

1-1-2005

## A journey in (re)claiming teaching : A critical ethnography of Cape Neal High School

Janean Robinson  
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**A JOURNEY IN (RE)CLAIMING TEACHING: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF CAPE NEAL HIGH SCHOOL**

**By**

**JANEAN ROBINSON**

**Master of Education**

**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Education**

**Faculty of Professional and Regional Development**

**Edith Cowan University**

**May 2005**

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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a journey reflecting on my professional practice as a teacher. It also captures the lived experience of other teachers' stories as they were gathered from the ethnographic site; a secondary senior high school.

These collections draw out common themes, issues and dilemmas that teachers face within a dominant managerial discourse. These conversations also provide a 'voice' for those who are often controlled by their own labour into silence. "Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 98).

I use the 'school effectiveness movement' as a window of investigation to study closely the impact of technical and rational thinking on the lives and work of teachers.

I provide emphasis throughout this thesis on the reclamation process of teaching, as I use my own personal biography of writing, reading, and critical investigation to challenge the disproportionate power relationships being experienced. This reclamation also highlights the moral and ethical dimensions of teachers' work. This provides a stark contrast to the 'corporate culture' continually inflicted on teachers, which denounces the presence and significance of the many sophisticated personal relationships that exist within learning communities.

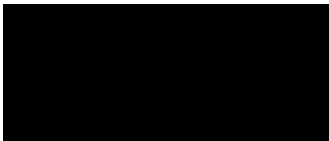
It is intended that this thesis provide hope and encouragement for others interested in schools to pave their own way forward and reclaim a space of their own.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper has been in the making since returning to study in 1998. Instead of dreading the final two compulsory units of my Bachelor of Education Course, I was pleasantly surprised by the inspiration and thought provoking lectures, conferences and seminars led and conducted by Barry Down at Edith Cowan University in Bunbury. This changed my teaching life. For the first time in my career, I became aware that to be politically conscious and struggling with issues around my work, as well as trying to understand and unravel them were actually worthy and significant events. As a teacher, I became connected with the valuable process of learning again. The support I received from other participants in the Master of Education by Research course in these formative years, leading up to this thesis, also continued to foster understanding.

Without the belief and professional advice of my supervisors, Dr. Dyann Ross and Dr Barry Down, I would not have had the energy to continue this teaching research journey. The thesis captures both my colleagues and my stories and like Barry and Dyann has not only become my saving mentor, but also my friend. I owe my supervisors so much as they continued to believe that I could complete this when I had given up.

My children, Vincent and Lizet have been waiting patiently the past five years for me 'to play' and put a full stop to this research. Within that time, they too have learnt that these processes are a journey and that they never really finish, only evolve and unfurl into new learning journeys. I find myself admiring their commitment now, to complete work that is challenging and arduous, yet rewarding to confront, problem solve and share with others.

The editing of this work was meticulously assisted with advice by Jane Henderson. She was the 'ray of intellectual light' to be found in the 'dark forest of confusion.' It was 'a gift' to receive her advice and feedback. Carl Holroyd took all the 'crinkles' out of the research for me with his fancy technical fingers. The final formatting and layout were made to seem a breeze with his skills.

My husband, Adrian, has been a pillar of strength, always supporting and providing me with the confidence I required. My sister, Annette, put together many initial scribbles and rambling's to make some coherent framework for this thesis.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this research to the many people who I work and have worked with in the school community. These are the teachers, students and parents whose life stories remind us of everyday struggles and connections we have in our lives. They are the ones whose humanness confronts us with the powerful significance of relationship and whose lives touch us with their fragility, complexity and richness. The uniqueness of this cannot be measured only treasured.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a collective record of my personal working journey within the field of secondary education. It is interspersed with the stories of my colleague's interpretations of their individual and collective teaching experience. It is my intention that by sharing this account, I and others can develop a better understanding of working in education in the present climate. My journey began when after a six year break, I returned to a workplace that had become unfamiliar to me. By studying up close what was happening, I have been able to cope with the considerable pain and torment of teaching in the current political climate. There were times when the stress of what I was writing about became unbearable and I had very little energy to do more than 'sit it out' as I endured the circumstances. It was also important to revisit the transformation or turning point of my study, so as not to give up hope. In order to do this, I continue to learn how to live 'within the struggle.' By this I mean engaging in the politics, making decisions and choices – being immersed (and looking for glimmers of hope) rather than afraid. An entry from my autobiographical journal, "Janice's diary" (23rd August 2003) demonstrates this:

If I have real belief in something – no matter how bad it may seem, sometimes to make a difference is to take risks. Some of my greatest learning curves lately (insights into my work) seem to be coming from surviving the chaos. It feels like I am becoming more strong and resilient.

Apple (1999, p. 18) says that we need to "... reinsert ourselves into the daily struggles and social movements forming and re-forming the institutions in which we and others live and work." I am indebted to my family, supervisors, work colleagues and friends who believed in my ability to continue in the struggle to capture these transformations on paper over the past four years.

In tackling this kind of personal-professional reflection I find the words of Inglis (1985) especially helpful:

Within this common, familiar present the lines of a very long, antique history can only be seen if the actor steps back for a moment and becomes a spectator ... only the spectator can see and feel tragedy; to do so requires exemption from every day life, a compassionate leave of some kind that everyday life as lived by

most people never grants, because the demands that go on as usual are altogether too imperious and pressing. The spectator watches the action, the actor, merely performs it. (p.3)

The fragmentation that I endured in my own biography was on par with the stages that people often experience in a time of loss. I had lost my innocence as an enthusiastic teacher in what was happening around me. I was experiencing an assault on my confidence as a teacher. I, like others, experienced anxiety, despair, isolation, anger and idealisation before moving into the acceptance part of the loss cycle. Through my research and collegiate support, I have been able to validate what I have experienced through a continued yearning for understanding. This illumination has not made it easier to accept the situation as one does in the cycle of loss; however, it has provided me with renewed strength, energy and hope to open up new possibilities with greater confidence. Inglis (1985) explains:

Autobiography comes as we might say, naturally, as the form in which to think out singular problems. It is supremely the natural form for men and women whose education drastically failed to fit their needs and wants and interest because their class or their race had no allotted identity in the present schemes of official education. (p. 53)

For the remainder of this chapter I want to explain the genesis of my thesis. Firstly, I explain the stirrings of unrest that stimulated my research journey. Then I outline why I believe that this study is significant in the field of educational research. Next, I outline the limitations of the study. Finally, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 Things Don't Feel Right**

By reflecting on my personal history both as a student and as a teacher, I hope to reveal why it was that I felt enough disquiet in my own professional life to question the policy directions in education. Of particular concern was the impact of marketisation, devolution and new managerialism on teachers' work. In this task, I locate my theorising in the tradition of critical social research for the purpose of connecting personal troubles with broader economic, social and political forces. Similarly, Kanpol (1998, p. 191) states that "... no political, or counter-hegemonic invasions into schools can be made without eventually understanding one's relationship to social structure, which embraces one's personal history." Quantz (1992, p. 473) also comments that

“...emancipation requires people to overcome their historically structured culture, which, in turn, requires that they step outside of their cultural views and reflect on their positioning in the world.”

My own memories of school are probably not that much different to many reading this and may even trigger other memories of schoolyard experiences.

*My Emerging Sense of Unease. (Janice's diary, May, 2000)*

*My memory of wanting to become a teacher evolved when I was around 10 years of age. In my home life, a baby brother arrived to join the other 3 of us. I loved that. At the same time, the small country school I attended became even smaller due to environmental and economic changes. Many families, including share-farmers, left the wheat belt. The school diminished from 80 students to 20. It became a one-teacher school. There were no assistants. I then spent many a day listening to 5 year olds read, helped little girls thread needles, lead netball skills and organised fun activities. I still have clear images of writing instruction cards, monitoring maths exercises and checking daily diaries. These are happy memories. More fearful ones are in earlier grades; of the daily fingernail check, of being criticised for daydreaming {when really I was searching for creative inspiration from my isolated desk!}, the green bent twig cane that took pride of authority on the bus driver's dashboard; of the headmaster's little chats to parents when having dinners together, and being caught out taking bottles from the local shop and re-depositing them. It was, after all, a very small town. My High School experience was fraught with the fears, anxieties and tensions that many teenagers struggle with as they search for self-identity and independence. The good memories, however, are of the teachers who continued to inspire me on my journey to become a teacher. They were the ones who held compassion, who had a deep desire to engage. They were the enthusiastic ones who played music that stimulated thought and set the creative juices flowing. They were also the ones who started my drawing because they believed that I could. They were the ones who cared if I was confused or lost - who picked me out of isolated despair, even if only for a moment. By their making my education something real to my life was something they did out of human concern - wanting to teach with essence - with soul – with inter-relationship. I don't believe it was because they were being measured for student progress or monitored for school benchmarks. They were the ones that helped when other styles and modes of teaching had demoralised me. I learnt, instead, to follow the lead of the teacher's paths that had inspired me. They were my role models. It was the teacher as a person, not as a technical subject that was important to me. It was their relationship with their students and their passion for teaching that really mattered. During my first ten years of teaching, it was these human virtues that I tried to take into my own practice. I discovered that by doing this, not only was I able to maintain my person integrity but I also had the opportunity to inspire and motivate others. Respect, honesty and integrity were values that were expected by schools and their communities and I felt comfortable in my chosen career. Within this climate, it was the students' own learning and their personal feedback that*

*continued to inspire me as my own teachers had done. My colleagues, in their encouragement, also supported me.*

*The test came later, seven years ago when I found myself back in the classroom after a break of six years. I returned to what I thought would be familiar territory, but I felt like an outsider. No longer were those virtues that I had considered natural to my calling as a teacher enough to survive the new social order I was experiencing. I felt alienated, unsure and confused. It was as though I had to begin my training again to learn the new discourse of administration and management. I had been so keen and confident to get back into teaching, yet I had hit a solid wall of concrete. I began doubting and questioning my competence.*

In this passage, I reveal that since coming back to teaching, I have found much discomfort and unrest in what was formerly a predominantly familiar and relatively harmonious work environment. As Kelchtermans (1996, p.308) suggests "... throughout their career experiences teachers develop a subjective 'lens' through which they perceive their job situation, give meaning to it and act in it." No longer did I feel part of a community that had as its ultimate aim to care for children. I had considered myself to be a confident and successful teacher, as demonstrated after twelve years of full time experience with the Education Department. In that time, it seemed that learning was paramount.

My concern about injustice and the way that education is sabotaged by narrow sectional interests, is the driving motivation for this learning journey. Based on my conversations with colleagues in this study, these sentiments are shared by many teachers. In fact, I now feel a sense of responsibility in sharing some of these stories. Hopefully, other teachers concerned about social injustice will find solace in the realisation that they are not alone. By critically examining the state of things in education and the public service at large, and placing this alongside collected stories, I have transformed my practice by the re-telling of these stories. Throughout this thesis, I explain how this occurred. The result has been that I have been able to draw on threads of meaning from these stories, woven them into my teaching practice, and new visions of hope have emerged. From this path my thesis title emerges as 'A journey in (re)claiming teaching.'

I consider teaching to be a caring profession, one in which relationships are vital. As Connell (1985) explains:

Schooling is a powerful institution through which people and their relationships are produced, that is not a matter of choice; schools do that, one way or another. The choices are about how they do it. Schools have the capacity to shape the way they do that work and determine which social interests will be advanced by their labours. (p. 207)

Unfortunately, when business-like models of management infiltrate our schools then many of the humanitarian practices that many teachers feel natural to their profession, such as inter-relating, are challenged and personal-professional tensions and conflicts arise. Gewirtz and Ball (2000, p. 256) consider public sector markets to be sabotaged by Darwinian principles. In their words, “strong institutions, defined as those that attract custom and maximise income, are meant to thrive; the weak, ‘the unpopular’, are meant to go to the wall.”

This new management regime has been ‘released’ as the ‘school effectiveness’, ‘school improvement’ and/or ‘self-management’ movement in Australian schools (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988, Caldwell, 1998). To better understand how this movement is impacting on teachers' work, I use an aspect of the school effectiveness approach, namely, School Development Planning. As Mahony and Hextall (2001, p. 176) explain, “... managerialist ideologies are fundamentally grounded in the notion that there exist sets of principles and procedures, which can be applied to bring about ‘effective, efficient and economic’ modes of operation.” It is this site based management and the self managing school which often develops forms of social control over teachers’ work, “... most noticeably, through the ways in which teachers are increasingly required to self-monitor and self-regulate what it is they do” (Smyth, 1996, p.1).

In this research, I will document the journey of events and experiences in my own teaching career and how they influence my understanding of teaching. This began with a sense that ‘thing’s don't feel right'. A series of pervasive changes in education in recent times have produced strong personal-professional responses. These include the feeling of never getting it right. The more I did, the more I still had not done enough. Then, I was being forced to teach vocational subjects in upper school which were technically skills orientated and industry related. I had very little connection to the subjects as they did not involve many personal and relational components and the stifled measuring of outcomes made them seem emotionally barren. The customised, modular packages they came with seemed uncreative and limited in their diversity and application. It restricted my teaching style. In contrast, things such as my not asking

students to take their hats off outside the door seemed to be treated as a serious crime. I was told that I was not following the team and was setting a bad example. The school evaluation of how well I taught seemed to be based on how effectively I controlled the students by enforcing silence and the compliance of rules, most of which I personally felt were irrelevant. I found myself asking lots of questions at meetings. Again, these were met with disapproval. I was being forced to do things that I perceived as meaningless and insulting considering my past successful classroom experiences. An example of this was performance management. After seventeen years of committed teaching with the same employer, I began questioning where in this system was there recognition of professionalism. How does this management style really help improve my teaching? I was at the same time, witnessing first hand, managerial type procedures being 'used' for obscure and destructive purposes. An example of this was departmental management plans. I felt less involved in genuine decision making. On several of the committees I joined, I experienced fake efforts at collegiality. Many 'task teams' and other consultant projects that were set up seemed short term. For me, the consequence of this was a sense of helplessness, having no impact or sense of purpose as a teacher within a community. Mahony and Hextall (2001, p. 176) help me to understand why I was feeling this way, "... workers (teachers in our case) are presented as units of labour to be distributed and managed. The characteristics of these labour units are deemed largely irrelevant providing that they comply with certain specifications and meet particular working criteria."

In a similar way, Connell (1993) explains what is happening to teachers' work:

Workplace control extends into the classroom and out to the yard as well; teachers are not only subject to controls but are expected to exert control over the pupils. Indeed the quickest way to get known as an incompetent teacher is not by failing to convey knowledge, but by 'losing control' of one's classroom. (p. 62)

Finally, research by McInerney (2001, p. 9) helps to illuminate my growing sense of unease with the 'vocational' direction of education whereby schools are viewed as instruments in "assisting Australia to become a more internationally competitive nation through a focus on vocational education and the acquisition of workplace skills and competencies."

On reflection, I now realise that my unwillingness to adopt a "compliant and flexible disposition" (Smyth, Shacklock & Hattam, 1997, p. 6) to these emerging trends

was actually the impetus for this thesis. In the context of these personal-professional experiences, I wanted to find out what was happening to teachers' work under the regime of the school effectiveness/improvement movement. I also wanted reassurance that I was not alone in my discomfort and ask the question; how do other teachers cope within this political climate? Therefore, my research question becomes defined:

*How is the school effectiveness/improvement movement impacting on the lives and work of teachers?*

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

Why is this study important? Firstly, teachers have stories to tell about the theory and practice of their work. Under the new managerial regime which is currently reshaping teachers' lives and work, I continue to observe an increasing sense of demoralisation among teachers as they are marginalised in policy debates at all levels. I witness increased surveillance that comes with accountability. In the case of Cape Neal High School, competition, sarcasm, jealousy and infighting are dominant themes. I have collected stories of fear, confusion, frustration, suspicion and blame arising when people do not understand what is happening to their familiar territory. These stories tell of switching off, loss of spontaneity and reflection time and in its place, compliance. I also note a trivialisation and feeling of apathy toward educational change and professionalism as a way of coping with stress and exhaustion. Since beginning this study, I have watched many dedicated teachers lose faith and motivation and leave the profession, disillusioned, tired and confused. Below is a journal entry from (Janice's diary) capturing the damage:

*This reflecting has made me realise that I and other colleagues spend nearly every second working day on these typical "struggles for justice", often struggles which should be our rights anyway. Instead, we are caged up into a den to fight amongst ourselves as lions to see who survives. The trouble with this Darwinian theory of survival is that a lot of good lions are slaughtered and the less caring but sly lions survive as they manipulate others to suit their own needs. (Jan., 2002)*

I also see a 'casualisation' of school teaching staff and a deterioration of the working commitment of others as people give up and lose morale. This is of great concern to me. I also sense a loss of genuine professional collegiality. I believe that



teachers are being encouraged to adopt a culture of individualism and competition in response to an alleged dependency on the system. McLaren (1989) explains:

We live in a culture that stresses the merits of possessive individualism, the autonomous ego, and individual entrepreneurship. In this prevailing view, social conflicts are reduced to individual, subjective concerns rather than problems having to do with social and material inequality and collective greed and privilege. (p. 225)

This, I argue, is a dangerous state of affairs, as without debate, following such a technical approach in schools prevents people from genuinely working together. Instead, schools adopt a “competitive ethos and the values of the marketplace” (Smyth, 1996, p.1). Sikes (2001) captures these sentiments in her study of teachers’ lives and the performance management system which came into statutory force in England and Wales in 2000:

Teacher morale is known to be low and government criticism and intervention is commonly accepted as a major root cause of this. Constant criticism and the eroding of autonomy may well have a negative effect on how teachers perceive themselves: it certainly has significant implications for the content and nature of their work. Perhaps this pain is all the greater because teachers themselves, as parents as well as professionals, are keen to provide the best education possible. It is, therefore, particularly galling to be cast as the problem, or at least part of the problem. (p. 88)

She goes on to explain that this occurs because “... focusing on the teachers and their performance deflects attention from the social, economic, technological, moral factors which, in combination make their contribution to the challenges facing teachers” (p. 88).

This study makes a contribution towards reinserting the missing voices of teachers back into the debates about education. According to Giroux and McLaren (cited in Goodman, 1992) this means:

... a significant restructuring of economic and social power so that power flows from cooperative efforts among groups who share a common concern for the social good and who stand for solidarity and dialogue rather than for structures of hierarchy and control. (p. xii)

Secondly, this study will emphasise the central importance of relationships in teaching. I want to (re)focus on the teacher as a person, not as a technical object to be managed and manipulated in undemocratic ways. It is the teacher's relationship with their students and their passion for teaching that really matters. Smyth (2001a) echoes these sentiments when he states that:

One of the primary reasons teachers come into this line of work is because of the opportunities it presents them with to connect with and help shape and form the lives of others - students, colleagues, and members of the wider community. (p. 150)

This involves a complex web of reciprocity, trust, participation, equity and inclusiveness. These complexities are too difficult and too precious to measure, examine technically, or even worse, completely disregard. According to Smyth, (2001b, p. 37) "schools are fundamentally relational places, and when relationships become undermined, then schools become damaged places." Instead of experiencing the values of reciprocity, trust, equity and inclusiveness, teachers find themselves in a capitalist driven, self-managing regime based on the values of competition, efficiency and surplus production. To rationalise, economise, formalise and standardise how and what it is that we do, is to take the real essence out of education and leave it with an empty facade. In such an oppressive system, teachers' dignity and integrity is under attack. Robertson (1993, p. 132) explains that present day self-managing schools "... carry within them the danger of engaging teachers in endless debate and a futile routine about means and not ends, at an enormous moral and social cost." Morley and Rassool (1999) put it well:

There are major gaps and silences in school effectiveness theory relating to identity, culture and difference. The school effectiveness discourse lacks a view of history and of people in the complexity of their lives. (p. 127)

Being open to teachers stories provides me and, hopefully others, with a powerful and purposeful means of understanding and surviving the new work order that I find myself and others coming to terms with. Shacklock (1995, p. 2) argues that the value of work stories is that they are "... rich in detail about what it is like to be engaged in the work of teaching: the tasks, the demands, the interactions, the complexity and the 'feel' of teacher's work."

Thirdly, this study endeavours to move beyond personal and depressive war stories by engaging in a dialogic/dialectic process. Smyth and Shacklock (1998, p. 10) refer to the dialogic school as one "... with a social conscience/justice as its central organising feature and has spaces to speak." Smyth (2001a, p. 176) also explains it as a place where people are "... continually debating what needs to stay the same and what needs to change." I have captured my personal experiences and scaffolded them throughout other teacher's narratives. This storytelling acts as a resistive practice in reclaiming social justice in teaching work. It aims to provide credit to different forms of knowledge by supporting these voices with research that legitimates them. This has culminated in a delicate balance between my own story, supporting stories from teachers and what the relevant articulated theory is saying. I attempt to make the data 'sing' and provide as a backdrop a social and political framework that is consistent with it.

Finally, I aim to transform these depressing stories by providing a sense of optimism by looking, thinking and acting differently. According to Foucault (cited in Quantz, 1992, p. 466), "truth is found in the struggles of everyday politics and the 'wars' of institutional practices." I have discovered that these stories can transform our practice by their re-telling, which allows a claiming and reclaiming of teaching. Threads of these stories are carried into my practice and provide new visions of hope. They also enable an alternative understanding of my practice to emerge.

### **1.3 Limitations of the Study**

This section outlines an awareness of what I am not able to cover in my thesis. It identifies the caveats that I have placed on my work, due to the complexity of my research project. Consequently, I have set boundaries and parameters for the reader to consider in my work.

First, I recognise my "implicatedness in the production of knowledge and claim responsibility for it" (Skeggs, 1998, p. 45). I do not believe that one theoretical framework can capture everything I am attempting to reveal. Perhaps, the very best that can be hoped for is to provide a window into the complexity of the problem my research question poses. However, critical social theory guided me in the beginning of my research, enabling me to question current ideology and attempt to understand the political, social and economic factors at play. It struck a chord with its calls of

resistance. It is about taking risks, and having purpose and hope embedded in knowledge projects (Skeggs, 1998, p. 48). McLaren and Tadeu da Silva (1993) detail the language that is acquired from critical pedagogy as it enables us to reflect upon and shape our own experiences:

By promoting a deep affinity for the suffering of the oppressed and their struggle for liberation, by brushing commonsense experience against the grain, by interfering with the codes that bind cultural life shut and prevent its rehistoricization and politicization, by puncturing the authority of monumental culture and causing dominant representations to spill outside their prescribed and conventional limits. (p. 49)

Second, my use of critical ethnography is not without problems. As Quantz (1992, p. 497) explains “critical ethnography is a recent development in educational research that is still evolving.” Skeggs (1998, p. 45) notes that “a persistent problem of ethnography” is to know how to “collapse a variety of interpretations into one representation.” She elaborates, “there is such a multitude of expressions, nuances, and feelings ... (that) ... we have to generate representations that can do the work of non-reductionism.” I am not able nor do I wish to claim to have captured all the voices on these complex matters. I have merely captured a teaching group by interviewing twenty out of the eighty five staff at Cape Neal High School.

Third, I do not get an opportunity to converse directly with students within the school regarding the impact this particular study theme has on their lives. This may be considered by some as a limitation because the setting of the research is, of course, based around the needs and learning of students. Smyth and Hattam’s (2004) research on students leaving school early, observed that “the average high school tended to be characterised by dimensions that position towards the ‘cultural geographies’ of the aggressive/passive categories” (p. 162). The features of these schools have striking similarities to those that I discovered in my case study: disproportionate power distribution, the absence of sense of trust, a lack of respect, inflexible, not good at dealing with emotions, antagonistic relationships, people under scrutiny and surveillance, loss of autonomy and competitive and compliant behaviours. Even though I do not interview or involve students, the research findings have enormous implications for the kinds of relationships and culture that directly and indirectly impact on students.

Fourth, I do not try to find easy solutions to complex issues. As Crotty (1998, p. 157) explains “critical inquiry cannot be viewed as a discrete piece of action that achieves its objectives and comes to a close.” My analysis of data and my subsequent chapters on examining teachers’ lives and work, in no way attempts or pretends to provide simple answers. Instead, “with every action taken” (p. 157) they reveal people’s realities and told lives and sometimes the context changes and I am forced to critique my assumptions again. Within this framework, my data cannot claim to be truths. Skeggs (1998, p. 48) assists in arguing for a re-evaluation of ethnography:

... because it is multi-method, carried out over time and with a sensitivity to the collapse of interpretation ... and because it contains a recognition of power and an acknowledgement that life can be contradictory, it offers more explanatory power than other methods. (p. 48)

Finally, I am aware that there are issues of representation. By this I refer to the complication of deciding and determining when and how to organize my own spoken experiences and history as an insider and when and how to include other voices throughout the research. This is the point of reflexive practice. Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid and Shacklock (2000) explain what this means:

The influences and patterns impacting on and constraining the perceptions and intentions of the actors in the setting, while simultaneously avoiding imposition of his or her own theoretical constructs, and engaging with the participants in open-ended theory building and renovation. (pp. 60-61)

#### **1.4 Thesis Structure**

In chapter one, I begin with my own story and introduce the reader to the historical development of my research topic. I consider this to be an important place to begin as Quantz, (1992 p. 393) acknowledges “history is continually expressed through constraining cultural formations and ... it is an active force in constructing the future.” In chapter two, I move from my personal experience to consider the broader political, economic and social contextual factors impacting on teachers’ work. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the literature around my study and critique the school effectiveness/improvement movement as an example of ‘new managerialism in action’ within schools. I will use school development planning as a process and a means of critical analysis. In chapter three, I outline the framework that provides a theoretical understanding of my research. I discuss the features, origins and interpretations of

critical theory to enable me to better understand what is happening in my school. This makes Cape Neal High School a case study for ethnographic examination. In chapter four, I outline my methodology, specifically critical ethnography. I then discuss the related methods of data collection that I use throughout the research process. I also outline the ethical issues that I encounter during the development of this thesis. I conclude by explaining how the data analysis was conducted. In chapter five, I examine the key themes emerging from the lives and work of the participants' stories. Interspersed with their stories are supporting sections of literature and my own journal reflections.

In chapter six, I endeavour to make a stance by examining ways of reclaiming teachers' work. I discuss new ways of acting, thinking and re-evaluating the pedagogy of education. In the final chapter, I outline the value of the research to others. I examine risk and resistance as emancipatory practices and analyse relationships with others in terms of power and new ways of knowing.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT

In chapter one, I introduced my own teaching biography and described the feeling of things not being right. Angus (1994b) clarifies why this could be the case:

It would appear that any social and educational vision of democratic and participative school arrangements contributing to an equitable and socially just society has been dimmed by one of cost-efficient schooling, market competition in education and the notion that education serves private rather than public good. (p. 31)

Angus also suggests that: “the rhetoric of equity settlement of the 1960's and 1970's, have been gradually devalued and marginalised during the 1980's and 1990's, (1994b, p. 31). According to Louden & Brown (1993):

The concept of accountability has flourished in Australia in the 1980's nowhere more strongly evident than in the public sector where the need to provide more services with static or declining budgets has brought from governments a quest for efficiency and effectiveness which rivals the most entrepreneurial organisations in the private sector. (p. 130)

In this chapter, I outline the international corporate reform that influences what is occurring at national, state and local levels as public spheres such as schools are re-structured. The ideologies and policies that accompany dominant economic rationalism, I argue, can no longer be ignored as they are enforced in institutions such as Cape Neal High School, under the guise of self management. Within this devolved culture, schools and their communities are held to ransom, as they are blamed for economic problems.

### 2.1 The Bigger Picture

At the local school level, according to Woods, Jeffery, Troman and Boyle (1997, p. 1) the reason why this restructuring of schools as public sites continues to occur is that it is: “... a response to the globalisation of capital and communications, the rapid growth of information and technological developments, changed modes of economic production, economic crisis and increased moral and scientific uncertainty.” McLaren (2000, p. 20) believes that capitalism has entered a global crisis of accumulation and profitability. He also explains that “the logic of transnational capitalism now flagrantly guides educational policy and practice to such an extent that one could say without

exaggeration that education has been reduced to a sub sector of the economy” (2000, p.169). The concept of management is drawn from the methods of organization, administration and control employed in industry and contains a set of assumptions derived from the work of F.W. ‘Speedy’ Taylor (Ball & Goodson 1985, p. 10). Consequently, authoritarian and prescriptive methods of management have been advocated which “... laid down standards that facilitated the precise measurement of work output” (p. 10).

In short, restructuring became a part of an international agenda, in response to globalization. This means that the context in which educational policies develop and are to be implemented have changed drastically. In Australia, as in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the neo-liberal policy dominance has been extreme. As Apple (1999, p. 9) states “for neo-liberals, the world in essence is a vast supermarket”. Globalisation also brings with it de-regulation and a culture in the Anglo-Celtic world that embraces neo-liberal policies such as self-management. Details of these economic rationalist policies can be perceived in Anglo American cultures where governments have deregulated finance, privatised public assets, lowered taxes and made substantial cutbacks to public services (Rees & Rodley, 1995, p. 16).

Paioff (2000, p. 1) discovered that this educational restructuring throughout Western Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia over the past two decades led to the devolution of strategic planning and operational responsibilities from highly centralised governmental institutions into school sites. Smyth (2001a, p. 54) observes that as teachers grapple with the impact of restructuring on public spheres such as schools, they are “...continually blamed for problems that more accurately reflect the priorities and failings of our economic system, while dominant teacher evaluation practices help to sustain hierarchical and authoritarian arrangements by which students and teachers are effectively silenced.” In the United Kingdom's restructured state, the *Education Reform Act* (ERA) of 1998 has crystallised policy to ensure control over teachers' work. As Ball (cited in Woods et al., 1997, p. 9) argues, “... despite the rhetoric of autonomy and empowerment, new systems of management are a pervasive way of controlling teachers work”. Self- management thus easily becomes the steering tool of the managerial vehicle. The reform agenda has an underpinning belief system that self management will “lead to a more effective and efficient use of diminishing public resources” (Paioff, 2000, p.1).



During the 1980s, in Australia, traditional sources of school funding collapsed. Public service expenditure, both State and Federal, was significantly cut back (Yeatman, 1993). During the same period, in Western Australia, a number of Ministry of Education reports such as the *Better Schools Report* (1987) and the *Beazley Report* (1984), sought to connect education more effectively to the demands of the industrial society (Angus, 1986). Watkins (1983) explains:

We find ourselves in a new efficiency movement that has been associated with the increasing economic crisis and to counter the effects, the state and educational systems under its control has increasingly turned to corporate models of management as a means of solving the problem. (p. 125)

As the state promoted devolution of power within a capitalist society (Harris, 1993, p. 7), then it moved as an “entrepreneurial agency from central to local levels within a capitalist framework.” This new ideological and structural reworking which placed education at the service of the economy meant that schools could easily be blamed for economic problems. Policy initiatives emerged from the neo-liberal segments of the new hegemonic alliance. Most centred on either creating closer linkages between education and the economy or placing schools themselves into the market (Apple, 1999, p. 10).

Gunter (1997) summarises some of the reasons for key policy developments in the 1980s and 1990s that set the agenda for the future:

- The emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and economy linked to standards and excellence.
  - Sources of funding for education are based on the marketplace through attracting business investment to projects.
  - Education is conceptualized as part of the infrastructure of the economy and fits in with government policy on national curriculum and vocational education.
  - The management of education institutions is seen as needing business management skills, in which attracting and working with private sector investors will enable their development and
  - The broadening of the capital base for education through private sector investment is linked to the overall policy of privatisation from the 1980's.
- (p.7)

These policies placed schools, alongside other public goods and services, into a precarious market. In this environment, schools are considered to be producers, where “performance” is more important than “practice” (Ball, 1993, p. 77) and “democracy is

redefined as guaranteeing choice in an unfettered market” (Apple, 1999, p. 14). This spells dangerous conditions for public schooling and much is at stake as “underpinning this position is a vision of students as human capital ...to compete efficiently and effectively” (Apple, 1999, p. 9). This type of competition often diverts schools away from community values and the social and personal aspects of education as it continues in its struggle to perform and improve scores. As Robertson (1993) concludes:

... in essence, devolution and the creation of the self-managing school appears to mean the restructuring of the centralized bureaucracy into smaller collegially managed units, responsive to centralized policy-making and hierarchically accountable to the new corporate head office. (p. 124)

The environment of the global market and its impact on teachers’ work is clearly a sinister development as Sivanandan (1998/1999 cited in McLaren 2000) explains:

The free market destroys workers’ rights, suppresses civil liberties and neuters democracy till all that it left is the vote. It dismantles the public sector, privatizes the infrastructure and determines social need ... and it throws up a political culture based on greed and self-aggrandizement and sycophancy, reducing personal relationships to a cash nexus. (p. 21)

What this global context means for teachers, according to Gleeson and Gunter (2001, p. 140), is a focus on league tables, measurement, performance, inspection and accountability.

## **2.2 Devolution and Self-Managing Schools**

Smyth (2001a, p. 80) provides a clear definition of what is going on in schools today: “... at the level of individual schools, devolution becomes something quite different to what it purports to be - it is a budget cutting exercise masquerading under the banner of schools getting more control of their own affairs.” The “market revolution” (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000, p. 266) in education sees centralised, bureaucratic systems of education move toward devolved structures in which schools accept responsibility for many services previously provided by central authorities (*Better Schools Report*, 1987). As the devolution process stifles teachers, they feel powerless. Smyth (2001b, p. 40) explains that “because the self-managing school is based on the notion of schools competing with one another, this can creep into the way teachers compete with one another for decreasing resources, and it tarnishes good professional

and collegial relationships.” The tendency then is often that teachers own professionalism is replaced. Apple (2000) agrees that:

Rather than moving in the direction of increased autonomy, in all too many instances the daily lives of teachers in classrooms in many nations are becoming ever more controlled, ever more subject to administrative logics that seek to tighten the reins on the processes of teaching and curriculum. (p. 114)

In Western Australia, schools were exposed to policy evolving from the *Better Schools Report* (1987). The Ministry of Education released “*Policy and Guidelines*” as part of the devolution process. One of the key restructuring policies in this report was the establishment of school based decision-making groups. The contradiction of this move was that even though the report was originally set up to provide more autonomy over decisions concerning educational policy and school development, in fact the opposite has actually been shown to occur. Staff and community members were seduced into believing that by establishing a management plan (also referred to as School Improvement Plan, School Strategic Plan or School Development Plan) that they would have more power over decision-making. Now, however, they do not feel that they have any say in decision-making. To support what I am saying I take a quote from the *Better Schools Report*, Ministry of Education, Western Australia (1987):

One way in which schools should exercise greater self-determination and greater responsibility is by preparing a School Development Plan each year ... it would aid curriculum planning and financial and resource management, as well as constitute a focus for co-operative decision-making by school staff, community members and central administrators. (p. 11)

What we have instead is a ‘restrictive bandage’ that ties bureaucratic central policy to each school by limiting resource allocation and holding the group accountable by the slick use of ‘rationales’, ‘priorities’ and ‘reviews.’ In the same report, (p. 6) we find evidence of this: “It is also proposed as a means whereby schools are accountable to the Ministry of Education for performance against centrally established standards and goals”. As Ball (1993, p. 77) discovered, schools in fact “find themselves ‘starved of cash and playing with pennies’”. Goddard (1992) provides a brief overview of the political context within which School Development Planning (SDP) was, and still is, being situated and examines the ways in which the requirement for SDP became institutionalised in the West Australian government education system. Goddard (1992, p. 117) describes how requirements which emanated from the Burke Governments commitment to corporate managerialism became “enmeshed in education policy,

legislation and regulations, industrial agreements for teachers and job descriptors for promotional positions within schools.” A report released by the Ministerial Independent Assessment Group on Devolution (1994), clearly reveals education entering the marketplace:

... as a marketable service provided by schools, with the consumers (parents, on behalf of their children) ‘shopping around’ for the best quality. Schools must compete with one another for clients who, because school boundaries will no longer exist, are able to choose the school which is providing the best educational service to meet their requirement. If not enough clients choose the service being offered by a particular school, that school either has to improve or go out of business. Schools must be able to adapt to the forces of choice within the marketplace in the way that businesses have to in the private sector. (p. 14)

To ensure the corporate management system prevails, there has been a push for site based management. As a direct consequence of this West Australian government schools have responded to the devolution agenda by establishing corporate School Development Plans. These include performance indicators to facilitate ongoing review and evaluation (Paioff, 2000, p.1). A major problem with this effectiveness movement is that in contrast to conventional markets, schools are not set up to maximise their profits. In having to do so, there is a risk that valuable human resources are wasted. As schools attempt to translate national policies into practise, many school needs do not sit easily in the planning system which is driven by the demands of efficiency (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992). According to Gibson (1986) this form of technical rationality represents:

... a preoccupation with means in preference to ends. It is concerned with method and efficiency rather than with purposes. It is the divorce of fact from value, and the preference, in that divorce, for fact. It is the obsession with calculation and measurement: the drive to classify, to label, to assess and number, all that is human. (p.7)

An even more complicated problem in combining devolution alongside corporate managerialism, is that according to Sachs (2003) the accompanying strategies and discourses:

... are no longer seen as being problematical or as acting against the best interest of schools or schooling systems. In fact the paradox is that is schools do not take on this discourse they are seen to be out of line with contemporary thinking and policy processes. (p. 22)

In the section to follow, I want to examine how this ideology is played out in the School Effectiveness/Improvement (SEI) movement and to consider the response of socially critical educators.

### **2.3 School Effectiveness/ Improvement (SEI)**

I have positioned my research within the current school reform debate in which there are two general competing positions. On the one hand, there is the school effectiveness/school improvement movement, and on the other hand, the socially critical perspective. So what is the SEI movement and what is wrong with it? The dominant discourse of SEI presently shaping school culture arises from the positivist scientific management tradition and is encapsulated in the notion of the School Development Plan (Thompson & McHugh, 1990, p. 23). It is often argued that in successful and effective schools, culture should be aligned with a vision of excellence. In the words of Caldwell (1993, p. 164), one of the leading advocates of school effectiveness, “if we are concerned about equity, effectiveness and quality then we must strive for greater efficiency.” In the search for excellence, schools are urged to become more like businesses, in which teachers comply with structural goals and purposes already fixed. Riddell, Brown and Duffield (1998, p.170) argue that the appeal of school effectiveness work lies in its promise of “simple solutions to practical problems.”

In this section, I want to ‘spell out’ the nature, assumptions and ideology behind the SEI movement and offer a critique drawing on the critical social research framework outlined in the next chapter. I want to challenge the rhetoric of SEI and expose its hidden value positions and the impact these have on teachers’ everyday work.

The school effectiveness literature generally lacks a critical dimension or any sense of the social and political context in which schools and teachers must operate. For example, Beare (1995, p. 132) claims that if educators do not learn to immerse themselves in new emerging structures then they will not survive. He argues (p. 132) that because of globalisation schools should be “basing their operations on outward looking curricula and on international best practice.” This sort of instructive discourse, apparently value free in its concreteness, is an example of the conforming and hermetic that can often restrict and control teachers’ work. These forms of local management, according to Grace (1995, p. 127), are flawed and deficient as they are “not so much a device for empowering schools as a device for depowering and weakening the role of

the local state in education.” Grace (1995) continues to explain (p. 127) that the supporters of local management of schools have “tended to concentrate upon its managerial utility, while the critics, (as in my stance) have focused upon its political intentions.” Subsequently, views such as Beare’s (1995) and Caldwell’s (1993, 1998) can no longer be seen as neutral but seductive and corruptive in nature as they marginalise other educational values. Schools should instead be viewed within their own social and cultural contexts and teachers ‘seen’ as ‘social and political actors’ rather than as mere occupants of organisational roles. Government policy and its binding connections to the classroom become more overt as we expose this form of discourse and the consequent actions that are constantly happening around us in education. Louden and Brown (1993) provide an example of this when they state that “... performance indicators based upon corporate plans are subject both to the scrutiny of the auditor-general and of parliament.” If management is seen to be the best way to organise and run schools then schools often shift away from the culture of welfare and public service toward a culture of profit making and production (Ball, 1993, p. 70).

#### **2.4 School Development Planning**

Specifically, then, what is the School Development Plan? The Western Australian Ministry of Education (1989, p. 3) defines the School Development Plan as a “... public statement which the school makes available to anyone interested in its performance.” It is also the plan which “enables the school to demonstrate the extent to which it has incorporated Ministry policy and community priorities into its operations.” According to Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991, p. 3), “The purpose of development planning is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in a school through the successful management of innovation and change.” They also believe that development planning offers a more genuine, systematic and sustained approach (Hargreaves & Hopkins 1991, p. 9). Managerial structure systems and technical language become embedded within these School Development Plans and begin, therefore, to define schools by making them conform to Ministerial policy. The Ministry of Education’s *Better Schools Report* (1987) required that schools “... undertake to write a School Development Plan each year” and that “school based decision-making groups be formed to provide for community participation” (p. 7). As the Ministry of Education *School Development Plans: Policy and Guidelines* document (1989, p. 2) states, “The process of devolution requires that schools be accountable for their decisions to both the community they serve and the government”. The same guidelines clearly state that

School Development Plans will help teachers work more “effectively and efficiently” (p. 2) and that the performance indicators will allow outsiders to assess their work (p. 4). Both of these statements have many underlying implications for teachers and the way in which they will be allowed to operate. Proponents of school development planning such as Cuttance (1997) believe that:

... the significant investment of time required for successful school development means that all the participants must have a strong commitment to the changes required and be prepared to divert time and energy from other activities into the various phases of the programme. (p.105)

In a similar way, Stoll and Fink (1996, p. 71) believe that school development planning is more than just a means to an end. They believe that it is not used enough and that they would like to see its impact on teaching and learning used more frequently.

Drawing on the tradition of critical social research, I will now briefly problematize the practice of school development planning. As explained by Hume (2000, p. 43) “... the emphasis is on rational strategic and operational planning, usually with a focus on ‘delivery’ within a clearly defined time-scale.” The Ministry of Education's policy on *School Development Planning* (1989), issued as part of the devolution process, states that each school's development plan must include:

- the purpose of the school;
- indicators of the schools' performance;
- details of how the school will monitor its performance;
- local and Ministry priorities that need to be addressed;
- how these priorities will be addressed, and
- the allocation of school resources to ensure effective outcomes. (p. 1)

*The Local Management of Schools Pilot Project* was launched in Western Australia in March 1999 by the then Minister of Schools, Cheryl Vardon. (WA Teachers' Journal, 2000, p. 53). This project claimed that it would develop models of management that would explore optimum levels of local flexibility within school systems if they wish to be “committed to learning excellency, equity and care.” The most recent Government School Teachers and School Administrators Certified Agreement (2004), states:

The Principal is accountable to the Director of Schools, for the effective operation of the school and for demonstrating that the school is operating according to Departmental policy. The school plan provides the means for reporting both to the Director, Schools and to a school decision-making group. (p. 23)

The School Council (school council election 2004) is responsible for planning, including financial arrangements and evaluation of school performance. In order to enforce through legislation, the whole process, the School Education Act (1999, Section 63 e) stipulates that the functions of the principal of a government school are to "...establish a plan for the school in consultation with the council and the school's teaching staff setting out its objectives and how the objectives and priorities will be achieved." Section (63 f) of the same act states that this plan will be used to monitor and report on the school's performance.

In reality, my experience and my research indicate that very little time, energy or discussion is actually expended on consultation with teaching staff. Due to the enforced nature of the School Education Act and its prescriptive implications, complicated by a lack of time and consultation; then it seems that the main emphasis of school development planning is on monitoring, reporting and performance.

## **2.5 Critique of School Effectiveness/Improvement (SEI)**

SEI, in the form of school development planning, (Stoll & Fink 1996, p. 62), is the dominant discourse presently shaping what is happening in our schools. The approach is consistent with classical managerialism in which policy is determined by experts and the job of administrators and teachers is to implement it uncritically. Cuttance (1997) demonstrates this approach:

... strategic school development plans have been established in most state systems as the basis for the implementation of systemic and local school priorities. Action plans for the implementation of strategic school objectives, regular monitoring of students and an annual review of progress are essential elements of this approach to strategic management. (p. 105)

Critics (Elliot, 1996, p. 214, Smyth, 2000, pp. 496-499; and Gerwitz 2002, p. 125) on the other hand, suggest that we need to be asking different kinds of questions about SEI such as:



- In whose interests/demands are we following this business model?
- Why has it so easily permeated our schools?
- How is it changing the culture of schools?
- What impact is it having on teachers' work?
- What are the assumptions and values about teaching and learning?
- Does it enhance student learning?
- Who benefits? / Who is disadvantaged?

In the process of answering these subsidiary questions, a social context is framed to my overarching research question; How does the school effectiveness/improvement movement impact on the lives of teachers? Questions such as these provide a framework for investigation into teachers' lives in the workplace.

The present obsession with SEI is based on the naive functionalist view that schools are instrumental sites. Such accounts need to be challenged. As Goodman (1992, p. 28) argues, we need to consider the "... agenda and structure that very much conform to and legitimate the individualistic ideology that dominates our society." This means asking a number of questions; such as, effective for whom? (Stoll & Fink 1996, p. 30, Slee & Weiner, 1998) and who gets to do the choosing anyway? Is it really the parents or could it also be that the school selects according to which children fit the marketed image that the school determines? (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998, p. 49). As Smyth (2001c, p. 16) claims, the marketisation of schools forms a "kind of competitive grid within which to locate schools for purposes of comparison." Likewise, Elliot (1996, p. 200) challenges the central assumptions of the school effectiveness research paradigm, which he calls a "mechanistic methodology". He believes that it uses an instrumentalist view of educational processes and holds the belief that "educational outcomes can and should be described independently of such processes."

Caldwell and Spinks (1998), leading advocates of school effectiveness and self management, attempt to celebrate the neutrality, utility and effectiveness of their model which they claim may be adapted to virtually any occasion or any type of political context. Caldwell (1993) contends that:

Efficiency thus becomes a key consideration at all levels of education; the capacity to set and reset priorities, to monitor inputs, processes and outcomes, to tailor resources and programs in the face of shifting priorities and continuous monitoring, calls for high levels of skill in administration. (p. 164)

In contrast, social critical theorists argue that no one model can be implanted on any one school without taking into consideration its own complexity of history, politics,

social situation and unique cultural environment. For them, SEI is based on the functionalist values of “orderliness, uniformity and adherence to hierarchy” (Perrone cited in Elliot, 1996, p. 207). With such a perspective, there is little room for autonomous action in teaching students in classrooms. The real concern is that SEI has already been widely embraced in many schools throughout the world, including Australia, and continues to be so without sufficient debate or awareness of its potential damage. This uncritical acceptance of such methods and forms of educational practice can hardly be regarded as democratic schooling. It also serves the interests of those who gain from the status quo the most. As McLaren (1989) warns:

... we inhabit a perilous course in history in which democracy is in retreat ... we have seen an inordinate stress placed on career motivation and school/business partnerships in efforts to link youth to the corporate imperatives of the international marketplace. (p. 3)

I agree with Brennan (1993, p. 88) when she says that, “the Caldwell and Spinks model of planning is mechanical and procedural.” Yeatman (1990, p. 34) explains why such technical models have permeated so easily; “Laborite neo-conservatism takes the form of defending the public sector by making it appear as well managed as the private sector”. The goals set are short term in vision as they are about making or saving money. They have very little time or space for building relationships or stimulating long-term social and cultural environments which may have their own character, vibrancy, strengths, debates and support systems embedded within their structures.

What is disturbing is that human and non-human resource allocation and accountability within Cape Neal High School are becoming more and more associated with the School Development Plan. A recent example of this was an Employee Initiated Placement/Transfer (E.I.P.), due to the institution being over-staffed. The School Development Plan was used as a ‘measuring tool’ to determine who was to be eliminated. No matter how many ‘nice’ and rhetorically equitable terms are used, in the end, the decision is blatantly subjective! A recent personal experience of mine was applying for an Advanced Skills Senior Teacher position. In this process, it was also suggested that the applicant approach School Development Planning as one of their major goals within two of the six selection criteria. Selection for Head of Department (HOD) positions in the school now requires applicants to address school priorities listed in the SDP as essential selection criteria. Performance Management, Professional Development days (PD), duties of a Senior Teacher and HOD’s (Heads of Department)

meetings now have a significant amount of time and emphasis devoted to accountability in line with departmental instructions and the School Development Plan. For example, a recent PD (Professional Development) day involved, “reviewing department plans, ensuring that mechanisms are in place for collection of relevant learning area data for 2005 planning cycle, drafting the 2005 learning area plan and rating the school according to the school review framework” (School Development Day agenda Nov., 2004). Reinforcing such approaches, a recent directive from the Director General of the Department of Education and Training on school development days for 2005 reads: “District directors will look for evidence that the school development program provides opportunities for school staff to engage in extended planning for school improvement and to devote time to system-wide initiatives.” The same directive also stated that “in 2005, schools will be required to set aside up to four of the seven school development days for system-wide initiatives.” According to Albert (2004) “... performance management is one of the important accountability measures for staff and line managers.” Ball (1993, p. 70) describes such processes of self-management as a mechanism for ensuring the delivery of a national curriculum, as it ties “classroom practice, student performance, teacher appraisal, school recruitment and resource allocation into a single tight bundle of planning and surveillance.”

The SEI research is a large and growing industry. This is because the research is mainly concerned with problem solving and making schools work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of perceived trouble. The downside is that when too much energy and time is invested in selling the school and competing with other schools, then other important elements such as investment in children and teachers as people becomes more challenging and less of a priority. Smyth (2001b) explains:

Schools tend to respond to the ideology of competition and market forces that accompany the self-managing school, by resorting to conservative pedagogies, through pursuing image and impression management strategies (for example, through advertising, school uniforms, and discipline policy). (p. 25)

Lauder, et al. (1999), describe the main assumptions underpinning the supposed effectiveness of marketing in education. From a survey of the literature, they identified the following related hypotheses:

- Parents will have equal knowledge about schools and the power to send their children to the school of their choice.
- Schools will become more ethnically and socially mixed.
- Schools will become more diverse.

- Education markets will drive up school performance through competition for students.
- The quality of teaching will be raised. Bad teachers will be fired while good teacher's morale, motivation and performance will be raised.

However, their evidence showed a range of contradictory consequences such as:

- School performance will be driven up by the competition for students because school income will be determined by student numbers.
- Good schools will enrol more students while bad schools will improve or close down, and,
- Staff will be hired or fired according to this market system and teachers will need to 'perform' to stay employed. (p. 18)

If we take a long, serious and critical look at what is happening in our own schools here in Western Australia, we are witnessing a strikingly similar pattern unfold before our own eyes! So what are the consequences of SEI?

First, Smyth (2001c, p 4.) explains that the move towards self-managing schools is "... a kind of economic self-mutilation as schools lacerate themselves fiscally, as the state retreats from its fiscal responsibility to adequately fund public education." Consequently, rather than lead or govern, principals and administrators are often forced to become managers of limited resources as well as organising structures, processes and procedures which shape everyday activity (Angus, 1994b, p. 34). At the same time, teachers are expected to use 'self-surveillance' as it is considered to be more effective as "... resistance sets the dissenters against colleagues not policies" (Ball, 1994, p. 54). When teachers can no longer engage in professional debate concerning their own schools educational goals and have to implement the plans of others, then they "come to collaborate in their own oppression" (Woods et al., 1997, p, 9). I have discovered, like Blackmore (2002) that the self-managing systemic values and structural reforms actually produces dangerous results:

The focus upon structural reform in recent times in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Victoria, with the focus on self-managing schools, and the individualising practices that derive from local self-management based on market and management values, did not in itself improve student learning, nor promote teacher professionalism or democratic community practice. It did encourage localised survival mechanisms that polarised inequalities between schools, fragmented communities, and failed to assist those schools, communities and students with the greatest need. (p. 39)

Second, Smyth (2001b, pp. 23-24) goes on to argue that: “There is as yet no demonstrated or substantiated improvement of learning attributable to the shift to the self-managing school, even after a decade of such policies.” Chadbourne and Clarke’s (1994, p. 4) investigation into the responses of West Australian Principals to *The Better Schools* devolution process, demonstrates that it provided no direct evidence of improved student learning. This report was conducted after seven years under the new devolved structure. In contrast, considerable evidence from the report (p. 7) demonstrated that the sort of factors that do improve students learning are educational leadership, resource allocation, good teaching, relevant curriculum, student attitudes and parental support. Most principals in this study (Chadbourne & Clarke, 1994, p. 5) believed that educational change should be based on pedagogical principles and not on particular structures or cost effectiveness. Dellar’s (1995, p. 7) investigation of the impact of school-based management on classroom practice concluded that teachers did not perceive it as contributing positively to the educational program at their schools and that school-based management approaches in Western Australia appeared, in fact, to have had the opposite effect for which they were intended. Malen et al., (cited in Smyth, 2001a, p.210) concludes that “... there is little evidence that school-based management improves student achievement.”

Third, Hatton’s investigation (2001, p. 132) of school development planning in a small Australian primary school, suggested a lack of concern for social justice was apparent. She concluded that, “clearly aspects of school organisation associated with corporate modes of management are difficult to implement when the context is not ‘tailor-made’ for it.” Bennet, Crawford, Levacic, Glover and Earley (2000) also examined the extent to which the technical-rational approach to school development planning is appropriate for primary schools. They discovered that teachers remained unconvinced that this approach is successful for implementing change or school improvement. They concluded (p. 12) that “... government policy requirements are creating turbulent waters, and many small primary schools are being buffeted about.” Legget (1995, p. 171) also discovered in her study that “... whilst interviewees acknowledged that aspects of the school and of students performance needed to improve, they criticised school development planning for not having an impact in the classroom.” Riddell, Brown and Duffield (1998) discovered that at the micro level:

The concern is with the mismatch between, on the one hand, the ways in which school effectiveness research and policy-makers’ thinking have concentrated on

management issues and broad generalizations and, on the other hand, the complexity of the ways in which those in the classrooms (with the responsibility of effecting improvement) make sense of their work. Unless the former address the question of how classroom practitioners can be persuaded to reflect on and develop their own thinking (a bottom-up approach to balance the extraordinarily powerful top-down tendency), the search for improvements may well be pointless. (p. 184)

In summary, it appears that even though not a great deal of ‘good’ is coming from school development planning as an enforced policy, much ‘damage’ is being done to teachers’ working lives. It is a search for simple solutions to complex problems. There is a reduction in the time that can be spent on real teaching and learning. Dellar (1995, p. 7) concludes that school based management has contributed to further divides among groups, increased work pressure and decreased teacher motivation. Mahony and Hextall (cited in Smyth, 2002, p. 359) encapsulate the dilemma as they “... talk about teachers not only being up to their knees in paperwork, but of literally being down on their knees, on the floor with all these documents, trying to map them onto each other to find out what on earth they are meant to be doing.” (p. 359)

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL TRADITION

### 3.1 Critical Social Theory

Critical social theory is the framework I have adopted to investigate the situation at Cape Neal High School. Smyth et al. (2000, p. 69) argue that this choice is wise as it helps us to become active agents in “unravelling connections between social structures, ideological forces, and the marginalization of teachers.”

I identify four major features of this theoretical framework and call them ‘movements’ to express the way this theory unfolds in layers, helping me understand the political, social and economic forces impacting on classroom practices:

**First:** The language of possibility

**Second:** The act of knowing

**Third:** Teaching as a socially informed practise

**Fourth:** Human emancipation

There is often little respect for the history, social benefits and moral purpose of a school when only crucial economic and rational factors are taken into consideration. Critical theory, according to Bassey (1990), rejects rational, positivistic means of thinking in which the social world can be understood in terms of general statements about human actions. In its place, “action flowing from meaning and intention, weave the fabric of social reality” (Greenfield cited in Bates, 1983, p. 26). From this perspective, the teacher is a social agent who actively engages in the world.

**The First Movement:** Critical theory can offer a language of possibility, of reconstruction - a way of looking and doing things differently that did not seem to exist in my thinking or experience before. When one is ‘controlled’ it is often difficult to perceive alternative choices. This is the important position or moment of change and it is the movement where gaining this knowledge brings back confidence and power. The real value of critical theory lies in its ability to establish the possibility of reflexive thought and practice (Giroux, 1983, p. 18). This then becomes an instrument of critique and understanding. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 46), “the language of critique unites with the language of possibility when it points to the conditions necessary for new forms of culture, alternative social practices, new modes of

communication, and a practical vision for the future.” This tradition then offers an orientation or position to assist in understanding and critiquing everyday interactions, decisions, experiences and questions about my teaching. Critical social research deconstructs the dominant discourse and allows it to be reconstructed into a discourse of possibility (Smyth et al., 2000, p. 57). The danger with educational practices such as school development planning is that they become a part of commonsense thinking about schooling in ways that seem perfectly harmless and innocent, and in doing so, operate to obscure and naturalise power relations. Angus (1994a) argues the case therefore that sociological analysis of self-managing schools and education management is indeed urgent.

The dominant ideology that Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) subscribe to assumes that the purpose of school development planning is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Due to their concentration upon the ‘business’ of education, they treat schools in isolation from one another. Critical theory, in contrast, has a “concern to question authority, to examine all forms of hierarchy, domination and power, making it deeply unsettling to those who possess power, authority and status” (Gibson, 1986, p. 17). According to Morley and Rassool (1999, p. 127), “the exclusion of socio-economic factors and the lack of attention to equity issues in school effectiveness, reinforce traditional power relations, and function as disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms for ensuring conformity.”

As a consequence of this obscurity, more and more power is actually being recentralised despite the rhetoric of devolution. According to Smyth (2001b), the reality is that, despite official efforts to adopt more placatory terms such as choice, collegiality, ownership, consultation and empowerment, schools are nonetheless being restructured along lines that, “re-institute hierarchies, diminish co-operation, foster competitive individualism between schools, and in the end divert schools away from their educative agenda by requiring them to be entrepreneurial and more like businesses” (p. 32). According to Freire (1998):

More serious still is the way we can so easily accept that what we are seeing and hearing is, in fact, what really is and not a distorted version of what is. This tendency to cloud the truth, to become myopic, to deafen our ears, has made many of us accept without critical questioning the cynical fatalism of neo-liberal thought, which proclaims that mass unemployment is an inevitable end-of-the-century calamity. (p. 113)



Critical social research seeks to demystify these sorts of power relations. As Angus (1995) explains:

Scholars in this tradition, influenced by a number of Weberian, neo-marxist and critical perspectives, reject the implicit assumption of mainstream approaches that schools are socially and politically neutral institutions simply to be managed in the most efficient manner. Instead, schools are regarded as social and cultural institutions, sites of power relationships, in which schooling serves the interests of dominant groups largely through the reproduction of relations of class, race and gender. (p. 66)

**The Second Movement:** ‘Acts of knowing’ (McLaren, 2000, p. 76) whereby learning is viewed as a political act. Giroux (1983, p. 16) explains that there is a link between knowledge, power and domination. By using critical theory I become more aware of what is shaping my work and acknowledge that some knowledge is false. As Giroux explains (p. 16) the ultimate purpose of such critique and critical thinking is in the interest of social change. McLaren (1989, p. 188) states that “to resist means to fight against the monitoring of passion and desire.” It was this monitoring of feelings and emotions that made my teaching experience uncomfortable and alien. I now realise that by linking this passion together with the information I am gathering within this culture; that I am performing a very political act (Giroux, cited in Torres 1998, p. 155). Janks and Ivanic (cited in Smyth, 2001a, p. 149) term this “emancipatory discourse”. It involves recognising the forces which are leading one to fit in with the status quo and positively resisting them. Consequently, this means we are less accepting of initial judgements and the ‘naturalness’ of things, therefore resistance and transformative change becomes possible. Woods et al. (1997) explain:

There are forces and groups’ intent on deprofessionalizing teachers and their work, while there are others seeking to refine teachers in more positive ways. Teachers themselves occupy the key position in this conflict. It is important, therefore, in the pursuit of enhanced professionalism that teachers engage with the changes, rather than being taken over by them. In order to do that, they need to understand the origins and nature of the changes, and their own responses to them. (p. xiii)

**The Third Movement:** By using critical social theory, teaching can be more clearly viewed as a socially informed practice. McLaren (1989) argues that schools are democratic public spheres and as sites dedicated to forms of self and social empowerment, provide students the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills

necessary to live in a democratic society. According to Gibson (1986 p. 7), technical rational thinking dominant in managerial cultures prefers the intellectual over the emotional and represents the devaluation and marginalisation of feeling. It is this complete disregard for humanity in teaching that I wish to highlight. As Gibson (1986, p. 8) explains “it is all too easy to lose sight of the child in the classroom, to reduce the complexity of human needs to a neat timetable and an administrative memorandum.” Gibson (1986, p. 10) explains further that “critical theory argues for recognition of human intentions, powers and purposes in shaping society and claims to stress the powerfulness of individual endeavour.” This position, therefore, acknowledges its social significance as it requires stepping outside and reflecting on our position in the world (Quantz, 1992, p. 473).

**The Fourth Movement:** Ultimately, the collective aim of a critical theory of education is to identify sources of social domination, oppression, and injustice and to promote the kind of individual and collective reflective practices and actions necessary for human emancipation. As Kemmis (1994, p. 6) points out: “finding ways to realise this concern for the abolition of social injustice is not only the task of critical theory, but also of the socially-just school-in its curriculum, its pedagogy, and its social relations of assessment, evaluation and authority.”

To create a window of investigation into my own scenario, having understood these layers, I will now venture into using a relevant theory which keeps a check on the mechanics and regulation of control within teaching. This is termed ‘Labour Process Theory’ and is the focus of the section to follow. This section provides a framework to understand the work of teachers and their actions in socially unjust environments and, at the same time, allows for emancipation and liberation. I concentrate on the SEI movement as an example of labour process theory in action.

### **3.2 Labour Process Theory**

Labour process theory was set in motion when Braverman (1974) reworked Marx’s analysis of capitalist production (Thompson & McHugh, 1990, p. 38). It enables us to understand the work organisation as a “site of key economic processes and contradictions, and the meeting place of capital and labour” (Thompson & McHugh 1990 p. 38).

Teachers have been exploited under the culture of managerialism as it has simultaneously controlled the work process by prescribing knowledge and action (Smyth, 1991, p. 6). The negative effects on the social relations of teachers by labour process regulation are not often recognised. According to Reid (1998, p. 66), “it is clear that the current dissatisfaction, low morale and stress amongst teachers is as much an outcome of interventions into the labour process of teachers, as it is a result of labour market issues.”

As Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 39) explain “all societies have labour processes, but under capitalism it has specific characteristics; when capital purchases labour it has only a potential or capacity to work”. Even more corruptive, according to Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 39) is that, “to ensure profitable production capital must organise the conditions under which labour operates to its own advantage”. What this can mean for many teachers is working in very isolated circumstances.

We do not have a clear picture of what teachers are experiencing as they struggle with reform, what the emotional consequences of their work is and how they are feeling. According to Connell (1993 p. 60), teachers own craft skills include “ways of conveying information, managing groups, relating to pupils, managing time and ones own emotions”. As the gap between principals and teachers widens, so too, does the nature of their relationship (Reid, 1999, p. 196). Ball and Goodson (1985, p. 10), make the point that “management itself is not simply a neutral administrative technology. It is one form of organizational control, based on executive control of labour.” The problem is that teachers are increasingly regulated, isolated, organised and controlled. Ball (cited in Troman, 2000, p. 2) again uses labour process theory to explain that “intensification involving the separation of conception (managers) from execution (teachers) has fragmented staff relations creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ culture more characteristic of industrial contexts”.

Apple (2000, pp.115-116) outlines two major consequences of labour process on teaching. First, he identifies the ‘separation of conception from execution’ where “the person doing the job loses sight of the whole process and loses control over her or his own labour since someone outside the immediate situation now has greater control over both the planning and what is actually going on.” Second, he sees the ‘deskilling’ of teachers as “they lose control over their own labour” (p. 116). Apple concludes that the teaching methods, texts, tests and outcomes are being taken out of the hands of the

people who put them into practice, at the same time as the skills teachers have built up over decades of hard work, are lost (pp. 116-117).

At Cape Neal High School (CNHS), the consequences outlined by critical social theorists above, are being executed in such ways that there is a growing divide between departments, occupational roles and school hierarchy. As Ball and Goodson (1985, p. 9) argue; “duties which had previously been carried out by class tutors or teachers are now separated off as the responsibility of specialists”. Some examples of this at CNHS are; pastoral care structures, student services, year leaders, Associate Principal roles, HOD’s (Heads of Departments) or HOLA’s (Heads of Learning Areas), team leaders, performance managers and line managers. The result of this increasing specialization and complexity as discovered by Ball and Goodson, (1985, p. 9) is “increasing bureaucratization in school procedures-form-filling, record-keeping-and in teacher-pupil relations”. Dellar (1995, p. 4) notes that as a consequence of this “teachers in their classrooms function largely independently from the administration of the school.” Even greater mis-matches in social class status result. Riddell et al. (1998) explain:

At the micro level, the concern is with the mismatch between, on the one hand, the ways in which school effectiveness research and policy-makers’ thinking have concentrated on management issues and broad generalizations and, on the other hand, the complexity of the ways in which those in the classroom (with the responsibility for effecting improvement) make sense of their work. Unless the former address the question of how classroom practitioners can be persuaded to reflect on and develop their own thinking (a bottom-up approach to balance the extraordinarily powerful top-down tendency), the search for improvements may well be pointless. (p. 184)

Where choice and creativity are stifled, decisions made within this hierarchical system are not always in the best interests of teachers and/or students. Reid (1999, p. 197) confirms this: “As the identity of teachers shifts from one of common membership of a profession, to that of individual operating in an education market, so too, do the prospects for solidarity and collective action decline.” Fox (cited in Troman, 2000, p. 7) also confirms that the “presence of conflict and a lack of mutual loyalty and responsibility between workers and bosses are features of low-trust workplaces”. Smyth (1991) highlights the characteristics of such managerial styles in schools:

When teachers retreat behind the closed door and play ‘catch me if you can games’ with administrators, then they are enacting a time-honoured and very effective form of resistance, knowing full-well that the costly surveillance apparatus necessary to control them is impossible to create. At the same time,

they are also accommodating to a system that would fragment them and treat them as individuals competing against one another, rather than risk the danger of public displays of solidarity. (p. 13)

These contrary behaviours highlight teachers struggle against the dominant discourses of management. As Connell (1985, p. 82) discovered, “the first pattern is the division of labour, crystallised in the school timetable.” The allocation of classes, the supervisors and new roles within the school become power struggles within the school. The so called practical functioning of schools, when unearthed, reveals a “steady stream of workers trained in accordance with the social and technical division of labour” (Aronowitz cited in Giroux 1981, p. 2).

In his plan of new patterns for managing schools and school systems, Beare (1995, p. 150) claims that “school management could become the activity of a core staff, which recruits instructional services from professional companies of teachers.” He goes further to claim (Beare, 1995, p. 150) that “teachers could have their firm negotiate a contract for them, including a fee for service at rates the market will pay.” What is actually happening here as confirmed by Robertson (1994, p. 108) is a “discourse which provides a clear picture of the new type of skilled teacher as worker, a smarter, more highly skilled, self-managing, multiskilled and flexible worker, able to work in teams and on a variety of tasks.” Ball (cited in Merson, 2001) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 35) terms this phenomenon ‘proletarianisation’ and describes this as a denigration of teacher’s good work. When teachers are reduced to the status of technicians and not carers in a community, their historical and cultural school lives are undermined.

The teacher's stories that I have collected, provide information that has enabled me to analyse these sorts of issues. Significantly, according to (Gibson, 1986, p. 14) they have “exposed fractures and contradictions”, thus enabling exploited teachers to see the “roots of such distortions, and so themselves affect a cure: emancipation”. Teachers’ work is increasingly viewed and evaluated in terms of output measures (tests and exams) set against costs (subject resources). As Connell (1985, p. 70) states, “there is something a little mysterious and evasive at the heart of the business of teaching ... a great deal of work is done in schools, day in and day out, but this work does not produce any ‘things’”. We can say, therefore, that these so called outcomes of teaching (things) are very difficult to measure. Should we be measuring anyway? How can one measure the complexity of the inter-relations that exists between teacher and student? This seems

far too subjective and simplified. The rhetoric says that to be effective and responsible, we should be not only measuring but also comparing, thereby ensuring effective improvement! Troman (2000) suggests that:

... rather than policy-makers listening to teachers' views on their changed work, there now seems to be a consensus and political will among the governments that school effectiveness/improvement is to be sought by further tightening the control of teachers' work. (p. 347)

What makes a good teacher is varied and diverse and should not be determined according to criteria set outside of the profession and the context of the individual school community. This appears to be what the School Effectiveness/Improvement (SEI) movement seeks to do, where one model is expected to suit all and competition is encouraged to promote managerial efficiency. When this particular model of reform is followed, schools “abandon a discourse about education and social justice” (Smyth, 2001a, p. 13). The SEI movement fails teachers because as Smyth (2000, p. 493) aptly points out, “their developers have ignored the realities of teaching and tried to segment teachers' work in ways that make teachers operatives in somebody else's processes.” To make matters worse, the SEI movement with its emphasis on monitoring standards, packaged curricula and testing, in fact actually “de-skills the teacher” (Apple & Beane, 1999).

In the section to follow, I will discuss how labour process is acted out at Cape Neal High School. Key decisions and actions are administered and enforced by management following mandated plans and directives often resulting in greater divides and separations. It is the section where I find “political purpose” (Smyth et al. 2000, p. 54) as I demonstrate how I and other teachers can then discover strategies in order to resist control of our work.

### **3.3 Labour Process Theory in Action**

The power relations that become important are not the ones that are imposed on teachers through seemingly oppressive forms of supervision, but rather those that reside in the nature and the changing texture of the work of teaching itself (Smyth, 1991 p. 19).

In June 2002, The Western Australian Education Department released its '*School Accountability Framework*' built on five fundamental commitments:

- We are committed to high standards.
- We are committed to every government school being effective.
- We are committed to quality teaching.
- We are committed to parents receiving quality information about the standards being achieved by their schools.
- We are committed to the wider community being better informed about the standards being achieved across the government schools system. (pp.2-3)

The framework replaced existing policies relating to school development planning and school accountability. It is to be interpreted in association with *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines* and *Policy Framework for Performance Management* (2003, p. 3). Consequently, it is a:

... crucial part of the Department's overall quality assurance framework, which includes system-level mechanisms such as Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) and internal audit, and which is articulated in the Department's Annual Report to the Minister and Parliament. (p. 3)

In the following section, I want to examine four key shortcomings of this approach as evidenced at Cape Neal High School.

First, self-management, if we peel away the 'gloss', is as a way of "delivering national curriculum, ties classroom practice, student performance, teacher appraisal, school recruitment and resource allocation into a single tight bundle of planning and surveillance" (Ball, 1993, p. 77).

As Smyth et al. (2000, p. 54) explain "labour process theory helps us to make sense of what is happening to teachers' work and why". At CNHS, The School Development Plan (SDP) has been strongly linked to an enforced Curriculum Framework. In 2003, CNHS changed its priority within the School Development Plan. This was done in light of the Education Departments new *Strategic Plan 2003-2006*, (later to become the *Plan for Government Schools 2004-2007*) which "seeks to improve the outcomes of all pupils" (Department of Education and Training, 2003, p.1). There is more emphasis on student academic performance and work ethic. This transpired as an emphasis on 'standards.' These standards define expected performance of students at particular year levels (3, 5, 7 and 9) in certain outcomes that are "deemed critical by the government school system" (*WA Government School Standards 2003*, pp. 1-2). This sets the scene for greater emphasis on productivity instead of process. Teachers are now held more accountable by these standards as they measure performance and link key results to government priorities. Teachers are often supervised and evaluated according

to these standards as they become institutionalised in accord with standard setting already well established in the private sector. The *W.A. Government Schools Standards* were introduced by the Department of Education and Training (DET), as part of the *DET Outcomes and Standards Framework* (December 1999).

Many teachers, meanwhile, have been seduced into believing that it is their fault that standards have slipped and that they need to solve problems and improve the standards. This is often a response to the incentives set up for principals (managers) to be seen to be achieving and meeting the predetermined performance levels as an integral part of their performance management agreements. An example of this, taken from the CNHS new school priority 2003 of the SDP states that:

... the school community will work together to continuously improve student performance in all areas of study and activity. To support this improvement, the establishment, maintenance and monitoring of the following will be expected of all community members: high academic standards and high levels of skill development.

Second, I demonstrate how this controlling climate mandates teachers' work, by making them more accountable through the use of measurements and standards. Within this climate, a 'good' teacher is considered a 'compliant' teacher who ignores the political, industrial and organisational matters that shape their work. At CNHS's final school development day in 2002, teachers were asked to start 'improving themselves'. They were asked to think about what a good teacher does. The question was then rhetorically put "do you want to be a good teacher?" They were also reminded that School Council ratifies the priorities of the SDP. It was permeated by a tone of threatening coercion. Smyth (1991, p. 21) explains why this felt so; "rather than becoming equal collegial peers, teachers become agents charged with policing one another's oppression." Then in 2004, another school priority was put into the SDP:

- High standards of student achievement – academic and social with a special focus on: Key Objective 1;
  1. Motivated and engaged students,
  2. Improve writing outcomes for all students,
  3. Develop appropriate pedagogy to support and complement the implementation of Curriculum Frameworks and Curriculum Improvement Program – phase 2.



These adaptations to the SDP were made to accommodate the *Strategic Plan for W.A. Government Schools 2003-2006*.

Absent in these modifications are the priorities that formerly spoke of relationships and personal interactions:

- Priority 3: Provision of a caring and nurturing environment based upon respectful relationships.
- Priority 4: Support for strong community links.
- Priority 5: The physical environment will be enhanced to support learning.

It seems these priorities were too difficult within the current situation, to set strategies, indicators or targets. The other two priorities, however,

- Priority 1: High academic standards
- Priority 2: High levels of skill development

became the focus of the 2004 plan and were easily filled with indicators of evidence and proposed targets. Priorities 3-5 were no longer considered significant as the emphasis now was to, “tie in with the *Plan for Government Schools 2004-2007* and be linked to Key Objective 1 of the Plan” (School Development Officer, Memo, 27 May, 2004).

A recent example of the mandated change I have been discussing, at a local level, is provided below. It was delivered to the State Executive by the Director General of Education (Albert, 2004):

... this state executive provides us with opportunities to engage in key strategic issues, with a strong focus on accountability; specifically school performance and school review. We need to identify our schools that really are value adding to students ... we must also ensure that issues impacting on the performance of schools over which we have at least some control are identified and dealt with. State Executive provides a forum for us to refocus on our priorities – and to ensure a strong corporate approach to addressing issues and achieving our goals. (pp. 1-6)

Quality Assurance Audits and Annual School Reports are held each year as a way of analysing and checking data and establishing ratings to ensure that the School Development Plans are following the Education Department Guidelines. A section from the Principals Report for the month of September, 2002, reads:

For 2003, I want to see each learning area and program demonstrate the following in their plans:

1. The link to the 13 overarching outcomes.
2. The link to Department of Education initiatives.
3. The link to the school priorities - these will remain the same, but with a strong emphasis on academic achievement, critical literacy and working independently.
4. The process linking each of the above to the strategies to be adopted.
5. The indicators/evidence of success.  
(Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>, HOD's Minutes, School Development Planning, 2002).

Quality Assurance Reviews are held each term with visits from the District Director. They are often data driven as noted by the school principal:

... he came with school data as the basis for any queries and wanted to review our poor TEE results. This school data is required to be presented to School Council (HOLA Meeting minutes, 20th May, 2004).

Then after the review the school was pleased to be issued with the annual 2003/04 School Report which stated that:

- There are strong links between the plan for Government Schools and our own School Plan and they are being explicitly outlined.
- Clear links to teaching, learning and assessment principles of the curriculum framework were evident as an effort to raise student performance (p. 2).

In the introduction of the SDP for 2005, CNHS administration chose to place their own interpretation of what the key objective 1: Motivated and engaged students, means:

- Improve writing outcomes for all students.
- Develop appropriate pedagogy/ies to support and complement the implementation of Curriculum Frameworks, including the Curriculum Improvement Program-phase 2 and post-compulsory courses of study.
- Develop appropriate course selection processes across all years but with a special focus on transition from Year 10 to Year 11.
- Improve attendance rates.

The first school development meeting held in March 2005, required all staff to analyse data and then "... drill down and address weaknesses in their practice in order to improve students performance." It was also announced by the school development officer at this session, that "school development does not sit on itself, but becomes part of our performance management and presentation to parents and the community as we 'track', 'map' and 'value add'". We were told, in March 2003 general staff meeting, by the then Associate Principal in charge of personal relations that our school vision and priorities were to be used to promote our image. Now in 2005, teacher judgements must

be used to plan for improvement! Finally, it was stated that the school priorities for the SDP would need to be re-assessed. From now on (2005 onwards) priorities would be set according to weaknesses collected from data.

One is left with the impression that easily measured, accountable and quantified data is now the driving force behind School Development Plans. Very little genuine concern for students or teachers own interpretation of what is intrinsic learning is mentioned or called for. Blackmore (2002) confirms this:

What does change classroom practices in devolved systems, for the worst, is labour intensification that leads to lack of reflective and collegial time, imposed curriculum and assessment reforms, increased recording and data gathering, and teacher alienation because of lack of ownership. (p. 40)

Finally, just to be absolutely sure that teachers continue to be held accountable to these aims, the fine print at the base of each page of the *School Accountability Framework* (2002) reads: “All Department of Education employees are required to comply with all policy and procedural statement of the document. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.”

By looking closely at these changes to school priorities, and the mandated nature of control over the School’s Development Plan, we get a sense of the type of enforced and litigated policy that is shaping teachers’ work. It is a piece of historical evidence of W.A. government policy and guidelines using the *School Education Act of 1999* (W.A) and the *Curriculum Council Act 1997* (WA) to authorise and enforce processes and procedures which schools must follow. Smyth et al. (2000) capture this argument well:

... labour process theory does not have to become a theoretical strait-jacket. It is eminently suited to picking up on the nuances of educational practice. Indeed, it can only really be understood through detailed ethnographic analysis, at the level of individual school sites, which seek to trace how control is played out at the local level at specific historical moments. (p. 54)

The SDP can be used as a device in dividing up this unequal power, yet is often masked by its seemingly innocent and organised discourse. As Troman (1996, p. 483) discovered in his analysis “teachers have not participated in the formulation of the School Development Plan, not because they have been officially excluded from the process but they see their work in terms of the classroom.”

Many teachers are not even aware of the School Development Plan, its priorities and the criteria used for measuring performance. Teachers are not given much 'say' about educational theory, policy or curriculum, even when the rhetoric of local school management declares that they will. A few powerful people with the right structural capital have their say, yet the teachers are the "ones whose labour process is shaped by that process" (Reid, 1999, p.198). Teachers find themselves trapped into a cycle of data collection and review to ensure that the school is fitting within the boundaries of a regulated and accountable system. Regular audits held by district office, checking results and ensuring that average marks are raised are an example of this. In turn, there is often pressure placed upon students to conform and comply with rules and regulations that assist with the goals of improving standards for the school audit. There is little room or space for individuality, circumstance or questioning in such a confined and controlled system.

Ultimately what this means for teachers is that they are often socially controlled through the intensification of their workload. They are kept busy with mundane paperwork, large numbers of students to supervise and extra expected duties that they have little time or energy left to do. They are denied of a potential 'voice'. By this I mean a voice of provocation and a voice that provides power. This voice is one that could be stimulated to provide collective dialogue. It could also be a voice empowered sufficiently to challenge the discourse of managerialism. As Bailey (2000) discovered:

... teachers may be placed in the position of violating their own deeply felt beliefs about what children in their care need when they are told how and what to teach. The study participants believed mandated changes required them to abandon methods and materials that had been successful with their students. With mandated change, their impulse to evaluate new methods before adopting them was disallowed: they were essentially denied their right to professional expertise. As a result they often felt like they were teaching 'blindly', and not 'doing it right by (the) kids'. (p. 118)

In summary, I have outlined these events, statements and quotes in this section, to emphasise what I see as extreme control of teachers' labour and the type of discourse that is constantly filtering down into our daily lives and classrooms. Giroux (1981, p. 132) explains, that if we divorce knowledge from the processes that constitute it then we maintain "a division of labour that prevents radical educational praxis." What this often means for teachers is a never ending collection of surveys, ratings and other accountability paper work, regularly displacing valuable teaching and learning time

without improving any 'performance' and without being provided with any extra resources. It is more often than not presented in a mandated, threatening and competitive way. This marginalises teachers because as Bailey (2000, p. 112) explains "we neglect the possibility that teachers, assessing past experiences as well as current realities, may have something important to tell us."

### 3.4 Teachers and Resistance

Teachers, however, are not passive agents. They often work to provide the best possible education for their students in whatever situation they are working. Goodson (1992, p. 247) points out that by using feedback and negotiation "teachers have a final power of veto over the data and reports in which they feature." Teachers typically find ways around the bureaucracy by ignoring or resisting official mandates, therefore continuing on with their own work or they may become severely stressed trying to 'get it right' and 'get in front'. Elliot (1996) reinforces the point that:

Teachers' practices won't change without corresponding changes taking place in their implicit theories. They will resist change that does not appear to be consistent with their beliefs. Therefore, the starting point for change is with classroom teachers and their understandings of teaching and learning, rather than with the organisation as such. (p. 216)

This is in stark contrast to the '*Change Management*' document of the Education Department (part 22, p. 105 of the 2004 Certified Agreement) which states that; "the direction and nature of these changes will be determined largely by the Department's strategic planning process". Even more worrying, (p. 105, 109.8) is that, "the final responsibility and authority for making decisions to ensure the provision of a quality public sector education system rests with the Director General."

In conclusion, this chapter has investigated the usefulness of critical theory and labour process theory in action as frameworks for understanding my interpretation of teaching. I want to argue that the values of trust and engagement are more important facets of successful teaching in a democratic system than echoes of controlled labour. Relationships are paramount here and as emphasized by Covington and Beckett, (1998, p.30) it is within a family that "children learn to trust those who are consistent, reasonable, predictable, forgiving, respectful, and loving toward them." Unfortunately, however, for many people democracy is viewed in the words of Goodman, (1992, p. 4) as an "artefact (government agencies) or a set of cultural rituals (passively observing or

voting in elections) rather than a dynamic process in which the public actively participates on a daily basis and which involves face-to-face contact.” By using the language of critical theorists such as McLaren and Giarelli (1995, p. viii) we can mount resistances more often in order to counteract the forces of undemocratic practices within schooling. Freire’s pedagogy (1972) provides us with ways to break the cycle of psychological oppression by confronting our own lives and engaging in a dialogue with our own fear as a representation within ourselves of the power of the oppressor. Gee, Hull and Lankshear, (1996, p. 148) advise us to start “our resistance by flatly refusing to see ourselves primarily as consumers driven by the complex systems of global markets, and rather, seeing ourselves as moral agents with a new globalized citizenship”.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Goodman (1992) says:

The education of children is a complex phenomenon that involves organizational structures, personal identities, interpersonal dynamics, and symbolic communications. An understanding of what happens in a given school is not readily accessible by simple or direct means. As a result, education as a lived experience must be sought through observations of people as they engage in various types of communicative experiences, as they manifest their personal identities, and as they create structures, rituals, and symbols that express values and ideas. (p.44)

A major purpose of this case study is to critically examine the dialectical dynamics of the impact of recent policy in education on teacher culture and in turn how teacher culture has impacted or 'talked back', to education policy. McLaren (2000, p. xv) reminds us that "there is, and always has been, a dialectical relationship among education, politics and power." To this point, the reading, writing and reflecting that I have chosen to engage in throughout this research, are political. In Freire's terms (cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 76) they are "acts of knowing". He elaborates (p. 76) that "learning is inevitably and always a political act ... the new socialist being is both critically self-reflexive and self-critical - in other words, is an agent of self and social transformation."

### 4.1 Features of Critical Ethnography

In pursuing the ethos of critical social theory, I want to now examine critical ethnography as my preferred methodology. By using critical ethnography, I hope to have unearthed the broader social, economic and political forces at play and reveal the ways they have impacted on the everyday lives of teachers at CNHS. According to Atkinson and Delamont (1990, p. 121), "ethnography is defined as research on and in educational institutions based on participant observation and/or permanent recordings of everyday life in naturally occurring settings." Skeggs (1998) elaborates on the nature of ethnography:

Ethnography is especially powerful; it enables different theories to be understood over time. It is a form of historical analysis that pays attention to

complexities. It allows for a range of interpretations to be tried out over time to see if they have any value. (p. 43)

According to Troman (2000, p. 2), “ethnography is a key research strategy in such historic times of change. It provides a window into the practical realities of people’s work and lives.” I situate myself as a researcher in analysing the setting at CNHS. As Goodman (1992, p. 45) states: “human beings often speak in narrative form” and it is “one way to gain insight into the social reality of a given school.”

The major features of critical ethnography that I have adopted are:

Being *reflexive*, by being self reflective, open, honest and explicit with my own values, opinions and practices. This has meant that I have become more conscious of my teaching practices and techniques and as a result more able to value and reclaim micro-practices. By observing self change and becoming self-conscious, my own biases and positions are acknowledged. I want to make the stoic admission as Smyth and Shacklock (1998, p. 7) and McLaren (1995 p. 281) do, that there is ‘no truth’ in research as it is essentially ‘socially situated’. Tripp (cited in Smyth et al. 2000) provides more detail on my position:

Specifically, reflexivity involves a kind of circularity in understanding in which the person trying to understand the so-called ‘objective’ phenomenal world they are investigating, examines the way in which their developing understanding changes them and their knowledge of it, but also to how they are observing and understanding the phenomenal world. In doing so one is making a self reflective relationship between the theory and the data. (p. 39)

Sultana (1995, p. 123) calls this type of ethnography radical because it examines the politics of absence by giving the silenced a voice. It can “shed its subservience to the regimes of realism in order to become a meditative and reflexive vehicle.” This theoretical framework provides the base in which to analyse power and knowledge relationships. By being ‘self-reflective’, I can relate to the essence of what Kanpol (1998) has to say about the structure of schools and our relationship to them:

One’s history is tied into the research site on some conscious or unconscious level. The move from critical cynic to emancipatory joy becomes a moving dialectic between researcher and researched and ‘our’ otherness - an ongoing process of etching out common democratic threads as an inter-subjective understanding. (p. 200)



Macy (1991, p. 92) also confirms the use of self-reflectiveness throughout this thesis: “self reflexive consciousness emerges when the degree of complexity has evolved to the point that self-monitoring is required for evaluating and selecting between alternate courses of action.”

Being *dialectical*, by overlapping the theories with the practice as I make observations and reveal any contradictions that emerge. Thomson and McHugh (1990, p. 32) describe this as a process where the movement goes from thesis, to antithesis and synthesis. As Anderson (1989, p. 253) explains: “critical ethnography seeks research accounts sensitive to the dialectical relationship between the social structural constraints on human actors and the relative autonomy of human agency”. According to Cortazzi (1993, p. 11), it “relies on the dialectic between events and meanings, practice and theory.”

By using *praxis* and “getting beneath the surface” (Lather, 1986 & Harvey, 1990) of apparent ‘reality’ to reveal the myths surrounding the school effectiveness regime, whilst taking a critical view of practices occurring around me. Harvey (1990) provides a scaffold in which to embed my methodology:

... a constant shuttling backwards and forwards between abstract concept [School Development Planning] and concrete data [teachers’ stories] between surface appearance [School Effectiveness/Improvement policy] and essence [teachers’ lives]; between reflection [my thesis writing] and practice [my teaching experience]. (p.29)

According to Peters and Lankshear (cited in Giroux, et al.,1996, p. 31): “as a praxis of theory and practice, cultural studies provides opportunities for teachers to confront the dominant official narrative of classroom education.” In the words of Freire (cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 149) “meaning circulates, is acted upon, and is revised, resulting in political interpretation, sense making and will formation.” Apple, (cited in Torres, 1998, p. 23) seeks praxis through “a combination of theoretical elaboration and personal struggles.” McLaren (2000) expands on this point:

... the philosophy of praxis is a radical educational praxis, a method of analysis and a conception of the world that involves a dialectical comprehension of reality and a dialogical unity with the people. It involves making coherent the principles and problems of the masses in their practical activity. (p. 191)

In my own way, this is what I endeavour to do in this thesis; to take on the philosophy of praxis as transformation as I interact with the researched. Thompson and McHugh (1990) provide reassurance that this principle is a wise alternative:

... praxis involves developing analytical resources which go beyond reflexivity and can help members of organisations constrained by existing relations of ownership and power to critically reflect on and reconstruct their circumstances. (p. 34).

In this way, the critical ethnographer is seeking knowledge of the structure under investigation, in this case CNHS, and “what underlies that structure becomes the gut of the critical ethnographer and his/her relationship to that structure” (Kanpol, 1998, p. 200). A quote from my reflective journal (July, 2000) demonstrates this:

*... through studying other people's lives, I find I begin to understand my own much better. It confirms my own powers of rationality and imagination. Studying qualitative research has helped me understand “the nature of human experience, the origins of human knowing and what it means to be human” (Webb & Glesne, 1992, p. 807).*

By using *discourse analysis*. The use and understanding of language can be a powerful mapping tool in challenging the SEI paradigm. It is a tool that is tangible and accessible to many teachers and a way of offering resistance, understanding and hope in their work. Harmon and Mayer (cited in Smyth 2001a, p. 145) define discourses as, “combinations of words and phrases which, taken together, organize into our sphere of attention certain values, concepts and ideas. Discourses thus create meaning or ‘truths’ for those speaking, listening and reading.” Language is acknowledged in critical social theory as a powerful political tool and one I believe that can help us all to reclaim discourse. If not, its counterpart, ‘silence’ or “intrusive synthetic managerialist discourses” (Smyth, 2001a, p. 147) will dominate unchallenged. By embracing the politics of discourse, the critical educator can make an important and responsible contribution to democracy in society (Yeatman, 1990, p. 151; McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p. 49).

## **4.2 Embedding Critical Ethnography**

Most educators find critical pedagogy politically untenable or hopelessly utopian. It is certainly a position that threatens the interest of those who are already served well by the dominant culture (McLaren, 2000, p. 148).

Given that critical social theory drives my research, it is consistent that I adopt the methodology of critical ethnography to gather evidence at CNHS. This is in order to “examine the stories and myths in a school to probe its embedded values and visions of education, society, and the roles of individuals with these contexts” (Goodman, 1992, p. 45). By using this methodology, my intention is to unearth the broader social, economic and political forces at play. What makes this ethnography critical is my desire as a researcher:

- To expose the interests driving the SEI movement.
- To listen to teachers’ voices, and in the process create a greater awareness of their situation. This ‘critical literacy’ or conscientisation approach (Freire, cited in Apple, 1999, p. 5) means capturing “real struggles by real people in real relations in real communities” (Apple 1999, p. 5).
- To be able to make a difference in the lives of teachers by critically questioning the status quo and exploring the use and abuse of power.
- To initiate dialogue (talk and debate) as a form of resistance to dominant discourses. From my experience, resistance is often treated as a defect and something to remedy.
- To place myself in the ‘story’ both as a researcher and as a teacher.

### 4.3 Methods

The methods I have used to gather evidence in this critical ethnography at Cape Neal High School include:

*Teacher’s stories (narrative):* Gathered through conversations and semi-structured interviews with colleagues.

*Auto/ethnographic data:* Collected through personal journaling of my own experiences. Sections are shared throughout this thesis as ‘Janice’s diary’.

*Participant observation:* Daily events and processes recorded in my reflexive journal, and,

*Document analysis:* Key official policies and guidelines.

In this section, I want to demonstrate how I have incorporated the features of critical ethnography outlined in the section above together with these methods to investigate CNHS; the ethnographic site.

CNHS, the site for this case study, is a typical high school in which teachers are struggling to cope with the foreign discourse of managerialism in their daily interactions with students and colleagues. It is a large senior school, with over 1200 students and 85 staff, whose personal and professional concerns can often be glossed over in the business of school life. Throughout the past four years, I have critically examined my workplace by collecting anecdotal data from observations, minutes and journal reflections and relevant document and policy analysis.

By studying the school up close and placing a lens over its environs, the situational context of narrative is revealed (physical, social, cultural and political). My own personal experiences, together with the teachers' stories provide valuable sources of data (participant observation). The interpretation of this data is possible by reflecting on the wider meaning of the narrative and its relevance to other people in other schools. By doing this, I have made a stand regarding what I and others value as important in teaching (case study). Many rituals have been captured in these ethnographic stories. Moore and Myerhooff (cited in Goodman, 1992) state:

Rituals contain properties such as special timing, a particular order of events, and style of behaviour, collective setting and repetition and although they often contain overt messages, their symbolic form leaves their meaning open to interpretation by those who observe or participate in them. (p. 45)

Listed below are two contrasting examples of the types of data, one personal and the other official, that I used in my research:

*(Janice's diary ... August, 2000)*

*I had an incidental chat to one of my colleagues today when going to borrow a camera. It was important to both of us to feel like we were listening, sharing and understanding as we tend to often work in isolation. This can even happen whilst all the wonderful teaching work carries on in the background. The students were creating, discussing and happily learning while the two of us vented our spleens! It made me think how important it is to 'interact' with the action. Try to discover the essence of what is happening. Talking with others. Trying to be clear about what our experiences are within this complex institution.*

The priorities for 2002 need to be reviewed with a strong emphasis on academic achievement, critical literacy and independent learning. The new plan needs to be in place by the end of November. The Annual Report will be prepared from the information gleaned from the ratings as well as basic data as per this year's report.

(Principal's Report, HOD'S Minutes, 7th November, 2002)

In undertaking an ethnographic case study at CNHS, I am mindful of Leggett's (1995) comment about the usefulness of such approaches:

... whilst I do not have any reason or desire to claim that the focus school is typical of secondary schools, I do not have any reason to assume that it is so atypical or isolated to be unique in regard to the discourses operating within it. (p. 275)

Leggett (1995, p. 275) also claims "that the situation can arise in one school is evidence of an issue which needs addressing." This study has of course, my own biases and value systems embedded, simply by what I have collected. Below is an example to illustrate this:

*I feel powerless in this non-democratic system - dictated to by the regiment - told to conform, 'train students', 'enforce uniform', 'nip non-compliant students'. This imbalance of power that seems to be playing itself out in front of me creates absurd behaviours of military style division of labour. The scary thing for me, is that no-one seems to be questioning the madness. (Feb., 2003)*

Here, I demonstrate my own position as a participant observer in the research. I continue throughout this research to include my 'own story' at the site (autoethnographic) as I consciously work to uncover the manner in which broader social, economic and political forces are operating on teachers' work. Teachers stories' (narratives) are the way I express my methodology. As Cortazzi (1993, p. 11) explains, "narrative research offers a way for us to hear teachers' voices and to understand their culture from the inside." It also allows us to develop descriptions of teachers' culture which preserve their voices. In Mishler's (1986, p. ix) words, I have attempted to show "how individuals perceive, organize, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences, and their worlds." I also highlight metaphors throughout these stories to inform the reader of fractures and various forms of legitimate language. A narrative is a "distinctive type of 'recapitulation' of experience that preserves the temporal ordering of events in the real world" (Labov and Waletzky, cited in Mishler, 1986, p. 83). I treat as Bertaux (cited in Goodson, 1992, p. 237) mentions, the speakers as subjects creating their own history, rather than objects of research.

People tell and retell their own stories to make sense of their world, to give it meaning (Sikes, 2001, p. 90). Stories contain powerful knowledge linked to the daily practice of teaching. This in turn provides the theory with a reality check. As Sikes (2001, p. 90) confirms; “personal narratives have a status as personal, as well as research, data.” These stories could be considered as Peters and Lankshear (cited in Giroux et al., 1996, p. 2) define them as ‘counternarratives’. According to their definition, there are “the official and hegemonic narratives of everyday life: those legitimating stories propagated for specific political purposes to manipulate public consciousness by heralding a national set of common cultural ideals.” (p. 2). The notion of counternarratives are moreover the “little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledge’s and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives. (p. 2)

To gather these ‘counternarratives’, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty different teachers who responded to an invitation letter; (Appendix A). A broad range of teaching experience, ages and positions in the school responded to this letter. I had an expectation that six subjects may respond but in fact more than twice as many people responded to my invitation. Some of the volunteers were on their first year out of university, some at the point of retiring after forty years teaching service and others recently choosing to leave the education system. The initial conversations ranged from fifteen minutes to one hour in length and some had incidental comments they wanted to add later (often along a corridor!). The interviews were conducted in private either in the teachers own home, in a corner of their classrooms, in an empty staffroom or behind doors in semi-detached offices. The style was informal. I wanted teachers to be as relaxed as possible and say what they needed to say without being too cautious. The questions were semi-structured. The three questions used were;

1. What is it like being a teacher?
2. Have you seen a change in school culture?
3. What does School Development Planning mean to you?

The purpose of these questions was to establish teachers lived experience of the school setting and to establish relationships with my colleagues. I did not want the subjects to answer the question in a rigid structural format. It was more in tune with the philosophy of Smyth’s ‘voiced research’ (1998):

... voiced research starts out from the position that interesting things can be said and garnered from groups who do not necessarily occupy the high moral,

theoretical or epistemological ground – they actually may be quite lowly and situated at some distance from the centres of power. (pp. 11-12)

My intention was therefore political in providing opportunities for expression through ‘purposeful conversations’ (Burgess, 1988) rather than interviews where the researcher often falls prone to having data extraction in mind when framing the question. My questions were kept intentionally vague and open ended for as Burgess (1988, p. 144) states “the conversations that are established then provide an opportunity for teachers to talk about their work in their own words, using their own concepts rather than in an abstract way or in response to a set of staccato questions.”

The collecting of conversations was reassuring and revealing and became a liberating experience for me. By listening to others experiences and sharing their most intimate and personal teaching experiences, one could not help but build up relationships of empathy and understanding. It often provided a sense of freedom to hear silenced voices talk back. In Mishler’s (1986, p. 34) view “the interview can be a discourse between speakers where the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent.” This also enabled me to appreciate the great diversity and survival strategies that teachers often develop in their work and the many isolated struggles that people endure. At one stage, I remember wanting to gather all my subjects together to confirm that they were not alone in their stress and that they could embrace their individual struggles.

After transcribing these stories, some revealing themes and issues emerged. The transcripts were shown to participants then common themes and content of script was confirmed with them as a form of respondent validation. (Measor & Sikes, cited in Goodson, 1992, pp. 244-245).

During the entire research process, I kept a reflective journal in which I recorded my own experiences, anecdotal data from books, novels, newspapers and other journals. Many of the stories that I intersperse throughout the data analysis section (Janice’s diary) of this thesis were taken from my reflective journaling and dialectical observations.

Throughout this research, I kept school documents to track changes and incidents. Examples of this are relevant minutes from Staff Meetings, School Council meetings, Local Area Education Planning (LAEP) meetings, Heads of Department

minutes and school staff daily notices. I also collected school development planning notes from The Principal and Deputy Principals in charge of school development planning in order to trace changes throughout the school. I insert an example of this below:

In essence, HOD's need to demonstrate that there is an established process of plan, act and review with their faculty and that the Department's strategic initiatives are being implemented. We propose to manage this process by;

Term 1 – Year 12 Analysis and planning for lower school data collection and analysis.

Term 2 – A focus on teaching and learning that supports outcomes focused education.

Term 3 – Lower school data analysis and student participation and engagement.

Term 4 – Whole school priorities and formal improvement planning for 2004.

I collected anecdotal data at whole school staff meetings and school development days. Below is an example:

The agenda for school development day on 26th March, 2004 was;

Morning session: All staff members to work in learning areas on

a) Strategic planning and learning area accountability and

b) Data collection and analysis of data.

Afternoon session: Performance Management of all staff, teaching and non-teaching.

(AP, School Development)

The agenda for school development day, May 2004;

Morning Session: *Curriculum Improvement Program* – phase 2 (18 HOD's from the school had already attended compulsory district P.D. on this two weeks prior)

Middle Session: Standards (*Outcomes and Standards Framework*) and

Afternoon Session: School Planning/School Priorities/ Data Analysis

In summary, I use a triangulation (Smyth et al. 2000, p. 62) of layers of evidence. This means that I use at any one time at least three methods of data collection, overlapping them throughout the study as I critically question and analyse various aspects of human behaviour within the case study institution (school site). I use participants' (teachers') stories to talk back to the theory and in turn inform the literature. I scaffold this data with my own stories and then intersperse it with anecdotal data collected from and within the site.



#### 4.4 Ethical Issues in School Based Research

McLaren (2000) summarises some of the ethical struggles that I have encountered in taking on critical ethnography as my methodology:

... critical pedagogy needs to reflexively engage its own premises, to challenge its own decidability, and to be self-conscious of its own constructed character. Surely critical pedagogy must not only continue to be critical of its own status as a commodity, it must also remain critical of its own presumed role as the metatruth of educational criticism. The language of critical pedagogy, after all, is also a social system that inscribes subjects. Critical pedagogy in this regard will always be other to itself; will always be at odds with itself. (pp. 184-185)

To follow, I will examine how, as a beginning ethnographer, I use integrity and power in the research situation. To demonstrate some of the ethical issues that I have encountered in the process of doing my research, I have recognised obstacles and identified them as ‘struggles’. I chose the notion of struggle as a way of capturing the complex dilemmas of doing critical research in my own workplace without doing harm. It is the type of research in which I, the researcher, am immersed in the culture that is being studied. Thus, in the process of doing critical ethnography, I am mindful of the following questions:

##### *4.4.1 Struggle 1: How to position myself as a ‘participant observer’?*

Throughout the research process, this proved to be a challenge, as I felt enmeshed personally and had become part of the whole dynamic of study. This inadvertently resulted in me interacting with the teachers whilst attempting simultaneously to detach myself from them. This became even more challenging as I tried to reflect on what was actually occurring and then, trying to locate some understanding during these events. An example of this was my emotional reaction as I came up against personal issues whilst doing my research. A critical incident for me occurred when I was applying for the position of Senior Teacher. It became highly sensitive ethically as I pushed up against the management hierarchy and experienced resistance. I realised from doing this study that by reframing the situation and not taking the incident personally, I did not have to feel victimised. My own story then mirrored many of the collective voices that I have been capturing to show strength and resistance. For me, it also demonstrated greater understandings of the managerial culture and its impact on teaching practice. Freire (cited in Crotty, p. 147) is reassuring here when he states that “reflection without action is empty verbalism.” Mishler (1986, p.105)

concludes “the interviewer’s presence as a co-participant is an unavoidable and essential component of the discourse, and an interviewer’s mode of questioning influences a story’s production.” The important aspect for me then is to be open and honest about this. This constant struggle of finding the right space and the right balance of loyalty to all has not been easy but is very important in this type of research. Gunter (1997) highlights the importance of reciprocity and ethics in this situation:

If emancipatory research is to be facilitated, there is a need for an interactive dialogue, and the researcher has to consider what appropriate disclosure about the intentions of the interview is and how his/her own life interacts with that of the research. (p. 79)

Kanpol (1998 p. 191) expresses his struggle in ethnographic case study work: “none of this would have been possible without the intrusion of my own subjectivity, personal biases or political agenda.” Richardson (1994, p. 523) explains that “self-reflexivity unmasks complex political, ideological agendas hidden in our writing. Truth claims are less easily validated now: desires to speak ‘for’ others are suspect.”

#### *4.4.2 Struggle 2: Which parts of participants’ stories to use?*

Bassey (1990) provides reassurance:

I believe that researchers should try to reveal their social identity and values and to this end I see no difficulty in making polemic statements: for example, as part of the ending of a report. But it should be clear who is making the statement and that it is an expression of value and not of fact, thereby locating the polemic firmly within an ethic of respect for truth and respect for persons. (p. 90)

Being ‘critical’ means being up front and honest in values. It means being subjective, yet respecting other’s value systems. I try to deal with this dilemma by using triangulation of data and respecting difference. Sultana (1995. p.118) assists; “the real promise of ethnography as a transformative tool is fulfilled when it becomes theoretically embedded and when it, therefore, tries to recover the silenced context, the conditions and the relations in the light of which phenomena need to be apprehended.” According to Richardson (1994, p. 521) “we are freed to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as “getting it right,” only “getting it differently contoured and nuanced.” Robinson (1994, p. 39) also offers guidance in making such decisions by suggesting that we ask ourselves how meaningful the

information is and to consider what difference it will make for the lives of all the subjects of the research. In a similar way, Shacklock and Smyth (1997, p. 15) argue that “any form of research is about making choices and in collaborative forms of research these choices take on a moral significance because of the interpersonal essence of the activity and outcome.”

#### ***4.4.3 Struggle 3: Why haven't I included students?***

This dilemma has meant that it has often been difficult to separate the impact of my research topic on teachers' lives from the very lives of the people they are working with, and for; the students. Students themselves are often at the coal face of everything I have been critiquing and it is a sense of loss that I have experienced in not being able to include them. Smyth (1998, p. 8) confirms that “it is not possible, in the end to talk about teachers work without also making some incursion into the world and experiences of students.” It would make this thesis too complex, too long and confusing to try to include all the students' stories as well. Instead, I chose to collaborate in this study with teachers and I have taken on the moral significance of their stories. From becoming more aware and appreciative of this struggle, I notice that more flexibility, understanding and tolerance of difference have developed within my teaching practice. I believe this has occurred due to the acute and overt behaviours that have been illuminated from consciously modelling what I have been forced to encounter and confront daily. Shacklock and Smyth (1997, p. 16) explain; “the kind of conversation we have in mind is dialogic in character and is not limited by the technical discussion of methods and end products – it puts people first.”

#### ***4.4.4 Struggle 4: How do I deal with representation in a school?***

The key issue here is how to critique without seeming to be critical and negative rather than hopeful and optimistic. It has taken time and understanding to become aware that with critique, improvement can eventuate. In dealing with this issue, maintaining confidentiality and informed consent have been very significant ethical considerations. It has been continually important to remain honest and transparent, yet tactful and sensitive to others reactions. As Shacklock and Smyth (1997, p. 16) indicate “things like respect, trust, equality, flexibility, and reciprocity – and the conditions which establish them – must become the determining agents at all stages of the research act.” At times, I have wanted to get teachers together to share their woes and help them understand that they are not alone in their struggles and assist them in embracing their struggle. Of

course the dilemma of confidentiality within the worksite prevents this. As Mishler (1986, p. 121) confirms, “informed-consent procedures are intended to minimize negative social and personal consequences and serve the purpose of allowing subjects to assess the risks of their participation in a study.”

I used a personal consent form for subjects to participate in the research (Appendix B). I also obtained permission from the principal of the case school before beginning the data collection. (Appendix C).

#### *4.4.5 Struggle 5: How do I overcome the tendency to ‘rescue’ my subjects?*

I am mindful that it is important not to give a false sense of simple solutions considering the complexity of this research process. In this I have been aware of the great need of genuine collegiality as teachers become more aware of their own situation. This collegiality contrasts with the “institutionalised collegiality” that Smyth (1991, p.3) refers to that is often used to serve the needs of economic reconstruction. As stated by Sultana (1995, p 123) “radical ethnography can shed its subservience to the regimes of realism in order to become a meditative and reflexive vehicle.” Instead, I have tried to provide some breathing space, allowing for reflection, moral support and encouragement. In doing this, I hope to transform some energy of the persons I interviewed, alleviating feelings of apathy, helplessness and disillusionment. Shacklock and Smyth (1997, p. 15) point out the moral commitment to schooling:

Teachers who engage collaboratively with academics in research about their work do so in order to provide an opportunity, not necessarily tied to the outcomes of that research, for the exchange of information and perspectives which might lead to some collective increase, or change, in understanding about their work.

McLaren (1995, p. 274) emphasises that “fieldworkers always are cultural workers who engage not just in the analysis of field sites but in their active production through the discourses used to analyse field relations.” Leonard (1997, p. 153) also outlines the ethical problem of acting in the interests of the well-being of others. He advises that “we may act if the ‘other’ wishes us to, and on their terms, but only after reflection, trying to relax the imperative to organize and classify with our plans and projects.”

#### ***4.4.6 Struggle 6: How do I prevent myself from being dogmatic or moralistic?***

As Kanpol (1998, p. 194) experienced in his research, it is important to “remain hopeful without being cynical, and democratic without being authoritarian.” McLaren and Tadeu da Silva (1993) provide some advice:

So that critical pedagogy does not fall prey to forms of evangelizing or enunciating its call for liberation as if it were the sole theoretical representative of the oppressed, teachers should give the oppressed a preferential option for developing their own language of analysis as a means of interrogating the conditions of their own oppression. (p. 51)

I attempt to honour this challenge, by firstly telling the stories as they were told yet at the same time, I acknowledge that by omitting some of their dialogue and interviewing only a sample of twenty five percent of the staff, that the data contains a certain bias to it; for example, those who wished to vent their frustrations with the system. Critical ethnography and critical social research recognises this type of struggle as an inherent component of its own complexity. Apple (cited in Torres, 1998, p. 38), for example, warns of the danger in human beings of arrogance as they think they have a lock on reality. He recommends instead making our anger collective (p. 43).

In summarising and reviewing these struggles, I am reassured by the wisdom and experience of Goodson (1992, p. 246) who confirms that there is no method which can suspend ethical and methodological issues. There are just methods which obscure and mystify such issues ... or methods which honestly confront and openly wrestle with such issues. Skeggs (1998) confirms that ethnography is like a permanent ethical dilemma, so in having ethical struggles, I am provided with challenges that can enrich my study. She says that:

... it forces accountability and makes us assess the usefulness of theory and concepts. It teaches us to be careful, rigorous and thorough. It is the only methodology that can show how complex processes are lived together and in contradiction. It should make us think about our relationships to others (not to ourselves), aware that knowledge always bears the marks of its producer. It enables us to question judgements made on appearances. (p. 48)

I believe that by participating in this research and enduring many of the above struggles, that I have indeed developed a much greater awareness of my own practice and become more critically reflexive as a teacher.

## **4.5 Data Analysis**

In this section, I provide a summary of the entire data analysis process. I explain how the process began, how it developed and how emerging themes arose. Finally, I provide a summary of the major elements that eventuated to formulate discussions in the proceeding and concluding chapters. I have divided this section into three parts; an introduction, the process and emerging themes.

### ***4.5.1 Introduction***

I developed themes of common concerns, issues and topics that my own and other teachers' stories echoed as I transcribed their stories. I used these themes to be my portraits of analysis. Some of these themes connect and crossover. They are not discrete topics; in fact it was difficult at times for me to know which theme to place the teachers' experiences and accounts into, as they could often fit into many or all of the related themes.

I often begin with a personal story (Janice's journal entries which reflect day to day relations and practice at the site). These are typically conversations, meetings, staffroom experiences, duty encounters, and other dialogic experiences in the workplace; often working in isolation. It is this dialogue, I believe, that inspires thought processes and generates knowledge.

I then write in conversation with others' stories. Once these stories are 'out', I continue by placing alongside them, the literature that helps support what the teachers are saying. My aim in this analysis is to 'give voice to other values.' These are values that are not necessarily heard or valued under a managerial regime. I want to get inside the 'struggles for justice.' Burgess (1988, p. 139) calls these 'purposeful conversations'. They are ethnographic due to the intense relationships that researchers form with their informants as they engage in conversation with them, answering as well as asking questions.

### *4.5.2 The Process*

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed their stories. As I did this, I noted many powerful notions of struggle; voices desperate to be heard. I also noted that listening to these stories created reflexive action of my own story and changed my teaching practice. I became more aware of what I was experiencing through the voices that were speaking to me with their experience and wisdom. Through studying political details of other people's lives, I understand my own better. Stories remind us of the most powerful meaning of democracy.

It is important to note in this section, that all of my participant's comments and phrases transcribed from interviews were initially distinguished by the use of letter symbols (a-t). I then decided to put them into a conversation mode, identifying similar conversational material and changed their letter identification into fictitious names to provide the subjects with 'voice' and 'real purpose'. For this exercise to work, I occasionally needed to change the grammar of the text, but did not need to change the context of the conversation or the content of the language. All of the stories are identified throughout the following chapter by the use of italics.

### *4.5.3 Emerging Themes*

In listening, recording and analysing teachers' stories and interspersing them with my own, I began to capture dominant themes and issues that reflected what people were saying. I use these themes in the chapter to follow. I did this to provide the reader with headings that disclose the stories, fractures and differences in teacher's daily work whilst under the regime of the SEI movement. Richardson (1994, p. 519) explains that the "metaphor, moreover, structures the actions we take in theorizing and what we believe constitutes theory."

These themes provide me with a lens on which to focus my own lived experience and to minimise associated stresses. They confirm my own understanding and perception of what it means to be human and provide me with a framework of sense making. They also provide me with hope and possibility for a socially just future. From these conversations, I focus on the major elements that filter through in line with my theoretical framework. They are:

- Social relations are often undervalued and undermined within the cultural politics of schools.
- Many teachers develop survival strategies to cope with the tensions occurring within schooling.
- Many teachers' voices are 'silenced'. Many feel a sense of liberation in sharing their stories. As Goodson (1992, p. 12) points out: "by systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them."
- There is voiced knowledge about the cultural politics of schooling.
- My voice emerges as an auto/ethnographer because I attempt to make sense of what is happening to both myself and to my colleagues in the workplace.

In the next chapter, I organise this data for my study by piecing together the theory that I have investigated, together with my own and other teachers' stories (dialectical) and interspersed them with supporting commentary from the literature. The significance of this process is supported by Apple (1999, p. 17) when he says that "we need to use and expand the spaces in which critical pedagogical 'stories' are made available so that these positions do not remain only on the theoretical or rhetorical level."

From this research I discovered that teachers are more often than not, excluded from directly participating in school development planning. As there is little room allowed for autonomous action, many teachers feel controlled and tightly constrained. The SEI regime that I have discussed in the former chapters ensures that many teachers are not free agents and their own values are considered to be unimportant or, as a survival mechanism, they remain passive. It is at this point that I begin 'my journey' in trying to reclaim teaching.



## CHAPTER 5: PORTRAYING TEACHERS' LIVES AND WORK

In this chapter, I shall discuss seven themes emerging from my data analysis to portray the lives and work of teachers at CNHS. These are emotionality, connectedness, intensification, discipline, performance, resistance and resilience. These themes continued to ring true because, as Shacklock and Smyth (1997, p. 6) point out "... teachers adopt a 'reading position' for research which seeks resonance with practice." From my reading, particularly within the field of critical social research, I began to find a discourse which helped describe the features of struggle that were experienced within the workplace. These are portrayed below both in the teachers' stories and my observations and stories as a research participant. Smyth (1998) recognises such voiced research as being valid in that it is both 'believable' (p.14) and political. This is because it has "an explicit agenda of reinserting in multiple ways, opportunities for expression that have been expunged because dominant social visions hold sway" (p. 12).

### 5.1 Emotionality

*(Janice's Diary, October, 2002)*

*When tragedy strikes and takes human lives away, people who have worked in a team or workplace together with them are exposed to the cycle of loss. They search for the support of the family and instant community.*

*Strangers were in the staff room. Men in suits. Departmental big-wigs not knowing where or how to look. Psychologists from all over, scanning the room. It was first Monday morning of last term. I had heard the news late the night before of the bombing but had made no connection with familiar faces. The news was broken in a matter of fact way and we were told that these 'strangers' would be there for us. 'Dee' was a close colleague of mine and was missing, presumed dead.*

*Two days later I was spinning. 'Nile' was doing his monkey trick again where he hangs from the top of lockers making strange sounds as he waits for a reaction outside the classroom. I did not have the energy today. I just stared in numbness at the absurdness of the behaviour and wondered if people's lives had taught us anything. Surely their souls did not have to pass in vain with no growth in our establishment.*

*I experienced first hand the pain of loss. I felt the despair and loneliness yet could not find the support and family to ease the pain. We did not come together for long. Strange men in suits offering hollow noises of compensation and unfamiliar psychologists who did not even know me or the person/s that had gone were not what I needed. I needed a family or a community who could share and grieve together. Ones who could provide support when children who did not even know 'Dee' were acting out. Now I realise they were acting out because they did not want to lose the attention – they knew the attentive power was going else where but were certainly not able to understand why.*

*Since this tragedy – we have lost several other staff and students. No doubt this happens in large workplaces. We have had suicides, traffic accidents, terminal illnesses. Each time a tragedy occurs the people in the staff room are quiet, uncomfortable – never sure where to look. The 'circle' concerned receive the 'in house' news to go to the funeral, we are issued a statement to read out to the form class and then we are expected to get on with business as usual. Each time I grieve. I grieve the loss of opportunity in coming together as a community and wonder how much tragedy and human loss one place must take in order to unite.*

How this theme connects with my argument so far is that in the business of what is the present culture of a place like CNHS, often the significance of inter-relationships are lost. The Bali bombing tragedy that took one of our 'community' and badly injured another, jolted into emotional reality for me a vacuum that existed of shared feelings and emotions. What was missing was a sense of grieving, mourning and coming together as a community.

Teachers' personal lives often appear to be neglected in the SEI movement. There is no accommodation amongst and within all the 'policies', 'strategies', 'vision statements', 'priorities', 'future structures', 'benchmarks' and 'monitoring standards' for issues of the heart. Yet it is the heart and art of caring that are important issues in the field of teaching. Hargreaves, (1994, p. 145) suggests that "for teachers as for many members of other 'caring professions', care appears to be interpreted as the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love." Smyth (2001b, p. 21) begins to open up the complex nature of this theme, "the damage being inflicted is to the subjectiveness of teachers; that is to say, their identities, and how they think about themselves and ultimately the nature of teaching." Teachers are human in their work lives as well, not some product that can switch on and off according to production and deadlines. Kelchtermans (1996, p. 310) notes that "because these changes heavily affect teachers' daily workplace context and conditions, they are personally and emotionally involved."

I was not alone in this emotional fallout. Other colleagues shared stories relating to the emotional dimensions of their work:

*Paul: 'Yes, that's how bad we are – we need a disaster to make us motivated.' It feels as if we are in survival mode – barely managing to stay afloat because of the stress and energy that requires. We cannot step back and do any good. Everyone is in inertia for various reasons. It is very distressing. People are waiting for the vessel that they can jump on board with.'*

According to Kelchtermans (1996, p. 314) these emotional vulnerabilities for teachers have political and moral roots:

*Stuart: 'There has been a cultural shift. Now I come in and fight my way through to get to the end of it. Before, I expected to get things done without such a struggle. I now have to be very determined about getting through the work. It sucks the energy out of me. I see others struggling too.'*

Here, as I reflect on my analysis, feelings of agitation, feelings of guilt and anxiety and depression are apparent in the workplace. These often occur when people are devoid of passion, their creativity stifled, lacking stimulation and imagination. In short, the soul of their teaching is sabotaged. Hargreaves (1994, p. 155) explains that “for many teachers, guilt is a key feature of their emotional lives ... in many cases, teachers’ behaviour can degenerate into exit, burnout, cynicism and other negative responses as they attempt to cope with the intolerable burdens of guilt that are imposed from without and that evolve from within” (p. 156). Consider the following teacher comment:

*Celeste: 'Well yes, you give so much of yourself in teaching. You have to control your emotions to achieve results. It is difficult otherwise to shut off. Teaching can easily dominate your life. The personal in the end is what dominates. I am retiring now after 40 years with EDWA and these are some of the feelings that I am left with.'*

As Hume (2000, p. 35) asserts “these are real emotions, not the sanitised variety that so often features in official documents about ethos and school culture.” Hargreaves, (1994) explains this further:

... while what teachers do and how teachers think is now more familiar territory to those who study teaching, we know much less about how teachers *feel* while they teach; about the emotions and desires which motivate and moderate their work. Moreover, much of the research and writing that *has* addressed the emotions of teaching has started less from teachers themselves and what they have to say than from preconstituted theoretical agendas and concepts that have then been applied to teachers and teaching. Researchers have tended to have their own theoretical preoccupations with concepts like pride, commitment, uncertainty, creativity and satisfaction, and have asked interview questions or interpreted data in relation to these constructs. (p. 141)

*Olivia: 'Yes, if you wanted to be an amazing teacher it would take over your life – the constant changes, lack of time and money, the over crowdedness – it restricts any creativity.'*

Kelchtermans (1996, p. 307) study of teachers vulnerability illustrates that “teachers’ talk about their work immediately reveals that emotions are at the heart of teaching.”

*Ciara: 'Well I think we have got good bits in the school but not a good whole. The parts themselves are actually better than the whole. There are lots of good things but overall it is a school that probably has a long way to go. It had a bit of a shake up but has been left a bit aimless. There is a lot that can be done but at the moment there is so much reaction and so much to be done that there is paralysis.'*

*Andrina: 'Yes, teaching is like looking through a kaleidoscope – it is always changing, cutting shapes; some are smooth and others are jagged.'*

*Ashley: 'EDWA are keeping kids at school yet not addressing their needs. All these tortured souls in our school systems that are wasting time. They are lost. They don't know why they are here. What kids want is different from what we are supposed to be doing. There is a push to always do better. They (EDWA) do not acknowledge where it is working – they are only acknowledging problems.'*

Connell (1993, p. 63) outlines what is occurring: “being a teacher means being able to establish human relations with the people being taught. Teaching involves emotions as much as it involves pure reasoning.” Some teachers expressed their own experiences of the lack of these relational aspects:

*David: 'EDWA shot itself in the foot.'*

*Celeste: 'Yes, I agree, it is a relentless employer.'*

As Sinclair (cited in Smyth 2001a, p.147) states “the emotional emptiness of efficiency propels a mechanical and often fearful managerial performance.” For example:

*Ruth: 'Culture change due to family structure means schools have to take on a lot of the care and life skills stuff so being a teacher we mustn't put too much emphasis on things that happen in school otherwise it can be mega depressive.'*

*Stuart: 'Yes, teaching sucks the energy out of me ... instead of being human beings we are working as cardboard boxes with limited use by dates.'*

Some teachers mentioned some compromises in all of this but were none the less not happy. Ruth, for example, believes that:

*'Teachers survive by learning what they can get away with but also I don't take things personally, instead I focus on life outside school.'*

Tom, however, does not think all these strategies are good:

*'I see dozens of people walk past not dealing with issues because of lack of time to follow incidents through.'*

Lara does not like having to do what she does to cope:

*'I have lots of breaks of some kind or another to cope. I switch off being a sensitive type – I do not like doing it, but I have to, in order to survive.'*

Some words by Macy (1991, p 186) are poignantly pertinent: “the fact that it is not talked about very much makes it all the more pivotal, because nothing is more pre-occupying or energy draining than that which we repress.” McLaren (2000) also explains some of these emotional reactions:

We live in unhappy times, in the midst of a global hegemony based on fraud, when our feelings of unhappiness do not appear to be connected to the

depredations of capitalist exploitation occurring with the external world. Rather, our feelings are attached to the shimmering surface effect of signs and simulation and the dull radiance that illuminated the spectacles of the everyday. Our external and internal worlds seem to have been split apart. (p. xxv)

The theme of emotionality evolved as the first theme in the analysis of teachers' stories not because it was the most obvious or easiest to speak about, but because it is the one that is avoided, silenced and neglected. It is seen as either too confronting or irrelevant to the business of schooling. I found myself avoiding this aspect of my work as a teacher and, from the stories of my colleagues, I was not alone. In this research, teachers talked about the stress and emotionality of their work but, in the technical rational culture of schools, these stories are typically perceived to be disruptive, reactionary, unimportant, or inconvenient to the real work of schools and need nipping in the bud!

## 5.2 Connectedness

*(Janice's diary, December, 2003)*

*It was towards the end of another school year. I was utterly exhausted but starting to feel exhilarated at the thought of summer holidays. Students were starting to relax too and I had just taken them on a fantastic excursion. They were great, enthusiastic and appreciative. It seemed to make the entire ordeal worth it.*

*I waltzed into the staff room and scanned the room trying to find someone to share my joviality with. I spotted gorgeous 'Jem', a gentle and quiet man who visits the school now and then to teach music. I knew him socially 20 years ago. He had a smile on his face. I sat down opposite him to make conversation and have fun. There was a seat with a parcel on it. I could see that the occupant of the seat was at the door in deep discussion with other visitors. Caustic comments from others around kept reminding me that the seat was already occupied. I confirmed that I had realised that. They came back at me again like pecking chooks. When I did not move they instructed me to place the parcel under the chair. 'Jem' looked on helplessly and shocked. He is so shy. I could not be bothered with the power play. It did not seem worth the effort. I got up and walked out of the room. I went back to my desk and sobbed.*

*(Janice's diary – a day later...)*

*People react on what happens to them. Instead of working together in our staff room there is a pecking order at play. Recess is the only time that we come together each day and even then many teachers choose to stay in their respective departments. I am never sure where to go. I am not connected. Recess is fifteen minutes. Most of us have duty at least one of those.*

*Competitive behaviour seems to arise when people are fighting for each others power instead of being in a collective, collegiate place. This in-fighting is infectious – it spreads its message to all new-comers and students. To survive, it feels you need to find a safe cubby to hide from others and feel strong. These little bastions of power appear superior, by making others feel weak. The other option is not to be connected at all and stay lonely on the outside.*

The definition I bring to this theme is one of social collectivism: the significance of working together for the benefit of all in a genuine manner. This means being able to link and accept each others diversity within the school establishment and learning from one another. In contrast, what is often revealed is contrary to this: isolation, fragmentation and fear combined with a lack of honesty, respect and trust among people. Connell (1998, p. 64) explains that “as the identity of teachers shifts from one of common membership of a profession to that of the individual operating in an education market, the prospects for solidarity and collective action decline.” Other colleagues shared their own stories around this theme:

*Mandy: ‘I think that new teachers like me find solace in departments. Support networks are important. I don’t know many others though in the school. Everyone in our department just helps one another.’*

*Stuart: ‘I think it depends, for example, in mine, there is a lot of in-departmental bullying. One of our younger, newer teachers has had a hard time. A few of the others consider his time in the nursery is up and we have to forget about all that soft handling!’*

*Lara: ‘We are less connected as a staff. People are more aggressive and more defensive and more cynical. We are not a group or if we are it is group against group. We don’t have Friday drinks anymore.’*

*Kate: ‘Yes, I agree there is no gathering of staff any more. There is more pressure on our time. We are just too busy.’*

*Janice: ‘Yes, I did not go to any staff wind up or function this year for the first time in 20 years. It seemed contradictory to be drinking and celebrating with people who I had not connected with.’*

*Nicola: 'There is no sharing and caring anymore. It is much more individualised. What happened with getting together? I think a lot of the social and moral needs of teachers have been lowered.'*

Smyth (2001a, p. 39) indicates that many of these trends and tendencies around the notion of collegiality and collaboration, teamwork, partnerships and networking “have the sounds of pseudo-participation and quasi-democracy about them.” It is clear to Preston, (1994, p. 47) that “rather than enhance teacher professionalism, a market model places teachers in a position in which their professional duty to the education of all students and the service of the wider community is undermined.” For example:

*Stuart: 'Last year I was really excluded from my department. I am feeling quite distant. As I come to school it is a bit of a battleground for me.'*

*Olivia: 'Well, I think a form of racism exists in the school culture – a lack of diversity and acceptance of difference. There is competition between staff due to all the pressure and there is no support network.'*

*Paul: 'We are departmental – segregated mentally. People are too afraid to take risks within the school. It may be because they don't want to be bashed by the cynics.'*

Elliot (2001) explains why some of these behaviours are occurring:

Performative cultures within public service organisations imply a low level of trust in the professionalism of their employees: the more pervasive the gaze of audit the less the trust invested in the moral competence of its members to respond to the needs of the people they serve. (p. 200)

*Olivia: 'We don't seem to communicate properly anymore, especially across departments. We hide in our own little cubby holes and those that don't fit in stay wrapped in their cocoons on the outside. Alone.'*

*Paul: 'Yes but remember, many people are jaded, cynical switched off – they are great people, just pissed off – too many of them are burnt.'*

*Andrea: 'My department are cohesive – they look out for one another.'*



Working as teachers in a large school at a time when the working environment is increasingly controlled and confined by managerial strategies often restricts resolution. This creates further isolation in the formation of ‘mini empires’ that unite as a substitute in order to cope with the demands. When one does not belong to a subject or learning team or chooses not to be part of the fracture, then it is a lonely place. According to Macy (1991):

... to feel despair in such a cultural setting brings a sense of isolation. The psychic dissonance can be so acute as to seem to border on madness. The distance between our inklings of apocalypse and the tenor of business-as-usual is so great that, though we may respect our own cognitive readings of the signs, we tend to imagine that it is we, not the society, who is insane. (p. 19)

*(Janice’s diary- November, 2003)*

*Some days I will walk down that long corridor of concrete searching some respite from the difficult morning. I am looking for conversation that is light and humorous – something to ease the burden – something to share – feel connected. I walk into the crowded staff room – it is buzzing with noises – none of which I feel drawn too. There are circles – the same ones – huddled. On the outskirts, the science group, the maths, the phys-eder’s, the manual arts, the S & E. In the middle, the Arts and in the front the ‘odd bods’ as they are known; T-ladies, ancillary staff, and whoever else does not venture within. My energy is already so drained that I can’t decide where I fit, where do I belong? I turn around and take myself back down the corridor and get ready for my next class.*

Many teachers spoke of not being listened to or respected. Many indicated that feeling valued and appreciated as being an important issue for teachers so that they can continue to give a strong committed sense of inter-relationship within teaching. Some examples they provided of their isolation and the lack of collegiality are shared below:

*Tom: ‘I had 23 years of giving and this was not coming back the other way. The employer is trapped because they rely on goodwill.’*

*Paul: ‘Yes, people are looking for leadership to guide them and to blame. There is a lack of consultation in decision making. There is so much inertia. As a result, we have regressed back into our havens in order to survive and people are too afraid to take risks within.’*

*Andrina: ‘There is all this empire building. Little pockets all around the school not solving things, “My department, my school, my thing, my empire”*

Hargreaves (1994) suggests these subgroups, the like of which are present at CNHS as subject departments, are a form of “balkanization”. They are typically territorial and work as segregated groups working against one another, competing for limited resources and position.

*Brianna: ‘Yes, the further you get down the line of the hierarchical structure, the closer to the factory floor. When you’re there; you cope on your own with difficult students.’*

*Paul: ‘It seems that people regress back into their havens in order to survive and are too afraid to take risks within.’*

*Ivan: ‘Yes, school is an isolating place. I think we need to go into each others classrooms – start sharing information on topics, methods and kids.’*

According to Smyth (2001a, p.13) we are “abandoning a discourse about education and social justice” and instead being encouraged to facilitate a culture of individualism to prevent alleged dependency on the system. This is dangerous as without debate, following a technical, rational and managerial approach prevents people working together. As Smyth (2001a, p. 59), explains, “treating teachers as objects and not as subjects means that teachers’ consciousness or range of vision about what they do in classrooms is quite severely limited”. Smyth (2001a) goes on to argue that teachers are instead:

... encouraged to facilitate already identified goals, rather than to debate them. What we find being celebrated, therefore, are approaches that identify and entrench technical aspects of teaching where goals are treated as if they were agreed upon, and where social, moral, and political issues are put to one side. (p. 53)

### 5.3 Intensification

*(Janice's diary – September, 2003)*

*When is enough, enough? It seems teaching competently and helping students to learn is not what is required. Daily absentee sheets, roll calling, forms for excursions, yard duty are all more important.*

*It was toward the end of another long term. Another long day. Period 6. It was hot and everyone was tired. The students straggled into the transportable that was situated as far away as one could get from the front of the school. Some day's students stared out the windows at the traffic wishing they could escape 'Woomera' as it was affectionately titled. One of the few forms of power left for the students was to leave their bags unattended under their seats. Always test the system! As I wandered around the classroom my leg caught on one of the bag straps. Pressure was building, the mood was not calm – I threw the bag along the floor of the classroom to the back of the room where I had asked all semester that they go. As I did, and as it goes when things are that heated in the surrounds of a congested box – the bag in its motion tripped up a student still arriving. The boys laughed loudly. I sat already exhausted and allowed the 'gang justice' to echo and do its thing. My instinct told me that I should intervene but I could not be bothered.*

*I saw the class three days later. No mention of the 'bag incident'. Meanwhile, around the school continued episodes of serious bullying and conflict occurred. A teacher was on sick leave because his nose was broken by a student. He had been part of the new 'roving' regime which was a militant administrative attack on the rubbish build up. We all had extra lunch duty and were to be extremely accountable. HOD's and other senior staff were asked to volunteer more of their time to check we were doing our duty. This 'rover' on this particular day asked the wrong kid the wrong way to pick up someone else's rubbish. His big brother intervened and found his own justice. He has now been expelled. The power from the top down had intensified and at the bottom of the ladder were the kids.*

*The following week I had asked for some help from administration regarding a couple of boys from another Year 8 class that were hanging from the rooftop screeching for attention. I had no luck with admin. The boys spent another lesson jumping around the classroom pulling faces and slagging off at whoever they could. An Associate Principal approached me at the end of the day. Said she had to see me. I was rushing to another lunch duty. I said that I was relieved that she was attending to the boys. She did not know what I was talking about – this was very important – a complaint had been made against me. I went into shock. What have I done? My head started spinning as I tried to fathom what I could be held accountable for. Nothing came into my head. Only my desperate exhaustion and how I had nearly made yet another term without breaking down. She followed me – it felt like I was being chased. She said she could not tell me what the complaint was for or who had made it – only that I should gather a union representative and have them accompany me to the front office to have a meeting with admin. It was in my best interests and for my own protection she*

*said. A big lump came into my throat. I was in disbelief at what I was hearing. What is this woman on about? Has she got the right teacher? I felt like a criminal being taken to court who was innocent and did not even know what the crime was!*

*I had classes all day and did not know where or how this was going to be dealt with. I did not sleep or eat. Only cried. The next day I caught up with the union representative, who like me shook her head in disbelief at the absurdness of the situation. I felt weak in having to reveal that I needed to go to the front office with her. I hardly knew her and she knew nothing about my teaching or life. She instructed me to find out what the case was before she attended. I then walked into the office of the AP concerned and asked if I could at least know what the incident was relating to.*

*“A mother of a girl in one of your classes is concerned about her safety in your classroom, We need to be sure that we are ready.”*

*At first, I still could not place the incident. Then I remembered that this AP had been the one that had had a complaint made against her the year before by a student and she had been investigated by the police. She was getting her own back at me! I must tread carefully. I asked if I could phone the mother to put her mind at ease. That I was not some incompetent monster out of control and that it was a minor incident that had obviously blown out of proportion with all the bullying incidents that had occurred on site during the last few weeks. “No”! I was not allowed to contact anyone. This was to be an experiment in the new method of things. When complaints are made – they must be taken to court. That poor mother. Her mind could not be put to rest while all the new litigation process was being put to work. Meanwhile the class had sorted it out. We had had our weekly circle, when we discuss things. The boy that had been tripped expressed his concern at being laughed at. I had the opportunity to express my concern at the safety in the room and all the bags left lying around. I determined again that through my frustration after a whole semester of this not happening that I had thrown the bag along the floor and this had caused the trip. I had a chance to apologise in front of his mates. His place in the gang and self dignity had a chance to return. I did not come to work for two days. I felt really sick. Sick of the stupid way it was being dealt with. I went to the doctor and got put on anti-depressants again.*

Intensification often relates to the extra burdens and bureaucracy that many teachers experience whilst in the workplace. These include accountability, mandated curriculum, extra administrative duties, volunteering more time and services, having to make do with less (larger classes, no resources) and generally having no time to relate to students. In essence, all the factors that can cause teacher stress. As Apple (2000, p. 119) explains “intensification is one of the most tangible ways in which the working

conditions of teachers have eroded. It has many symptoms, from the trivial to the more complex.”

The former theme on emotionality draws attention to the idea that teachers are inter-relative beings that have relationships with their students and with each other which are not recognised or encouraged in the managerial regime. Emotions are not necessarily calculable or steady but a complex phenomenon that revolves around relationships. To compound the problem, intensification of our work may instigate some absurd power plays. As Apple (2000, p. 119) explains “collective skills are lost as ‘management skills’ are gained.”

It seems in the above journal led story, that the needs of students and teachers are no longer a priority. The Assistant Principal did not know any of the students concerned in this incident, yet is the one nominated in charge of that year group. The mother did not know either of the staff or what was happening. The intensification of our work often replaces the personal. If the parent had been provided with a personal and supportive phone call or visit, it is possible this type of incident could be put to rest. Instead, it was not until a month after her inquiry to the school, that this parent was contacted. It was then via the principal who knew only that I needed to come back to work.

Gewirtz (2002, p. 89), explains that “performativity” undermines teacher autonomy and sociability, and generates an intensification of the labour process of teaching. This results in a “refocusing-and narrowing-of pedagogic activity, and a concomitant shift in who and what is valued in schools” (p. 89).

The power relation pertaining to performance and control that comes to the fore undermines respect, dignity and professionalism. Inter-relationships and goodwill are complicated and interwoven within the art of teaching. The energy required to survive these emotional incidents is not recognised. More intense demands in the workplace with no rejuvenation or recognition of damage to the personal, as portrayed in this story, result in emotional voids and/or complete exhaustion. As Apple (2000, p.119) explains “pride itself is jeopardized as the work becomes dominated by someone else’s conception of what should be done.”

A result of this is that many teachers become less spontaneous, more cautious and careful of where to show emotion so that they have energy to cope with

intensification of other measurable, yet less humanitarian facets of their work. Apple (2000, p. 119) explains “as time itself becomes a scarce ‘commodity,’ the risk of isolation grows, thereby both reducing the chances that interaction among participants will enable critiques and limiting the possibility that rethinking and peer teaching will naturally evolve.”

In the quest to move to the top of the ranks on the educational institution ladder, which does not challenge the ‘corporate’ culture, some disproportionate power plays are enacted which can cause great damage. I am reminded of the labour process theory that I discussed in chapter three, as I reflect on how the working class are disempowered. In the reconstruction of teachers’ labour a dualism develops which “privileges, as winners, those who support the system imperatives and which penalises, as losers, those who have failed, or refused, to play the game” (Robertson, 1994, p.144). These new forms and layers of bureaucracy that have emerged within the school organization itself (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p. 54) help me understand what happened. How strength and a sense of belonging to the profession can often be taken away from teachers. In this critical incident above, what is demonstrated is how teachers are often treated as mere pawns in a game of dominance and rank that need to be controlled and cause no mischief.

McLaren (2000) elaborates:

... for it cannot be denied that the globalization of labour and capital have brought about material shifts in cultural practices and the proliferation of new contradictions between capitalism and labour that progressive educators who work in schools of education have been hard-pressed to respond to, as opposed to react to, successfully. (p. 19)

So much energy seems to be consumed in ‘proving’ one’s worth in this regime to demonstrate that you are in control. It seems as though if you can be arrogant and tough enough then you will survive:

*This survival of the fittest stuff is not in my nature and I become exhausted just proving that I am good enough. (Janice’s diary, August 2002)*

As Smyth (2001a, p. 167) explains: “The ‘life worlds’ of teachers, their work, their experiences, and their aspirations (and that of students, too) have been largely overlooked as reservoirs of talent in the worldwide rush for school restructuring.”

I share some of these stories:

*Celeste: 'We are always ticking boxes and we cannot choose the timetable – we are controlled by it. More support staff are needed, more resources, space and smaller classes.'*

*Fay: 'Teaching in the United Kingdom, with mandated policy, standardised curriculum, inspections and nervous breakdowns was like working in Mao's China. We had to produce reports and say how much productivity had increased. We used to falsify them to keep them (the inspectors) happy.'*

*Brianna: 'Outcome statements are couched in vague and confusing language. I feel unsupported in the whole curriculum change. Just to rub salt in the wound, we are also being asked to do more with less time and resources.'*

There is a decline in the sociability of teaching and there is pressure on teachers to adopt more traditional pedagogies with a focus on output rather than process (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 88). Several teachers reported this:

*Ciara: 'Yes mandated change is frustrating, without being resourced. There is no ownership. There is inertia with curriculum framework because it is too long in the implementation process.'*

*David: 'Resources used to be supplied by the education department. Now very little is provided and our resources are limited. You feel you always have to re-invent.'*

*Ashley: 'Curriculum framework is not resourced or funded. It is so much work. We are constantly re-inventing the wheel. On top of it all, The Education Department tells you what you have to do but they do not tell you how.'*

*Ciara: 'Working in schools these days is really challenging – a bit tightening especially CNHS. We are not 'out there' as we are so busy being reactive. We do not have time to be pro-active. We do not have time to put in place things that will break the cycle.'*

*Brianna: 'We are being governed by crisis.'*

Celeste, Olivia and Ruth agree:

*'Teaching can take over your life.'*

*Paul: 'Yes, there are too many burnt people.'*

*Kate: 'Managing students' behaviour takes up heaps of time. So does administration, the reading, and marking, and using technology.'*

*Fay: 'We do a lot of different things for a lot of different kids. It is challenging and it keeps changing. Support staff is needed. We are chronically under funded. Physical structures are not maintained. This shows us that teaching is undervalued. There are many nervous breakdowns, work, work, work.'*

*Ruth: 'But you cannot get bogged down. The paper work you are asked to do is not possible. It is not possible to deliver either.'*

*Ashley: 'A lot of this stuff we have to do is 'crap' – our teaching is suffering, so is our health. It is taking away our 'nuts and bolts time'.'*

*Lara: 'There is a break down of support. The assessing systems keep changing. We have so much paper work.'*

*Nicola: 'Yes, the mountain of paper work – having to justify yourself all the time. I find that tedious'*

*Stuart: 'Curriculum Council is a disaster – what they are forcing on us. The pre-set instructions stifle creativity – sometimes we can take 5 days to deal with a single incident.'*

*Tom: 'Well I gave it up because the employer was asking more and more and asking me to up skill. However, they were not equating effort and enforced skills update with monetary reward.'*

*Ashley: 'We battle on until we burn out or retire.'*

Five months after the interview Ashley resigned. She had taught for twelve years with the Education Department.

*Tom: 'There are many good and valid things happening in school – there is just not enough time to do them properly.'*

*Nicola: 'Plus the validation year after year interrupts the lessons. The large part of teaching now is justifying yourself, being always accountable. It takes a lot. It is a hard 'slog'. You are never in front – you just keep trying to be a step ahead-*



*looking for opportunities; trying to do the right thing by the department- getting some skills for myself - but I am forever juggling and wonder if I'll get ahead and get it right. Now with this outcome based thing, it is put upon you with no back up help. I am uncertain all the time.'*

Morley and Rassool (1999, p.5) explain these struggles: "The rhetoric of school effectiveness starts with an assumption of guilt." Hargreaves (1994, p. 149) agrees, "accountability and intensification provide a potent cocktail for inducing feelings of persecutory guilt – pervasive worries and fears that mounting expectations have not been or will not be met."

*(Janice's diary July, 2003)*

*In Term 2 the bells stopped working. It was actually a sigh of relief for many of us who did not need those war sirens to get us into the classroom. Of course there would be a few students who would test the waters of control and yes the same two came late to class. After two weeks of that, I just left them outside as we were getting into our class projects in a big way. It was another one of those 'period 6' classes on a Thursday; end of term. Everyone is a little frazzled to say the least. In my quest to help students to be responsible for their own behaviours, I am always challenged by a school that does not want that style of working. Just when I went to photocopy a sheet for an 'eager beaver' who was so animated by her project, the new AP went by. Now this guy is new and is popular because he loves control. "Just what the school needs" I hear echoed all around. "A bit of discipline!" Well he decided to discipline me. This man who does not know me, my classes, my teaching history. He tapped on my shoulder and said that there was some bad classroom management happening in my class. "You MUST not leave them!" The two boys that had been left outside were swinging through the windows to get INSIDE! Quite funny now when I think about it. But it was not funny at the time. To be insulted about my teaching style. To not be supported when I needed some help. Those same two boys had been wandering around the school days before, testing out the school structure again. Because I did not chase them to come in, instead of the usual bell, they were having fun. They ended up in the front office. When asked why, they said that their teacher does not like them! When another AP then asked me this morning "is that true?" I felt strong as I had been to my doctor that evening and had a good counselling session. I replied " before I go any further with this incident, is it my story as a colleague, or theirs as year 8 boys testing out the 'no bell regime', that you are going to listen to?"*

These stories display and reveal the despair, passion and isolation that teachers experience as they struggle to survive and deal with the damage to their lives. They reveal a culture of competition with a 'dog eats dog' mentality and many of the stories show that teachers feel disrespected. Others feel guilt. These feelings are the result of a

culture which has embedded within it values of efficiency and money saving. The expected behaviours and subsequent reaction of many of the teachers within this culture are defensive or on the attack. Macy (1991, p. 21) provides some solace: “To experience anguish and anxiety in the face of the perils that threaten us is a healthy reaction.”

At a Union District meeting (14<sup>th</sup> August, 2003), a teacher’s strike had been called, and I listened to many dedicated teachers publicly speak in despair and witness them angry or sobbing to a gathering of eighty other colleagues from the district. It felt so criminal. I captured what three of those who spoke revealed:

*Betty: ‘I can’t do the job I am supposed to do. I am burnt out. I have started working less time to try to cope but I get paid less.’*

*Sandy: ‘I watched my husband leave the profession, because as parents our children were suffering the stress we were both experiencing after 20 successful years of teaching.’*

*Bruce: ‘I have only been teaching two years, but our school being new in the district and a merit selected school...well we are under pressure. I want to warn others. We are a pilot school monitoring standards. All of my time is spent legitimising this at the expense of real teaching. I feel sorry for anyone teaching Yr 3, 5 or 7’s.’*

A staff ‘Health & Well Being’ survey was conducted at CNHS in October 2003 by the Principal and a working committee. Thirty three staff responded. All thirty three participants prioritised staff relationships, both socially and professionally, as one of the three most significant factors that have a positive and significant impact on their health and well-being at work. Collegiality, support and collaboration were considered to be extremely important. Feeling valued, appreciated and listened to was considered important to staff at all levels. Ten responded that they have greater administration, accountability and litigation responsibilities and ten responded that they had greater student behaviour management issues.

Health, well-being and depression within the district have been identified by the Education Department as an issue. The remedy or response to date has been three expensive and extensive surveys completed in isolation and independently with no follow up, counselling or inquiry into the causes. In fact the school “must do a self-

assessment of its behaviour management issues with regard to receiving Behaviour Management and Discipline funding” (Staff Memo, 6th Dec. 2004). These appear to be no more than seductive ‘quick fix solutions’ to attend to complicated social issues. They also come together with an agenda that has more to do with targeting money.

*Janice’s diary entry, November, 2001*

*New learning teams being established – asked to develop own vision. Teachers are going around in circles trying to get it right. They are confused and in turmoil. So they try different approaches...new goal posts. I witness them getting keen again “maybe this time it will be alright, maybe this time I have the formula okay”. It is as though they begin to relax as they search familiar and secure ground. I watch it everyday – people again falling into that same trap. Thinking it is something else. So they keep trying to find the solution...only to tumble again into despair and frustration. They keep hitting the same blocks, the same walls of confusion. It is almost unbearable to watch the pattern repeat itself...moving from one project to another.*

This madness occurs because teachers’ knowledge about the importance of values and the realism of micro politics and personal investment in human relationships is not regarded as useful in the world of efficiency and accountability (Gunther, 1997, p. 15).

## 5.4 Discipline

*(Janice's diary...June, 2003)*

*Every Monday morning the staff chime calls us into the staff room for our weekly briefings. (I call them sermons!) We wander down the corridors in our 'clans'. Some 'clans' are checking that some are not too early. It is against union directives. We assemble at our respective tables and the late ones hang at the door. The same ritual happens at staff meetings. There is a silence as we await the sermon. The leaders who speak to the audience are the three AP's and the Principal. They take turns to read their speeches. I often catch myself changing mood from one of rested, jovial and optimistic after the weekend to one of sobriety and sadness as I watch the dull morbidness around me and the futile attempts of discipline and control around me as we are preached to. This I realise now is what it is to be OPPRESSED. We have to be there and must listen to how we need to behave. What a way to begin each week! There is no joy, no humour, and no appreciation. Only orders and mutterings of disapproval. Who has been suspended for 'non-compliance' this week, who to send to the front office if they turn up, which reports, papers, meetings have to be attended to. How we must discipline this week. How we must not let students out of class. How we need to lock them in and out. How the duty roster is being reinforced. Who needs to volunteer for what. Who needs to 'rove' to maintain order. My head starts spinning. That squirming familiar feeling of loneliness and despair begin to return. I remember that Monday morning feeling when I was a lonely teenager sent away to school. No belonging. Again no discussion or debate. Only orders. No sense of 'otherness'. I look around and see the same blank faces that reflect what I am feeling. My joy is dissolved. We all have to go and teach in five minutes. Those poor children are going to be infected with the same morbid poison.*

My reflections on this theme are centred on the social control and oppression of teachers in their workplace as they are treated as subordinates, trained to be obedient by mandated policies. Recent educational reforms have an accountability agenda implicit within them forcing teachers to be more compliant (Smyth 2001a, p. 15). My argument is that this so-called orderliness and control actually results in teacher on teacher scrutiny, dishonesty, suspicion and low staff morale. As Macy, (1991, p. 18) states: "Despair is tenaciously resisted because it represents a loss of control, an admission of powerlessness. Our culture dodges it by demanding instant solutions when problems are raised." An example taken from the Student Services team at CNHS, giving notices on Monday morning briefing demonstrates this: "This week we are targeting getting to class on time. Please issue pink slips and demerit points for non-complaint behaviour ... keep the clientele on task". This type of dialogue provides an analogy with the police force. It employs the discourse of law enforcement, it is clinical and dehumanised. 'Pink

slips, demerit points, targeting behaviours that are non-compliant.’ Education in this regime is not about freedom, democracy or risk taking but instead the indoctrination of traditional discipline employed to ensure policies are implemented and enforced in a rigid manner. As Smyth (2001a, p.59) explains “treating teachers as objects and not as subjects means that teachers’ consciousness or range of vision about what they do in classrooms is quite severely limited.” In turn, the misuse of power embedded in teaching is used as a form of surveillance and discipline (Smyth, 1991, p. 17).

I listened to other stories of confusion and social control:

*Ciara: ‘Well I think there are five things stopping our school from moving: finance, information technology, mandated curriculum without leadership, looking after buddies, having promised jobs and running the place like a business.’*

*Ruth: ‘It is strange; money is an issue. We are self funding, making profits from our enterprise but then the school places jurisdictions on how we can spend it.’*

Freire (cited in McLaren, 2000, p. xv) explains that “never in history has there been so great a distance as today between scholastic education and social practice as dictated by the sophisticated technologies created to serve the dominant economic and ideological interest.” Some examples of these disciplinary power relations are described below:

*Janice: ‘Well did you know that today at our whole school staff meeting, we were told that Paul Albert, Director of Education, insists that schools invoke a dress code. Neat clean attire required. The principal also warned that school council will want to enforce the policy.’*

“HOLA’s need methods of collecting data on end of year results for ALL years...levels/strands for the annual report. HOLA’s will be told the required format for data” (Heads of Learning Area meeting minutes, 28/10/04).

As Robertson (1994, p. 145) explains; “the creation of a massive reserve army of labour will do much to ensure teachers’ systemic compliance.”

*Ciara: ‘Well I know that we do not like people telling us how to do things’.*

Kelchtermans (1996, p. 313) suggests that teachers find judgments and assessments about their professional competence by others as unjust and only based on limited visible and shallow parts of their job:

*Janice: 'Yes, like when we were asked to do internal relief at the end of term. It is like we were all checking to see who had drawn the short straw. This was to save the school money. Do you remember when administration was too busy to file duplicates of student reports so teacher volunteers were called? The teachers, who volunteered their time and showed enthusiasm for saving the school money, seemed to gain credit points for promotions within the school.'*

Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 44) explain that some of this disciplinary and controlling action are created by and reflect specific relations of production. This includes layers of supervision whose sole function is labour control.

*(Janice's diary...April, 2000)*

*So much evaluation of how well one teaches seems to be based on how well you 'control the behaviour' Is this why I am finding it so hard? I am trying to control the masses? There seems to be much defiance, resistance and reaction to this control; both by students and teachers. A culture of defiance seems to have become embedded. I'm sure I am not the only teacher feeling this – often in our hideaway faculties we do not dare declare too much. That may mean more work. It may display weakness. So we all carry the myth that everything is A.O.K. whereas behind the doors are many dysfunctions.*

According to Covington and Beckett (1998, p. 31), “dysfunctional families, fearful of the loss of control implied by the uncertainties of change, often try to enforce an unnatural stability into unstable situations.” Features of dysfunctional families (Covington & Becket 1998, pp. 29-32) appear to have many similarities with the type of culture being revealed at CNHS. These common symptoms are alienation, isolation; feeling used or exploited, lack of trust, denial, betrayal, inflexible rules, abuse and intrusiveness. As Smyth (1995, p. 17) explains “how we relate to and learn with one another has much more in common with what occurs in families than what management and organizational theorists tell us occurs in formal organizations.”

*(Janice's diary ... Jan., 2004)*

*Day one and we are back at it again. I limped in literally, not sure whether my feelings of apathy and disillusionment would give me away. I had decided this year to take a very low profile and just find the glimmers of hope that shine through the cracks occasionally. Well I did not last long. The speaker for PD (another one of those so called imported professionals) was giving us his spiel on 'Verbal Judo'. His body language already had me offside. His language included clichés and condescending comments... 'having your heart in teaching', using 'peace phrases', 'don't be a dinosaur and accept change' (I was already agitated). He then decided to tell us that we were there to spend a day with him to learn tactics that enable us to redirect hostility and defuse danger. It was for our own safety and protection! He was from the tactical training unit of the Police Service. Thoughts flashed through my mind of the schools in America that had recently employed police to patrol their corridors as a method of discipline. Is that where we head next? What has this to do with teaching? When he then informed us that as professionals, our main goal in our work was to aim for voluntary compliance and eliminate any 'why' questioning, I was sure again that I was in the wrong environment. I left the crowded hall of 100 returning staff who were all just sitting, listening, occasionally nodding and took myself away to my desk. I stayed alone for the rest of the day.*

Being asked to be compliant creates a dangerous conformity that does not question nor speak but instead frustrates and forms apathy or rebellion. Compliant behaviour, according to Smyth (2001a, p.81), is a symptom of the devolution regime which "produces labour that is more compliant. Opposition to this line is branded as being deviant, old-fashioned, or just out of touch." As Merson (2001, p. 84) indicates "the traditions of collegiality and co-operation are difficult to sustain when individual teachers are being encouraged to compete with each other for the reward of compliance."

When people are controlled, silenced and oppressed as I believe many teachers reveal in these stories, there is often a "hidden referent" (Sultana, 1995, p. 119). This is silence of the context in which the text is framed. At CNHS, the teachers are not sure why they feel like they do – exhausted, controlled and oppressed. They often want to blame the students and/or the lack of administration. McLaren (1989, p. 173) describes this state of hegemony as a "struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed; with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression." The control that is occurring through managerial policies such as School Development Planning is carefully disguised. According to Sultana (1995, p. 119) this

is the “phenomena that needs apprehending.” It is therefore often important to make reference to what “is not being said” in these stories (p. 119). “Inverted ethnography is the only way that one can subvert the positivistic regime of realism that still lingers on” (Sultana, 1995, p. 119).

Teachers are often blamed, along with students and their families, for school failure. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 7), teachers typically “grow cynical about the chance that anything can be done to reverse the situation” or “admit that they do not expect to do much teaching in the classroom but have settled for maintaining order most of the time.” Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 7) believe that teachers “have remade themselves, against their own social and political beliefs, into harsh disciplinarians or rule makers without an ultimate goal as a strategy of self-defence.” As (Gewirtz, 2000) discovered:

... compliance models of quality control produce subjugated classroom teachers, teachers who have largely lost control of what they teach, how they teach and the determination of the goals of their teaching and who have to live in the shadow of constant surveillance. (p. 361)

Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 224) explain that under the influence of classic liberalism, the focus on individualism, competition, personal effort and reward leaves a neo-conservative discourse about public schooling which takes a strong position on important education issues such as standards, values, and school discipline. In short, we “draw more attention to those ‘overt symbols’ which denote academicism, performance and discipline” (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p. 138). Furthermore, according to Gewirtz (2000, p. 361) “the government is happy to encourage citizens to share in decision making, but only on condition that they behave in what are deemed responsible ways.”



## 5.5 Performance

*(Janice's diary...Nov. 2003)*

*I was stupid enough to apply for some leadership jobs in the school. A dear friend who knows me well and helped me through some emotional traumas told me that it was a stupid thing to do. He was smart and left. I still felt I had something to prove. I wanted senior staff to notice me after all these years. I wanted some recognition. After all, I was feeling strong and wanted to experience job applications and interviews again. I wanted to demonstrate that I was good enough.*

*It was stupid. My friend was right. I should have known better. They did not want a sensitive, hard working and committed teacher. They wanted a conforming, performing, loud, look good, controlling, do-as-your-told, puppet!*

*To make matters worse, when I asked for feedback on my applications, I was told that it was not structured enough and that I was too fragile. I had pressed some buttons! I was also told that the only thing I could expect from my job was a pay cheque every week. How did this sort of toxic dialogue enter a workplace? Is that the sort of behaviour that respects and relates to people and their needs?*

*After 22 years teaching, I have the sort of timetable one is issued on their first year out. 11 different classes. All lower school. 270 students every week. Not much opportunity to relate; that is the saddest part. I see them for a term or two and if they are lucky, I remember their name. Obviously I am not doing the performance thing right. Fortunately for me, I received lots of Christmas cards this year from students thanking me. Some have been challenging all year. One boy made me cry as he gave me a genuine hug of thanks. That is worth more than a leadership job in a place that does not recognise true leadership. That is worth more than conformance, compliance and structure to me. Those cards are my rewards and are what keep me going back. Not my pay cheque or false recognition from the big bosses!*

My reflections around this theme in my analysis relates to having to show one's worth in performance management; encouraged to think as an 'individual' who is continually having to improve themselves. This struggle to maintain a position and demonstrate one's worth undermines teacher autonomy and sociability (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 89) and "generates an intensification of the labour process of teaching" (p. 89). Smyth (2001a) indicates that much of this performativity relates to mandated and managerial change:

... a crucial element of this educational commodity approach to teachers' work is the attention to calculable and measurable aspects of the work, especially educational outputs, for without that kind of information the capacity of the school to successfully promote itself will be severely circumscribed. (p. 71)

*(Janice's diary... May, 2004)*

*Today we were told at our general staff meeting from the principals report "that we should be 'maximising school data' such as WALNA testing and TEE results to 'value add' and improve our performance. Federal funding will be distributed according to standards and targets being accomplished." The "toxic practices of managerialism" (Smyth 2001d, p. 131) are vividly revealing themselves!*

Teachers also have stories to tell about performance:

*Brianna: There is a huge roll over of staff. People with obvious agendas. Part of their job description is to implement change. So people come in, implement the change and take off again. They are not around to see if the change works.'*

*Celeste: 'Yes, we always have to perform – get students over 'the line' who are not even readers.'*

*Andrina: 'Yes and they keep changing the goal posts all the time.'*

*David: 'Job applications nowadays for education are at least 16 pages. They are assessed by a panel who do not know you or the subject. Many pay up to \$4,000 to have someone make it up.'*

*Ciara: 'The school is struggling a lot with people who are too fragile. There is a culture of paralysis.'*

*Tom: 'Yes, the culture of this school is in survival mode.'*

*Janice: 'Being constantly too busy stops one from having reflective time to digest and absorb what is really happening. What is important and what is not worth fighting for! It is as if I am always chasing my tail – not really being in front of things.'*

*Tom: 'Yes, I have noticed that stress levels increase because every time you say or do something now...you have to word it exactly right and you have to think through how you will deal with the response.'*

*Jack: 'Yes there is panic out there,'*

*Lara: 'Yes, and that means a lot of time and energy is spent on just keeping order and staying afloat.'*

*Fay: 'Well I feel that a business model has been imposed. Teachers and students are measured against a yardstick and everything seems to be standardized.'*

Students as well as teachers do not only work for grades, in fact, according to Noddings (2003, p. 257) not only is it insulting to assume this but it also de-motivates people. Ball (2001) explains the impact of a performative culture in schools:

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or even a system of 'terror', that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances - of individual subjects or organisations - serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. (p. 210)

*(Janice's diary... June, 2004)*

*Today, again my integrity and confidence in teaching were challenged. The AP appointed on the Senior Teacher panel spoke with venomous jealousy 'at me' yet again. She wanted to 'verify' my selection criteria. It was an application for an allowance which had been an administrative nightmare to write up. I had avoided it for over 7 years. Again, I had put myself on the line in this culture by writing this application and again treated with cold and insensitive responses. I felt insulted by the callousness and technical and rational language. I was again being spoken to like I was insignificant, powerless – a little child who needed directing. Not as an equal or at the very least, a colleague who may happen to share the responsibility of caring for students within the same institution! I felt the respect due to me for working hard and with care, passion and dedication meant zilch!*

Kelchtermans (1996, p. 308) declares that such "critical incidents" question the status quo and are often turning points or key experiences that have personal meanings for teachers. As such they always "provoke emotions of distress, unease, doubt and uncertainty." This is evident in my story. Smyth et al. (1997, p. 6) describe the image of policy support through education reform and restructuring for a 'preferred teacher'; this is where I believe I was deemed to fail. I was not "one who is prepared to focus on designated agenda; willing to accept a view of teaching constructed by others at a distance from the classroom" (p. 6). My stories above and those from some other 'non-

preferred' teachers do not necessarily demonstrate that they are "technically competent as measured by generic skills; displaying necessary collaboration and teamwork skills that don't threaten the aims of the organization; able to match practice to criteria as required; and, above all, possess a compliant and flexible disposition" (Smyth et al. 1997, p. 6).

Lim (1999) examines teacher's perceptions of the policy of the Advanced Skills Teacher Class 1 and discovers that the concept is already 'bastardised' at the implementation level. The potential of the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) to meet teachers' career path needs was never realised. Instead, the position was usurped by employers to fulfil administrative duties previously the domain of principals and deputy principals. In summary she concludes that the whole process trivialised teachers' work and exploited the conscientious. I believe the same to be happening to many policies now impacting on teachers' daily work. Examples of this are Performance Management and School Development Planning, both significant sections of the *Accountability Framework* (2002). Smyth (2001a, p. 118) states that "for teachers to not take on the garb of professionalism, with its embedded notion of the self-analytical, is to run the real risk of being branded unprofessional, and even worse, downright recalcitrant."

## 5.6 Resistance

*(Janice's diary, May, 2003)*

*When your efforts are not acknowledged for long enough and what you do does not gain credit then it is easy to give in. Do the bare minimum and begin to withdraw. This was happening to me and I witnessed many others having already done so. The extreme cases left the workplace altogether. Apathy creeps in and goodwill becomes a thing of the past. These are not very positive or uplifting things to be around and work with. In fact, often these behaviours seem to form energy of their own – comforting each other with their despairing. Less committed teachers feeds other problems in institutions of interaction like schools. Lack of honesty, respect and trust with each other and towards students. The students seem to model back the behaviours that they experience each day.*

My personal experience of this theme is one of pushing against the grain by refusing to comply. This is demonstrated by teachers in the form of the withdrawal of

their labour and a culture of apathy and other forms of resistance as their only means of survival. Amidst the perils and sorrow outlined in the themes above, some teachers are strong enough to cope with these tensions of a performance culture. These are some of the strategies that were mentioned as a means of coping:

*Brianna: 'We survive 'it' (all the enforced changes) by doing a lot of head nodding.'*

*Lara: 'Yes, 'I switch off and I chuck lots of paper.'*

*Edith: 'I strive on stress,'*

*Jack: 'I get more determined,'*

*Greg: 'I don't take it home',*

*Ivan: 'I don't take it seriously,'*

*Olivia: 'I drink more,'*

*Nicola: 'I focus only on the classroom,'*

*Greg: 'I have learnt what you can get away with,'*

*Mandy: 'I look forward just to the breaks, the money and then plan my next holiday.'*

*Ruth: 'Teachers survive by learning what they can get away with but also I don't take things personally, instead I focus on life outside school.'*

Such accounts suggest that we have an opportunity to re-frame things and move to a transformatory state, displaying upward resistance through story. An opportunity to change the way things are. As Smyth (1998) explains:

... how schools enact and live out their vision has a lot to do with the way teachers construct a culture of what it means to be a teacher – making sense of opposition, and moving beyond merely resisting, to adopting strategic action with and through the school community. (p. 6)

Leonard (1997) also states that:

... subjects are constructed, we are arguing, in discourses, including discourses of organization, in a way that enables a subject's actions to become meaningful, a mode of objectification that provides the ground where power/resistance takes a beneficial turn and can lead to the empowerment of the subject. (p. 92)

The stories that follow demonstrate the idea of our subjectivities as contingent, complex and shifting, therefore providing grounds for resistance to the managerial culture:

*Edith: 'The way I teach now is totally removed from the way they expect me to. I have reduced everything to ticks. I see lots of structure and logic and it is very boring.'*

*Lara: 'Yes, I don't collect any stuff that will not help me in the classroom.'*

*Fay: 'I find innovation is stifled. We are working against it with development planning, standardisation, increased testing and checking, record keeping, monitoring, reporting and accountability!'*

*Ciara: 'I think we need a will to change. We need a leader not a business manager. If there was good leadership working at a plan with direction then the staff would not be so jaded.'*

*Olivia: 'Because of changes in family dynamics we have more kids with special needs. Yet we do not have the staff or resources to help. Apathy develops in staff and students as a result. No one wants to take responsibility.'*

*Tom: 'Yes, I do not see many teachers interacting with kids any more.'*

Teachers' responses to school development planning demonstrate further strategies of resistance. These responses range immensely from temporary embracement to complete ignorance and denial. I encapsulate these marginalised voices below:

*Hannah: 'We just nod and say "fill in the ticks." No-one bothers to check up on it. It is insulting.'*

*Greg: 'Well, it is an accountability thing – to show the big bosses at the top that we have a vision. The rhetoric is, no time and resources are provided. You*

*should be able to believe what you say and make practical steps towards providing the environment. There is not much honesty.'*

*Paul: 'Yes, showmanship each year for school audits – no one is game enough to put their hands up and say that it is a lot of "crap".'*

*Hannah: 'School development has made people in our school cynical. It seems to be stuff for someone's C.V. All that time and money that went into 'The School Culture' project. People became disillusioned. Very few people really believed it – they just make it fit in where it suited.'*

*Jack: 'However, school development would work if what it says was put into practise. It is not evaluated and parents and teachers do not have a say.'*

*Kate: 'I was a school development officer at 'TSHS' for a few years. We collected data, figured problems, determined strategies, addressed them, implemented them and then reviewed our performance. That was in '91. School development has been there and done that already. It should have been embedded in the whole school process of educational administration and been delivered to schools.'*

*Tom: 'It is seen at our school as something that someone else does rather than a whole way that the school may operate. It has to be a system wide approach how you manage change. I was also a school development officer.'*

*Ciara: 'Yes, school development planning involves lots of paper but it is a journey, a mindset of values that the group has. If done properly, such as reviewing things, then it is a tool to be used in a school for improvement.'*

*Mandy: 'Well, we did fitness testing. It was very structured.'*

*Brianna: 'But why bother with it – everyone is trying to do better anyway!'*

*Andrina: 'I think actually that school development links Education Department policy to classroom practice.'*

*Celeste: 'Yes, for me school development planning is the demands of the classroom that you walk into and have to cope with. Pressures like these; you feel that they are just interested in getting something out of you rather than helping out.'*

*Olivia: 'We fill out forms in which we show what we have been doing, what we have achieved and then we wait for approval. THEN, after ALL that we have to relate it back to THEIR plan! School development planning comes from*

*“above”. There are these great mission statements with goals and objectives but by the time it has filtered through administration back to teacher, it is either unrealistic or non-relevant to your own experience.’*

*Greg: ‘I agree, school development is a “pie in the sky, window dressing thing” It is an impractical, futile exercise – saying what you think sounds right.’*

*Tom: ‘School development – well we nibbled on it for a bit, it looked like it was going to go on a roll alright and then it died in the “arse”!’*

*Paul: ‘I used to go into schools with lots of different colour dots – now I realise that it has no meaning and it was a waste of time.’*

*Lara: ‘Yes, I ignore stuff like that; I hope no-one will sack me!’*

*Ruth: ‘Well, I know nothing about it – maybe an easier question would be “if you did not have SDP, would you miss it”?’*

Caldwell (1998 p.12) claims in contrast to these findings that “school development programmes set a range of goals and priorities to meet the development needs of members of the school community.” Smyth (2001b, p. 31) voices teachers’ thinking when he rebukes by explaining that:

... what is being veneered and laminated over in making schools responsive, accountable and productive in terms of measurable performance indicators, is the very essence of what lies at the heart of good schools - something as intangible as changing the minds of students. (p. 31)

Troman (1996, p. 485) explains that “even in the face of the most stringent control of schoolwork, human agency creatively shapes the teachers responses.” Freire (cited in Crotty, 1998, p.154) “seeks conscientisation and liberation for oppressed peoples everywhere”. The teachers oppressed by the managerial culture come to “see themselves as the oppressor sees them, and needs to see them, and needs to have them see themselves – as incompetent, lazy, prodigal, and so on” (p.155). In contrast, Freire (cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 155) advocates the use of dialogue. For this to work one needs trust and the ability to reason. Without such faith “dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation” (Freire cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 155).



There are many examples of the lack of faith, trust and the ability to reason, within the oppressed culture of CNHS:

*Paul: 'Our leadership is all over the place. People look to that to guide them. They have a desire for a better culture but everyone is looking elsewhere as to where that change is going to come about. They are disempowered. People are not trained or prepared for devolution.'*

*Ashley: 'Yes, the message we are always getting from administration is that we need to improve. It is not enough that kids are doing well.'*

*Hannah: 'The whole school decisions, the way they are made, and how they change, is so "ad-hoc". Decisions are chopped and changed without any consultation. Often decisions have already been made. We get fooled into trying to own a decision. It is a lot of phoney stuff.'*

As Bailey (2000, p. 120) discovered, many teachers find mandated change problematic, especially when introduced without knowledge of the "range of needs that existed in their schools, or having the necessary skills to help teachers improve their practice." It is clear from these stories, that if you quell resistance from teachers, then you more often than not, remove opportunities for greater understanding and learning.

## 5.7 Resilience

*(Janice's Diary... August, 2004)*

*Today things seemed to be so much more bearable – I went to work with no expectation of positive interaction – just went along in the habitual mode. Today some rays of sunshine happened – my colleagues greeted me – the administration smiled – groups of people played music to celebrate weekend frivolity – students catching my eye and winking, teachers talking together – animated...all this and it is a Monday and the weather is shocking. The feeling of belonging and worth begin to embrace and flow in my being. I had a very productive and creative day. I don't want to fall in the trap of suspicion and despair but instead learn to trust the sprinklings of optimism that are creeping in. It has been a long time coming but it could also be that I have not been looking for it.*

Amid this sense of recovery and optimism, I want to examine the theme of resilience. Leonard (1997) provides a sense of what this means:

The collective practice of self-disclosure and the development of critical consciousness enable individuals who occupy subordinate subject positions to reveal to themselves the oppressive conditions of the existence, an understanding which is systematically denied by the dominant discursive formation which had previously constituted their subjectivities. It is upon this basis that alternative explanations of the social order may emerge, explanations which challenge the discourse of fragmented individualism and begin to articulate a different discourse, one which maintains that interdependence is at the core of human subjectivity. (p. 60)

The idea of resilience is used in this section to capture the strength to move forward. It means being creative and inventive in finding strength amidst the oppression and suffering. It is the opportunity of hope and choice throughout the other phases and themes that have been discussed. It is the embracing of struggle and the rediscovery of will. It is a reform from the bottom up that aims to empower teachers to transform schools. I think it is important to note at this point that some people feel a sense of liberation in sharing their stories. Leonard (1997) summarises what I wish to express:

Emphasis on commonality, solidarity and interdependence serves not only to counteract self-invalidating and destructive internalizing of shame and guilt, but also enable subjects to express individual resistance to domination and the possibility of participating in collective resistance in the pursuit of claims for welfare. (p. 166)

*Lara: 'It felt good to have someone listen. And get this off my chest.'*

*Fay: 'It was an amazing experience to be asked about my teaching concerns and experiences and to be heard. I realized this later.'*

According to Kelchtermans (1996, p. 320), “sharing one’s way of ‘reading’ (interpreting) with others and listening to their stories of experiencing and coping with vulnerability opens up perspectives for alternative ‘readings’ of one’s own experiences.”

*Hannah: 'I speak up because I have a lot of conversations with people and I feel that I can't let go. It is good to talk to other teachers about what is going on.'*

As Mishler (1986, p. 82) explains: “the interviewer’s presence and form of involvement - how she or he listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates

topics and terminates responses - is integral to a respondent's account." It is in this specific sense that a 'story is a joint production'.

Teachers also shared stories of hope, strength and optimism:

*Greg: 'With all this, we try to help kids – generally attempting to let kids know that there are other options, not only laborious or depressing ones.'*

*Ruth: 'Yes, relationships matter. They keep you in tune. Honest feedback and letting kids know how you feel.'*

*Stuart: 'I agree; you can't reach a bench mark without relationship.'*

*Fay: 'I must say, I did feel valued by most of the kids and you could see the impact you had as a teacher.'*

*Mandy: 'By teaching life skills, health and communication, we help kids to manage. We do not only teach what is mandated.'*

As Gewirtz (2000, p. 365) confirms, "there are still teachers who, despite the pressures generated by the government's narrow quality agenda, are devising imaginative ways of harnessing the creativity and imagination of their students and promoting the skills of critical thought."

*Fay: 'Yes, life experiences and attitude is important. We get to know all different types of students.'*

*Nicola: 'Well, I really like the hands on part of teaching.'*

Smyth (2001c, p11) also agrees that there are "spaces and places where teachers speak about the nature of their work and the cultures of teaching and learning".

At this point, I begin to connect some of the stories and findings of this research with the qualities that help build healthy families and communities. Here I am interested in building an alternative set of relationships in schools, based on the values of trust, respect, equality, flexibility and reciprocity. Freire's notion of conscientisation (cited in Giroux, 1981, p. 135) can guide us to "learn through reflection and action to overcome the social, economic and political contradictions of an oppressive reality."

Unfortunately, the capitalist system of social relations is founded on an obsession with self and commodities, leading to individual greed and self centred gain. Ricars (cited in Giroux et al, 1996, p. 27) believes that “many young people grow up in the market rather than at home.” It is only with determined strength, struggle and resilience that we have an opportunity to transform. We have to work with people, rather than on or to them. Giroux (1981, p. 139) argues that it is in the “spirit of respect for human struggle and hope, that an emancipatory pedagogy can be forged.” For Macy (1991, p. 186), “it is being recognised that a compassionate response is neither craziness nor a dodge. It is the opposite; it is a signal of our own evolution, a measure of our humanity.”

There is a powerful metaphor used by Greenfield (cited in Bates, 1983, p. 26), when he argues that “action flows from meaning and intention weaves the fabric of social reality.” The vigour of this message is the social and human factors that provide the optimism needed in this journey of reclaiming teaching; by linking people together into a tapestry – full of complexity, vivid colour and expression, together creating an image of possibility. Each thread is unique but put together to create a cohesive, unified whole belonging. It is at this point that my sense of hope, change and resilience emerges. I wish to note that it is the value of my research journey as I studied, understood and simultaneously listened to other teacher’s stories that make this resilience possible.

## CHAPTER 6: RECLAIMING TEACHERS' WORK

*(Janice's diary ... Sept. 2003)*

*To rationalise, economise, formalise and standardise how and what it is that we do is to take the real essence out of education and leave it with a false facade.*

This chapter begins to create alternative understandings of teachers' experiences in the workplace; how they can be different and less oppressive than what has been described so far. Smyth (2001a) explains:

It is one in which schools are educationally vibrant places - where parents, teachers, students, and the community feel they are able to freely engage in discussion and debate about what is going on, why, and with what effect." (p.83)

Building on the notion of resilience, this chapter sets out to provide the space and places for creating a spirit of hope and optimism in our public schools. Leonard (1997, p. 179) puts it well: "because nothing is historically inevitable and because the dominant features of modernity in its capitalist form are the result of willed human action under particular structural conditions, we are able to envisage alternatives." With this mind set, teachers as members of a school community are in a position then to reclaim their own inherent knowledge and practice. Elliot (1996) creates a picture of what this involves:

... the search for the pedagogical conditions which effect worthwhile learning, without predetermining its precise outcomes, is shaped by a concern to respect pupil's capacities for constructing personal meanings, for critical and imaginative thinking and for self directing and self evaluating their learning. Such values are inconsistent with the idea of schooling as an efficient cause of learning and a process of social control. (p. 210).

Education becomes a site of struggle. As teachers, we have a lot to gain by creating alternative visions based on truly educative values and practices. Learning is dynamic and unpredictable, and a process in which the outcomes are not something the teacher can or should confidently predict or control. Rather, the responsibility for teaching lies in pedagogical conditions that enable students to generate personally

significant and meaningful learning experiences for themselves. Elliot (1996, p. 221) explains that this is complex and context-bound. However, teachers should not lose faith as he outlines teachers' role in determining the quality of the educational process. Kemmis (1994) confirms the injustices of domination and oppression:

... they may suffer disadvantage, but these particular attributes are not the cause of their disadvantage. It is social processes, practices, structures and institutions around them which cause the disadvantages or inequities they suffer, and it is the social nature of these disadvantages or inequities which makes them injustices ... it is the systematic domination and oppression they experience which both outrages us and give us grounds for hope-those things can be changed. (p. 9)

Bigelow (cited in Smyth 2000, p. 507) provides us with some important guidelines and strategies for everyday critical teaching:

- Teachers engaging students with questions that have relevance beyond the classroom;
- Working with students in ways that enable them to delve more deeply into content that is normally presented to them;
- Schools and teachers operating in other than individual and competitive ways and creating forms of shared responsibility and community;
- Changing of mind-sets and orientations rather than using "how-to do-it" approaches;
- Listening to voices that originate within the classrooms;
- Using personal experience as a starting point and source of knowledge;
- Questioning the authority of the teacher as the sole source of knowledge;
- Students themselves becoming important alternative sources of theorizing about learning;
- Focusing on how power is reproduced through structures and forms of language;
- Encouraging the translation of democratic processes pursued inside the classroom into venues outside.

Such critical teaching requires confidence, hope, faith, trust, optimism and courage as teachers find new ways of acting and struggling politically. Apple (1999, p.18) argues that to "engage in truly critical education," we need to "reconnect with the dreams, visions and utopian hopes that are denied in a society in which profits count more than people."

In the data analysis section of this thesis, I develop common emerging themes from issues that impact on teachers' work. I do the same here as a way of discussing human agency and new ways of acting and working. It is, however, important to point

out that I intend this to be a cyclic process whereby themes are interconnected and in no way meant to be linear or hierarchical. These themes are divided into acts of human agency that I discover are transforming points in my own practice:

Act 1: Hope and Possibility

Act 2: Trust and Perseverance

Act 3: Transformation (The Turning Point)

Act 4: Finding Dialogic Space in Learning Communities

### 6.1 Act 1: Hope and Possibility

McLaren (2000, p. 172) observes that “Freire understood that while we often abandon hope, we are never abandoned by hope.” Throughout this research there were occasions when the stories and incidents felt overwhelmingly pessimistic and lonely. (see ‘Janice’s diary’, section 5.5; Performance). However, by transforming this struggle (usually with collective effort) into an emancipatory project, I have found renewed hope:

*(Janice’s diary...July, 2004)*

*My resentment must be dealt with before true hope and forgiveness are allowed to flow. I want to understand things without fear of confrontation. This has been preventing me from stepping out. I keep getting angry and resentful instead. It then allows people to dominate. I am starting to see that this struggle is paramount. It is providing the will and determination to ‘see’ things otherwise and begin to allow some hope and transformation to occur. I am also profoundly aware now this cannot be a lone journey. Going alone to battle only throws one time and time again against the same wall of despair.*

This theme in my study opens up the opportunity of change and the use of professional integrity in our work as teachers. It also acknowledges the profound trust that we can place in ourselves and each other in the struggle for democracy and justice. By not having to expend all our individual and collective energy on coping with the loss of what was our work, we can regain our strength to struggle for authentic educative communities. As Macy (1991, p. 25) argues “images of hope are potent, necessary: they shape our goals and give us impetus for reaching them.” This shift in thinking helps me to rediscover the benevolent and emancipatory intent of my teaching. I keep a quote by Freire (cited in Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 46) above my desk at work. It has assisted me in becoming more conscious and reflexive about my practice: “This is a great discovery, education is politics! When a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the

teacher has to ask, what kind of politics am I doing in the classroom?" This shift or transformation of my thinking enables me to hold the tensions close to develop more awareness and all the while, not give up hope. Importantly, it helps me to look for the gaps, spaces and fractures in the managerially controlled culture presently experienced in many schools.

By maintaining a sense of hope, I am able to regain a sense of identity and place in my work. Freire (cited in McLaren, 2000, xvi) explains that, "It is important to nourish hope, that ontologically human thing, which builds faith in a better future and makes us act in the direction of establishing truly democratic societies." Freire also says that, "hope is a revolutionary transformer, either through knowledge or through radical ethics, but it loses strength, brilliance and political clarity without fraternal love" (xvi). What this means for me is that hope is a resilient tool that looks for possibility in times of confusion. In this case, courage does not have to only mean the absence of fear and distress. It can also be 'the age of heart'; having the boldness and readiness to face up to the challenges that present themselves and knowing that things can be different.

Smyth (2001c) in his examination of what emerged from his and other studies of teachers' work discovered that:

... a certain amount of courage was required in pursuing these ideals because they were not characteristics that often featured highly or received resounding acclamation in terms of what was 'officially' valued by the education system in its pursuit of the marketised and competitive school. (p. 23)

Leonard, (1997, p. 162) argues that, "the struggle for human welfare as an emancipatory project requires an analysis which leads not to paralysis but to a politics of hope." As teachers we need the confidence to continue the struggle despite the oppressive culture that we currently work in. Central to this project is the capacity to engage in dialogue and 'confide in' our colleagues. Kemmis (1994, p. 9) believes that "the question about how to begin is in reality less important than the question of where to begin. And that can only be decided within the school." This means creating a culture of firm trust. Hope, then, is created and connected to trust as it forms a framework. It can be relied upon. It can be safe and secure. Within this culture teachers and students are able to genuinely interact, learn, collaborate and have faith. This environment allows for the belief, trust and faith that the social order of schools can also be reconstructed.



Not just a faith in authority, but also a trust in one another in creating a new learning community and being loyal to what is then created. Apple (2000) provides hope:

One of the places that journey of hope continues is in the real lives and experiences of those politically active teachers, parents, and students who are now struggling in such uncertain conditions to construct an education worthy of its name. We can join with them, assist them, and be helped by them. In the process, the 'we' can become larger, more inclusive, more democratic, a more decentered unity, thereby countering the Right. (p. 41)

As mentioned in my data analysis, many of the teachers' stories highlighted the significance for them of the social and political culture of our schools. According to Shor and Freire (1987):

... the people can teach us many things, but the way the dominated teach is different from the way the dominant teach. The workers teach silently, by their example, their situation. They are not acting as teachers to us. Because of that, we as teachers must also be absolutely open to being their students, to learning by experience with them in a relationship that is by itself informally educational. (p. 30)

Freire (cited in McLaren 2000, p. 149) believes "that the ongoing production of the social world through dialogue occurs in a complex, dialectical interplay with the structural features of society such as its social relations of production, its cultural formations and its institutional arrangements."

We have a choice therefore as how to behave, what decisions to make and what conscious and unconscious choices we make in teaching. Macy (1991) states it well:

Through the operation of feedback, the behaviours we choose and the goals we pursue take root in the psyche. They affect the ways we interpret experience - and these ways constitute who we are. Deed and doer arise. Hence our continuity of character, bearing the stamp of repeated choice and habit. Hence also our freedom, for the casual flow of co-arising is altered by each present act of will. (p. 94)

## **6.2 Act 2: Trust and Perseverance**

Troman (2000, p. 334) argues that trust and perseverance are important because an "atmosphere of distrust undermines collegiality." Smyth (2000, p. 492) also believes

that teaching is a “complex process of risk-taking in which disclosure is a key element in understanding the judgmental basis of the work”.

This theme is centred on respect and compassion. It is a passion that can evolve out of the type of suffering (‘war’ stories) revealed in this research. Trust helps retain “professional self and personal integrity” (Keltchermans, 1996, p. 316). It is therefore important to consider how we might go about creating and sustaining genuine learning communities and new cultures. In this realm, teachers are continually learning from teaching, the quality of relationships is considered important, and trust and support are present as the backdrop. As Woods (cited in Troman, 2000) says:

High levels of trust are required among participants (teachers, children and critical others) in ‘critical events’ for the development of communities marked by a strong feeling of camaraderie, a sense of common destiny, mutual support, the absence of stratification by age, ability, social class, gender or race, the transcendence of status and role as they apply in normal life, and great excitement and enthusiasm. (p. 334)

Drawing on Freire (McLaren 2000), McLaren explains the importance of collective trust and action:

Freire taught that in order for the oppressed to materialize their self-activity as a revolutionary force, they must develop a collective consciousness of their own constitution or formation as a subaltern class, as well as an ethos of solidarity and interdependence. (p. 153)

In this task, Elliot (2001, p. 208) believes quality development in learning and teaching “is conditional upon teachers being trusted to engage in the process free from the unremitting gaze of audit.” Persistence is important as an opportunity to re-shape the future by building on the faith developed from the last act. This often requires perseverance, determination, will and stamina in rebuilding. Timing is important in this act too as we step back, reflect and re-group. It is also important to consider, as Sachs (2003, p. 140) does that trust is not unconditional. It is not blind faith in other people but is a “contingent and negotiated feature of professional or social engagement with others.”

As Giroux (cited in Smyth 2001a, p. 203) explains “what is needed is a faith in the power of teachers to reflect upon, resist, and change the oppressive circumstances in

which they find themselves.” In a similar way, Leonard (1997, p. 168) notes that “to encourage and support the opportunities for agency involves particular attention to the power exercised by professional experts, and the resistance it encounters, because resistance is a foundational element in the striving for autonomy.”

If we, as teachers, do not allow more compassionate and understanding modes of teaching to occur, other forces are likely to dominate such as mandated policy or sceptical research funded by its own economic interests. Being compliant or silent is not an intellectual act. Resistance involves questioning and making problematic those policies and practices which are not in the best interests of teachers and their students. This kind of activity will enable teachers to reclaim their place as transformative intellectuals. Giroux and McLaren, (1986, p. 215) explain what this means:

... one who exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice which attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. (p. 215)

By becoming more resilient and refusing compliance, teachers can reclaim their own knowledge and experience about teaching, and responsibility for what they have chosen to do - teach! In its place, the “authentic voice” (Smyth 2001d and Gleeson & Gunter 2001, p. 154) of teachers replaces the silence. These ‘authentic voices’ allow for more creative, contextual and critical forms of teaching and learning. According to Gleeson and Gunter (2001, p.154) this involves, “seeing pedagogy as being located in a local polity, in which difference is not articulated through niche marketing, performance or self-interest, but in the context where learning and achievement take place.” From this perspective, ‘what works’ in education cannot constitute neat franchised packages or slots into which teachers and learners must fit. Instead, as Smyth (2001c, p. 23) reveals in his study of teachers reclaiming their pedagogical work, we find schools that are sustained “with a consistent and patterned capacity to pursue progressive school-wide visions and aspirations that are anchored in the schools themselves.”

### **6.3 Act 3: The Turning Point (Transformation)**

This act is concerned with transforming schools as we experience them now and reclaiming an ethic of care and social justice. According to Smyth (2001a, p 141), this means “opening up of the spheres and spaces within which teachers can become more

active theorists of their own and one another's teaching." By making spaces for alternative ways of thinking and acting (even though at times appearing foggy and difficult to see the way ahead), teachers may come to understand that dominant discourses are myths which oppress and marginalize them. It may then be possible to transcend current realities through transformative action. By reclaiming our work as teachers we can develop learning communities where teachers can again connect with the lives of students. The concept of relationships within these communities is essential. As hooks (1994) reminds us:

... the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

It is important to move outside of isolated teaching arrangements such as insulated subject departments and engage in each others' lives, questioning injustices and oppressions and "exposing and transforming authoritarian acts and hierarchical structures" (Smyth 2001a, p. 83). By supporting each other in everyday incidents and communication we may take more ownership and professionalism in what we do with greater self image and satisfaction the result. Leonard (1997, p. 170) terms this a "collective resistance" which has "both a form and an object." In his words:

... its form is usually characterized as the attempt to develop a collective organization of subjects which, in contrast to the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of the state, emphasizes wide participation in decision making and the de-differentiation of roles. Because its object is to confront and negate dominant discursive formations, the continuous effort to ensure that form is congruent with object necessarily assumes a high priority. (p. 170)

A resilience that provokes debate and discussion encourages more autonomy amongst teachers who can then become free agents, not fearful of expressing their own values. An alternative reform can then emerge from the bottom up that aims to empower teachers. Smyth (2001a, p. 83) creates an image of schools where "there are genuine opportunities for dialogue, chances to understand one another's perspectives outside of coercion, and a greater tolerance, difference, and diversity." These reforms do not seem so out of reach especially when we are free to let go of the constraints of conformity, passiveness, uniformity and centrally determined market controls because the "roots of

repression and inequality lie in the structure and functioning of the capitalist economy” (Bowles & Gintis cited in Bates, 1983, p. 23).

A reform which can transform schools by breaking down their hierarchical nature, can then allow them to be part of the social capital and set goals towards which they work. This provides an alternative to ‘damaged lives’, (Smyth, 2001b, p. 21) in which teachers are labourers working to foreign enforced conditions. This would also permit teachers to find spaces (as outlined in the next act - enunciated space) that are true to their teaching work and consequently viewed as intellectuals in their field. By allowing reforms such as these to permeate our consciousness, education becomes a process, rather than a product.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 46) present a vision of “transformative intellectuals” to replace the dominant notion of teachers as educational technicians. This means combining reflection and action as a means of empowering students as they are exposed to “alternative social practices, new modes of communication, and a practical vision for the future” (p. 46). Teachers are more autonomous in such a system – they are active and free agents whose values are considered important.

Reclaiming is not a once off act, but ongoing and its focus and dimension shift as our teaching practice moves on. This process can begin with problem posing questions that surround teachers in their everyday work, such as ‘Why are we doing this?’ and ‘Where will it take our school?’ This helps one to transgress and move beyond the boundaries. Sometimes such questions may seem at first glance to be unnecessary or matter of course, however, with the new regime of managerialistic discourse now firmly embedded in our workplaces and filtering into our psyche, it is important to be reminded of our social responsibility as teachers. It is then that teachers are more likely to be involved in major decision making and be more aware of the social forces at play. Consequently, they are involved in the very foundations of the schools own moral fibre, vision and future school development. In Smyth's (2002, p. 361) words it allows us as teachers to “speak back to the policy deafness.”

Establishing our own ‘voice’ (Connell, 1993, p. 114) reassures us “that in the nature of our work, we will gather a great deal of knowledge.” This knowledge is not just about subjects. It is real curriculum knowledge, real knowledge gathered about our working lives, students’ lives and the integration of both.

## 6.4 Act 4: Dialogic Space Found in Learning Communities

Smyth et al (1997, p. 9) define the resistance narratives spoken into existence by teachers as “enunciative space” (Spivak, 1988). This is the dialogic and reflective space which engages, contests and opens up possibilities; defends and frames conversational space and provides an ethic of care. Teachers need to be free to genuinely collaborate in such a culture. Smyth (2000) warns what will continue to occur otherwise:

If the work of teaching is driven by a competitive rather than a cooperative ethos, if there is a lack of generosity of spirit toward the views of others, and if the purpose of education is conceived narrowly as being to satisfy the dictates of the economy - then social capital will be eroded and the capacity of schools to enhance it will diminish. (p. 492)

According to Smyth, (2000) there is a possibility of bringing all the above mentioned acts together in a dialogic/discursive manner so as to adopt the culture of ‘learning communities.’ Smyth intentionally adopts the term ‘community’ as distinct, remaining separate from ‘organisation’ as a space of resistance. In such communities, teachers support and reinforce each other in a climate that encourages sharing, observation, experiment and feedback.

Sachs, (2003, p. 153) explains that this requires “risk taking and working collectively and tactically with others ... [it] demands conviction and strategy.” Macy (1991, p. 28) agrees; “in community, we can find our power and learn to trust our inner responses to our world.” Smyth (2001a, p. 217) explains that such communities “also have a well developed commitment to asking poignant questions about the broader context within which such learning and schooling are occurring.” Some examples of these questions that ring true at CNHS include:

- Whose needs are being met?
- Whose voices are being excluded, silenced, and denied?
- Whose interests are being served?
- What kind of feasible and prudent action can we adopt?

Capper (1994, p. 39) asks similar types of questions in order to evaluate and deconstruct policy proposals such as school development planning. Debate and consultation are then more likely to occur. Some examples he gives are:

- By what criteria are we to evaluate its success?

- What has any of it got to do with what happens in classrooms?
- What is it intended to achieve?

When these types of questions are encountered within a learning community, the nature of the society to which the school is contributing is challenged, values are exposed, and the teachers are genuinely engaged. Teachers also feel safe to express and debate issues in such a culture as they will not be judged on personalities but on the merit of their ideas (Smyth, 2001a, p.176). Such ideas could and often do revolve around distribution of resources within the school. Gewirtz (2000, p. 368) emphasises that the “relatively high levels of financial and human resources that are currently invested in regulating and demonstrating quality” would be wiser spent on supporting a “non-segregated system of schoolings within which democratic practices and values could evolve.”

It is not difficult to imagine that these types of questions are possible within a learning community; the difficulty is often in overcoming the fear or realising that we as teachers can actually engage with the political aspects of what it means to teach in schools such as CNHS. As indicated by a staff ‘Well Being’ survey conducted by the administration in 2003 at CNHS, many teachers indicated that “feeling valued and appreciated and listened to is important to staff at all levels”.

Young (cited in Evers, 1994, p. 42) states “critical pedagogy is the form interaction takes on when participants in a learning situation are mutually concerned with the development of each others' capacities to join in making validity judgments.” Sergiovanni (cited in Smyth 1995, p 17) explains that communities are based on commitment. They are: “... socially organised around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them. This social structure bonds people together in special ways and binds them to concepts, images, and values that comprise a shared idea structure.”

To restructure the type of schools that Woods et al. (1997, p. 6) portray we need “a positive moving mosaic with dynamic and vigorous collaborative networks, partnerships and alliances within and beyond the school.” There is much work to be done to heal and mend the present structure, however to not begin is destined only to despair – strength and vitality together with other activists is desperately needed. To summarise this section, I use a quote by Leonard (1997, p. 177) to provide a picture of what a reconstructed culture for schools could be: “... a culture which resisted the urge

to homogenization even while it continued to build solidarities; which encouraged discourses of difference and sought to reclaim and articulate previously hidden narratives of subordination and exclusion.”



## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

My journey in this study has enabled me to view the personal as political. My story scaffolded amongst teachers' stories and further supported by what the literature is saying in helping to express these stories has enabled me and, hopefully my colleagues, to cope with the stress of what has happened to our work. From a 'wounded ethnographic' (McLaren, 1995) position that writes about 'damaged lives' (Smyth, 2001b and 2001c) and 'teachers pain' (Shacklock, 1995 and Woods et al. 1997, p. 147), I am able to reflect and express different ways of knowing what is happening to our work. It is time to challenge the values of managerial discourses, so other voices can be heard, emotional and relational values reclaimed and teachers' lives lived in a heartfelt and mindful space.

By way of conclusion, there are some key learning's I take from this piece of research:

*First*, I believe that my study demonstrates that mandated policy initiatives such as school development planning are not always translated into school practice without a personal cost to teachers' working lives. As Paioff (2000. p.1) argues, "broad based policies for managing the performance of educators are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes, because they attempt to deliver purposes that are competitive in nature and require extensive human and financial resources." As the push for greater performance increases, often associated with external accountability, then pressures on schools further intensifies teachers' labour. This often results in more superficial and damaging human relationships within the school. These relationships are those between teacher and teacher, between teacher and student, between parents and schools, between administration and the school. In short, everyone associated with and within the school community.

When a culture of whole school reform for social justice is not embraced with determination by the institution, then mandated policies such as school development planning becomes overly efficacious and destructive. It can become, it seems, a powerful tool disseminating unequal power relations, causing further stress and oppression. According to (Smyth, 2001a, p. 70), however, "teachers are continually re-

framing the discursive boundaries of their teaching in situations where sharing insights about their teaching is a normal part of a wider community-building process.” Therefore, an infrastructure, composed of groups and individuals, inscribed with each schools political structure needs to be considered.

Initially, planning needs to be embraced by all those involved as important, otherwise the mode that an institution, such as the one studied, falls victim to, is one of clumsy survival. Next, rash decisions are often made by those in positions of authority who misuse their power, while others are left feeling powerless, disillusioned and disrespected. Teachers often do not know or understand why it is that they can no longer function in an incredibly alien workplace. This was my experience and I am now feeling confident from my own journey, and purposeful conversations with others, to reclaim my own voice and authority as a true “activist professional” (Sachs, 2003). According to Sachs, this involves “active trust, respect and reciprocity” (p. 141) as teachers endeavour to “defend and understand” themselves better (p. 153).

*Second*, I discovered throughout this study, that my attempt to reclaim teaching is a lonely journey and one that I would not recommend travelling alone. For me, a supportive and caring teaching and learning community are crucial ingredients. Smyth, (2001d, p. 127) argues that “fundamental change is only possible at the level of the school.”

We need to put back our crowns of confidence and realise that we can reclaim what is ours. We can then engage in intellectual activity that contests and reclaims the spaces that are required to work in genuine ways. It is not us who have failed, but a system that is suffering under the assault of managerialistic culture. This, in fact, is what has hi-jacked our claim to familiar ground. Support structures such as families and the features that they offer to support us need acknowledgement here. These features noted by Covington and Beckett (1998, pp. 29-33) include connectedness, acceptance, appreciation, trust, truthfulness and commitment, as well as the inclusion of flexible rules, problem solving skills and safety boundaries. They combine to assist teachers as members of a community and help to strengthen and regain confidence. Many teachers have lost confidence in their own power and politics and there are spaces in which this can be reclaimed. My personal story reflects this loss and then tells the story of regaining hope and confidence in myself and my work. It is these features of healthy

family and community functioning that intellectually engaged and guided me back into the familiar and confident path of teaching.

Smyth (2001c, p. 15) explains that “there needs to be an active process of presenting school reform as something everyone in the school at large had a stake in shaping”. This means engaging in the change process rather than being fearful of it as I was. This engagement needs to be truly collaborative, creating new spaces for action and debate. In doing so, improved learning opportunities and confidence arise and a sense of profession and purpose for all those who are recipients or providers of education (Sachs, 2003, p. 153).

*Third*, I realise now that it is ultimately the re-construction of school culture through dialogue which is the key to school reform. As expressed by Woods et al. (1997, p. 165) “restructuring schools is well under way. The reconstruction of teachers is long overdue.” With determination, faith in ourselves and each other, recognition of the diversity and complexity of teaching and all its realms of possibility, we can regain our strength to continue the struggle and hope for liberation in our work. This can be looked at in two complementary ways:

1. Exposing the principles and values of The School Effectiveness/Improvement movement in schools so that we can “reclaim the educational discourse from the morally and socially blinkered economic rationalists” (Robertson 1993, p. 133).

2. Developing an alternative discourse based on the principles and values of social justice and democracy and encapsulated in the notion of a learning community.

Discourse according to Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996, p. 10) is “composed of ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects, in particular settings and at specific times, so as to display or to recognize a particular social identity.” Therefore, the type of discourse I am advocating here is one in which there is a possibility of genuine teaching practice. This educational discourse enables inter-relationships and has greater pedagogical freedom to protect ourselves from the ever increasing technocratic consciousness within the school community. It is a discourse that allows discussions and dialogue which captures teachers’ stories and the complexities of their lives. Quantz (1992, p. 478) explains that “critical discourse is more likely to challenge the very basis of the organization of

power ... because it recognizes social structures to be the result of particular asymmetrical power relations.”

My research has been an attempt to explore and enact what this critical discourse might look like in my own work world and practice. By telling and re-telling stories and trying to understand them, I have been able to transform my own practice. By drawing on the threads of meaning from these stories and placing it into my teaching work, validation and new visions of hope emerge. In reclaiming my practice, I am able to re-authorise my own craft. As Goodson, (1991, p. 145) points out: “life experiences and background are obviously key ingredients of the person that we are, of our sense of self. To the degree that we invest our ‘self’ in our teaching, experience and background therefore shape our practice.”

*Fourth*, at the beginning of this thesis, I felt injured, during much of the evolution of its content, I had hoped to make a difference. Now, it is school reform that I focus on. All the features that Smyth, Hattam, McInerney and Lawson (1999) discovered as boundary conditions of school culture are in stark contrast to the ‘managerial’ cultural conditions that I experience as school reform at Cape Neal High School. To illustrate my point, I draw on Smyth and Hattam’s, (2004, p. 161) notion of “cultural geographies” to distinguish between two “archetypes of school culture”: the ‘socially-critical’ school and the ‘stuck’ school. The main features of the ‘socially-critical’ school include:

1. A focus on meaning rather than a focus on measurement and accountability.
2. Diversity encouraged rather than compliance.
3. Supportive structures embedded rather than an ‘institution’ relying on directives and policy.
4. There is an understanding of power rather than being apolitical.
5. Multiple voices are heard rather than implementing others agendas.
6. Creative social practices exist in relationships rather than low trust ones.
7. Visionary solutions are sought rather than competitive market solutions.

8. Democratic relationships are developed rather than technocratic and hierarchical ones.

*Fifth*, I now realise that dialogue is possible in shifting between these two categorizations. It is possible to move from the descriptive to the transformative. I do not have to get 'stuck' at one level and not allow possibility for the other to occur. As Smyth and Hattam (2004, p. 161) explain, "while these archetypes represent useful categories, they also need to be treated with some caution. Rather than appearing definitive, they can appear more as a constellation of tendencies or trajectories". Using these cultural geographies as guides, school reform can be seen as an attempt to move from the stuck state, in the direction of the collaborative and socially-critical cultures (Smyth et al. 1999, p. 13). Gewirtz and Ball (2000, p. 256) also distinguish opposing discourses between 'welfarism' and 'new managerialism'. These distinctions display very similar characteristics to the points made above as they compare cooperation, consultation, collective relations, and public service ethos with competition, authoritarianism, individualism and customer-orientated values. Gewirtz and Ball (2000) are able to provide an example of this transformation in their study of head teachers:

... new languages of enterprise, quality and excellence grate against existing and embedded welfarist languages but may still encompass aspects of the welfarist project. This was due to the fact that teachers bring with them into this transformation, personal qualities, complex histories and social positioning that mean that a straightforward totalising fit within a dominant discourse is unlikely. (p. 266)

*Sixth*, these revelations regarding transformative practices within dominant and oppressive cultures provide us with hope. As McInerney (2001, p. 20) confirms "devolution may indeed be taking schools into potentially dangerous territory but there are maps to chart a more democratic and socially just pathway for public education." The distinctions between these two different discourses, have, for the purpose of this study, enabled me to map the ways of thinking and acting. They have also continued to assist me in defining the values and principles that underpin our cultural experiences. Simultaneously, I have learnt as Leonard (1997, p. 153) explains, to have a "responsibility to otherness, a principle which requires us to reflect before acting, and celebrate difference on a foundation of solidarity."

As Goodman (1992, p.103) states, “teachers need to consciously create rituals and structures and act with reasoned authority in order to nourish a connectionist perspective with children.” By collectively taking the courage to do the things in teaching that really matter and maintaining hope for future transformation by creating spaces, then it is possible for teachers to become more autonomous. In doing so, teachers can become proactive in creating more socially just schools. Teachers are not passive subjects, but human agents who can make a difference. Giroux (1989) explains:

By defining schools as sites of contestation and cultural production, it becomes possible to engage forms of self and social representations, along with the practices and interests they articulate, as historically specific cultural practices that construct as well as block the exercise of human agency among students. (p. 143)

*Finally*, my study and its analysis of teachers’ work have created a picture of the personal becoming political. In this process we are provided with hope and strength by having unearthed the unequal power structures of our work. Teachers do not have to hide as politically neutral players, separate from the socially constructed nature of the teaching world. They can help students to become creative, to become critical thinkers and active social participants. They can also help them to become capable of redefining the nature of their own lives in the society in which they live. Cape Neal High School is such a place. However, teachers cannot work independently in this process. They need to act collectively and without pretence. As Smyth (2001d) advocates:

... we need a new critical professionalism of teaching that is informed by a robust culture of debate around issues of teaching and learning as an alternative to the toxic practises of managerialism. This antidote is necessary in order to refashion school reform worldwide so that it is more cognisant and respectful of those who have the largest repositories of knowledge about teaching - classroom teachers. (p. 131)

My hope is that this research contributes to this process. What started out as a ‘journey in reliving the past’ in chapter one and knowing that things didn’t feel right but not understanding the reasons, has culminated here as a journey in facing the present with faith and courage. Tolle (1998, p. 131) describes this transformation as coming about by creating a space for change to happen then allowing “grace and love to enter.”

I have experienced enormous emotional growth from this journey. I have also learnt not to “dwell on the power that we don’t have but to work with the power that we know is ours” (Connell, 1993, p. 73). Apple (1999, p.18) advises us to “reinsert ourselves into the daily struggles and social movements forming and re-forming the institutions in which we and others live and work.” By struggling through the murkiness of managerialism and understanding its debilitating forces as it inflicts its market model on schools, a certain clarity and a sense of power to manage my own emotions has emerged. Due to this, a strength and determination to regain democracy and social justice in my work has eventuated. I am grateful towards others for sharing their stories which creates a sense of freedom and energy to carry forward. As Kemmis (1994, p. 8) confirms “the road is long ... there are few shortcuts in the journey. Overcoming injustice is not just a task for our generation, but for every generation.”

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# APPENDICIES

## Appendix A: Invitation Letter

CMB  
Carbunup River  
WA 6280

Dear .....

RE: Educational workers own interpretation of their work.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project that I am undertaking as part of my Master in Education Degree at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury. The aim of the research is to explore educational employee's interpretations and experiences of their own workplace. This research aims to give these workers a 'voice' and a greater understanding of major impacts occurring within education.

The information for the study will be collected through semi-structured interviews encouraging 'purposeful conversations'. I anticipate that each interview will take approximately one to one and a half-hours, although not necessarily in one sitting. For the purposes of the research, I would like to audio tape the interview. Once completed, the tapes will be transcribed and you will be provided with a copy for verification, amendment or deletion. I can assure you that your personal details will remain confidential and will not appear in the research process or the final document.

I would like to thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

.....

Janean Robinson

## Appendix B: Personal Consent Form

### Personal Consent to Participate in the Research

I ..... consent to participating in the research project being undertaken by Janean Robinson as part of her Master in Education research at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury Campus. I understand that the aim of the study is to explore issues impacting on educational workers within school settings.

In giving my consent I understand the following:

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time throughout the research project without any pressure or prejudice.

All of the information that I provide will only be used for the purpose of this research.

My interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher and a copy of the transcripts will be made available to me.

My recorded interviews will be either destroyed or returned to me.

Any information that I provide to the researcher may be modified, amended or deleted by me at any time during the research process.

I will not be identified in either the research process or the final document and my personal details will remain confidential.

Participant Signature .....Date.....

Any questions concerning the research project can be directed to Janean Robinson on 97551101. If you have any concerns about the project and you would like to speak to an independent person, please contact Margaret Doust, Academic Skills Adviser, at Edith Cowan University, South West Campus, Bunbury on 97807717.

Thank you, your assistance is greatly appreciated. Janean Robinson.

## Appendix C: Letter of Permission from School Principal

Principal  
\_\_\_\_\_ Senior High School

10th August 2002

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing this letter to request your permission to conduct interviews at the \_\_\_\_\_ Senior High School to enable me to complete my research topic as part of my Master in Education Degree at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury.

My research topic involves studying the changes in teachers' daily work experience. I wish to collate their interpretations of how they see their teaching practices at the present time.

The information for the study will be collected through semi-structured interviews. I plan on interviewing six different education department employees, who would volunteer an hour of their time for this purpose. Their conversations will be taped and transcribed. These transcriptions will then be handed to the individuals for their approval and modification before being used for research. I hope to gather a broad range of interpretations by drawing on subjects from various positions and experiences in teaching.

For ethical reasons I have maintained confidentiality and security of information and plan to continue to do so throughout the research. I will continue to use honesty and integrity throughout this process.

In order for further research processes to occur, I would appreciate your approval to begin conducting these interviews in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

Janean Robinson  
Teacher

## **Appendix D: Abbreviations used throughout thesis**

AP	Assistant Principal
AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
CNHS	Cape Neal High School
DET	Department of Education and Training
EIP	Employment Initiated Placement
EDWA	Education Department of Western Australia
HOD	Heads of Departments
HOLA	Heads of Learning Areas
LAEP	Local Area Education Planning
PD	Professional Development
PM	Performance Management
SDP	School Development Plan
SEI	School Effectiveness/Improvement
TEE	Tertiary Entrance Examinations
WALNA	West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment