passion for life alongside sober scientific inquiry (Egan, 1997, p.146) and move fluently from perspective to perspective (p. 145). At all times, the other capacities are present. Philosophic understanding provides the foundation for ironic understanding. The general schemes of the philosophic mind are not rejected outright but are now perceived as being useful tools in organizing particular knowledge (1979, p. 83). The philosophic capacities also give focus to romantic capacities, which further allow the ironic capacities of associations beyond the extremes of the transcendent to non-romantic subjects. The ability to

absorb romantic understanding offers to the ironic the ability to feel association with a struggling neighbour, a person on skid row, and mundane experiences. Romantic and mythic understandings allow us to free ourselves from conventional thinking, to give affective meaning to an inhuman world. They provide energy and power to the ironic and help it to maintain a lively soul (Egan, 1997, p. 159).

The aim of Egan's educational theory is to keep alive as much as possible all of the earlier kinds of understanding in the development of irony so that the focus of interest and intellectual engagement begins with myth-like construction, romantically establishes boundaries of reality, philosophically maps the major features of the world (Egan, 1997, p. 126) and ironically finds particular truths, joy and freedom from the needs of the ego and the independent self. In some way our understanding comes full circle as less consciously in somatic understanding and more consciously in ironic understanding we seek to include a wider and wider group in the category of "us" (Egan, 1997, p. 171).

The noble and worthwhile notions of education described here might be most helpful to girls and meeting their needs when combined with idea offered by the ethics of care.

Chapter 4: To Care About Caring

And when I was a teenager my self-hate grew worse, as you can imagine happens with adolescence. My mother reminded me often that she thought that I was beautiful but that was no consolation, she's my mother, of course she's supposed to think I am beautiful. And then ... Alek Wek. A celebrated model, she was dark as night, she was on all of the runways and in every magazine and everyone was talking about how beautiful she was. Even Oprah called her beautiful and that made it a fact. I couldn't believe that people were embracing a woman who looked so much like me, as beautiful. My complexion had always been an obstacle to overcome and all of a sudden Oprah was telling me it wasn't. It was perplexing and I wanted to reject it because I had begun to enjoy the seduction of inadequacy. But a flower couldn't help but bloom inside of me, when I saw Alek I inadvertently saw a reflection of myself that I could not deny. Now, I had a spring in my step because I felt more seen, more appreciated by the far away gatekeepers of beauty. But around me, the preference for my skin prevailed, to the courtiers that I thought mattered I was still unbeautiful. And my mother again would say to me you can't eat beauty, it doesn't feed you and these words plagued and bothered me; I didn't really understand them until finally I realized that beauty was not a thing that I could acquire or consume, it was something that I just had to be. And what my mother meant when she said you can't eat beauty was that you can't rely on how you look to sustain you. What is fundamentally beautiful is compassion for yourself and for those around you. That kind of beauty enflames the heart and enchants the soul. It is what got Patsy in so much trouble with her master, but it is also what has kept her story alive to this day. We remember the beauty of her spirit even after the beauty of her body has faded away. And so I hope that my presence on your screens and in the magazines may lead you, young girl, on a similar journey. That you will feel the validation of your external beauty but also get to the deeper business of being beautiful inside. There is no shade to that beauty.
(Lupita Nyong'o, 2014)

Why Is There a Need for the Ethics of Care?

As early as 200 years ago, ideas were recorded that were consistent with an ethics of care (Brown, 2006), and while similar ideas were evident from time to time throughout the last century (Vandenberg, 1996), the dominant discourse has remained rooted in deontological, utilitarian, and neo-Aristotelian traditions (Bookman & Aboulafia, 2000).

Finally in the last generation, an ethics of care has emerged as not only a feasible one but as a

necessary alternative in addressing needs that are largely overlooked in the more traditional understandings of moral theory.

Carol Gilligan received a great deal of attention when she published her well known book, *In a Different Voice* (1982). In it Gilligan challenges what seems to have been a widely accepted understanding that women are less suited than men for intellectual work. When the research of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg, suggests that women are less inclined to moral reasoning, she asserts that perhaps it is the narrow definition of rationality that requires changing (Simson, 2005). Both Gilligan and Noddings are seen as, “timely contributors to...empathy-grounded, sentimentalist ethics of care” (Carson, 2010, p. 953), that can serve to transform our understanding of ethics.

Despite other differences in approach and language, the many proponents of an ethic of care agree that moral theory grounded in unwavering moral principles and rules that can be applied universally in the absence of context exclude far too great a portion of the population to be deemed sufficient. The controversy that often arises when an ethic of care is discussed is the feminine or feminist language that can give rise to the notion that this is simply another moral theory that is exclusionary. In response, Gilligan defends the conversation that results from the tension between universal ethical principles and personal ethical relations with the qualification that care should be understood as a matter of theme as opposed to gender. For Gilligan the theme of care first manifested itself in listening to voices of women because prior expressions of relation and connectedness regardless of the source had been dismissed as being inconsequential (Gilligan, 1995).

The reason, then, for an ethics of care is that without it there is a distinctive human voice that is lost when we ask how we should live our life. If “to care means to be

considerate of human needs” (Falkenberg, 2006, p. 105), it follows that an ethic of care is to be found at the foundation of our human existence and that to ignore or dismiss the importance of care is to ignore an important and irrefutable role that care plays in human life. No other healthy creature is as intensely and extensively dependent as a human child on a care-giver. It seems that this cannot be an accident. In fact we remain interdependent with others throughout our lives, and it seems to follow that something as fundamental as care should hold a central role in any moral discussion of human understanding (Brown, 2006).

What Sets the Ethics of Care Apart?

An ethics of care requires an entirely new way of perceiving morality and its situation. Whereas contemporary popular moral theories focus on technicality, rationality, political expediency and economics, an ethics of care recognizes certain shortcomings in these (Sanchez, Bahr & Ahlander, 1996). And it would seem that there is not a lot that sets contemporary theories apart from more traditional ones. Both seek to divorce moral reasoning from the self and others allegedly as a way of maintaining universalizability, rigour and objectivity. For the eminent philosopher Immanuel Kant and the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, morality is embedded in reason and has as its end in human autonomy and a certain ethics of justice that comes from it (Crain, 1985; Rohlf, 2010). Similar to these ideas are notions of utilitarianism and contractarianism. Utilitarianism can be described as an impartial and neutral view that the “morally right action is the action that produces the most good” (Driver, 2009). Contractarianism maintains that, “persons are primarily self-interested, and that a rational assessment of the best strategy for attaining the maximization of their self-interest will lead them to act morally” (Cudd, 2008). Arising from these notions of the moral

and the good is a liberal individualistic ideology that defines morality as being rights and obligations based. Such an idea of morality makes use of exclusionary and reactive techniques to control individuals' actions (Sanchez, Bahr & Ahlander, 1996). This criticism is valid for all of the moral theories mentioned above as they all require that moral agents separate themselves and others from decisions in order to maintain their integrity. Despite the fact that reasoning and judgment are identified as being exclusively human, there are too many other aspects of the human condition that are overlooked or actively neglected. The problems that can arise as a result will be discussed in further detail later on.

An ethics of care challenges the ideas of traditional and contemporary ethics by its very nature. An ethics of care is a relational ethics (Noddings, 2005) and those who seek to engage it refuse to remove themselves and human connections from their moral reasoning. Unlike traditional ethics, an ethics of care attends to real people, responds to their needs and finds its basis in concrete situations of lived experience (Noddings, 2005). Relationships and emotional connections are found at the core of a care perspective. Caring furthermore is not simply an important element of a moral life as a compliment to a commitment to justice, but it is rather, "the source of all moral striving and ideals" (Bergman, 2004). In the context of care, there exists a moral obligation to act in a way that allows one to establish, maintain, and enhance a caring relation. The moral education of traditional ideals is supplanted by an ethics of care ideal that sees its role as producing better people, not simply better principles or capacities for reasoning. Moral principles in isolation cannot possibly provide enough motivation for behaving morally. Nor can the virtue ethics of Aristotle or neo-Aristotelians. While the virtues extolled may well be desirable purveyors of the common good, they are insufficient when they are presented only as agent-centered since as such they need to be

deliberately inculcated. Authentic experiences where conditions conducive to practicing virtues are established are much more effective and more morally sound. Another issue that can be addressed through an ethics of care and that is neglected by virtue ethics is the importance of context. It is nothing short of moral indoctrination to choose for a diverse population of different cultures, races, genders and faiths which virtues are to be taught and extolled. And beyond this obvious problem lies the justification of violence in any form against others who do not share the same values (Bergman, 2004). Anyone who listens to international news will regularly hear that enemies have been created all over the world over their choice of values. Many will recall former U.S. President George W. Bush's claim that the "axis of evil" (2002) must be eliminated at all costs and that "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (2001). This idea in fact echoes similar sentiments expressed by others in times of conflict including our Canadian minister of public safety, Vic Toews, who claimed recently that "either stand with us or with the child pornographers" (*Online surveillance critics*, 2012) in reference to concerns over restricting the privacy of Canadian citizens. Such messages can only come from an ethic that places virtues above human interaction.

Unlike other ethical approaches, an ethics of care does not presuppose the equality and liberty of its participants. Instead an ethics of care recognizes that care is the context in which morality first develops. Infants are receptive to care from their very beginning. They show love and affection, they demonstrate a capacity for sympathy and they identify with the people who care for them. It is evident, then, that care precedes rationality. Rationality does not appear until much later in development and it compliments emotion (Brown, 2006). The potential for morality is thus perceived as being rooted in care. When the element of caring is

omitted, the resulting remote, abstract and principled approach cannot reach its moral potential. Many proponents of the ethic of care point out that morality cannot even exist without its affective causes (Brown, 2006; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1984) since it stems from memories of being cared for and engenders sensitivity to other people. Caring is a human condition that is perceived as good. The acts of longing and striving for caring render us moral. Our well-being and the well-being of all other humans are indelibly linked to caring and the central role of human connections that it assumes. The longing and striving for caring relationships is an essential element of the ethics of care. Like other conceptions of morality, the ethics of care recognizes that there is an obligation to foster and nurture our caring selves. We need to ensure that we are acting in such a way as to grow as caring individuals, attending to care so that it does not suffer from neglect. Neglect of the caring part of our selves can too easily result in an ideology of individualism. In isolation, other approaches to moral theory can have this result. Because morality is seen as originating in rational, independent self-sufficient adults, individuals are perceived as solitary beings whose needs and interests are at least separate from, and potentially in opposition to other individuals' interests (Jaggar, 1989). The ontological assumption that the fully developed self is the one that is most separate from others is in complete opposition to the caring stance that the best self is the one that is connected to others (Tong & Williams, 2011). Individualism that leads to self-interest could not possibly be the aspirational outcome of any kind of human ethical stand and yet it is the problem of other traditional and contemporary approaches since attempts to transcend all human emotion rejects the fundamental human condition.

It follows that individualism is not a necessary condition for respect of individuals. The values of equality, rights and social justice espoused by liberalism are in fact more

effectively implemented when their motivation comes from sympathy grounded in relationship and response to human need. For this there is no better approach than the ethics of care. Such an ethic also permits the admission that as human beings, we are incapable of entirely separating emotion from intellectual understanding. Every intellectual pursuit that relies on purported objective observation and evaluation is coloured by the observer's emotions, values and history (Held, 2006). Feeling is the foundation of moral behaviour and reflection a more suitable as well as more realistic approach than "pure" reason.

The ethics of care precludes selfishness, abstraction, and impartiality. An ethics of care requires a disposition to care by which is understood a willingness to receive others, to offer lucid attention and to appropriately address perceived needs. To truly enact the ethics of care, the carer must think of particular others and experience moral emotion. According to Manning (1992), we do not, as of yet, live in a caring world since many do not recognize a personal obligation to care. Further, the rules and rights upon which current society rests should be seen as a minimum obligation below which no one should fall as opposed to a sufficient response to living together. It takes much more than this to consider oneself a morally decent person (Manning, 1992).

We require a radical change in the way that questions are posed and by which observations are made and conclusions drawn. The moral tradition that brought us the concept of rights, autonomy and justice is the same one that justifies oppression of the many who have never had the right to choose (Brown, 2006).

The Contributions of Nel Noddings's Feminine Ethics

Nel Noddings's name has become synonymous with the ethics of care from a feminine perspective (Noddings, 1984). Noddings is quick to point out that all philosophical discussion of morality has been dominated by a male perspective that places justice and fairness above all other values. These principles, she asserts, have long been subjected to exceptions which allow for justice and equality for those who "deserve" it as decided by a "detached" observer. Such an approach has been used to justify wars and the killing of innocent people in "righteous wars". As such, the feminine voice has been largely silenced and dismissed. The solution, according to Noddings, is a feminine approach to ethics that is characterized by a, "receptive rationality of caring" (Noddings, 1984, p. 1).

For Noddings, the appropriate model of a moral attitude and a longing for goodness comes from the mother. The mother can be any person who upholds values that she equates with the feminine such as receptivity, responsiveness, and relatedness. Whereas using hierarchical arrangements of principles to make judgments is typical of other moral theories, Noddings insists that such approaches are at least peripheral and usually alien to moral action. The feminine view of ethics allows instead giving attention to and crediting the affective foundation of human existence (Noddings, 1984).

Noddings's ethics of care as a moral theory is the most developed one. In the beginning she describes a conceptual framework for an ethics of care, she then continues by describing moral education as well as school education and finally she moves on to social policy and the aims of life (Falkenberg, 2006).

In Noddings's framework there are two human beings involved in any relation of care: the carer and the recipient of care or cared-for (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). This

relationship, while it may not be equal, must always be reciprocal. The attitude with which the carer enters the relation must be an open and receptive one that Noddings characterizes as engrossment and motivational displacement, or as Falkenberg qualifies both, “attention-with-concern” (2006). When Noddings speaks of engrossment, she means that the carer must be completely open to recognizing the needs of the cared-for and receptive to her role in the fulfillment of those needs. Motivational displacement then is the further position of placing the satisfaction of those needs above one’s own “projects”. Noddings tends to define caring relations in terms of personal encounters but as Falkenberg (2006) points out, this type of care can be extended to groups and to social policy where attention-with-concern extends to create conditions in a social framework that will ultimately result in caring encounters. When the carer is, “seized by the needs of another” (Noddings, 1992, p. 16), the first condition of the caring relation is met. The reason that we cannot claim that the caring relation is complete is because we need to ensure that the reciprocal requirements of the cared-for are met. The cared-for must in some way receive the care that is offered not for some superficial gratification of the carer but rather to ensure that in fact the carer has the best interests of the cared-for in mind or at heart and that the cared-for is able to receive it. In such a way, “one learns not only how to care by being cared for, one learns that one must care if the self that has been confirmed by receiving care is to be sustained” (Bergman, 2004, p. 152). Noddings’s ethics of care thus emphasizes the interdependence of participants in the caring relation.

It would not suffice, however, to assume that what Noddings terms, “natural caring” is the end of an ethics of care. The natural caring that arises in relations in which caring is the natural inclination for example those of a mother for her child or a teacher for her student,

while necessary and imperative to modelling and moral education, cannot be considered sufficient for denoting morality. Ethical caring extends to relations in which the inclination to care is not a natural one but rather one that is seen as a moral imperative (Bergman, 2004). When we are able to care for our own ethical ideals while at the same time honouring those of others we are showing care and growth of our ethical selves.

The ethical self is forever a work in progress. To ignore or neglect it at any point is to cause it to suffer. Instead we need to nurture our ethical ideals by constantly and consistently behaving in a caring manner in every human relation. An integral part of this involves in turn the nurture of others' ethical selves. And again this relational care needs to be extended since there are so many more people in need of care than we can possibly care for. Beyond the caring relations of caring for that engage humans in direct relationship lay the relations of caring-about. Engrossment and motivational displacement cannot hold the same meaning when we are speaking of people that we have never met. In small ways, we can try to meet some of their needs but we cannot really be attentive-with-care outside of personal relationships.

Moral education must be central to an ethics of care as we strive to attend to people's ethical ideals. For Noddings, an approach to moral education is made up of four essential constituent parts; these include modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation.

To understand modelling it is useful to use the analogy that one must not only "talk the talk" but also "walk the walk". To teach caring, we must not simply tell them how to care, we must consistently and attentively demonstrate caring in our relationships with our students. The capacity to care, according to Noddings, is related to the memory and

experience of being cared for, hence modelling is a very important part in the development of the ability to care.

Dialogue is essential to caring since it is through discourse that we are able to derive “understanding, empathy and appreciation” for the other. It “connects us” and “provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for a response in caring” (Noddings, 1992, p. 23). Dialogue makes “attention-with-care” possible and helps us to identify needs. Reflective dialogue can further help to identify and promote the other’s ethical ideals (Bergman, 2004).

Practice may begin in the classroom but it should extend beyond it in order to more sufficiently reflect ethical care. Students should take their caring “on the road” as it extends to school and community service. Finally, we should bear witness to the goodness that we see in each person’s endeavours to develop an ethical self. In each person we should recognize the efforts and admirable accomplishments that are made in the name of care. Noddings’s moral theory, although not without controversy, offers an excellent starting point and provides the means for deep reflection and discussion as I seek to elaborate the best parts of an ethics of care.

Bold Critiques of Noddings’s Ethics of Care

Even amongst those people who recognise the potential and promise of the ethics of care there are misgivings and criticisms that are regularly aimed at Noddings’s conception of it. While they are cognisant of the importance and impact of *Caring* (Noddings, 1984) as having provided the basis for a proposed shift of the source of ethical sentiment from rules to natural sentiment of care, they are wary of the potential that exists for the ethics of care to

pose problems related to power distribution in relationships as well as the somewhat ineffectual way in which the relations to distant others is addressed.

Noddings and Power. Hoagland (1997) appears to be particularly concerned with Noddings's treatment of the one caring (or carer) in the caring relationship. Hoagland points to the unidirectional description of caring and the use of mother as model as reinforcing oppressive institutions.

Two possible problems arise from the unidirectional nature of the caring that is described. The first is the difficulty that comes from the possibility that the act and work of caring is a socialised one born of oppressive ideas and attitudes. Hoagland points to Noddings's description of care that uses mothering as a model as being particularly problematic because in the mother-child relationship, there is no expectation or need for children to exhibit concern for a mother's projects. To the extent that the child as the cared for cannot understand the needs or wants of the mother as the one caring, the relationship is seen as being a diminished caring relationship and unable to stand up to ethical scrutiny. Hoagland intimates that it is necessary to question whether an ethical ideal that promotes receptivity as simple acknowledgement of care is sufficient for a respectful and equal caring relation. If Noddings's analysis of caring appears to promote a move away from the self, then the carer appears to extend herself virtually unconditionally and opens herself to exploitation. Further, the dependent relationship between mother and child is meant to be a transitory one with the ultimate purpose of weaning the cared for of his or her dependency. This also seems to undermine the caring relation as ethical ideal. A caring relationship should be one which is allowed to develop and grow in both directions without restriction.

It is hardly surprising that anyone approaching the ethics of care from a feminist bent would be sensitive to an ethic that is based upon the mother-child relation. Taken simplistically, to pursue such an ethic of care is to pursue oppression where the feminine arises from a masculinist framework. The worry is that as history has proven again and again, the unexamined life of care is most often of the kind that does nothing to instill the value of the one caring in the cared for. The result of the caring relation has generally been that the cared for *male* expects more caring from all *female* carers. Rarely is this expectation accompanied by a reciprocal concern for a girl's projects. Rather, through socialisation, she learns to curb her own projects and to lose her sense of self in response to the needs and desires of those she cares for. If the girl, and eventually the woman learn to curb all ambitions and abilities she becomes increasingly dependent on the approbation of others, over-identifying with their goals to the neglect of her own (Keller, 1997). Petterson (2012) points to Western traditions that conceive of care as being the work of slaves and servants, and Tronto (1993) recognises a thinly veiled ideology that functions to maintain relations of privilege and burden. It is Petterson's (2012) concern that the conception of care that is readily accepted can sustain, reinforce and create inequality. While Diller (1988) lauds the valuable contribution for understanding the complex skills and enormous work of caring that Noddings has contributed, she identifies a lack of critical consciousness that can make explicit all that has been learned and internalised regarding women's roles. Without a discussion of the economic, political and social contexts of those who do caring labour, it is too easy to perpetuate inequality and subordination.

But Petterson's unease extends even further. She explains that in fact it is a carer's ethical imperative to meet rather than fly from the existential challenge involved in creating a

life of one's own. The ethics of care, suggests Petterson, carries an ethical responsibility for the carer not only in relation to the cared for but also toward the self. Hoagland (1997) would concur. She worries that if the ethical self is only allowed to emerge through caring for others and if the self is defined only in an ethics built upon caring that is always other-directed, the only time that a carer may focus on her own goals is when they are important to someone else.

Part of what is lacking for Hoagland is the possibility to withdraw from the cared for without diminishing the ethical ideal. It is necessary, she insists, that one be able to assess any relationship for abuse and oppression and to be able to withdraw when it is necessary in order to enhance the ethical self. Diller (1988) echoes this concern. While recognising the primacy of care and relations, she posits that the pervasiveness of the image of the economic man in contractual relations in our entire social structure, puts the practice of care in danger of requiring servility or supererogation. It is not sufficient to be morally admirable but politically powerless. The danger of educating children in moral propensities that we have identified as genderised virtues is that the same education might have very different impacts on boys and girls. Girls in our society are predisposed to caring through nurture and self denial whereas boys are socialised for indirect caring that has at its center pursuit of their own projects. This is philosophically problematic of course because it upholds difficulties of selflessness on the part of carers who seem to consistently place the interests of others above their own (Petterson, 2012).

The second problem that might arise from a unidirectional conception of care is that the voice of the cared for might be lost, suppressed beneath the imposition of the carer's perception of needs. Again the problem of power differences is at the heart of the matter.

When the carer wields an unparalleled amount of influence in the caring relation, the danger becomes not only that the carer's perception of the cared for's needs will overshadow the actual needs of the cared for, but also that the cared for will be unable to achieve any degree of agency. This might sometimes be difficult to identify because if the carer is enabling overly dependent behaviour on the part of the cared for, it is quite possible that the cared for will not object. This should not be misconstrued as ethical care, however, because it cannot enhance the ethical self of either the one caring or the cared for.

In addition, Petterson (2012) argues that the carer may not know what is in the cared for's best interest. And when a carer's approach is paternalistic, the autonomy of the cared for can be violated. Hoagland (1997) would warn that power differences can damage connections between different people and this can serve to perpetuate all manner of harmful relational isms. Racism, sexism, ageism and heterosexism are among the problems that can be engendered or maintained by uneven so-called care relations.

Noddings and Distant Others. The other major critique of Noddings's work on *Caring* (1984) is one that she herself has admitted to struggling with. According to a number of critics, Noddings's ethics of care does not deal effectively with larger social dynamics and is therefore limited (Sander-Staudt, 2011). Originally Noddings asserted that a carer's primary obligation is to proximate others. But as Hoagland (1997), Robinson (1999) and Tronto(1995) point out, caring cannot be insular. It cannot ignore the political reality, material conditions and social structure of the world. Hoagland (1997) goes so far as to claim that Noddings's analysis fears the proximate stranger, refuses to challenge the proximate intimate and ignores the distant stranger. While doubtless it was not her intention,

Noddings's stance offers little hope for crossing barriers of difference or promoting change but rather gives the impression of excusing carers from attending to the important differences in standards of living around the world and the causes (Sander-Staudt, 2011) of which we in the West must be held largely responsible. Evidently this is insufficient. If the ethics of caring is going to be morally successful it must provide the possibility of ethical behaviour in relation to that which is foreign. It must consider oppression and acknowledge relation and relatedness to everyone and everything that we might influence. Diller (1988) identifies as the vast areas that do not fit Noddings's model namely national and international politics, economics, business, large institutions, law and the military. It will require an imaginative and novel approach if such glaring gaps are to be addressed.

Conclusion

While I see hope and promise in the ethics of care as a moral theory that can withstand the challenges set out by a complex world in difficult times, I have been made aware of the shortcomings in Noddings's conception in particular. In chapter five I wish to address these and to imagine, with the help of critical and engaged pedagogy as well as imaginative education, and other care ethicists, a more robust and rigorous approach to caring. I hope to describe an approach that will serve girls and all of humanity as I search for ways of meeting their needs in school and beyond.

Chapter 5: Imagining a New Framework

You may be a construction worker working on a home,
You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome,
You might own guns and you might even own tanks,
You might be somebody's landlord, you might even own banks
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.
You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride,
You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side,
You may be workin' in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair,
You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.
Might like to wear cotton, might like to wear silk,
Might like to drink whiskey, might like to drink milk,
You might like to eat caviar, you might like to eat bread,
You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-sized bed
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.
You may call me Terry, you may call me Timmy,
You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy,
You may call me R.J., you may call me Ray,
You may call me anything but no matter what you say
You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.
(Dylan, 1979)

Today I woke up and I listened to an incredible woman speak about the pain that life in general and high school in particular had inflicted upon her. Through her stories I felt the anguish and the alienation of a hundred different ways that we did not do right by her and she was a girl. And she is the girl. She is the girl that I long to reach and teach and transform with

the wisdom of years. I yearn to help her to understand that she is not alone, that in fact she is utterly surrounded by others who are searching for their way. But that is not enough. I want to whisper sweet everythings in her ear. I want her to hear that she is beautiful, that she is just right, that whatever it is that she is to become, it can be good, it can be worthy and she has every reason to be proud.

Instead what I do and what I have done for fifteen years is go through the motions. I teach Math and French and Science with as much passion as I can muster for those subjects but that others can do much better. I am often overcome with the discord that is my teaching life. I feel most at home when they come to see me in my little office after class. Can we talk is one of my favourite questions and sometimes they even ask a question about Math but most times those questions lead us down an utterly different path and we end up talking about life and angst and the hugeness of it all. And I never say she's just looking for attention because that word "just" is just so mean. If you are looking for attention, I want to give you some. I want you to find it and I want it to reach into those places that cause you shame and grief and maybe happiness. This is why I teach and this is why I think that I am here and this is why I need to propose a new framework. Because tried, tested and true as it seems to appear in our strict adherence to what we like to call standards and accountability is not good enough when it applies to human beings.

Where to Start?

A few years ago I watched a documentary called *The Corporation*. The filmmaker, Michael Moore explained that the world was changed forever on the day that policymakers declared corporations were legal "persons". Because these "persons" are concerned with

nothing but self-interest in its purest form, the corporation has dominated the social and economic landscape for over 100 years resulting in unprecedented wealth but also “the remorseless rationale of externalities” (Copyright 2003 - 2013, Big Picture Media Corporation). This means that it is virtually impossible to find an actual human being to take responsibility for actions that affect other human beings and the world. Even our governments operate with this mentality and in the past year in our own province we have seen our greatest lake declared the most threatened on earth (Water Canada, 2013) in large part because there is no one person or group who is responsible for the problems of pollution and eutrophication which means no one wants to claim any part of the responsibility for cleaning it up.

In my perception, this is much the same problem that girls face. I have become increasingly aware as I watch TV, surf the net, look at magazines, see movies, and observe billboard ads that there is no escape for girls. They are bombarded with messages about the way that they should look and act constantly. They are told that they deserve to be treated as objects, that if they do not conform to beauty ideals, they deserve to be abused by absolutely everyone and that the content of their character is not all that important because they will rarely if ever be judged on that. And the media, and Hollywood stars and retailers and schools, have basically adopted attitudes of the corporation. If you can't beat them, join them appears to be the prevailing attitude and no one has to take responsibility because everyone is only partially responsible.

Thankfully there are outliers. Many girls, women and organisations are discovering that they can use social media to strengthen their voices and get their messages of empowerment and change to large audiences. Around the world groups are forming or

strengthening that recognise the important role that girls and women are meant to play in transforming the world. Schools need to play a much more active role in the revolution not only in those parts of the world where the simple act of going to school is revolutionary for girls but also here in the West where access to ideas means that the values that we transmit have far reaching implications for individuals and our society.

Responding to Needs and Education

As I have already outlined, there are four areas of needs that schools should do a much better job of addressing. These needs are inspired by girls in particular but they would benefit everyone because they are human needs. As I connect the needs to the goals of education, I will attempt to look anew at the ideas of Noddings and Egan as they might be informed and enriched if they are viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy, calling upon hooks and Freire to deepen the discussion about what it means to care for and to educate everyone. I intend to use the needs that were summarised in chapter two as the foundation from which the ideas and ideals for addressing them might arise. Please refer to the appendix for a visual representation of the ideas that follow.

Responding to Belonging

That which tends to obscure our interconnected social reality is a readily available liberal image of the individual citizen. More often than not, the message that is conveyed and received from schools and from other social institutions portrays individuals as self sufficient masters of their own destinies. This allows those who are privileged to falsely imagine that discrepancies between people's circumstances hardly exist and, furthermore, that those that

do exist are a matter of personal or private preference (Held, 2006). Relationships of care should not be subordinated by universal rules that confer equal moral rights and obligations to all for a few reasons, not the least of which is that these rules were designed in contexts of conflict (Held, 2006). Instead, we might learn to recognise that care is ontologically basic. We might know that it is the primacy of the particular that is able to pay attention to material, psychological and social prerequisites that hold the promise for autonomy among others within social relations.

Education from a caring perspective consists of four key components that are outlined by Noddings (1984) that can be seen to correspond well to the four needs. Belonging fits together with the *practice* of care. The aim of the practice of care is to assume that all people are adequately cared for. This is not a utopian ideal but it suggests ways in which schools and other democratic institutions should aspire to function (Held, 2006). Citizens, students, teachers need to have contact with one another. Care and respect must be extended to the souls of all students and the acknowledgement of our mutual connectedness should guide all of our interactions (hooks, 1994).

It will be possible to perceive the changes that will take place when the practice of care finally begins to meet the need for belonging. When every student is known, seen and heard; when people take a genuine interest in one another and recognise and celebrate each one's strengths; when constant dialogue springs from stimulating experiences and an awareness of the complexities and inequalities that exist, then we will learn about the connectedness that leads to mutual responsibility for each person's social capital and collective efficacy. These ideals certainly do not end in schools but they should begin there in the fertile ground where the nurture of souls might lead to freedom and autonomy within our

connections. Schools need to learn to live up to the expectation of being places where people can live well and learn how to live well with and among other people. In a sense, schools should be able to be seen as exemplars; sites that contribute helpful ideas about how we might live together well.

The possibility of meeting the needs of girls requires imagination at every turn. The critique leveled at Noddings's ethics of care with regards to her treatment of distant others helps with my own understanding of the ways in which imagination might play a role in addressing the needs for belonging that can tend to seem unwieldy. Greene (1997) suggests that when we are able to become open to the world, we will in turn become conscious of the possibility that alternative realities exist. In the process of becoming more fully aware of who we are or who we are meant to be, we will be able to break through the conventions and presuppositions that weigh us down and that make it difficult to connect with others in all of their diversity. For Greene real education consists of engaging in the construction and reconstruction of realities with those around us and, as Appiah (2008) explains, in our global village, "those around us" actually means all other human beings. The way by which we might foster openness in our students is first by introducing knowledge to students in the context of human hope and fears and passions. In order to tap into the fullest meanings, the best tool is imagination. Through imagination, one dimensional explanations or narrow notions give way to multiple realities and understandings that allow for those who might not otherwise be able to connect and to relate to one another. The remedy to the emptiness that is often ascribed to the young people today lies in self-reflectiveness that originates in a situated life of persons who are open to one another in their distinctive locations and who are

able to engage with one another, to come to a place where they might imagine the lives of others as possibilities for their own.

Egan (1997) offers additional insight into the way in which students' development and ways of understanding should contribute to their ability to seek belonging for all. And while it begins well before adolescence as Egan intimates, we wish to maintain, insofar as it is possible, important pieces of every kind of understanding. Mythic understanding arising out of our earliest understanding of spoken language develops our ability to derive human meaning from the inhuman world. Later, mythic understanding contributes to a person's affective orientation and opens the mind to multiple perspectives.

The lens through which hooks and Freire allow me to view the need for belonging aids in my attempts to orient my consciousness more acutely to issues of power and privilege, subordination and disadvantage. Hooks's engaged pedagogy (1994) calls for schools to be places of respect, recognition and communal commitment to learning. She understands that the only way that this might be accomplished is if we are able to constructively confront issues of class, race and gender while creatively seeking practices by which democratic ideals can be realised. A pedagogy that insists that everyone's presence be acknowledged means more than taking attendance. It means walking amongst our students, and embracing sharing as a way of life that sustains all who are involved. It means persuading by persistence and caring to become connected and it means offering contexts for girls to participate in rituals, responses and negotiations that give them power and opportunities to make real life choices. Freire's (1970) ideal of *praxis* calls each person to transform the world and to give it meaning through perpetual action and reflection as we recognise the power relations that assume that the rights to choose are open and available to

everyone. This is how an ethics of care holds the most promise to meet the needs for belonging without exclusion or paternalism.

Achieving Belonging

And so I return to where the discussion began. If schools are going to become more effective and caring places, they need to focus much more upon the needs of girls that still remain largely unaddressed. It would appear that the ideas that have already been discussed regarding education, care and imagination could be augmented and made more practicable with some inspiration from other groups and organisations that have already claimed an important role in furthering girls' causes.

I will not make any attempt at an exhaustive study of the groups that are currently busy at work for the cause of girls and their rights because the list is extensive. Here I will simply discuss the work of a variety of groups in the hopes of giving an overview of the kinds of efforts that are already underway in the name of helping girls to become all that they might wish to be.

One way in which the need for belonging could easily be addressed is for everyone's existence to be celebrated as our mutual connectedness is acknowledged. There are a number of groups and organisations that do this very well.

An area that is often recognised for this is sport. Team sports in particular can offer girls the opportunity to be a part of a positive group working towards a common goal. While it might not be perfect and it does depend on the coaches' and team members' attitudes, many girls benefit from playing organised sports. In healthy team settings, girls involved in sports are encouraged to achieve their personal bests. They receive the message that there are

high expectations placed upon them because they are capable and every accomplishment is met with excitement and celebration. Because I have daughters, I have seen the positive influence that sports can have. My younger daughter, Nico plays soccer and it has shaped her personality and allowed her to come out of her shell. When she finally scored her first goal, her team was ecstatic and every girl sought her out and made sure that she knew that it was something special. Regardless of the wind and weather, Nico never, ever wants to miss a game or a practice because she knows that she belongs and that this thing that she is a part of needs her just as she needs it. My older daughter, Anais has fallen in love with basketball because she has had the opportunity to work with amazing coaches and teams who build her up on the tough days and hold her high on the best ones. She always knows that she belongs, that she is missed if she cannot attend a game or a practice and that, no matter what; she is an integral part of her team.

Sports are certainly not alone in tending to girls' needs for belonging. *Girls Inc* (2013) is one example of a non-profit organisation that was developed during the Industrial Revolution to help girls to adapt and to thrive. It offers an average of 30 hours of programming per week for girls aged six to 18 and it seeks to help girls to meet the intellectual, physical and emotional challenges that they might face. Girls are mentored both by professional women and other girls in order to become equipped to navigate gender, economic and social barriers that might stand in their way. Testimonials from participants in *Girls Inc* indicate that the sense of belonging is an important part of their experience. Girls in the program are made to feel that they are an integral part of the group and that their presence matters. They are encouraged to work toward goals that are informed by mentors seeking to equip girls for academic achievement, healthy living, money management and navigation of

media messages. They are encouraged to use their voices and to bring to light the issues that are most important to them.

In addition, there are campaigns that seek to empower girls and to reach girls all over the globe with messages of hope and belonging using media. *Because I am a Girl* (<http://www.becauseiamagirl.ca>) is a movement that develops curricula that challenges gender stereotypes. Leaders of the movement travel to schools to spread the message as they help to launch and support school groups while delivering a message of belonging and inclusiveness. *Girl Rising* (<http://girlrising.com>) is a movement that has arisen out of a film by the same name that allows girls to hear others' stories. The message that powerful stories can drive change helps to situate girls in their strength and connectedness. *Miss Representation* (<http://film.missrepresentation.org/>) which has evolved into *The Representation Project* (<http://therepresentationproject.org/>) serves to expose and challenge the limiting depictions of girls and women in the media and in our cultures and seeks equality and belonging for all.

Finally, girls only schooling continues to flourish in many parts of the world. Many girls who have experienced discrimination and feelings of exclusion feel more at home when they are surrounded exclusively by other girls. Many girls observe that they feel freer to express their ideas and feelings in an environment where the pressure to conform to boys' ideals has been removed. Here in North America, girls' schools are places where girls often seem to be more compelled to take responsibility for their learning and for their environment. Elsewhere in the world, girls' schools allow girls to participate in their education in ways that would otherwise exclude them based upon cultural or religious values. The executive director, Meg Milne Moulton of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools, points out that in

girls' schools, there is an attitude that it is cool to be smart that creates a culture of achievement where girls exhibit higher levels of political engagement, increased self-confidence and a stronger predisposition towards co-curricular engagement.

Something that sets public schools apart from all of the organisations and groups mentioned above has to do with its nature. Whereas not all girls will get involved in sports or have access to after school groups or the internet, all girls in the western world are required to go to school. This places a great deal of accountability and responsibility at the feet of educators who need to be doing all that they can to address the needs of girls, many of whom have not experienced real belonging in these places.

Something New

There would be a number of things that caring, imaginative schools could do better if they were to seek to meet the need for belonging for their students. It is a complex problem because it requires at once becoming more open and broad as well as more “closed” and tight knit. I would explain this first by illustrating what appears to be wrong with most large high schools. In many large schools, students move from class to class and from teacher to teacher every hour or so. After spending a little less or a little more than an hour with that teacher, students move to a different classroom with different students and different teachers throughout the day. This cycle repeats itself each day for five months at which time an entirely new schedule begins with yet different teachers and classmates. Not only do students tend to perceive the subject matter to be parsed into multiple unrelated pieces of information in such situations but they also tend to view their school-based relationships in a similar manner. My observations lead me to believe that many students feel no real connections to

their school, their teachers, or their classmates. In a school that placed more value on belonging, the number of teachers that students would see would diminish as Noddings recommends (1992), and all of the teachers who taught the same groups of students would be much more connected. Whereas currently teachers are somewhat limited by time constraints and isolation to simply teach the subject matter that they have been assigned and to know their students primarily by their interactions with the subject matter, teachers in a caring school would be given time to discuss content that would allow students to explore the world in a more holistic way and they would spend more time getting to know each and every student while fostering genuine care for one another in the classroom setting and beyond. It would appear that in Finland, this has proven to be feasible with an increase in positive performance as well (<http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/oecd/finland.html>). Noddings (1992) recommends that students spend a number of years with the same teachers. In such a setting, teachers and students would all really know one another and would travel through the school together. This seems necessary in schools that may contain more than one thousand students.

At the same time, content would be responsive to the numerous kinds of understanding outlined by Egan, and would encourage an inclusive worldview that would allow students to feel as if they were a part of a broader humanity, accepting “us” in the context of a multifaceted world full of people worthy of understanding and kindness. For Noddings (1992) this would mean basing curriculum on themes of care for self, others, the environment, plants and animals and ideas. This idea holds more promise when supplemented with Egan’s notions of kinds of understanding and would require an intense commitment from teachers to know their students intimately, to help them to better

understand their needs and wants and to help separate social pressures to conform from true aspirations. Choice and voice can only be as good as the understanding that students' bring or that they are able to achieve.

The Quest for Identity

The need and longing for an identity is never more evident than it appears to be during adolescence. The messages that adolescent girls in particular receive almost ceaselessly regarding their identities are infected with hypersexualisation and domination, obsessive self-interest and extreme self-consciousness or individualism. This dysfunction seems to arise at least in part from a narrow view of society as being no more than its political system and its economy (Held, 2006). An ethics of care counters that moral agents are encumbered and embedded in relation with actual other persons. This does not suggest, however, that they are not free but rather that they are autonomously making decisions that will promote the autonomy and responsibility of themselves as well as those for whom they care. Those critics who deem paternalism the only alternative to calculated self-interest do not understand that it is possible to develop relations of mutual or reciprocal care that do not require domination and subordination.

Identity fits well with Noddings's *modelling* of care. When educators and other carers demonstrate the way that care takes place in relations, they allow for those who are learning to care to identify with caring in a positive and transformative way. We have all witnessed the potent effects of less healthy modeling as we see in the media and in the effects of role models on adolescent girls who are highly impressionable and open to influence. To model

caring, and to walk the walk alongside girls who are seeking to forge their own identities, could be a powerful precursor to a new kind of self confident and self possessed, caring girl.

Educating for identity, much like educating for belonging, means seeking out multiple meanings, but within these an individual must hear her own story. In order to engage in becoming, in forming her character, a girl needs to locate herself in her story. She needs to understand her origins so that she might develop her own hard won sense of self worth, of hopefulness and optimism for her future and the future of the world in which she moves. Schools need to help girls to find themselves in their stories and to expose them to experiences of increasing self governance and self expression. It only makes sense for these ideals to be extended beyond the exclusive groups and clubs that so far allow for a select few to seek and find healthy and fulfilling identities within school life that are then available to them as they go out into the world.

Educating to meet the needs for identity in adolescence coincides with Egan's (1997) teaching at the philosophic stage of understanding and he asserts that teaching at this stage requires otherworldly sympathy and sensitivity to those being taught that they might have life and have it more abundantly. As teachers seek to awaken an ongoing quest for meaning, we must enlist our students in the quest. We must offer them opportunities to grow and to choose to be people of integrity and people who care. There is so much at play when we recognise the importance of meeting needs for identity. Egan recommends development of a flexible and buoyant recognition of the multivocal world of which we are a part. We must ask ourselves how we might invite our students to commit to the risky search for alternative possibilities. How do we help them to keep images of all that they love alive? How can we create spaces that encourage individuals to hope for their own futures and the future of our

world? Imagination plays an integral role in this. Cognitive adventuring and inquiry can lead to growing awareness of alternative ways of representing what is known and what is important to understand. Imagination plays a role in making meaning that helps to shape identity, develop agency and a commitment to the pursuit of possibility that can combat the fragmented, self-interested, sterile and meaningless lives that await those who refuse to engage in it.

Here again critical pedagogy sheds light upon the places that we must search to ensure that our movements and actions are consistent with our intentions for all. It is necessary for example to situate ourselves in the culture of “capitalistic frenzy and consumption that demand immediate satisfaction of desires” (hooks, 1994, p. 175). This will help us to understand that students need a great deal of assistance in thinking critically about the messages that they receive about class, gender and sexuality. We must understand that there is a place from which each one of us speaks (Bettie, 2003) and that we have a responsibility to uncover the pre-existing cultural discourses that each girl taps into to narrate her own identity. This cannot necessarily be equated with locating herself in her own story since the messages of which she might be prone to take ownership risk being more about herself as object rather than subject. She might have trouble recognising that it is not necessarily a flaw of character or personal inadequacy that can lead to a dearth of success in her life. She needs to become aware that all subjectivities to which she has fallen victim are constructed, institutionalised and regulated (Bettie, 2003). The alternative then is to help girls to listen to the distinctive voice that come from memories, families, religions, languages, cultures and feelings (hooks, 1994, p.88). Telling and being told their stories works as social capital that opens the way for agency and autonomy and allows people to challenge fixed

albeit often unstated assumptions that can render progress and dialogue impossible (hooks, 1994). Care for the souls of individuals is the perfect beginning and end to helping girls in their quest for identity.

Finding Identity

At times it seems that the longing for identity is one that is ignored or that is put on hold while one is in school, and again it would seem that some other groups do a much better job at meeting the needs for identity than schools do.

This past year Anais has discovered *Athlete Initiative* (<http://athleteinitiative.com/>); a group of female basketball alumni that dedicate their time and talents to mentoring young girls who are interested in the game. Twice a week the girls meet, mostly to work on skills but also to participate in sessions with women who bring messages of empowerment and finding identity amongst all of the less positive messages that girls receive. The girls are encouraged to set goals, they are mentored and they are all celebrated as athletes, as girls and as leaders. The message of Athlete Initiative is that girls are strong enough to be responsible for finding their own identities. The mentors strive to cut through the noise and images that our culture and the media insist on feeding girls so that they might find their true powerful selves. The girls feel a sense of belonging that allows them to take ownership of their becoming. Whether teachers are prepared to accept it or not, they can be powerful influences on their students and they can learn from the example that is set by good coaches and leaders.

Girls Inc is also interested in the shaping of girls' identities. The girls' bill of rights developed by *Girls Inc* focuses among other things on aspects that might contribute to a healthy identity. The very first right named is that girls have the right to be themselves, to

resist gender stereotypes and to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm. Girls are encouraged to take risks, to put themselves out there without fear of external expectations. Girls also, the bill of rights declares, have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies. They are encouraged to accept themselves as they are, to accentuate the positive, to recognise all of the good and amazing things that they can do because of their bodies. Partly this happens by raising awareness of cultural assumptions and by equipping them to think critically about the dominant messages of the media. Finally, girls have the right to be safe everywhere in the world. The naming of these rights comes with the recognition that they are to be aspired to, that there are many obstacles in the world that stand in the way of achieving these rights but they are named with the hope that someday, they will simply be perceived as basic human rights that can be expected by all regardless of their differences.

Policymakers at *Plan Canada* and *Because I am a Girl* have determined that if girls' rights are to be upheld, the work needs to begin with the young. Programs are now being implemented that promote gender equity curricula to girls and boys in preschool. Because I am a girl acknowledges that girls cannot be alone in discussions about identity lest the full responsibility for gender based problems be placed exclusively on their shoulders. They are engaging girls and women as well as boys and men in the discussion to challenge discrimination in homes, in schools and in legislation throughout the world. It is exciting to think how much more effective gender discussions and identity development might become if the most people possible are part of the dialogue.

With the *Girl Rising* movement, founders have tapped into the potential of story to situate the self and to develop empathy and care for self and others. For so many, stories hold the key to their liberation from oppressive treatment and limiting ideas. The quote, "One girl

with courage is a revolution” is of incredible significance as we imagine all of those girls who have lived their lives in subordination and with little hope.

The *Representation Project* also seeks to name the harmful messages that have dominated girls’ understanding of themselves for so long. As with *Because I am a Girl*, the *Representation Project* has come to acknowledge that the most potent of identity formations must have the participation of as many people as possible.

Girls only schools have their own ideas about shaping girls’ identities. In single gender schools, girls experience more opportunities to grow in confidence and to develop strong self worth because they have a better chance of ignoring stereotypes and making their own way with teachers who can devote all of their time and attention to girls and their particular needs. When unimpeded by the presence of boys, girls are less inhibited and more willing to take risks, they demonstrate a greater willingness to take on leadership roles as they are mentored by strong female role models (St. Catherine’s School, 2008).

Something New

Schools that are based in care and imagination could find innovative ways to meet the identity needs of their students. Such a shift would require teachers who as Egan (1997) has noted would be prepared to teach with extreme sensitivity and sympathy, committed to the idea that students should have life as abundantly as possible and that school is an integral part of this. The ideal teacher for this project would be at once passionate about ideas and about imparting them to students and an active listener, hearing what students are saying and helping them to achieve an ever growing understanding of their world and their place in it. The ideal teacher would understand caring as Noddings and others have described it as a

moral responsibility that extends far beyond natural caring to caring for every aspect of every soul with which one comes into contact. The ideal teacher would move among students with love and compassion eliciting as much engagement and participation from each and every being as possible.

A teacher who appreciates the kinds of understanding of which Egan (1997) speaks would teach to all of the levels seeking to preserve as much of each as is possible. Lessons would involve students in mythic discussions, romantic musings and philosophic explorations. The teacher would push students to imagine worlds that they may never inhabit but for which they should develop empathy and understanding. Broad generalisations would give way to possibilities for multiple meanings in which students would be encouraged to develop their own stories side by side with other stories. Critically discussing cultural barriers, racial issues and gender discrimination alongside family stories would allow girls to identify themselves more clearly, to separate themselves from low expectations and fatalism, to channel the resilience of their friends their families and themselves. Critically questioning the voices and images of media and culture that are so dominant might allow girls to aspire to new and exciting senses of self worth and identification with self and others. Of particular significance is the fact that boys would take part in the discussion so that notions of objectification and victimisation would not be allowed to maintain their status as girl problems. Instead boys can be invited to join in the quest of making the world more fair and just for all. And all together teachers and students would engage in the risky search for alternative possibilities for equality, agency and hope amidst the fragmented, self-interested meaninglessness wherein so much “education” takes place.

The caring teacher would seek to make silence a thing of the past, to ensure that every child is seen and heard. This teacher would help students come to voice even as they learn to really hear one another. By recognising the complexities and diversity that enrich our relations, teachers and students would be able to nurture and care for each individual. Together they would rise against exploitative practices and relationships and create new, vibrant images of hope for themselves and their futures and they would use their disciplines or subjects as the entry into those discussions – as means to an end rather than ends in and of themselves.

The caring teacher would be best equipped to be renewed and rejuvenated if she were to be part of a group of teachers with whom to share ideas and struggles and care. More experienced teachers should enter into mentoring relationships with newer teachers that would evolve into lasting working groups that would reflect the types of relationships that we wish to foster among and with students. It seems too often the case that teachers work in isolation. Particularly in high schools, teachers are labeled experts in a certain field. This seems to contribute to the sense that knowledge and understanding is made up of discrete parts. It is an attitude that contributes to fragmentation at every level from knowledge to relationships to self reflection and does little to foster imagination and creativity. Teachers working in teams tend to be much more energetic, challenged and excited about finding novel ways to approach problems as they share thoughts with one another, test ideas out and plunge into the unknown with the sense that they are supported and thus able to support their students. This would require corresponding changes in structures and use of time for collaboration and cooperation e.g. Team meetings and co-teaching.

Competency Within Reach

The need for competency follows us throughout our lives. Often understood as the ability to “do stuff” well, from a care perspective it involves developing in everyone the capacity for practice of caring about all others as human beings like ourselves (Held, 2006, p. 125). Prior even to respecting everyone’s human rights, a society that cultivates caring relations would limit the kinds of activities that it leaves to markets and individual self interests. It would recognise that to be a caring is work that goes beyond motivation and a sunny disposition (Held, 2006).

Competency might be paired with Noddings’s *dialogue*. Dialogue is a big part of the work that goes into ensuring that caring relations do not threaten to become paternalistic, one-sided or exclusionary. Both competency and dialogue are forever “works in progress” that must by necessity be ongoing. As we have already seen, addressing needs for belonging and identity involves the acknowledgement of multiple meanings that can arise at least in part from dialogue with different people of varied perspectives.

Educating for competency will probably mean broadening or reshaping our ideas regarding what is important to know and to understand. Education for competency involves restless, impatient, hopeful inquiry full of the cognitive adventuring mentioned earlier and the intellectual openness that revolves around dialogue and an ongoing quest for meaning making.

Imagination is much more important to competency than our current structures would lead us to believe. If we accept the idea that school is a set of flawed compromises among the three great and powerful educational ideas (Egan, 1997) of knowledge acquisition, socialisation, and reaching the individual we might be able to recognise that “ignorance of

the world and the store of words is the main enemy of education” (p. 50) and the prominent cause of the poverty of experience to which we subject most students. Our obsession with “knowing about” has prevented vast numbers of us from creating imaginative worlds into which we might enter perceptually, affectively and cognitively. Egan’s educational development through the stages of kinds of understanding offers very different ideas for competency and seems to promise at least the possibility of actually leaving no child behind. Every stage of understanding receives equal billing as valuable in its own right not simply as a stepping stone to the next stage. Even more than this, those pieces that cannot be saved in the passage of phases are mourned rather than rejected as inferior to the next phase. Each new stage builds upon the last and insofar as it is possible, parts of each stage are nurtured and cared for so that they might not be lost. The stages through which most students pass in school on some level are the Mythic, Romantic and Philosophic stages. Egan explains educational development and therefore the development of competency as the process whose focus of interest and intellectual engagement begins with myth and its construction. It romantically establishes the boundaries of reality and philosophically maps the major features of the world. Each of these stages requires competent and caring teachers to make sure that the stages are met with intensity, excitement and purpose. At the mythic stage, children’s imaginations are most energetically alive and adventurous. They are powerful abstract thinkers and masters of metaphor. At the romantic stage children beat against the limits of the real world as they figure out why they might be interested in a bunch of bits of knowledge. At the philosophic stage, young people begin to organise their knowledge into some kind of meaningful schemes, and finally, at the ironic stage the mind is able to transcend the chaos of the world by harnessing both wild imaginativeness and deep

seriousness, artistic passion for life and scientific inquiry. Imaginative capacity is what allows us to understand a person's conduct; much like Nussbaum (2008) describes the power of literature, empathic imagination allows us to address biases, prejudices and assumptions as we seek to make meaning.

In the domain of competency and dialogue, Noddings, Egan and purveyors of critical pedagogy would appear to have a lot in common. Creating communities that work is viewed as a highly charged political act in which dialogue is an existential necessity. In Egan's terms they achieve a more comprehensive language of a more human world, which allows them to initiate and intercede on a different level or plane (1997). What Noddings calls care for ideas (1992), hooks refers to as passion for ideas and both insist upon critical thinking and dialogical exchange that should be shared in the classroom as in the world. Education can only be liberating when greater understanding and appreciation result, not mere transferrals of information (Freire, 1979). If students and teachers can perceive themselves as competent, mutually responsible participants in the development of the learning community, they are more likely to offer constructive input. As we lead them to connect the training of their minds with their emotions and the power relations involved in both we contribute to their liberation. As we involve our students in the constant unveiling of reality, we help them to become conscious of their ability to critically intervene in that reality. By building solidarity and enhancing efficacy among young women by naming the risks and the boundaries that they face (Miller, 2008), we might help them to put an end to their narratives of victimhood that have led them to evade responsibility. As a result, they might be empowered to become creative users of mass culture; citizens who can envision a different economic and social order, who possess the courage and the will to bring their vision into existence. Through a

permanent relationship of dialogue, knowledge emerges through invention and reinvention. Our educational institutions can be transformed to become places of restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry (Freire, 1979) so that the way we live and work reflect joy in cultural diversity, passion for justice, love of freedom and care for all.

Emerging Competence

As I have already mentioned, competence is the need that I believe schools would most readily claim to have mastered but there are obstacles that stand in the way of girls and competence.

In a sense, girls' groups and sports teams are at an advantage when it comes to the concept of competence because it is much more attainable when people participate willingly and by choice. This seems to illustrate that perhaps schools lack the desirability or authenticity that accompany other groups to which girls choose to belong and, that by becoming more relevant, schools might be able to achieve a greater degree of appeal for a larger portion of the population.

Girls only schools appear to be particularly proud of the competency that they claim to engender with programs that focus on academic achievement and preparation for successful futures measured in terms of acquisitions of lucrative and prestigious professions.

Something New

The school that I envision would recognise that dialogue and competency go hand in hand. Students who are actually engaged in their learning would be intent on shaping and reshaping not only their own thoughts but ideas regarding what is important to know and

understand. And schools constructed on imagination and care would have completely new conceptions about what is important to creating competence. They would see themselves as capable and worthy for commenting on the human condition and the state of the world, and engaging in ways to make things better.

Whereas current conceptions in most schools equate competence with academic achievement in the form of knowing about discreet bits of information, the new way of viewing education would be concerned with creating communities that work together to become something greater than anyone could aspire to be alone. This kind of competence in being a good person would require changes to curriculum that would allow for a great deal more continuity between subject areas and openness to constantly evolving and fluid ideas about what is important to know. Noddings's ideas on this point are somewhat difficult to imagine since in some cases they seem to leave so much to choice and free will that could run the risk of arising from uninformed or partial understandings. Unfortunately at times such ideas have led to the sense that curricula thus developed might lack in rigour, but done properly the opposite should be true. As Egan instructs, the imagination needs to be fueled by as much readily accessible information as possible. At times people have suggested that in this age of information, it is no longer necessary to know and understand but simply to be remotely connected to any information that we might need. Egan (2010) would argue that accessing information is not the same as deeply and broadly knowing and does not hold any of the privileges that come with the kind of deep understanding that enriches our reflective and contemplative lives. Therefore, rigour is not to be trifled with, and in fact I would suggest that much of what is done in schools currently, with mainly the most benevolent intentions sends a message to students that we don't believe in their capabilities and so we

continually lower our expectations. I want students to know a lot and I want the general impression of this knowing to be important and exciting and life-giving. I want them to know the kinds of things that make them yearn to understand how the world works, why inequalities persist, and the effects of even our most banal activities or words on other people and on our environment. I want them to question everything, and I would wish for thoughtful risk taking to become a part of everyday life. One of the winners of the Nobel Prize in Medicine this year, James Rothman, explained recently that a big part of becoming a successful scientist involves learning to handle failure (Jackers, 2013). Such an attitude requires a playful and ironic (Egan, 1997) understanding that we should be working towards with our students as we help them through the tough times. It should not be the goal of the teacher to shelter students and to help them to avoid adversity but it should certainly be the teacher's priority to proceed with care for the tender souls who are trying to make sense of the world. Our curriculum should take that which has been evaded and bring it to light so that our students can make real choices about how they wish to live. By high school, students should understand that while we may be created equal, there are so many systematic and structural inequalities that continue to flourish that inhibit the potential for equality. We all need to accept some part of the responsibility for changing at least a piece of the problems that have been created by racial, class and gender disparities. Students need to believe once again as they seemed to in the sixties that, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change." (Ghandi, 1913). Through dialogue and contemplation they might come to envision the evolution of an entirely new social and economic order. By trial and error in a safe environment, they might invent and reinvent their worlds to create something exciting and new.

The generation of students that are coming to school are generally better equipped than their teachers to take the lead in a technological revolution. We have been hearing about the ills created by abuse and misuse of social networks. Cyberbullying, sexting and child pornography are foremost among the problems of youth in the West. Media's exploitation of girls and women can at times seem to negate any strides that have been made in the direction of gender equality. Meanwhile for some reason there is persistent patience for the increasing gap between rich and poor and shameful tolerance for continued racist and homophobic attitudes. The time is ripe for students with conscience and consciousness to find creative uses for technology and social media to reach and teach other people in the global village about injustices and the potential for hope filled change. The passion with which students will approach issues that they buy into can be infectious and inspiring and more accessible than ever.

Hope that springs from care for students' competence can be contagious and self-perpetuating. Caring for students' competency would have far-reaching effects that would hold the promise of transforming our expectations for the world.

Embodying Caring Spirit

The need for caring spirit is an urgent one for this world and for our girls. The ethics of care is concerned with a coherent and intelligible form of moral understanding that does not arise from moral principles or impartiality but from interpretations and evaluations of social relations. According to Held (2006) caring relations should prevail in public and personal contexts and should move beyond local or national norms with a sense of care and concern for or solidarity with all other inhabitants of the globe. The ethics of care recognises

human flourishing as interdependent and a matter of the common good that does not notice borders or boundaries. In order for a caring community to thrive, people would need to trust one another, to respond to needs and to create and maintain admirable caring relations that would sustain all people (Held, 2006, p. 57). In opposition to contractual models applied directly to situations of economic interdependence, the ethics of care recognises that the economically powerful and powerless are not equally autonomous and can shed light on conditions that are conducive to exploitation and deprivation; in school, the evaded curriculum.

Caring spirit fits well with Noddings's idea of confirmation. Confirmation according to Noddings is identifying a better self and encouraging its development. This same idea applies to caring spirit. The caring spirit seeks to nurture the best parts of the person, to celebrate that which is admirable and good and to care for her body and soul.

To educate for a caring spirit is to identify each person as a citizen of the world and to acknowledge that each person has a responsibility to everyone else since we must all live together on a finite planet. To nurture a caring spirit is to teach humility and faith in humankind. It means recognising the complexity and connectedness that exists between people and to strive to live a good and worthwhile life with others. To care for a caring spirit is to strive for each person's realisation of her full humanity: her situation, condition, obligation and project (Freire, 1979). Educating for caring spirit means cooperation and building of relationships based on equality and care, and mutual responsiveness and responsibility for self and others that lends itself to faith, trust, courage, and love.

The only way to think of teaching as opening possibilities is kindling by emotion, perception and appreciation (Greene, 1997). Schools have not been very successful at

engaging students imaginatively with aspects of reality thus far. Part of the problem may well be the way we look at students – as underdeveloped, incompetent, lacking something we have when, if we bothered to engage and listen to them, we would find that they are extremely sophisticated and competent thinkers in some realms, far surpassing our own understandings, particularly when it comes to the world they inhabit and their view of their place in it. Schools should be concerned with fostering energetic, lively, unexpected connections and associations; they should seek to nurture and provoke the growth of people who reach out to one another as they seek to live more “adventently” in the world (Greene, 1997). And now more than ever schools need to take on the responsibility of moving young people to imagine, extend and renew their lives beyond the realities of family breakdown, homelessness, violence and the terrible inequalities that plague so many (Greene, 1997). Noddings (1992) pointed out several years ago already that schools behave as if society has not changed, that those ideas that worked to some extent in a world where most people came from nuclear families with mothers who were home to greet their children at the end of the day with a hot meal and engaging conversation do not need to change with the circumstances. Instead, as Egan (1997) explains so well, we can respond to the needs of our children as strive to engage with those features of our understanding that are beyond our capacity to articulate as we seek to include wider and wider groups in the category of “us” (p. 171).

The liberating pedagogy of Freire and hooks again helps us to better understand and articulate the place and role of caring spirit. Because according to relational theory the self exists in and is composed of relations to other beings and forces in the world (McIntosh & Style, 1991) we cannot accept keeping anyone at a distance. Rather than highlight

differences and divisions, the quest for caring spirit pushes us to search for those powerful moments when boundaries are crossed, differences are confronted and dialogue leads to solidarity (hooks, 1994). The potential for success of teaching for caring spirit lies in consistency between word and action, in the boldness that is required to love people and to have faith in them (Freire, 1979). Helping one another must not be distorted into relationships of domination and subordination, rather we are called upon to care and to be cared for mutually. Someday, Martin Luther King Jr. (1967) prophesied, we will need to cease to be a thing-oriented society and we will need to become a person-oriented one instead. When that day comes perhaps we will achieve the profound love for the world, intense faith in humankind and the hope that is necessary to allow for caring spirit to bloom and grow in every one of us, teacher and student, girl and boy.

Nurturing Caring Spirit

“Shall we make a new rule of life from tonight: always to try to be a little kinder than necessary.” Barrie (1902)

Finally, the other needs already mentioned can be buoyed by a caring spirit. Caring spirit resides where people are given opportunities to choose kindness, where modeling and confirmation show the potential for good works to multiply, where responsiveness to others’ needs and empathy meet to offer the best kind of life that we can wish to live.

Sports teams may fall short oftentimes in the realm of caring spirit. While the potential for nurturing caring spirit exists, the priority seems to be to care for the tight-knit group that is the team or even for that matter, small groups within the team. This can in fact be a threat to caring spirit in the broader sense since other teams are perceived as the

opposition, as people who need to be beat, whose projects must by their nature be undermined for the success of another team's projects. This cannot therefore be considered caring spirit as it must not be exclusive or particular about who is chosen to be touched by it.

Girls Inc, on the other hand, develops programs that allow girls to understand how to better care for themselves but they extend the care to others by regularly underlining the connections that exist between all of the participants in the organisation. Perhaps the most obvious way in which *Girls Inc* engenders caring spirit is by encouraging former participants in the program to become mentors to the younger girls. This seems the perfect way to ensure that true empathy can be developed as young women recall their own experiences as girls and try to help young girls navigate their way through the phases of youth.

Because I am a Girl, *Girl rising* and *The Representation Project* are all about nurturing caring spirit that extends well beyond girls' own lived experiences. Along with *Plan Canada*, *Because I am a Girl* invites girls to become intimately involved in changing the lives of girls in other less affluent parts of the world. They connect girls here in Canada with girls all over the world, who may not have access to clean water, to sufficient food or health care or to education. *Because I am a girl* seeks to engender care and love for strangers and neighbours alike through cooperation and aid work. *Girl rising* incites understanding and compassion through stories about girls in difficult circumstances all over the globe, and the *Representation project* asks girls and women, among other things, to see one another without judgment, to understand the external sources of competition and ill will between women.

Girls' schools in the West are quite often prosperous places with the means to take on extensive charitable projects. The girls only schools in Winnipeg take their responsibility to stimulate altruism and compassion very seriously. Each year girls at St. Mary's Academy and Balmoral Hall are asked to participate in activities that raise awareness and funds for people who are less fortunate in Winnipeg and around the world. Developing a caring spirit is definitely one of the main objectives

of these schools where mentorship programs are also seen as effective ways for girls to care for one another even outside of close friendships.

Something New

Public schools also offer possibilities for building caring spirit. In the school where I teach, there are philanthropy groups, social justice groups, volunteer credit programs and others who make a commitment to take some responsibility for making the world a better place for more people to inhabit. The biggest downfall of these groups is that they are relatively small which means that only a tiny proportion of the school population benefits and takes responsibility. Also, as Noddings (1992) cautions, treating volunteering and altruism as any other academic course where achievement is marked by credits and grades takes away from the experience of engaging in caring spirit.

In the ideal school, all of the students would be touched by caring spirit. Teachers would lead by example and maintain through confirmation the boldness and love that is required to care, to show concern and see solidarity with all of the other inhabitants of the world. In the ideal school, mentoring relationships would be ongoing and self-perpetuating. Here students would learn that everyone is a worthwhile citizen of the world and they would develop the humility and faith in humankind that are necessary for seeing the connectedness that exists between people. From custodians to teachers, bus drivers to administrative assistants, administrators to students, all would be perceived as equal players in the nurture of caring spirit. Responsiveness and responsibility for one another in the school and in the world outside would become a natural part of everyday life until faith, trust, courage and love would prevail. Caring spirit would permeate all of the aspects of education and schooling from the training and hiring of staff to planning curriculum outcomes, from the structure of the school day to the structure of the building. Consciousness of others, awareness of their particular stories and needs and the desire to find belonging and identity for every soul would be the result of teachers' hard work and concern. In a school where caring spirit was taken seriously, there would be a need to re-examine the ways in which rigour is assessed. Imagination, collaboration and time might permit teachers and

students to define each student's strengths and challenges in inspirational and productive ways that could contribute to growth and development of people who are caring and competent and intent on becoming their best selves.

Putting the Framework to the Test

If a new framework is to hold real promise, it must not only meet the needs of girls that I have identified but it must also allow us to observe the attributes that were outlined in the same chapter. First, a framework must allow girls to come to voice. Changes to school structure that would minimise the number of teachers and students that girls would come into contact with each day would give girls more opportunities to feel safe and at home and free to share their thoughts and ideas. Because those teachers would be sensitive listeners who would encourage girls to share their stories and to locate themselves within their numerous identities, students would be much more likely to come to voice.

Beyond simply learning to speak, girls need to feel free to express themselves in the most authentic and confident possible way. Self expression would arise from learning to make choices based in competence and awareness of the vast array of circumstances that impact understanding and self worth. Because girls would be working with intellectual tools that allow them to access hope and imagination within their stories, they would become much more able to express their true selves effectively.

If teachers and schools are doing their job, awareness should be foremost in their list of attainable objectives. Very little by way of awareness can arise from strictly adhering to curriculum outcomes and in fact adherence to strict rules or requirements is perhaps amongst the most effective ways of ensuring the preservation of the evaded curriculum. When students can be pushed to think, to reflect upon connections and to recognise the many

influences that impact each participant's circumstance, they can be awakened from the apathy or disengagement that afflicts large numbers of them. Meeting each girl's needs requires really knowing them because it is only through knowing them that we can begin to comprehend what is lacking. Girls need to understand that their situations have at least in part defined their success or lack thereof in order to overcome and become empowered. Some need to know that their difficulties come from external sources; that their class, race and gender have played too large a role in determining them. This might allow them to escape the bonds that come from being convinced that it is by some flaw of personality that they are less fortunate or abused or objectified. Other girls, often those who are found in the upper and middle classes, need to know that it is not their positive attributes of personality alone that have determined their success since this can lead to attitudes of entitlement and lack of empathy. And all girls need to have a clearer understanding of the source of their knowing and "choosing". They need help in recognising the cultural, societal and media pressures that are placed disproportionately on girls and women to conform to ideas of beauty and self worth that ring hollow and contribute to commodification and abuse.

Self worth then, needs to be profoundly and extensively meaningful. As Bob Dylan suggests, we all have to serve somebody or something. Too often these days, people in general and girls in particular seem to have decided that they will serve the gods of commercialism and sexualisation above all else that can only leave them empty and unfulfilled. Within the new framework, those gods would hopefully become much less desirable; to be replaced by self actualisation and a realisation of worth and worthiness. As girls learn to speak and interact from a place of deep meaning and yearning for connection and comprehension, girls can learn to value themselves for the choices and actions that can

be allowed to come from who they are and who they wish to become as opposed to how they appear. Shallowness can fall away to be replaced by caring spirit and the kind of healthy self love that leaves plenty of room for loving other humans and the world.

Social capital is another quality that girls might hope to achieve more abundantly when their self awareness and motivation ceases to be driven by external forces that undermine their ability to belong, to form an identity and to become competent, confident people. Social capital can be nurtured and upheld when girls are allowed to share their stories, to celebrate their triumphs and overcome their past or their position. When girls are given opportunities to participate authentically in their learning, when they can proudly speak of where they have come from and when they are allowed to dream of where they might be going, they can gain social capital.

Cooperation is another requirement of a more fully realised community. There is a tendency amongst girls to become extremely competitive in ways that negatively impact others and themselves. One of the issues as mentioned by Miller (2008) is that when bad things happen, girls wish to remove themselves insofar as it is possible from the possibility of experiencing the same fate. For example, when a girl is bullied or hurt by a friend or a boyfriend, other girls will focus on that girl's "faults" as a way of distancing themselves from the potential for similar hurts. If a girl is sexually harassed or abused, the same reaction is common. Blame is placed upon the victim because it is only in this way that other girls can feel as if they are in control of their own destinies. Caring spirit, as well as a sense of belonging and imagination all help to transform unhealthy competition into cooperation. When girls are able to develop empathy and to identify themselves and others as "us", they

will be prepared to cooperate, to work toward common goals that will serve the interests of all people regardless of difference.

Cooperation leads naturally into responsibility. This week, James Moore, Minister of Industry for the Federal Government had this to say with reference to child poverty, "Is it the government's job — my job to feed my neighbour's child? I don't think so" (Payton, 2013). Of course there was an outcry when people heard this statement particularly from a person who is so obviously "fed" by the people and also one who should recognise his responsibility to those same people. But what might be the most troubling about the spirit of the statement is that it reflects an attitude that is too common. In school I struggle to convince my students that they have a responsibility to do something as simple as cleaning up after themselves. Many of them identify this as the custodian's job without the slightest concern for all that the custodian's job entails without directly cleaning up after a thousand individuals. Many students also have a tendency to be very reticent about standing up for what they know to be right. And from the perspective of girls, it is very often the case that they choose to maintain rather than fight roles of victimisation and objectification because it seems easier to be denied the responsibility that comes with being an actor in one's life story as opposed to a spectator of life. Acting is more desirable than functioning because it means participating in life more fully. Meeting needs for belonging, identity, competence and caring spirit would all contribute to increasing the level of responsibility that girls and others would be willing to take. Belonging by its nature contributes to connections to others and to the world which by extension leads to responsibility for them. Moving in safe circles that allow for slowly increasing the definition of "us" allows girls to identify with and to take on increasing responsibility for others and themselves. Competence allows girls to distinguish between their roles and responsibilities as it offers girls the confidence that is necessary for taking responsibility for

themselves and others. And caring spirit contributes to girls' capacity to understand themselves and others. Caring spirit cannot allow girls to be judgmental of other girls. Rather than increasing the disparity caused by differences of class and gender and circumstance, caring spirit opens the way for increased empathy and deep responsibility for other human beings and for the earth and all that exist in it. The danger that appears to threaten is that some will accept too much responsibility while others will be willing to shirk their part. Developing competency should help girls to understand the need for balance between caring for others and for themselves. Mature caring helps people to better grasp the need in each person for self realisation that must spring in part from responsibility for self and others.

As cooperation can give rise to responsibility, responsibility can give rise to freedom. Freedom is understood here as Paulo Freire (1970) explains it. Educating for freedom means allowing students to become informed, creative and imaginative participants as opposed to "empty vessels" into which we dispense those bits of information that have been deemed worthy of appearing on the test. A great deal of the teaching that takes place today demonstrates little concern for freedom and equality of people. As Aronowitz explains,

Few of even the so-called educators ask the question: What matters beyond the reading, writing, and numeracy that are presumably taught in the elementary and secondary grades? The old question of what a kid needs to become an informed 'citizen' capable of participating in making the large and small public decisions that affect the larger world as well as everyday life receives honorable mention but not serious consideration. These unasked questions are symptoms of a new regime of educational expectations that privileges job readiness above any other educational values. (Aronowitz, 2008, p. xii)

This approach to education has resulted in learned helplessness and constant preparation not for living but for the next test in job readiness. When girls are free, their choices will arise from a place of belonging, of confidence in their identities, of competence and caring spirit. Action will spring from reflection that will determine the next action.

Messages of consumerism and sexualisation fed by the media will lose their potency when girls are equipped to recognise what is truly important for their becoming and meaning making. When girls are free to decide what is truly important, when they see the importance of their healthy connections to other people and when girls feel that they can not only tell but determine their own stories, we will know that they are free, that all of those factors that have oppressed them can no longer hold them down.

Conclusion

Imagining a new framework based upon the ideas of so many inspired and inspiring people enables me to take the best of so many notions of education, morality and pedagogy and to form from their fundamental human ideals something that holds the promise of meeting the needs of girls and everyone in new and exciting ways. This reflection upon longing for belonging, searching for identity, pursuing competency and promoting caring spirit paves the way for calls to action that might be possible in schools and beyond. In the following chapter I will explore some ways in which schools might be transformed in order to better meet these important needs that have been neglected for so long.

The ideals to which I aspire may be difficult to fathom. There are certainly a vast number of obstacles that present themselves as we try to imagine a system and a structure that would allow for girls' needs to be met in schools but this is an exercise of speculative inquiry (Burbules & Warnick, 2006). It begins with the recognition that things could be better and proceeds to envision some other way. Perhaps someday it will be possible to look back and see that it was possible all along but in the meantime I look forward to continuing to engage in musings about the way that things could be. This is what I am asking my students to do and so it has to be what I expect of myself. Even as I describe the potentialities though, I am recognising that other considerations need to be made before I can

really speculate as I have done. In the final chapter, I will discuss a few of the potential shortcomings of my scheme. I will imagine a time of truth and reconciliation for girls and I will briefly contemplate the future of my plans even as I look backward to try to understand where it all needs to begin.

Chapter 6: The End and the Beginning

Why I'm still Here

The idea of liberal democratic public education is based on a notion of freedom for all. This is a lofty ideal it is true, and in need of a consistent commitment to democratic praxis. Educators have a crucial responsibility to demonstrate a particular awareness of and sensitivity to the obvious exclusion of certain groups of people from the quest for freedom. Recognising that some people are denied freedom is the first part of the invitation that I extend with this paper. The second part of the invitation is a call to action as I redefine (with others) how accountability and standards might be understood as offering care and possibilities. Acting in the world in the interests and care of all means ensuring that opportunities and conditions exist that allow people to make unconstrained choices that enable them to appear in the world, and beyond this, that might permit them to contribute to reimagining and creating the world in concert with others. As girls and women have often been denied equal access to becoming all that they have the potential to be and to appearing fully, with this speculative inquiry I seek to find ways to address this shortcoming.

Current systems and structures that are often at odds with our aims of education are not the only available options. There are admirable examples of attempts that have been made to achieve better understanding of people's needs and how they might be met. Here I have tried to describe some of the educational ideas in which I see a great deal of promise for achieving something better than that which has already been attempted.

Despite everything that we hear, there are no effective quick fixes. Noddings, Egan, Freire and hooks have been working at describing their respective ideas for decades already

but change takes time and is often met with resistance from those who are most comfortable or who might have to make the greatest sacrifices in order for change to take place. Here I sought to combine pieces of all of their work in the hope of describing a new way of perceiving the relationship between needs and the conditions necessary for education and schooling to meet them.

Truth and Reconciliation

There are times when I despair. Sometimes the news just all seems to be bad, the obstacles insurmountable; but all it takes is a moment with my daughters or my students to remind me why it is worth fighting for change. Since one of my advisors suggested that perhaps some idea akin to the truth and reconciliation commission that is working toward healing and revitalisation for Aboriginal peoples of Canada in the wake of the oppression wrought by residential schools would be helpful for addressing the particular problems of girls, it has been on my mind. While I recognise that the tragedy of residential schools does not have a parallel, the apology and aims of reconciliation are admirable and desirable for any oppressed people. In this spirit I have been considering the letter that might be the catalyst for ongoing change and reconciliation as the letter of apology by the government of Canada (Harper, 2008).

Here is an idea for that letter:

Dear Girls,

The subordination of women and girls has long been a source of problems in our society.

For centuries patriarchal systems and institutions have dominated our culture automatically negating the rights of half of the population. It is only in the last century that we have begun to acknowledge that women are in fact fully fledged human beings, having

the capacity to vote and to make decisions about their own affairs. But still oppression persists in varying forms and with varied intensity.

We recognise that policies that undermine women's rights and which teach girls that they are inferior to boys cause great harm and they have no place in our society. The treatment of girls and women as sexual objects, the disrespect for their ideas and their ways of understanding, the disparate socialisation of boys and girls and unequal pay for the same work have sent a message to women and girls that they are less worthy than men and boys. They have been deprived of experiences of freedoms and choices that are taken for granted by men.

We now realise that the treatment of girls and women has led to a culture of rape, of violence and abuse. We understand that the socialisation of girls has led them to develop low expectations of themselves and has served to weaken their social and aspirational capital. It is impossible to know how girls' lives might have been different if we had treated them differently and for this we apologise.

Now it is time to look forward. To uncover all of the harm that has been done, to right the wrongs wherever possible and to expose the potential for future suffering so that we might prevent it. We understand that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing. The unwillingness for many to admit that any wrong has been done is difficult to reconcile with the changes that need to be made. So we will begin with an apology.

We are sorry that we underestimated you. We are sorry that we did not seek to understand what it is like to grow up hearing that your worth depends so heavily upon your physical appearance. We are sorry that we assumed that you were lacking in intellectual and moral judgment by virtue of the fact that you sometimes approach problems differently than we do. We are sorry that any and all differences from the dominant white male culture have been used against you to deny your basic human rights. We are sorry that your care and concern for others was oftentimes used against you. We are sorry that the word feminine has been equated with inferiority. We are sorry that you have suffered and that your suffering was not acknowledged.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden of this experience continues to rest on you but it is time that this burden be shared by all. It is time that we all take ownership for the hardship that growing up a girl has meant. It is time that the sadness and feelings of inferiority be brought to light so that they might be dealt with in order that healing might be able to happen. In moving forward, we will seek to listen to your voices, we will come to understand that the meanings that you make are just as valid as are others, we will hold you up that you might come to be full participants in decision making and in shaping all of our futures together.

Sincerely,
Society

Taking It Further

There are a number of practical, practicable ways that high schools and school divisions might choose to respond to the idea of truth and reconciliation with respect to girls.

Perhaps the letter could serve as a catalyst for discussions amongst staff members accompanied by questions regarding appropriate responses. Possibly the letter could be introduced at the beginning of a school year to serve as a focus for professional development throughout the year with the promise to engage with various girls and women who could visit with staff and discuss their experiences and their thoughts. Out of such dialogue ideas could arise that would make sense to include in the school plan. Further still, these discussions could serve to sensitise people to other situations of repression or neglect. Finally, the letter could lead school divisions to make some type of a public declaration, perhaps becoming part of the mission statement. This would be a very effective and potentially democratic way to begin to include groups of girls and engaged teachers in the discussion of reconciliation. Regardless of the route that might be chosen for truth and reconciliation, it seems important that the people who are the subjects of the letter be included in the process. This could be a very effective way of enabling girls to come to voice authentically and inclusively. Perhaps the letter could serve as a mentor text that would serve as a starting point for girls and other students to write their own letters. And because social media has come to occupy a central role in the lives of young people in particular, the potential exists for students to take the lead in developing innovative ways to spread the message and guide the discussion of truth and reconciliation.

What Remains to Be Seen

As I have struggled through the process of attempting to understand the particular problems of girls and the role of education and schooling, I have seen both the potential and the limitations of a framework that seeks to reach girls in adolescence. I believe that the

framework that has been described could help girls to become aware of the barriers that stand in their way and could enable them to deal much more effectively with them. I believe that the framework, while it was conceived with the interests of girls at its roots could be beneficial to both girls and boys as they negotiate the challenges of adolescence. As I have already mentioned, recent research suggests that boys are struggling much more than girls are academically. It seems apparent that everyone could benefit from a change to current procedures and structures in high school.

There are certainly limits to the impact that schools are able to have on the lives of students. In order for the proposed framework to be as effective as possible, it would be necessary for schools to act in concert with other organisations and people that influence girls' lives. The other kinds of programs described in this paper along with churches, clubs and various institutions of which girls are a part could be educated in the needs of girls in order to become more helpful carers of girls.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to the effectiveness of the framework described here is that beginning in high school may prove to be too late. While adolescence is a time of incredible change, much of the formative work takes place earlier in childhood. Healthy attachments are formed and attitudes towards one's body and the conception of one's place in the world begin long before high school. This does not mean that it loses all promise but simply that my own experience and my observations over time lead me to believe that it might be more effective if programs were in place that would reach girls earlier as well.

Hope for the Future

The burden of responsibility that rests on public school serves to distinguish it from private schools and other programs because it is designed to be accessible to all children. By its nature, then, public school holds more potential for shaping social norms and values than it tends to acknowledge. One way in which this responsibility has been grievously evaded is in its treatment of adolescent girls and their needs.

The story of girls and school is far from over, however, and there is time for amendments to be made. If school is going to be a place of relevance and meaningful participation for all then it must be concerned with the education of all. Education for all is a lofty ideal but it is the only ideal that makes sense to uphold if change is truly the objective.

Conclusion

The hope and potential of a new framework would depend on widespread changes. From a few different starting points, the kind of change proposed here would require participation and buying in from various people and groups.

At the university level, the kind of preparation that teacher candidates would undergo would need to be vastly reworked. Just as teachers would need to be caring and conscious and committed, the professors in charge of readying them for the challenges ahead would need to be prepared to model imaginative care, competence and rigour. Teacher candidates should spend more time with students and exemplary teachers who might best prepare them for all that they might face in instituting change. They should be invited to tell their own stories and to situate themselves and their ideas within the bigger picture. They should be

made aware of the evaded curriculum and be invited to teach, live, and work in a manner that reflects joy, passion for justice and love of freedom (hooks, 1994).

Also, it seems that it might all be too late to begin in high school. Much of the formative foundation has been set well before students arrive in Grade Nine and so it would be wise to follow in the footsteps of *Because I am a girl* and begin programs to reach girls and boys in preschool and to persist throughout their school years. Beyond this, it would seem wise to involve new parents in the formation of their children, to inform them and to create programs that might sensitise them to the many obstacles that have the potential to curb their children's hope for success and achievement. Parents need to be made aware of the issues that are so incredibly pervasive that they have become largely commonplace and accepted.

In schools, staffs need to feel supported in their quest to challenge inequalities. They should be encouraged to reach out to families, to hear and tell stories, to offer as well as take opportunities to be involved in stimulating educational experiences and to express themselves as they allow others the same experience.

In the search for imagination and hope, the experiences and resilience of the oppressed should be channeled into effective learning and action. This will make it possible for all to see themselves as complex characters who are capable of seeing and respecting many points of view. Noddings, Egan and the critical theorists have provided the significant conceptual resources for our use. Imagination, opportunity and relationships allow us to hold out hope not only for modelling democratic conversation but also offer us real examples for attending to needs that we might turn to as we seek to reinvent our world over and over again through education.

It is thus that a new educational framework might come to be known and accepted in schools. It is thus that schools might become places that take on the responsibility of shaping young lives into hopeful places filled with imagination and care for others and the world.

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Appendix

The following figures offer an overview of the notions that are discussed in chapter 5 and serve to support the development of a critical framework for educating adolescent girls.

Figure 1. Ideas that Nourish Belonging

Ideas that Nourish Belonging

<p>Care</p> <p>The aim of <i>practice</i> of care- to assume that <i>all</i> people are adequately cared for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• constant dialogue from stimulating experiences• primacy of the particular• autonomy within our connections; connectedness leads to mutual responsibility; contact with one another• nature of souls• awareness of complexities, inequalities
<p>Imagination</p> <p>Break through conventions and presuppositions that hinder connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of who we are, who we are meant to be• Foster openness – construction and reconstruction of realities with others• Introduction of knowledge in context of human hopes, fears, passions
<p>Critical Pedagogy</p> <p>Offer contexts for participation in rituals, response, negotiations that give each person power, opportunities to make real life choices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work toward democratic ideals• Constructively confront issues of class, race, gender• Communal commitment to learning• Embrace sharing
<p>Organisations and teams</p> <p>Situate girls in their strength and connectedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voice; identifying issues of importance; mentoring• Accomplishments met with excitement; presence matters

Figure 2. Ideas that Foster Identity

Ideas that Foster Identity

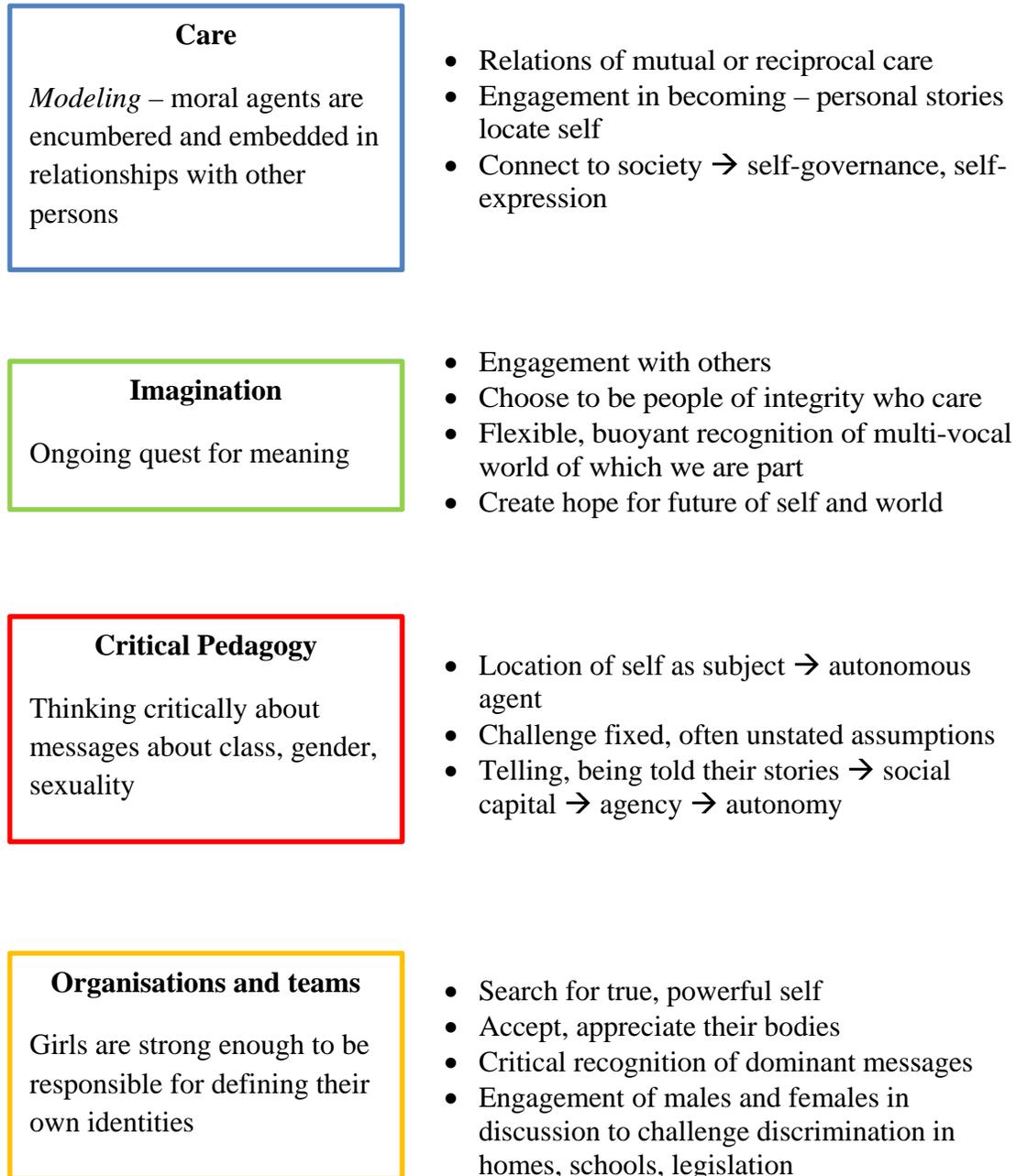


Figure 3. Ideas that Lead to Competence

Ideas that Lead to Competence

Care
Competency through dialogue

- Varied perspectives
- Forever works in progress

Imagination
Broadening ideas regarding what is important to know and understand

- Restless, impatient hopeful inquiry – need intensity, excitement, purpose
- Intellectual openness of good dialogue
- Creation of imaginative worlds into which we would enter perceptually, affectively and cognitively
- Myth and its construction → romantically establish boundaries of reality → philosophically map major features of the world
- Goal – world imaginativeness and deep seriousness of ironic kind of understanding
- Empathic imagination → address biases, prejudices, assumptions

Critical Pedagogy
Creating communities that work; is a highly charged political act

- Dialogue existential necessity
- Critical thinking leads to dialogue leads to critical thinking
- Education for liberation requires increased understanding and appreciation
- Empowerment → creative users of mass culture
- Citizens who can envision a different economic and social state
- Way we live and work → joy in cultural diversity, passion for justice, love of freedom, care for all

Organisations and teams

- Passion, interest and excitement lend themselves to achieving competency

Figure 4. Ideas that Encourage Caring Spirit

Ideas that Encourage Caring Spirit

