

**THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL EXPERIENCES ON THE
DERIVATION OF A TEACHER**

DEBORAH WOODCOCK

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ABSTRACT

I have examined, through an analysis of my autobiography, the influences of such cultural factors as patriarchy, economics, religion, and rural life on my 'way of being' as a teacher. I have reflected on how those influences affect my classroom management and interaction with the students, my colleagues, and the educational system in general.

My story was compiled from several writings which were assigned in Graduate level classes on teacher development. My research also included information gathered during an independent study on the needs and development of midcareer teachers. A study of the various forms of curriculum that co-exist in the classroom initiated my interest in the effects of cultural curriculum on my teaching. I examined my autobiography to identify significant characteristics and then studied the characteristics to determine cultural influences that seemed to foster them. I then researched each of the themes and traced possible ways they may have impacted my way of being in the classroom. I came to a greater understanding of the reasons behind some of my difficulties, and to greater acceptance and comfort with who I am and how I want to be in the classroom.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Background to the Study

Subject. This study, being an autobiography, focuses on myself as both the subject and author. I am a middle aged teacher with eight years teaching experience. The majority of that experience has been in programs for students with special needs, and English as a second language students in rural communities. This study will attempt to understand the cultural influences that impacted my performance as a teacher. Some of the irritants I want to understand are my feeling of exclusion from the regular body of educators, my feelings of inferiority and of consistently being judged and found wanting, and my dissatisfaction with my classroom management.

The questions. Working in a small, rural secondary school provides me with the opportunity to observe adolescent behaviour as the students interact with various teacher personalities. I have observed that group compliance with individual teachers can vary greatly. During my own brief assignments in regular, junior high school classrooms I struggled with establishing an

environment of mutual respect and cooperation. I observed that some of my peers, despite energetic and creative lessons, also experienced frustration in their efforts to bring the students ‘on side’ in the learning process. Other teachers however, working with the same students, seemed to have little difficulty instituting an environment of control and compliance. I question why I struggle and others do not. This study will attempt to understand this issue through examining how such cultural factors as rural life, patriarchy, economics, and religion influence a teacher’s ‘way of being’, and how those influences shape classroom management and interactions with students, colleagues, and the educational system?

Material and process. The autobiography used in this study is a re-examined and re-interpreted compilation of life stories I wrote over many years as study material for previous graduate level courses. My first experience with autobiographical inquiry was in the context of David Townsend’s 1993 summer class on “Understanding Teaching and Teacher Development.” Our first task in this course was to produce a metaphor for our professional life. At that time in my career I was frustrated with the lack

of effective programs for the learning disabled and special education students. As I saw it I was responsible for the futures of these students and held a rather negative perception of the education being provided for them. I wrote the following poem as a metaphor of my career and aspirations.

GOLD

There is a room off' filled with gloom
 where teachers come to gamble.
The room though old is tough and bold
 withstanding times that ramble.
Beneath the floors the government pours
 foundations ever changing.
From tiny parts to holistic starts
 philosophies are ranging.

And in this room careers are groomed,
 where teachers come to gamble.
Upon these walls the story falls
 of one particular amble.
Within the frame there runs a train;
 horizons ever seeking.
Emotions build and quite unwilling
 a passion blooms for teaching.

There is a room where futures bloom
 and teachers come to wager.
The pendulum swings and experience brings
 growth, both minor and major.
The clock's bold face records the race
 of time spent in revision.
The hour is young, I've just begun
 my journey in education.

Now in this room a shape doth loom

where teachers often hasten.
The table's an ear through which we hear
for we must always listen.
I've learned to heed my students' need
to paraphrase their yearning.
To know you're heard's the bottom word
for dignity and learning.

There is a room where futures bloom;
we teach in speculation.
Minds of gold are what we hold;
the lambs of education.
Their learning style decides the mile
each golden mind shall travel.
Some will soar while others pour
their verve on ruts and gravel.

There is a room oft' filled with gloom
where teachers do endeavour
To unfold the mind of gold
and give them wings for ever.
But below their feet the boards don't meet
and falls may go unbroken.
Some minds of gold do not unfold;
lambs suffer woes unspoken.

There is a room some feel the doom
where educations falter;
With gaping boards and words abhorred
the system tries to alter.
The gaps are fed with Special Ed.
in hopes the lambs recover,
But there's no match 'tween need and patch
the research doth discover.

There is a room where minds consume
as much as we can offer.
Some minds of gold we cannot hold
within our hallowed coffer.
They still slip through the cracks and glue
disturbing schools' foundation.

Our system's view of these students few
is one of consternation.

Below the room off' filled with doom
where students sometimes falter,
New plans are laid and programs made
with hopes the gloom will alter.
Gold through the cracks I can't get back
with methods of tradition.
I'll pan for gold and spirits bold
in a room of new condition.

The assignments and process of this class required that we write about our personal background, and our professional experiences. Ground work was laid to ensure a trusting and confidential environment where discussion and peer questions designed to encourage further depth of understanding by the author could be conducted. From this discussion and questioning we gained an overview of where we were and where we came from. The final task was to develop an action plan for the future. I was able to distill what I considered to be the core needs of the students I worked with, and the prime difficulties I was experiencing in the existing situation. I used the knowledge to develop a program plan that I hoped would more aptly meet the needs of my students.

The second class from which material was collected was the 1994 course on “Improving Teaching”. The professor, Cathy Campbell guided us in using what she called, “Self-Action to Growth”. She hypothesized that there are growth dimensions within specific phases of professional passage. The focus of this class was to identify developmental stages, locate the phase I was currently experiencing, and predict options for productively passing through those phases yet to be encountered. Campbell wrote a chapter on each of the six growth areas of interpersonal relationships, ego, instruction, content, conceptualization and socialization. The chapters served as an exploratory guide for descriptive writings of our behaviour, thoughts and feelings in relation to each dimension . This writing was the first stage of the Self-Action process and provided the data for the subsequent steps. Each chapter followed a pattern of writing, reflection, disclosure, feedback, data collection from various sources such as plan books, artifacts, feedback, and any other source which helped us see ourselves more clearly. The data from these steps was analyzed to make sense of our professional passage. Such writing and analysis is not a static process. A lifetime habit of writing about

experiences and our response to them was encouraged, the purpose always being to decide, ‘So what?’ and to develop resultant action plans.

The final contribution to the original stories was written for Richard Butt’s class, “Teachers’ Life Histories and Curriculum Development” which I attended in 1994. The process followed in this class had many similarities to those I have described in my first two autobiographical experiences. Butt’s work however, provides a theoretical and methodological underpinning for the use of autobiography in research in understanding teacher’s knowledge and development (Butt, Raymond and Yamigishi, 1988). In this class the students were guided through the four phases involved in the process of collaborative autobiography. We were assigned exploratory writing activities based on aspects of our current working reality, our current curriculum-in-use, and reflections on past personal and professional lives that contributed to a deeper understanding of our present thoughts and actions. The ground work was set to provide an environment conducive to open sharing, collaboration and reflection. Through critical analysis, collaborative probing, and personal reflection on these phases of

our realities, we wrote a projection of our future professional developmental directions, (see Butt, Raymond, and Yamagishi, 1988).

I began by reading and rereading the original stories. It was interesting to note that the same stories could lead my thinking in quite a different direction from the original processes that were applied to them. I recalled reading Sheehy's (1996) statement, "As you begin to put your own adult life into words, you will probably find that the story can be told in many different ways, depending on the kind of future to which you think it is leading. This should start you thinking about the possible relationships between your past self and your future self (P. 86)."

I collected data from the autobiography that appeared to form themes, and analyzed it to identify personal characteristics which may have been culturally transmitted. I examined the stories of each of my parents to identify patterns of thought and action. Patterns of my own attitudes and actions in my professional life were correlated with those identified in the life stories of my parents and myself. I then re-examined the stories, reading

‘through the cultural filters’ of rural culture, patriarchy, and religion, which appeared to be the major cultural factors within the themes identified and then engaged in readings in the three cultural fields. New knowledge derived from these readings enabled me to re-interpret my earlier analyses to evolve a deeper understanding of the origins of the values that shaped the patterns I observed in the autobiographical data. I had not anticipated that the historical investigation of the cultural soil in which my roots are embedded would go back to the Protestant Reformation. Sheehy makes reference to John S. Dunne’s book, *A Search for God in Time and Memory*, and his suggestion that we think about our life as a whole, all the elements of drama in it, in order to provide a sense of how it fits into the larger historical and generational saga of our times.

Where I was coming from. I recently made a trip back to my childhood home in southern Saskatchewan. The spring thaw had caused major flood damage along the creek beds and rivers on my route. Melt water had eroded the banks and I observed a clump of willows hanging precariously from the embankment of a stream. Their exposed roots clung desperately to the

crumbling soil. Much like the willows, the foundation of my roots have crumbled. My search in understanding the flood of change that has eroded my foundation has lead to an investigation of the soil my roots are embedded in.

While I was investigating my cultural soil in my personal life I was also enrolled in a Masters of Education program at the university of Lethbridge. When I began this program I did not have a clear vision of what it was I wanted to study. As I got more involved in the course work teacher development evolved as my focus. I registered in a practicum course in which I involved a colleague in a collaborative study of the type and degree of assistance I offered my students in special education. I concluded that due to a product based evaluation system I lead students to arrive at the correct answer within an appropriate time in order to complete assignments which made up a large portion of their final grade. While striving for an adequate product it was difficult to focus on process, and teach the students how to learn. An alternative method of evaluating students was required. However, with most students integrated into the regular classes this is counter to the

goal of close assimilation. This problem is unsolved and demands attention. The biggest effect this experience with self examination had was to make me less critical of myself. Initially I felt that the problem was solely with my teaching methods. Doing an investigative study on the problem allowed me to see a broader perspective of the situation. It was a productive growth experience.

“ The great contributions of psychologists in our time - Carl Jung, Otto Rank, Norman O. Brown, and Eric Berne - has been to show that humans tend to be motivated by deep insecurity. We feel alone and search for the security derived from being validated by others (Redfield, 1996, P. 21).”

Through my search I realized that the validation I sought after most was from my father and my husband. My response to the role of patriarchy became a major focus in the initial stages of my search. I did a lot of writing in my attempts to understand, and to quell the anger I felt at the chase for their elusive validation. This writing uncovered a second influence in my life, that of religion.

We are validated only for actions and attitudes that fit our particular culture and the United Church was a large component in the cultural soil I was investigating. My quest for validation necessitated measuring up to external measures of thought and action. I recognized a need to develop my own standards of measure. I found that determining my values was an exploration of nebulous criteria. Now instead of writing I began reading. My interest may also have been influenced by the explosion of literature on spiritual and psychological development. These concerns are obviously a part of current cultural changes stimulated by issues such as world trade, multiculturalism, and the feminist movement. My need to look inward for approval and standards directed my reading to books such as Benjamin Hoff's The Tao of Pooh, and The Te of Piglett , a study of the Eastern religion of Taoism, and The Celestine Prophecy, a 'new age' vision of spirituality and personal development.

Through this study I have also read material that examines the cultural influences of rural life, the Protestant revolution, and the foundations of patriarchy. A deeper understanding of the cultural base from which I

derived my reality has allowed me to redirect and refresh my purpose and approach within the classroom.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW
Autobiography and Teacher Development

Discovering a research methodology. Experiences in graduate level courses under the direction of Dr. Richard Butt, Dr. David Townsend, and Dr. Cathy Campbell introduced me to the formalized method of researching teacher knowledge and development through a study of teachers life stories. The ‘scholarly’ use of autobiography lent credence to a process I had seen only as an approach to personal growth and understanding. I was intrigued with expanding my focus to research my professional development as a teacher. The process I developed for conducting this study evolved out of my experiences in autobiographical writing described in the last chapter but I also dug deeper into the literature to discover the scholarly ground for my method.

Experiencing the literature. I have been struggling with the idea of change in my professional life. My teaching has been predominantly in

special education and I have been contemplating a request to be moved to the regular classroom as an opportunity to conquer some new horizons and old difficulties. This need for change follows a general pattern for adult development. I was interested in the chronological pattern of development that Chickering (1976) noted. He indicated that the early thirties are a time when the initial commitments in terms of work, marriage and family are reexamined, and their meaning and purpose are questioned. In the forties, however, the realization that time is finite and that, unless a change is made in careers, or there is a reaffirmation of the present career, there will be a degree of certain frustration. When I read Evans (1989) I identified with his findings that in midcareer a perception develops regarding one's options both within and outside one's current organization; a distinct contrast to early career options which indicated a clear path and organizational plan for future development. There is a perception of reduced career opportunity and uncertainty about career futures.

I have two fears in relation to making a move to the regular classroom.

Firstly I realize that time is finite and I fear leaving loose ends in my career.

I have yet to develop an effective and comfortable personal system of

classroom management with a large group of students. Classroom management definitely feels like a loose end. Paradoxically I fear that I am truly inept in this area and would prove myself to be a poor teacher.

Although I recognized these fears before I began this study I found that some of the literature I used for the project was motivational. For example, Redfield, (1996, P.58) states “ The kind of future humans will create is our choice. We can embrace our inherent spirituality and find purpose in discovering who we are and where we can go, or we can encapsulate ourselves in a vision of fear”. I am determined not to remain “encapsulated”. Smith’s (1994) observations on writing served as motivation and direction in the process of realizing my professional growth. I felt reassured to note that as we pass through the various stages of teacher development, we inevitably face a great many fears, and that writing serves as a meditation, “ ...a gaining of the true measure of one’s situation. ... [It is a sort of] de-reflection,” which helps the teacher to understand rather than explain teaching. Understanding, accepting, and being at peace with ones’ ‘self’ provides a secure base from which we may be more inclined to risk orchestrating our own growth.

These introductions to the ‘scholarly’ use of autobiography, and the developmental experiences with self examination, and personal writings underscore my initial reason for choosing an autobiographical approach for this study.

My second reason for deciding on autobiographical research methodology came from a study on professional development. I did an independent study on “Issues in Motivating Midcareer Teachers.” I have made reference above to some of the developmental patterns discussed in the literature I reviewed for this project. It concluded that the most efficient actions involved intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards; that change has to come from within. It can seldom be effectively forced from without. My observation in this previous study lends support to Lansmann's (1988) statement that the teacher has a responsibility for planning and achieving their own renewal. I agree with his premise that the capacity to change must be accompanied with the desire to change. The most effective approach in assisting teachers would seem to be those activities which rekindle the inner satisfaction. Autobiographical research incorporates these criteria. It must

be planned and achieved by the individual, and it provides the intrinsic satisfaction of self knowledge and discovery.

The intelligible focus for this study became clear to me when I took a curriculum studies course from Dr. David Smith, and had the occasion to hear him speak on “Graduate Studies and the Recovery of Self.” In his address he stated, “One of the things we must do as graduate students and scholars is to work hard and fight to protect the conditions under which life in its fullest measures can go on;” I recognized that the precise problem I was having in the larger classroom was that my classroom management was not conducive to “Life in its fullest measure.” Dr. Smith went on to say that “In order to take up this task, this struggle, the most essential requirement is that we understand our culture as deeply as possible...” Here again was a scholarly application for the personal study I was engaged in. Dr. Smith advised in the same presentation that, “In a deep sense, though, really, parents are simply metaphors or analogies for culture. To be born again, born of one’s own deep self, one has to undertake the long hard journey into one’s own culture, to examine it critically, to see how one has been shaped

by it, constructed through it -- not for the purpose of abandoning it but for the pedagogical purpose of mediating it into the future.” Such a journey is enveloped in autobiographical research.

In my search of the professional literature dealing directly with autobiographical research methods I found frequent references to the proposed value of narrative methods. Elbaz, (1983) suggests that the majority of research done in the field of teacher and curriculum development has involved strategies imposed from the outside. There is concern that the curriculum developer in essence works on the teacher to modify his/her behaviour, which in turn creates teacher tension and resistance for change. When I read Brown (1990) I reflected briefly on what I understand about quantitative research methods. She indicates that, “... past histories and research approaches have been constructed according to ideological, and political needs based on power relationships. Thus, research methodologies are structured by the power relationships of the people who construct them (P. 47).”

I noted growing support for research methods which empower the subjects, are nonquantitative and avoid hierarchies. Research without hierarchial frameworks avoids the purpose of judging my practice as a teacher, and focuses instead on illuminating the values, beliefs, and assumptions that are the foundation of my way of being in my practice. I appreciate Grundy's (1987) statement, "... [Such research] is not objective action; that is, it is not action upon an 'object' or even a person who has been 'objectified'. It is subjective action; that is, it is the action of a subject in the universe acting with another subject (p. 14)." Professional development approached from this type of non-evaluative interaction encourages change rather than creating a resistance to it. Grundy continues, "... it is judged according to whether the interpreted meaning assisted the process of making judgements about how to act rationally or morally."

A process of discerning teacher knowledge was described by Clandinin (1986). This process became known as Personal Practical Knowledge, or PPK. It involves the process of reflecting on and analyzing narrated episodes of action and interaction within the classroom. Butt and Raymond

(1986) offer an alternative concept of teachers' knowledge in their notion of autobiographical praxis. They focus on teachers' knowledge as a dynamic synergy of both the substances and process of teachers' knowledge as well as its evolution and expression throughout a teacher's life history through dialectical relationships between person and context, thought and action. A statement that I most closely identified with was,

Yet, regardless of all these transformations, teachers do not appear to lose track of where they came from. Significant others, events or relationships that occurred prior to teacher education are repeatedly invoked to infuse meaning and purpose to these transformations. Conversely, if classroom realities or imposed institutional changes challenge the teacher at the very core of these developmental areas, these might precipitate inner struggles and deeply felt contradictions leading to slow transformations, disaffirmation, or possibly withdrawal (Raymond, Butt, and Townsend, 1989, P. 13).

Through this study I discovered personal examples of such contradictions. I will address these 'knots' in a later chapter.

I believe that the idea of examining the relationships among the past, present and future which are an incognizant part of the interactions between person and circumstance, becomes a study of the culture that shaped the individual. I appreciated the way Brown (1990) described cultural studies. She states, "... a redefined meaning of the term 'culture' as all that we do, say and

believe, that is the practice of everyday living [replaces the] aesthetic criteria based on a notion of culture as the “best” that has been thought and created in the world as defined by T.S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold, for instance. Instead, cultural studies offer an analysis of how ideology is produced and functions ... (p. 14).”

I found the preface to Gianini-Belotti’s book Little Girls: social conditioning was useful. It states, “Our individuality has profound roots which escape us because they do not belong to us. Without our knowledge, others have cultivated them for us.” There is an interconnectedness between understanding one’s present and one’s past. There is also a connection between the culture that is lived and the language used to tell about the living of it. Brown notes, “The ways that people can live, their social practices, are ‘constructed’ by the way these practices can be spoken about or conceptualized in language (p. 15).” In essence then, the analysis of autobiography, or the way one speaks about his or her life, provides an understanding of the social make up of that life, and what that life can become. In this way autobiographical research based on a teacher’s story

presents a window through which one can become cognizant of the culture that shaped the teacher's 'ways of being', and the ways he or she can become. Raymond et al (1989) argue that autobiography is a vital form of personal and professional inquiry and indicate that in order to know what to do in the future we must come to know ourselves and how we came to be that way.

This study of the literature shows that the examination of culture through autobiographical research has potential as a tool of personal professional development. In the next several chapters I will use this method to examine the influences of such cultural factors as patriarchy, religion, economics, and rural life on my personal and professional development. In particular I will determine how those influences affect such aspects of my teaching as interactions with students and colleagues, planning and risk taking, decision making and classroom management. I hope that this inquiry will promote mindfulness in my everyday classroom life and increase the potential of professional growth and enhanced well being.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

Themes from the Autobiography:

Oppression and Power, Service and Devotion

Ecumenical themes. The process of analyzing my autobiographical writings has allowed me to see the three characters, my mother, my father, and myself, in both protagonist and antagonist roles in influencing my derivation as a teacher. I have inherited many strengths and talents that have held me in good stead. I have also absorbed several perceptual flaws that have caused me anguish and difficulty in my teaching. I perused literature in general in light of this tone of conflict and identified two ecumenical themes that intertwine and often merge. Literature is rich in themes of service and devotion, as well as oppression and power. Even young children are familiar with the devotion of Snow White, or The Lion King's Sarabi and Scar, and with the oppression experienced by Oliver Twist and Fagin, or Cinderella. Although they are different, service and oppression are often synonymous.

There is a duality in the nature of these themes. In the stories, service represents good and is respected, and yet delineates low class and scorn. Devotion represents gentle ministering as well as austere single mindedness. The oppressed can portray innocence and arouse compassion, while at the same time characterize the wicked and provoke reprisal. Power is to be scorned yet strived for. It depicts evil and yet narrates salvation. Such dualism is manifest in my autobiography. These themes of power and oppression, as well as devotion and service were the dominant strands woven through the lives of my parents, and evident in my ways of being as a teacher.

Oppression and power. Throughout the analysis of my autobiographical writing I was aware that I had veiled the stories with a generally negative, or oppressive slant. A partial explanation for this may be that I perceive this study as a method of improving my teaching. From that perspective I may have focused more strongly on the aspects that were troublesome. This however does not account for a similar tone in the accounts of my parents' life stories. In response to this observation I have become more conscious

of my tone and perspective in daily conversation. I am in regular contact with my parents. I have noted a frequent tendency for conversation with my father to swing to a review of political difficulties and injustices, predominantly those pertaining to the economic inviability of small farms in today's world. Such conversations usually have the effect of validating my father's sense of helplessness and oppression. My mother is most often less intense in her perception of powerless. Like Oliver, although she is no less concerned with or involved in the matters, she tended to acknowledge the circumstances and move on. This is possibly due in part to the secondary position allotted to women in our culture. Although she held a small portion of the land in her name, and although she was consulted on various farm decisions, my father was an authoritarian and her opinion held little weight in what action was ultimately taken. Although she was knowledgeable about world circumstances, and was politically active, the responsibility of running a viable operation on the farm was entirely directed by my father. Neither she nor Oliver were expected to fight the system in order to improve their lot in life.

The oppression my mother felt was not so much from the political world of power and economics, as from her position within our culture; from the subordination of women within family, community, and the macrocosm of society. This was compounded by the lower class afforded rural people. Her focus of concerns were personal. Occasionally my conversations with my mother involve religion and spirituality. Many years ago she voiced anger and frustration with the oppression she perceived. More recently though she assumes a tone of uncertainty and personal ponderance. Both of these tonal traits that I observed in my parents are evident in the discussion of my performance as a teacher. I have identified several problem causing factors over which I feel I have no control. I have often felt oppressed and powerless and have simply survived the existing situation. For example, I usually viewed the lack of guidelines, curriculum, and material in the realm of special education as a difficulty imposed by the political structure of the discipline. Although such circumstances do demand a higher level of creativity in providing for the individualized educational needs, I recognize that there is also a freedom available to explore opportunities and reach beyond the confines imposed by those same support systems I felt were

lacking. I have experienced the feelings of futility in the shadow of oppression, as well as the exhilaration and power of being limited only by my own imagination and confidence.

The language I chose in my autobiography to describe events and attitudes was also of interest. My awareness of, and response to the class stratification in my cultural heritage is revealed in my writing by the use of phrases such as, “pretentious air of aristocracy.” There is a sense of opposing sides; of ‘them and us’. I believe my mother conveyed this duality of societal structure most strongly in my life. Within her family she likened her own life situation to that of a ‘Hill Billy’ while she perceived her sisters to be rather sophisticated and aristocratic. She still frequently makes reference to ‘farm’ things and ‘city’ things, the city things always being of better quality or higher status. She habitually identified personally with peasantry or feudal serfdom.

Both my parents present an inferiority complex as a significant part of their beings. The belief in their subordinate position, particularly a belief that

others see them as inferior, permeates their daily conversation. My mother's feelings are predominantly connected to relations with her family and her position as a farm wife. My father's inferior self perception is primarily associated with the political community at all levels. Within the community he senses that he is frequently excluded or discounted. This can be associated with a variety of factors including economic status, exclusion from military service, and most recently, his status as a senior citizen. In the larger society his attitude of subordination is primarily related to political factors involved in the economic stratification of Western culture, and the inferior position afforded the agricultural segment. He seems to be 'stuck' in a negative view of the world in general. The isolation of life in rural Saskatchewan contributes to circumstances that my father extols as oppressive. Freire's (1970) description closely fits my father. "The peasant is a dependent. He can't say what he wants. Before he discovers his dependence, he suffers. He lets off steam at home, where he shouts at his children, ... and despairs. He complains about his wife and thinks everything is dreadful. He doesn't let off steam with the boss because he thinks the boss is a superior being (P.51)."

For years my father was an active member of the Farmers' Union. He saw potential in breaking the political oppression by breaking the isolation of being an individual farmer. There was a duality in his support of unions however. Like my mother he perceived opposing sides between urban wage earners and farmers. He was adamant that the labor unions, or the middle men, were the reason farm produce did not net the farmer a fair income. He theorized that there were too many greedy hands between the producer and the consumer. My father had many philosophies about reducing the economic competition. His theorizing , “ like Hamlet, necessitates a continuing monologue on the complexity of it all, while the world tumbles down around us (Apple, 1990, P.103).”

In my professional life I too exhibited attitudes of inferiority. I felt angry and defensive when ‘regular’ students and staff express a belief that I am not a *real* teacher, or that special education teachers don’t have the knowledge or background to teach ‘regular’ classes. I felt that I was perceived as not good enough to be accepted and respected on an equal basis with other teachers. I believed that special education was the feudal

serfdom of the educational enterprise. I saw antagonists in both societal and political realms. There was a sense of power in developing a unique program to meet the individual needs of my students. There was also the oppression of being deemed of low priority when the program, approved by the administration in the spring, was squashed in the fall because the space was needed for technology. I have felt patronized by administration when my advocations on the students' behalf were nodded to and dismissed. The students I work with usually experience oppressive life situations. In our industrialized world the careers available to students who do poorly in school are usually provide very little status or financial stability. I feel I have a responsibility to the students, not only to prepare them for the world they will experience as adults, but to teach them to be critical thinkers with the skills to become activists against the oppression they face. This is a daunting role when the students in general already have low self image and confidence. I enjoy the authenticity and purpose. I hate feeling trapped by government mandates and school priorities. Perhaps my parents also had a love/hate relationship with the land that provided for them and at the same time held them helpless over what it would yield. I remember as a young

child fearfully praying for rain. My parents' feelings of powerlessness led me to believe that our very survival was threatened. As a teacher I have frequently considered requesting a transfer out of special education. Like Simba in the children's story, "The Lion King" my confidence is sometimes shaken by oppressors and I need time for self appraisal and reflection in order to regenerate my power.

Service and devotion. Most of my working experiences have involved some facet of service. My first job was caring for residents of a training school for mentally handicapped children and adults. While I was occupied as a housewife I served on family and community service committees, church boards, Boy Scouts and Girl Guide groups. Through experiences with my son, I served in an executive position in an organization for children with learning disabilities. Although his struggle through academia afforded me many learning opportunities, I will leave it to him to tell his own story - at a time when the telling will promote his own growth. When I re-entered the work force prior to my teaching career I worked in the school system with a mentally handicapped teen. My involvement in these service

positions provided me with a personal sense of satisfaction. I was able to contribute to the larger world beyond my own home and family. I could see where my involvement made a positive difference in the lives of others. I received respect and public notice from the community. My inclination to serve however, was larger than obtaining a sense of satisfaction. A significant influence on my decision to become a teacher was an idealistic, romanticized perception that the general public saw teachers as exemplary citizens. Perhaps my idealistic impression of the public view of teachers was influenced by the fact that one of the only accounts presented to us as students, of women having a notable role in history were the stories of early school teachers, who were bound by excessively strict social rules, and thereby attained an image of model stature. This perception was reinforced by the respect commanded by my own teachers, and was driven home by the stern attitude my mother had about misbehavior and how she would have handled the classroom. Perhaps some of my insecurities as a teacher in a larger classroom are due to the knowledge that my management would not have met her expectations. I believe that my biggest personal goal was to attain a respected, praiseworthy image. I wanted to be able to give an

assured, positive answer to the echo of, “what would others think of you now?” My efforts in making my place in the world was based on artificial approval instead of developing an authentic place for my ‘self’.

This same desire to gain public approval through service was evident in the stories of my parents’. In my father’s case, there was public honor for the service of one’s country. It is possible that Dad’s almost ‘driven’ need to serve was an unconscious effort to earn, through his service to the community, the respect that was denied to him when a medical condition deterred him from serving in the forces during the war. His devotion to serving others was broader than his connection to the local Legion however. He quietly helped where ever he believed that the community or an individual was in need. He seemed to have a compulsion to maintain his self image as a ‘servant’. He was particularly devoted to the United Church. He was a lifelong member and served many terms in almost every lay capacity. My mother also served the community through her work with the church, children’s groups, and community social events of all kinds. Her demeanor was different than my father’s in that she was less recanted in her

service and thoroughly enjoyed the social interaction and involvement. My mother's air of oppression in service was more prevalent within her private life. In her subordinate role as a farm wife she endured extreme physical labor, especially in the years of her relative youth. Both my parents were frugal and hard working. There were rare occasions when outside help was hired. My mother was a tiny person, but regularly did the work of a hired man. Although she was proud of her accomplishments she was not the rugged outdoor type, and frequently voiced the anguish of oppression. She was a martyr. She felt pride and satisfaction in servitude and yet was resentful of her subordinate position. My parents both accepted service as a natural way of life.

There is a duality in the image of those who serve. From the perception of piety, service is the ultimate quality for gaining acceptance. The Christian faith teaches people to strive for the judgement, "Well done, good and faithful servant;..." (Matthew, 24:23). On the other hand, the cultural class afforded the servant by his fellow citizens is the lowest status of any wage earner. Only those who do not earn a wage are given less status and

respect.

The exception to a cultural disrespect for those who do not earn a wage is the tradition of women being given class status vicariously through her husband. This patriarchal tradition has its own vice which indicates that the woman has no means of procuring her personal worth except through either economic income (and most traditional female vocations are equivalent to that of servants), or the attachment to a male of desirable status.

There seems to be a public and political need to attribute the low status of a servant to the teaching profession. Teaching has been perceived as a feminine vocation. That in itself brings low status. In North American society there has been little value or regard for the raising and care of children. It has been noted that we pay more to have our garbage collected than to have our children cared for in a day care. There is no immediate public nor monetary gain in seeing that children are cared for or educated outside the home. It is a personal service, perhaps perceived to be of predominant benefit to the mother by releasing her from child care responsibilities, and thus allowing her to gain employment. In our capitalist

society there is little value afforded an enterprise that does not produce a notable profit and contribute to the gross national product of the country. Education is experienced as a deficit by government, and thereby taxpayers. There is little honor given for the service provided. There is also a personal betrayal in dedicated service. If it is not balanced with a strong self-knowledge and self-respect, there is a real danger that the 'self' may be given up in the oppressive obligation to serve others. This is the opposite of personal and professional empowerment.

Many of my experiences in special education have been a microcosm of the teaching profession within the larger public society. Within the school system the position of working with learning disabled or mentally handicapped students is often given low status. A teacher I worked with had attained her bachelor of education with honors. Her major subject area was English although she had significant experience working with mentally handicapped students. When she requested a transfer from special education to high school English, comments from colleagues questioned how a special education teacher could possibly teach high school English. It

is not unusual for regular stream teachers to perceive that special education teachers do not have abilities equal to their own. I have been told by students that I am not a real teacher. The respect as an exemplary member of society that I had expected to gain through membership in the teaching profession was not realistic.

Robert Redfield (1956) writes about career satisfaction in societies that have experienced rapid cultural change. He states, “The purposes that are created in early life ... are not always the purposes that the individual finds he can realize; or the ideals and purposes of mutual help and sacrifice for the community are not the ideals and purposes which he may be called upon to realize in his working life. The ends of life become obscure. Educated women find themselves doing many things which are immediately necessary but so not seem to be directed toward significant ends. People develop wants whose satisfaction brings no satisfaction (P.63).”

On a daily basis I experience the duality of honor and low status intrinsic in service. I feel personal gratification in working with the less fortunate

students, and am given recognition by the colleagues I work most closely with. When we discuss the difficulties involved with special needs students a common comment from those I am closest to is, “You’re a saint. I could never do it.” In contrast, I am aware that some of my colleagues do not entirely accept me as an equal member of the staff. They occasionally imply a belief that, because I work with individuals or small groups of students who may not achieve a traditional education (which would lead to productive employment in our capitalist society), my work is insignificant.

In my experiences as itinerant teacher I learned to be flexible beyond what I felt was reasonable because I felt I had no control. I silently accepted injustices and neglect as a natural part of a position that is relegated inferior status. The first few years of my career required that I provide classes in as many as five schools during the week. I was not a regular part of any staff, and took no initiative to make my needs or dissatisfaction known. As a female I absorbed a self denying attitude. My mother denied her own physical limitations to the point of damaging her health in her dedication to laboring on the family farm. Her needs were usually only spoken of in

retrospect, with a general feeling of oppression, bitterness, and sorrow.

Another factor in my inclination to silently deal with circumstances, was that I understood that there was honor in sacrifice and hard work. My parents were practical people, determined to succeed by their own ingenuity and effort. Their creativity and skill contributed to the well being of their family and community. In the community my father served reticently where ever he perceived a need. His family, as an extension of himself, was often subordinated in his dedication to the needs of those who were in greater need. My cultural background was formed around the idea that hard work earned respect. I recall my father frequently saying with disgust that it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. Such 'grease' was gained through talk instead of effort and so was seen to be disrespectful. Respect was a major purpose in life. A purpose that seems to be an elusive thread throughout my autobiography. As a child I can remember my Mother reprimanding me with the words, "What would others think of you now?" The entity of 'self' was unimportant in light of the public 'other'.

The attitude of self denial is evident in my experiences and difficulties in classroom management. In my narration of my teaching experiences I noted that I tend to be flexible and ready to incorporate interests and ideas as they arise. This is reflective of not recognizing clearly my personal limits. If a request seems logical and has the potential of being a productive learning experience I have difficulty maintaining a dominant value on my personal agenda. This tendency to serve others at the expense of self is reflected in many of my life experiences.

I absorbed the belief that personal value and worth was attained by serving through a direct experience. My father had helped out a neighboring widow who wanted to pay him for his work. Knowing that it was difficult for her he respected her dignity and arranged for her to give his daughters piano lessons in payment. I did poorly and wanted desperately to quit the lessons. Initially I was not aware of the arrangement but when I was told of the situation I willingly played the pawn and endured the lessons. Redfield (1956) notes that a value common to peasant populations is to teach the young endurance and hard work rather than to take risks and achieve

personal goals. On the surface the act of service appears worthy of respect and appreciation. There is, however, a disfunctionality in service to others. In my role as a teacher, by adopting the stance of serving the students by putting their desires ahead of my own, by enduring the situation rather than risking enforcing my goals, I only succeeded in creating a situation where the students learned the exhilaration of possessing rampant power. The cause of this situation in my classroom is the matter of taking control. Although I have ineffectually resorted to the oppressive authoritarian method I experienced from my own teachers, and from my parents, taking the role of the oppressor is contrary to my desired being. It is something that I cannot and will not incorporate as my personal management style. Wagner (1983) described such cognitive dilemmas as 'Knots'. These knots are the result of conflicting personal imperatives. In the case of my classroom management the first imperative I perceive is that I must maintain control over the classroom conduct of the students. My image of a good teacher is one who does not tolerate imprudence of any kind. I must impose an absolute presence of authority. The second imperative derives from my personal experiences of oppression under various cultural traditions. I

believe that all people regardless of age or sex, are entirely equal. As an equal I cannot dominate or control others. My knot is that I must control as a teacher but as an individual I will not impose the oppressive judgement and control that is so detrimental to growth, self knowledge, and independence. Discovering a method of emancipatory management is the only way out of this struggle.

CHAPTER IV
INTERPRETATION
Autobiographical Themes and Cultural Elements

I noted a frequent merger between devotion and service, and oppression and power. There is also a coalescence in the cultural origin of the themes.

There were four elements that I identified as the foci for this study. Three of them, rural life, patriarchy and religion are significant. The fourth, economics is so intertwined in rural culture and religion that it is difficult to distill it as an independent theme.

The influence of rural culture. The cultural soil that nurtured my development was that of a southern Saskatchewan farming community. Although I have lived all of my adult life in small urban localities, rural life is a part of my basic fabric. I believe that the themes of service and devotion, as well as oppression and power were all integral parts of the rural culture.

In the rural area where I grew up there was, and still is, a dominant attitude of farmers being victims. They perceive themselves to be victims of the market system, the government, labour unions, and the transportation system, to say nothing of the powerlessness over the soil and the weather. There is an urgency to control all that they can in the process of making their living, and yet their perceived helplessness reduces the action of fighting the oppression to complaining and a perpetual negativity of thought. Few can accept their role as a chain in the universe rather than a victim. Few recognize what they have in preference of focusing on what they do not have. The romanticized ideal of quiet country living is only an image.

My mother was always fiercely loyal and proud of farming and all that it stands for, but many of her attitudes relay an envy and desire for the life she associated with the city. At the same time she often expressed contempt for those who lived in cities. Although my father's attitude was focused on the structures of society more than the people within it, he demonstrated a similar feeling of rural oppression. Robert Redfield (1956) remarks on the two halves that compose the total society; there are two kinds of people,

peasants and a more urban (or at least manorial) elite. He goes on to state,

The student will want also to describe the prestige or contempt, the feelings of superiority or inferiority, and the examples of excellence to be emulated or of baseness to be avoided that may be present in the relations between peasant and the elite. ... The educated man, whose life is in part in the local community and in part - at least mentally - in more urban circles, looks down on the peasant. ... On his side the peasant admits his relative inferiority as to culture and manners but naturally claims virtues accorded him and sees the city man as idle, or false, or extravagant. He sees himself never the less with a way of life morally superior to that of the townsman.(P. 38)

This moral superiority that is perceived is derived from the notion that profit and personal gain, which is most often associated with the market place, is synchronous with greed and aggression, while the production of food is equated with the notion of nurturing service to humanity. This morality is a point of pride in the face of other dominant perceptions of farmers being poor, less intelligent, and less culturally refined. Redfield(1956) also notes that this demeaning attitude toward those who work the land is exhibited in great literature as well. He states, ““Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” , exclaimed Hamlet in one of his frequent moods of self-depreciation (P.38).”

In past decades there was a division of wealth between the peasant, who

seldom owned his land or home and often lived on what was left over after the land owner took what was deemed to be his share, and those in the cities who could at least feel ownership of what pay they received. Since colonization, especially in North America, the lot of the farmer has changed significantly. There is as much variance in the affluence among farmers as there is among urban people. This change in status from serf to land owner has not changed people's thinking. The two halves of society are still very much a part of cultural reality. Redfield (1956) refers to studies done by Professor Raymond Firth concerning the change in social structure that occurred in England when the common field system changed to private enclosure. He notes that, "[Although] the social structure in England changed ... the ideals of many people were still much as before, and even some of their earlier expectations lingered on (P. 34)." It would seem that social structures that denote subcultures are systems of elements which last and which everyone takes account of. As a teacher I have unwittingly been a part of perpetuating the status-quo. Apple (1990) states that, "students in most schools and in urban centers in particular are presented with a view that serves to legitimate the existing social order ...(P.102)."

Redfield noted an inferiority in culture, and a baseness of character that holds the rural culture in an inferior, and perhaps oppressed position in society. It is possible that those same traits are the elements that hold the culture of special education in the low status position that exists within the school system. The relative economic affluence provided by positions for untrained labour, which is the level of employment that most special education students find themselves, would also parallel the original economic situations of the serfs and early farmers. Because of my rural background I can bring a level of personal understanding and empathy to an educational subculture that exhibits many parallels.

My rural cultural background provides other positive attributes. I frequently feel frustrated with the seeming lack of progress I am able to elicit, from the students on a daily level, and from society as a whole in respect to the general regard given to special education. I find it difficult to deal with complacency and have a need to feel productive in my work, perhaps in an effort to gain the respect of those who seem to scorn what I do. In his research, Aceves (1974) observed that within the agricultural culture

industriousness is a prime virtue. He suggests that this emphasis is supported by the principals of security and respect. Both my parents were industrious, practical people. Redfield's(1956) research shows that in French Canadian rural culture, labour was a counterpart to dignity. A major goal in my life has been to earn the dignity for myself and my students that I believe is owed to all people, but is often denied to those deemed to be subordinate within society.

Redfield (1956) referred to Evans-Pritchard's statement that, "Men are born into [cultural structures] or enter them in later life, and move out of them at death; the structures endure." It would follow that elements of rural life that were prominent during the era of the settlement of North America would endure. I have mentioned that an inclination to service is a dominant theme in my autobiography. There is a strong sense of community and responsibility for the needs of others; a spirit similar to those evident in early barn raisings and quilting bees. It is interesting to note that there is a similar spirit among the staff of my school. There is a Three Musketeers' attitude; a dedication to work and play together and to support each other.

Although the sample is too small to be valid it is interesting to note that 74% of the staff members have a rural community background, and 39% have an actual farm background. The ‘culture’ of our staff would support both Redfield’s reference to the strong morals within the rural culture and Aceves’ observation of the industriousness and respect within rural culture.

The hypothesis of two distinct halves, rural and urban, making up the whole of society, and the superior and inferior status attributed to each would validate the feelings of oppression felt by my parents. In one of his studies Redfield noted that people of the city showed an arrogant manner toward the villager. The villagers in turn were observed to react in a similar manner to the European peasants in that they were suspicious, evasive and non-responsive. I recognize that my conduct in a large, regular classroom was similar to that of the peasants.

Firstly, I was often suspicious of the motives of students. Returning to the classroom as a teacher after more than fifteen years away from the public school environment was a culture shock. My mind had been imprinted with

an idealistic image where students were well mannered primarily because misbehavior of any kind was not tolerated. I recently visited with a friend who grew up in a neighbouring town and attended school the same time I did. The conversation revolved around the value of tutoring a specific disability as opposed to general classroom instruction. I mentioned that it was a poor comparison because the tutored student would not be distracted by the occasional spit-ball, or peer conversation and clowning. My friend was shocked to think that such activities were 'allowed' in today's classrooms. Like me, he recalled a stern atmosphere where few students risked the humiliation meted out for any impropriety. When the reality of student behaviour in the classroom did not correspond with what I envisioned I became suspicious that there was a disruptive motive behind many of the general classroom activities. This discomfort stood in the way of interacting from a personal or instinctive core. Although I occasionally tried, I had great difficulty administering the firm, inflexibility that had oppressed the classrooms of my youth. I was at a loss as to how I could control the behaviours so that learning could take place. In a later chapter I will discuss the confusing discomfort with and need for control.

Secondly, I evaded situations in which ‘the real me’ might be discovered and exposed. I lived with an oppressive feeling of being continually judged and found wanting. I kept my classroom door shut in an attempt to preserve my privacy.

There is a relationship between an attitude of superiority and the act of judgement. In order for a person or a culture to perceive itself superior to another, there is a necessity to judge the other and find flaws not acknowledged in itself. I suspect the peasants evasiveness was a response to the arrogant manner shown the by the urban culture. I had previously attributed my personal evasion of scrutiny to a patriarchal, authoritarian home. The true cultural origin of this factor in my development would require significantly further study. It is sufficient for this study to note that both the superior position of males and of urban cultures would require a degree of judgement of either females or of rural people. The fact that I am both female and of rural background validates my feeling of being judged to be inferior.

Thirdly, I was non-responsive to actions that did not comply with my expectations. I am inclined to keep a low profile when confronted with student improprieties. This non-responsiveness was also evident in my lack of interactions with other teachers. Earlier in my career I did not respond to affronts I experienced as an itinerant teacher. It was not unusual to arrive at a school at some point during the day and find that the students I worked with were away on a field trip or other out of school activity. I took such events silently even though the waste of my time due to a lack of information exasperated me. Although I recognized my lack of reaction and was perplexed and annoyed by it, I assumed it to be a personality trait. In both my professional and personal life I was non-responsive when faced with offensiveness from someone I perceived to be dominant.

This is not unique to the effects of rural culture. Under the oppression of patriarchy, austere educational environments, and religion I was indoctrinated to believe that I was inferior to males, adults, and the public conscience - which included pretty much the entire population. Even as an adult I had difficulty perceiving myself equal to other adults. It was

interesting to read Honigmann and his report that, “Fear of adult roles, while not directly taught in America, comes as a secondary consequence of discontinuous learning (P.181).” He refers to our tradition of demanding submission of children on one hand and expecting them to illustrate self-assertion or dominance on the other. There are two issues here. My self image took much longer than my physical being to reach adulthood. I maintained my position of childhood servitude for many of my adult years. The other issue is that I genuinely do not want to assume a position of dominance. I will discuss this last factor later in an effort to delineate the creation of what Smith (1996) termed, my third self. It wasn’t until I began the self evaluation that eventually lead to this study that I became cognizant of the extent to which oppression directed my way of being. I discovered that what I believed to be personality traits or personal nature may only be a Vanier that covers cultural influences that we just have not figured out yet.

I felt reassured with my new understanding when I read Honigmann’s (1954) definition. He wrote, “Personality is patterned by many factors of group membership, by the emotional quality of interpersonal interaction, the

content of that interaction, and other activities which people in groups perform (P.172).” If this definition is accepted, my non-responsive trait may be attributed to patriarchal authoritarianism, rural cultural, religion and stern classroom management, all of which subjected me to information that I inherited a subordinate position in relation to society as a whole. My oppressed position in life is the key to my loss of self. In my personal life I came to the conclusion that I had to make a choice. I had to give up either my oppressive home environment or my personal self. Ultimately I learned to value my self above the cultural reality I had been immersed in all my life. By remaining submissive to the demands of servitude I allowed cultural traditions to “keep me in my place.” I did not attempt to create my own place in the classroom, rather I tried desperately to assume the position designed for me by a larger culture. My difficulty was that I did not know my self. I recall that Freire (1970) noted from his experience that the oppressed internalize the image of the oppressors and adopt their guidelines. Through time, it becomes unnecessary for the oppressor to be actively involved in the life pattern of the oppressed. The condition is perpetuated by the oppressed because of the internalized “reality”. The effects of the

colonization of North America on the indigenous people is a prime example. They have come to live their lives according to the belief that they are faulty, inferior, and powerless. Even within the cultural security of the reservations self worth and autonomy generally is not achieved. There evolved an internalized understanding of “their place” in society.

The influences of patriarchy. When I began preparing for this research project I hypothesized that immersion in a strongly patriarchal culture would be the dominant theme in the forging of my essence as a teacher. Through the work that has contributed to this study I have come to understand that patriarchy is a rather extrinsic component of my derivation. Perhaps it is because I am a female coming to maturity late in the twenty first century that I am able to perceive it so. Our male dominated society is not something that I internalize nor take ownership of. I have gradually come to see patriarchy as an influence that comes from outside my ‘self’ and that my existence as a person is not bound in it. The cultural factors that continue to define me are those that I incorporate as a part of my being. That is not to say that the extrinsic factors do not influence my daily conduct, only that by

identifying them as such I am more able to recognize them and consciously determine my reactions to them. As Freire (1970) indicated of the oppressed, “their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression (P.30).” Until I removed myself from the oppression of a patriarchal home environment, and began examining the reality of my ‘self’, I did not conceive the male dominance of our culture to be a fact external to my central being; that it was to be recognized as reality within the culture but not necessarily within myself. In order to recognize such cultural characteristics as extrinsic, it is necessary to achieve, at least temporarily, a stance outside of that reality. Until that state of aloofness is achieved there is a distrust and fear of ones natural self in regard to the particular cultural rule.

In a patriarchal culture, women are held to their submissive roles throughout their life time. In this state of submission the way to gain validation is to adjust one’s actions and thoughts to conform with the expectations of an omniscient patriarch. I grew to doubt my own worth or validity. I became a dependent follower. In the classroom I was expected to be to leader; to set

the climate, and to make and enforce the rules. This role was in direct conflict with the subservient position to which life in a patriarchal culture had moulded me. In my experiences with special education where I worked in isolation with few guidelines, I was reticent to take advantage of the freedom to develop my own structures and program styles. Without someone to follow I felt lost and inadequate. My need to measure up to an elusive, societal standard sharpened my observation skills and I absorbed as much information as possible to construct my program design in accordance with what had already been approved of. Geertz (1983) describes this evasion of self. He states, "... what is feared is that the public performance to which one's cultural location commits one will be botched and that the personality of the individual will break through to dissolve his standardized public identity (P.64)."

To be someone's daughter or another one's wife in a patriarchal system is in many ways, to be owned. To be held submissive to the domination of males, especially in an authoritarian environment, divorces women and children from their capacity to make decisions; "... to alienate [people]

from their own decision-making is to change them into objects (Freire, 1970, P.73).” I noted earlier that I experience an oppressive feeling of being continually judged and found wanting. I attribute this phobia to the conflict between my natural spirit and the need to submit to the dictates of others. In the recent drive for accountability the department of education has implemented numerous standards of measurement. In my position as consulting teacher in special education these standards are rather nebulous. I frequently experience an echo of my feeling of being judged by some omniscient being, in this case, within the school system.

The influence of religion. The acceptance of omniscience seems to be a factor in several cultural principles, although in none is it more dominant than in religion. My mother grew up in the Anglican church. When she married my father they both became active members in the United Church. Throughout my childhood and my early adult life I followed their example and served the United Church in many capacities. The roots of both the Anglican church and the United church reach back to the reformation, and to Puritanism. These roots have derived a variety of complex and often

contradictory fibres that have contributed to my being.

Tawney (1922) states, “ ... the revolution which Puritanism wrought in the Church and State was less than that which it worked in men’s souls ...” he goes on to say on page 201, “ And, in the end, all these - prayer, and toil, and discipline, mastery of self and mastery of others, wounds and death - may be too little for the salvation of a single soul.” This idea that the likelihood of being able to attain an adequate level of goodness to attain salvation provides some insight into my perpetual feeling of not measuring up to some external standard. I had initially attributed my oppressive feeling of being judged and found wanting to my immersion in a patriarchal society. An exploration of the forces in my religious background rise questions about the foundation of the judgmental role performed predominantly by males in our society.

There has been some suggestion that the use of a male image to represent God in the Christian Church, gave rise to the dominant status of all men. It is suggested that through this male image men have vicariously assumed the

position of God's representative, and since God is supreme above all other beings on earth and in heaven, it followed that men were to assume representation of His supremacy here on earth. This theory requires further comparison spiritual images and hierarchal structures.

Honigmann (1954) hypothesized that socialization strategies are imbibed from the surrounding culture. I made earlier reference to my mother reprimanding me with the words, "What would others think of you now?" As a child the 'others' that stood in my mind as moral judges in the community were the adults I encountered in the Church. Tawney writes about Puritan discipline and notes a vital part of the system was that rules of life were to be enforced by the pressure of the common conscience, and in the last resort by spiritual penalties (P.213)." This suggests that the Puritan influence within the United Church played a large part in the way I was disciplined. This need for validation from the common conscience resulted in my reticence to act on my own recognizance in my professional role.

All three characters in my autobiography display the characteristic of

devotion to service. They have been noted as frugal and industrious. The oppressive need to devote one's self to a life of toil and service originates in the Protestant Church. Weber writes of the Calvinist theory on service. "It is for action that God maintaineth us and our activities; work is the moral as well as the natural end of power ... It is action that God is most served and honoured by ... The public welfare or the good of the many is to be valued above our own (P.260)." I referred earlier to a childhood experience of taking music lessons so a neighbour of little wealth could pay for work my father had done for her. Through my parents' example I learned the virtue taught by Calvin. This is a personal virtue intended to be incorporated as a way of living. My involvement was strictly personal. I gained a feeling of prestige for being involved in an adult scheme to help someone. I also saw it as an opportunity to earn my father's favour. For my father the endeavour was both a personal and a business one since both he and the neighbour were involved in the business of farming and the debt was owed for both the use of equipment and for my father's personal effort. Tawney reports the same Christian ethic as it was applied to business. "He must carry on his business in the spirit of one who is conducting a public service; he must

order it for the advantage of his neighbour as much as, and, if his neighbour be poor, more than, for his own (P. 221).”

Early in my analysis I noted a duality in public attitude toward service, and power and oppression. Tawney states, “Popular feeling had lent a half-mystical glamour, both to poverty and the compassion by which poverty was relieved, for poor men were God’s friends (P.259).” He also wrote however of the enlightened morality; “What the poor need for spiritual health is ... ‘regulation’, [that is,] work under the eye of an employer. In the eyes of the austere moralists of the Restoration, the first, and most neglected, virtue of the poor is industry(P.257).” It is easy to see how I perceived both respect and disdain in my position of special education. My students are often given the compassion of the poor. Some of my colleagues allude to my being a saint. This is in keeping with the “half-mystical glamour” of working with the poor. On the other hand, in many cases students who do not achieve are believed to be lazy, and in fact, although they do have distinct disadvantages, they have often given up and appear to put little effort into their own achievements. For my own part, there were some staff members

at some of the schools I worked in who held the belief that because my student groups were small, and I did not have the same type of preparation and marking to do, that I was not very industrious.

Although there has been a sharp decline in public involvement in church organizations in general, the virtues of Protestantism have permeated our culture. Studies have been done on the connection between the Protestant Reformation and the evolution of capitalism. Tawney writes of Calvinism: “[The aim of man’s existence] is not personal salvation, but the glorification of God, to be sought, not by prayer only, but by action - the sanctification of the world by strife and labour. ... Good works are not a way of attaining salvation, but they are indispensable as a proof that salvation has been attained (P.117).” There evolved a oneness in the qualities of Christian virtues and economic success, the disciplined qualities of thrift, diligence, frugality. It followed that those who were not economically successful were scorned for lacking Christian virtues. I noted that Don Kash (1989) gives a brief description of our capitalistic society’s way of organizing and shaping people that closely parallels that of the reformation. I was also intrigued

when Goodson (1989) attributed the social order of educational discipline to the political ascendancy of Calvinism. I believe the two are quite similar in structure. To elaborate, Kash indicates that society succeeds when creative, competent, hard-working, risk-taking individuals can operate in an environment that does not constrain their pursuit of efficiency.

Alternatively, failure is the result either of flawed individuals or of an environment that constrains individuals by not allowing the most efficient people to win. Faced with an unsatisfactory reality, the answer is to increase the performance of individuals either by increasing their competence and/or motivation or by changing the environment in which they operate. The critical environmental changes, Kash says, are those providing greater assurance that individuals who are efficient will receive rewards, while individuals who are inefficient will not. This has evolved our modern drive for material gain. Although original Protestant philosophy was that the individual should not realize personal gain from his labour, accumulation of wealth resulted from the relentless drive for industrious efficiency. In the educational environment, if a student does not excel academically it is attributed to either a flawed student or to poor teaching

practices. There has been significant time and money spent in attempting to appease the political and public attitude that our schools, and more specifically our teachers, are ineffectual. In the scope of religion, capitalism and education there emerges an oppressive omniscient presence judging the worth of individual effort. There is a feeling that we can never do enough. Hoff (1982) speculates that, "... religions sciences, and business ethics have tried their hardest to convince us that there is a Great Reward waiting for us somewhere, and that what we have to do is spend our lives working like lunatics to catch up with it. Whether it's up in the sky, behind the next molecule, or in the executive suit, it's somehow always farther along than we are... (P.97)." We seldom allow ourselves the luxury of being content just being ourselves in the present moment.

At the beginning of my analysis I noted a general negative slant to my autobiography and to my father's prevalent outlook on daily events. In a comparison to the children's story Winnie-the-Pooh Hoff (1982) equates Rabbit and Eeyore with the Puritan approach to life. He states that, "followers of the [Puritan] religion failed to appreciate the beauty of the

endless forest and clear waters that appeared before them on this fresh green continent of the New World. Instead ,they saw the paradise that was here...as alien and threatening, something to attack and conquer - because it all stood in the way of the Great Reward (102).” Tawney quotes Mr Richard Baxter, a Puritan writing of his conversion. “ ‘ It made the world seem to me ... as a carkass that had neither life nor loveliness (P. 200).”

My father approached life with a determined seriousness. I too have been told on frequent occasions that I take life too seriously. Part of my difficulty in the larger, regular classroom was that I was intent on teaching the content of the curriculum to the extent that I minimized the importance of the students themselves. I held an image of control that I felt I should achieve but which I could not. Such strictness was not in keeping with my nature. The students saw my uneasiness and took advantage of my lack of decisiveness. My experiences with these students was again a paradox. On one hand I was too intense and on the other I accepted misbehavior much too readily. Weber records Luther’s identification of, “ ... absolute obedience to God’s will, with absolute acceptance of things as they were (P.85).” Both obedience and acceptance were ingrained in my way of

being. In the classroom I was ill equipped to make a stand based on my own merits and values. I expected absolute obedience from the students although in reality I did not want a stiff and formal atmosphere. I had such an aversion to being judged that I was reluctant to assume the task of judging others. I accepted things as they were instead of stopping insurrections before they got out of hand.

The oppression of judgement is one of the most significant components that moulded my way of being. It has been observed in my experiences in the rural half of society where 'peasants' are looked down on by the urban population. I believe this had a larger effect on my parents than it did on me. As a daughter and a wife I experienced the oppression of patriarchy, which in turn may be entrenched in the omniscient oppression of the Protestant Church. I was lead to believe that I was powerless to achieve the autonomy enjoyed by the oppressors. A part of the oppression I experienced translated into a dedication to serve others. I was lead to believe that service was the only way to achieve the autonomy I needed in order to realize my potential.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The influence of culture on teacher development

Although there are dominant overtones of oppression and servitude throughout the analysis and interpretation, there is a duality in the influences the identified cultural elements have had on my way of being as a teacher. Experiences of rural culture, patriarchal domination, and Protestant ethics have evolved a balance of circumspection and sensitivity.

Oppression. A number of personality traits emerge from climates of oppression evident in the cultural elements that were examined. There developed an apprehension of being judged, and of never being able to meet approval. Patriarchal culture taught that a female was inferior. A daughter was a disappointment to her father. The effect was an intrinsic conviction

that gender made me a failure. Immersion in Protestant mores lead to the belief that failure was the result of personal flaws or lack of industry and that one must live up to an omniscient social conscience. Rural culture derives the knowledge that the urban half of society judges its members to be superior. “ [Oppression] attempts to control thinking and action, leads men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power (Freire, P.64).” Together patriarchy, religion, and rural culture have eroded self confidence and obstructed decisive action in classroom management. Strict obedience to parenting influenced by Puritan ethics and patriarchal domination curtailed the cognisant development of individual standards. There developed a reliance on external measures and rules. When these were not obviously available classroom discipline fluctuated from an acceptance of the prevailing desires of others to enforcing, with the authoritarianism learned under the dictates of patriarchy, the puritan ethic of wasted time being the deadliest of sins.

Unquestioning obedience according to the model of the Church required that one subjugate one’s own ideal in preference to those of the authority, and

public conscience was the representative of that authority. The oppressive concern over being judged acceptable to the public conscience conveyed the need for reservation in the company of others - at least until the moral preferences of the particular public became safely understood. "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility (Freire, P.31)."

Ostensibly, the public becomes the omniscient judge, seeking to discover failure and therefore personal flaws. The classroom door becomes a shield; a blind behind which reality can be secured.

Service. An outcome of the need for public approval is an industrious spirit. The inferior status allotted to those involved in special education results in the need for ardent involvement in general activities in the larger school environment unless a reclusive position is desired. Such industry is inherent in both a rural culture and the creed of the Protestant Church.

A further element of oppression is the expectation of service. Agrarians display a loyalty to the land in spite of the interminable labour it demands,

and their powerlessness over its yield. There is a reverence for the land in the rural culture, much as there is a reverence for the less fortunate within the culture of the Church. A background in a rural culture heavily influenced by the Protestant Church breeds an inclination to serve. Inherent in a patriarchal society is the expectation that females assume a selfless, nurturing role. Such influences engender a spirit of empathy and compassion, such as are required in the effective education of students in general, and to a greater degree in work with students with special needs. The progress of students with special needs is often not readily evident. One must be perceptive of the gains achieved and the needs exhibited. The discerning attention that is learned in efforts to meet the omniscient standards of oppressors, and thereby gain acceptance and validation, benefit one as a teacher. Responsibility to the welfare of the students is perhaps the single most important characteristic of a teacher. To explore one's authentic self is perhaps the single most important process in cultivating one's ability.

Autobiography as a professional development tool. The need for

students to be active learners is well known among teachers. Another truism is that learning is a building process connecting new ideas with the knowledge base the learner brings to the experience. The use of autobiographical study satisfies both. Feelings of stagnation or ineffectuality are oppressions many teachers experience in their professional life.

“Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is so to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated (Lerner, 1986, P.52).”

Research indicated that Lerner’s statement can be employed in relation to the majority of professional development strategies implemented by various levels of administration. To adapt another of Lerner’s statements,

“[Individuals] thinking themselves out of [oppression] add transforming insights to their process of redefinition (Lerner, P.229).”

Creating my third self. When I consider the three foci of rural culture, patriarchy, and religion, I believe I have evolved most in honing my personal conception of God and deriving my own sense of spirituality. My tenet is

void of judgement and oppressive power, but is the essence of all energies in the universe. Through my spiritual understanding I gain a sense of energy that may be analogous to empowerment, rather than a sense of constraint and oppression. Although I have a strong sense of spirituality it does not conform to the precepts of any one religion. I know very little about the Eastern religions, but I feel more akin to the philosophies of Taoism as presented by Hoff. I can incorporate an understanding of the oppressive power imposed by others, be it patriarchs or aristocrats. Redfield(1996) noted that,

Too often humans cut themselves off from the greater source of our energy systems and so feel weak and insecure. To gain energy, we tend to manipulate or force others to give us attention and thus energy. When we successfully dominate others in this way, we feel more powerful, but they are left weakened and often fight back. Competition for scarce human energy is the cause of all conflict between people. ... When we force someone else to defer to us, we actually suck energy from [them].

I read Paul Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) several years ago. After I did my research on the Protestant Reformation, and reread Freire, I found it interesting that in his preface he directly refers to Christians and Marxists, and uses the term Sectarianism, a word derived from the sects formed from the factoring of an established or orthodox Church. Although I

believe that oppression reaches beyond sectarianism I appreciated Freire's observations and assertions. He states that, "Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates." He continues to say, "Not infrequently, revolutionaries themselves become reactionary by falling into sectarianism in the process of responding to the sectarianism of the Right. ... For the rightist sectarian, "today," linked to the past, is something given and immutable; for the leftist sectarian, "tomorrow" is decreed beforehand, is inexorably pre-ordained. They both suffer from an absence of doubt."

There are three factors within the above paragraph that clarify my situation and my vision for the future. Firstly, it was the presence of doubt in my own way of being in the classroom that gave rise to this study. I was not willing to perpetuate the oppressive power linked to the past role of teaching, and I had no preordained management tactics to impose on the students. I was however, "castrated" by my need to satisfy the image of how the public conscience perceived a classroom *should* be. My deep desire to attain a

public image of model stature, and my dependence on the approval of others to gauge my success in this endeavor stood in opposition to my need to refute the oppression I perceived in past roles of being a teacher. I was experiencing a typical cognitive dilemma that Wagner would call a knot. I had doubts.

The second determinant noted by Freire that contributed to my classroom management entanglement was the response of the students when I did not impose power over them. Adolescence and young adulthood is a time when most people experience a need to struggle against what has been termed 'the establishment'. It is my speculation that the term incorporates any environmental element that is perceived to exert power over the individual. This then is a natural time of life for students to become revolutionaries against the controlling power of teachers. I have often had conversations in which the observance of history has been likened to a swinging pendulum that can never seem to settle in the middle. Although young people tend to struggle for emancipation, once my students experienced an absence of control, the pendulum quickly swung to an experience of the exhilaration

derived from wielding power over another, particularly one whom tradition dictates would normally be the oppressor. The pendulum of their reality swung from oppressed to oppressor.

The final observation in Freire's preface that I want to respond to is, "Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative." He admonishes activists not to succumb to the turning of the tables such as I experienced in the larger regular classroom; not to remain passive in the face of oppression. When I contemplate the aggression of dominant animals within the various animal kingdoms, I am faced with the thought that perhaps it is the natural and intended way of the universe for order to be established by the leaders imposing oppressive power over the less elite, or the 'peasants' of the species. I choose to think that human beings have the intelligence to rise above this primal organizational method. Adolescence, rather than being the most difficult age group to teach, may actually be the most fertile. To promote my ideal of humans evolving to a state where there is no drive to attain power over any other person or group of people; to work toward a state where total equality is a cognitive reality in every aspect

of human existence, I need to shift the way I interpret the rebelliousness teenagers bring to the classroom. I need to recognize it as a hole in the oppressive dyke that holds the stream of human freedom and equality in check. I need to utilize this natural state of uninhibited adversity as a tool. I need to be creative. I believe Freire summed it up nicely in the following paragraph.

The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become prisoner of a “circle of certainty” within which he also imprisons reality. On the contrary, the more radical he is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. He does not consider himself the proprietor of history or of men, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he does commit himself, within history, to fight at their side.

It seems appropriate to conclude with a poem I wrote during the course of another graduate class.

Finding My Voice

I had a voice ... when I was very young.
I cried when I was hungry
I was fed
I wailed in fear or anger
I was comforted
I had a voice.

I discovered words and I was cute
I listened
Others gave my world language
I repeated what I heard

Others were mirrored in a baby voice
They were flattered
They listened
I discovered the world through my senses
Others named it and gave it meaning
Their meaning.

I used this language to define my meaning
I was corrected
Others' ways of knowing were more right than mine

I used this language to express my needs
I was corrected
Others' needs were more real than mine

I used this language to share my world
I was ignored
Others' worlds were more important than mine

I lost my voice to
Others who would not see my meaning
I lost my voice to
Others who would not know my needs
I lost my voice to
Others would not share my world

I lost sight of my meaning
I buried my needs
I doubted my world

I contorted myself to match the image in society's mirror
I fit the role
I didn't cause ripples on the glassy pool
I was not heard
Did "I" exist?

Anger, tears, hurt, fear
All real, all falling on deaf ears
I see my meaning
I feel my needs
I live in my world

I have a voice
Others do not have ears!

I am not radical enough to follow the example of the spring thaw that I spoke of at the beginning of this study, and crumble the soil around the roots of oppression. However, I do believe that if I can't make waves I can make ripples.

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