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**GUARDIANS OF AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM:
A Feminist Analysis of
Early Childhood Education Practices**

by

ELAINE LOWE

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

December 21, 1992

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Thesis Supervisor

Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

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ABSTRACT

Feminist poststructuralism is used to interpret the gender practices of an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, disclosing that sex-role socialization theory is normatively taught to ECE students. A number of problems originate from our contemporary obsession with a child-centred curriculum, in conjunction with humanist principles. Students are primarily taught a non-interventionist approach to ECE teaching, so that gender stereotypical behaviour in children is understood as the child's "natural" choice. Teachers are positioned both in authority over the children in their care, and in service to them, and little attention is given in the ECE program to the contradictory subject positions inherent to child care.

Course material on gender identity is decontextualized from feminism, allowing students' stereotypically negative opinions of feminists to persist. Discrepancies between student discussions and student questionnaires exposed hidden power relations in classroom discursive practices. Feminist pedagogy in a classroom of young children might recommend that teachers be reflexive in their exercise of authority and intervene to augment the legitimacy of subject positions available to students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The document you hold in your hands is incomplete. Linear and logical, it unfolds in a particular formation: sociological discourse. How ironic it is that my desire to affirm the importance of irrational, contingent, everyday life has resulted in such a formal text!

The fabric of my life and my heart are missing. Innumerable interruptions are invisible. Absent are the sleepless nights, and the days and weeks when all that lay before me was chaos. Months of reading, discussing, and researching are deleted, or caught in a word or phrase.

These gaps constitute the main context of my everyday life. A different context would have produced a different text. I wish here to affirm the importance of that unpredictable existence. As well, I acknowledge with thanks all those writers and thinkers who preceded me, for it is only from their shoulders that I can see what I see.

Countless professors, friends, and family intentionally or coincidentally counselled, supported, and encouraged me to continue over the past five years, and to you I owe my genuine thanks. Your confidence in me helped me through times when I no longer believed in myself.

I am deeply indebted to the faculty and students in the ECE program who welcomed me as an observer in their place of work and study. Special thanks also go to my thesis advisors, Steve Richer and Tom Ryan, who both guided me thoughtfully and with an open hand.

Finally, to my children and husband goes the recognition that this was a cooperative group project; your efforts were all integral to the process, in a thousand different ways. Adrienne, David, Conor, and Sophie: special acknowledgment of your independent spirits, your wit and humour, your enthusiasm for life, and your comforting hugs. John, your honesty and patience over the years helped me to get the job done. To you all, forever thanks.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction:

In this thesis, I examined the curriculum of a local community college's early childhood education program, asking what early childhood education students are being taught about gender identity formation in their program and whether they are exposed to any explicitly feminist perspectives. I was primarily interested in examining how we come to understand ourselves as masculine and feminine subjects, particularly as children, and what possibilities there are for alternative understandings. In the following pages, I immerse the reader in how I came to this thesis topic, and how I came to adopt a particular feminist perspective.

Why is Early Childhood Education a Feminist Issue?

When I was a full-time undergraduate student, for three years, my youngest daughter attended a nearby day care centre. I was awakening to the academic world of critical feminist thought, at the same time as my daughter Sophie seemed to be changing in the opposite direction, taking up a number of offensive (to me) feminine stereotypes: she wore only the frilliest of dresses; she hated to get dirty; she played only with so-called girl's toys. Where had these practices originated? Consistent with my understanding of gender construction at the time, I concluded that she must have learned these behaviours from teachers at her day care centre.

I found myself wondering about child care in general. What were child care workers teaching children about gender? What kinds of role-models were they? Who were attracted to this line of work? Did these women¹ desire to

¹ Child care work is almost exclusively performed by women.

change current male/female relations or did they tend to support the status quo?
Had they had an opportunity to consider alternatives?

I felt trapped in my situation because I needed child care, and there were few practical choices available. At the same time I was unhappy with what I presumed the caregivers at the centre were teaching her about being a little girl. However, I knew that the conflict embedded in our particular situation was (and is) not unique.

A consequence of the 1960s women's movement bid for equality with men is that today, unprecedented numbers of women work or study outside the home. Over fifty percent of mothers work in the paid labour force,² and increasingly, these women are mothers of young children.³ Because women are still expected to assume primary responsibility for the rearing of children, and children are excluded from the public world of work, working mothers are compelled to find alternative child care arrangements than sole mother-care so that "other-care"⁴ is a growing reality for many Canadian children.

² In 1984, 52.2 per cent of women with families were in the labour force (Eichler 1988:315). Of this group, roughly 50 per cent are mothers with no husband present (ibid). Almost 60 per cent of Canadian mothers with children under 5 worked in the labour force in 1989 (Baker 1990:71).

³ The fastest growing labour force population is mothers of infants under two years of age (Pardeck et al 1986:897). Over the past 20 years (1966-1985), the difference between female and male labour force participation rates has decreased from 59.6 per cent to 24.1 per cent (Eichler 1988:95-6).

⁴ This expression comes from Alan Pence's "Towards an enabling history for the child day care profession in Canada", *Early Child Development and Care* (57), and will often be used to replace more cumbersome expressions "alternative child care arrangements" (which suggests a pejorative meaning) or "paid care outside the home" (which does not include all forms of arrangements).

For some hours of the day then, other-caregivers replace parents as the primary socializing agents of the majority of young Canadian children (Eichler 1988:314). Although most of this other-care takes place in private homes, it increasingly takes the form of collectivized care in centres,⁵ a consequence of child care advocates' lobbying various levels of government for universal, affordable, accessible, quality care.

Although day care centres are often born out of demand, rather than a commitment to quality care, day care has become a more-or-less accepted norm. To ensure that some standards of care are met, the state has become increasingly involved in its realization. As such, there is a growing requirement that other-caregivers be graduates of a community college with a certificate in early childhood education (ECE) in order to work in a licensed child care setting.

People are deeply divided about the wisdom and appropriateness of day care because the collective care of children contradicts some fundamental beliefs about who is best suited to do what, especially widespread beliefs about mothering. This division has resulted in a stalemate between those for and those against collective care, so that the assurance of quality care is not guaranteed, arrangements remain uncertain, and child care advocates are positioned defensively. In this debate, what do child caregivers see as the legitimate role of women? Do their attitudes reflect the wider ambivalence noted above? These

⁵ Total Canadian children in licensed care (this included public, non-profit, and commercial care) in 1984 was 8.8 per cent. Of this group in licensed care, 8.7 per cent were children aged 0-17 months, 13.8 per cent were children aged 18-35 months, and 31.3 per cent were children aged 3-5 years (Eichler 1988:318).

questions drifted in and out of my thoughts for a few years, and in this work I have tried to address them.

An exploration of current literature on day care shows that very little has been written about whether educators in day care centres are actively working to liberate children from narrow gender stereotypes. The feminist rallying cry for universal child care stresses quality of care, but the acquisition of a gendered identity within that context does not appear to be a factor in this demand for quality. Early childhood education literature stresses a child-centred curriculum, but within this perspective, there is little room for differences in gender relations for "the child".

Research in child development literature takes gender into account from the various perspectives described above. As well, there is a significant feminist literature on gender relations. Among these perspectives, there is consensus that very young children are learning about gender relations. However, with few exceptions, this understanding has not informed either the day care literature or the early childhood education literature.

Although there is no single, unified perspective in the women's movement, by definition, feminism is political in its desire for changed gender relations. In contrast to dominant understandings of the "natural child", feminists argue that an interventionist approach in male/female relations is necessary to disrupt, expand, and challenge rigid and confining gender roles and stereotypical attitudes. In this way, both girls and boys will have a wider framework of possible positions available to them.

However, feminist perspectives are not part of the taken-for-granted truths in society. To be a feminist requires a high degree of literacy. "Contemporary feminism...is a highly literate political movement" (Connell 1989:298). As such, feminist ideas are primarily circulated through feminist books and journals, and among teachers and students on university campuses. The texts widely available to the general public are "popular feminism (which accuses men) and mass media (which ridicule feminism)" (Connell 1989:299).

The discrepancy noted earlier between feminist theory and practices in teaching about young children suggests that current feminist understandings of gender formation have remained within the academy and have not informed either an early childhood education or a day care context. While there are many reasons for this absence,⁶ it is nonetheless true that if children are cared for and educated by teachers who have not been exposed to contemporary critical feminist understandings of gender relations, then how can the children they care for have significantly different ideas about male/female relations than their predecessors?

Given the prevalence of other-care, particularly the rise of infant and toddler care, along with the growing demand for caregiver credentials, teaching contemporary feminist understandings of gender in early childhood education curricula could be a powerful tool for resisting constraining gender relations.

⁶ Gatekeepers, for example, restrict access to academic journals when the perspective of the researcher is not consistent with that of the journal. Critical academic work, including feminist research, is published outside the mainstream, forming a parallel body of work which informs other critics. From a mainstream perspective, feminist work is trivialized as that of a "special interest group". As well, academic research in general is often inaccessible to the general public.

Early Childhood Education: A View to Understanding

My daughter Sophie is now nine years old. She preens in front of the mirror, agonizes over her appearance, and is beginning to be interested in boys. At the same time, she uses her body fully and with pleasure in sports, playing hockey, baseball, soccer, and roller-blading. She has announced that she wants to coach hockey as an adult.

*The other night while we watched **My Fair Lady** together, she pounded her fists with rage and frustration to see Eliza Doolittle trivialized by Henry Higgins, wept to see her abused by him, and cheered Eliza when she finally left him.*

On Remembrance Day, Sophie came home from school and told me about the war veteran who had addressed her class. She said, "Mum, he never said one thing about women in the war. All he talked about was what the men did. I know women were there, but what were they doing?"

These anecdotal incidents reveal something of how my daughter has changed. She is fully aware of the importance of her appearance as a female. Nonetheless, this does not constrain her from getting competitive and sweaty and taking a great deal of pleasure in both. She identifies with a mistreated woman, and is enraged that she is not treated better. These incidents also show that she was aware of the absence of a female voice when the veteran spoke; she expects women to be accounted for, to hear the female voice. From this, we can see that Sophie positions herself as a female with a legitimate voice, legitimate concerns, and with a legitimate place in the world. What then, we might ask, is her identity? How can this transition from a "typical little girl" to a critically thinking one be best explained? Can all these female images exist in the same person? Are these contradictions to her, or merely our perceptions of what is contradictory based on conventional meanings? Questions about identity and

gender will be addressed in Chapter II, in a discussion of the basic theoretical frameworks used in this research.

Feminist poststructuralism provides the best explanation of my own and my daughter's positions as a female. As an interpretive tool, it also best explains my research findings and as such I outline its premises in Chapter II. I first outline the central principles of poststructuralism and discuss my understanding of its specifically feminist aspects. Second, because early childhood education uses child development theory as the foundation of its practices, contemporary understandings of child development are addressed.

In Chapter III, I offer theories of gender construction emerging from child development theories. A feminist poststructuralist account of gender identity formation concludes this chapter. The insights offered by this perspective are further developed in the final chapters of this work to interpret some of the students' behaviours I observed in the field.

Even the most insignificant social relation is concurrently shaped by a wider social context of economic and political realities. Because I am primarily interested in the formation of curricula, in Chapter IV, I present four structural factors which underlie curriculum formation. Contrary to my expectation that there would be meaningful state controls in the development of curriculum, I found relative autonomy in the ECE program. The curriculum is developed cooperatively among faculty; hiring new faculty is done internally; and the department had hired a feminist. There was only one document which originated

from within the state; this text, an exception to the relative autonomy this ECE program enjoyed, might be used to regulate the curriculum.

In the second portion of Chapter IV, I analyze this text: *Early Childhood Education Professional Competencies* (1991). Professional competencies serve to establish standards for graduates of college programs. My analysis shows that rather than determining ECE program curricula, these guidelines appear to be a bureaucratic response to already existing programs and the hidden effect of this document is to appropriate the authority for early childhood education as legitimately belonging to the state.

In chapters V and VI, I examine the course outlines and text books of specific ECE courses. In Chapter V, I first analyze the mission statement recently developed by the department faculty. This situates program goals within an ideological framework. I then identify certain ECE courses as the ones most likely to present comprehensive coverage of theories related to gender identity construction. I also analyze child development courses and children's literature courses. In Chapter VI, I examine a series of four courses linking child development theory to teaching practice, entitled "*Early Childhood Education*" (ECE).

In chapter VII, I examine in detail one particular textbook, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* (Derman-Sparks et al 1989), which is presented in ECE IV. This text, although introduced almost as an afterthought in terms of its placement in the program as a whole, is certainly the most "progressive" text offered to the ECE students, and, although not explicitly

feminist, closer links to contemporary feminism can be made in terms of its contents and the positions it makes problematic.

Up to this point in the research, I will have identified structural factors of both a general and a specific nature as related to curriculum formation. As well, I will have examined course materials for concrete textual evidence of feminist contents. Most of the evidence has obscured rather than contributed to understanding the ECE program in terms of structural constraints.

Rather, the ECE program seems to have been formed on the basis of highly contingent circumstances, very much specific to its location in time and space. Further, in all of the texts examined, themes emerged about how early childhood educators are expected to relate to children in their care. These prescribed positions are problematic in terms of taking up a feminist position.

It is these student positions which I address in the final chapters. They are devoted to analyses of two classroom experiences and the student voices heard in that space, and to student responses to a brief questionnaire administered in the classroom. I show that the relationship between the students' positions and curriculum contents is a process of interaction and interpretation which can neither be controlled nor predicted.

In chapter VIII, I present some demographic data on the students who comprised the sample and some contextual information about the group conditions on the days in question. Reviewing their responses thematically, I first discuss their statements explaining their reasons for choosing to become early childhood educators and their desires for traditional roles such as motherhood.

In chapter IX, I consider the students' perceptions of gender identity formation as it related to their curriculum content and their own familiar understanding. I paid particular attention to the second year students' reactions to *Anti-Bias Curriculum* and to the positioning of the lone male ECE student.

When I asked the students on the questionnaires if they would call themselves feminists, their responses took up several broad perspectives. It was these varied and emotional responses which provided a critical key to better understand these women's contradictory positionings as gendered subjects and early childhood educators. I present these reflections at length in chapter X.

In the final chapter, chapter XI, I bring together the many varied threads addressed within this text, trying to make a coherent "story" out of the research material in a way that will inform early childhood educators. My research findings support some of the most recent work in critical poststructuralist feminist pedagogy and I conclude this thesis with a cautious discussion of the implications of these findings for feminist pedagogy. These are of particular concern in the presentation of feminist pedagogy from within mainstream institutions and in the education of teachers of young children.

CHAPTER II

Identity and Child Development

In this chapter, I present a feminist poststructuralist perspective, the basic theoretical framework used in this research. It explains "the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power" (Weedon 1987:12). This framework will help me to interpret research findings in the early childhood education program. I show how humanist and structuralist explanations of these relations are not adequate. I present the principles of poststructuralism and how this perspective explains these relations, followed by an interpretation of feminist poststructuralism. I discuss the major theoretical debates within poststructuralism, and offer some thoughts on how these issues might be reconceptualized.

Because early childhood education programs are founded on the principles of child development theory, which in turn, form the basis of contemporary theories of gender identity construction, in the second half of this chapter, I outline the underlying assumptions of child development theory and offer a poststructuralist critique of these frameworks. These discussions will be useful when analyzing theories of gender identity construction and ECE documents.

Our Unreasonable Selves⁷

The questions which underlie all studies in sociology are: how can we best explain what holds social relations together and how can we best explain and effect social change? Theoretical debates in the social sciences have revolved around the relationship between society and the individual, also understood as the relationship between structure and agency.

At the heart of poststructuralist theorizing lies the notion that the relationship between the symbolic world and the material world, or between meaning and "reality", is arbitrary. What we see and the meaning we give it may or may not correspond to meanings attributed by others. Such an understanding has profound effects on our understanding of human identity and the nature of the relationship between "the individual" and "society". This stands both as a response and in marked contrast to earlier theories of identity, which I briefly and rudimentarily outline below.

Humanism

One perspective is humanism. Within humanism, the central belief is in autonomous individuality. The individual is theorized as a free agent, "the agent of all social phenomena and productions, including knowledge" (Henriques et al 1984:93). He or she moves about within a social structure understood as outside of and separate from the individual.

⁷ This expression I accredit to Ingleby 1987:209.

Social structure is something which serves a function and is available for the use of individuals. The symbolic sphere is reduced to a tool which individuals use to manoeuvre their way through the social world. Meaning is assumed to derive from within the individual, the result of their free will. Language, in this account, simply "is", existing unquestioned as a decontextualized, ahistorical phenomenon.

Hand in hand with the concept of an autonomous individual is instrumental rationality. Rationality assumes that the world is both knowable and controllable. History is understood as a series of temporally connected causes and effects occurring as isolated individuals collide with other individuals all carrying out goal-oriented activities. Activities are objectified as social scientists empirically observe human behaviour, interpreting human activity as rationally and purposively motivated as individuals intentionally strive towards their goals.

Rationality deeply structures how we understand the world around us. Rationalization is a process of centralized, hierarchical authority, and the valuation of pure technique, technological skills, and systems abstracted from process. An instrumental-rational orientation is towards the output of goals rather than the value-laden process of getting there; the end itself rather than the means to that end is most important. Control, calculation and objectivity are central features of social systems organized on rational principles. Personal social relations are institutionalized in impersonal, abstract and bureaucratic forms as social controls extend deeper into our lives.

Within this paradigm, relationships are individually determined through rational deliberation. Identity is an entity which belongs to each individual and bears no necessary relation to social structure. Rather, a single, true identity lies at the heart of each individual, an essential, natural element to be liberated from the constraints of social structure. Freedom or agency within this framework is simply a matter of exerting one's will. Failure to "succeed" is individualized as either a lack of drive or as some pathology.

Humanism is an ideology which underlies the modern western democratic state. Humanists see themselves as the defenders of human freedom positioned in opposition to the potentially repressive powers of the state. The "word" is equated with the "Truth", because only one meaning is assumed, and by extension, assumed to be shared by all members of society. The social world is understood as patterned after the natural world; social change is understood as a natural, evolutionary process. In this account, the way things are is concretized as "The Truth" and defined as "natural progress", which in turn legitimates social inequality.

Structuralism

Structuralism challenges humanist explanations of social reality, because it rests on an inverse relation between word and phenomenon so that it is not the individual who appropriates language, but rather language appropriates the individual. What we see is assumed to correspond to a fixed meaning. However, the meaning fixed on the object is not inherent but arbitrary. Thus, meaning is understood as always relational. If a signifier has no intrinsic meaning in and of

itself, then the meanings we ascribe must derive from differences between the signifier and other signs in the language chain. Thus, "meaning is never truly present, but is only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers" (Moi 1988:106).

This perspective offers a profound challenge to truth claims about the individual. If we are each born into and learn a pre-established linguistic culture which discursively positions us vis à vis the truth claims of that culture, then the individual, in this account, is profoundly constructed by social structure. If signs (words and meaning) are always in relation to other signs, then analysis of linguistic structure, especially the truth claims of a given culture, discloses the hidden power relations that underlie it. Who sets the agenda and who benefits are probing questions which deconstruct truth claims to reveal the relational component of social structures.

Thus, the notion that knowledge is not "Truth", but is culturally produced and historically situated is a powerful analytical tool. However, theorizing human subjects as passive conduits of social structure is deterministic. Agency and identity become products of ideology, mere figments of our collective imagination. In its most extreme version, structuralism reduces human agents to discursive effects of social structure. Without a framework that includes human agency, social change cannot be adequately explained.

Social scientists made attempts to insert agency into structuralism, for example by using Marxist historical materialism based on class struggle to understand social inequality, and by using feminist materialist analysis to

understand patriarchy and women's oppression. However, theories of social transformation which were based on a single identity (such as class or gender) were inadequate explanations of social circumstances. For example, in May 1968 in France a class-based revolution failed when, theoretically, conditions were ripe. Clearly, a more complex understanding of identity was needed; although the unitary, rational "individual" became understood as a historically specific phenomenon, no longer could one grand theory be used to explain social relations. Minimally, new theories would have to include gender and racial identities.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist theory attempts to strike a balance between these two extremes, the former which privileges the individual over social structure, and the latter which privileges social structure over the individual. The distinction made between society and the individual is bridged by the concept "subject", denoting the centrality of the person within a pre-existing framework of social conditions.

In contrast to the free agent individual of humanism, the subject is de-centred: both a product of and an active reproducer of social conditions. A theory of agency is offered which does not return to an essentialist understanding of individuality within the familiar individual/society dualism, and which explains social change within a framework of multiple and shifting identities. How these different subjectivities are formed and how they are differently positioned within ideological practices is the new theoretical question to be addressed (Henriques et al 1984:96).

Within poststructuralism, the centrality of the symbolic found within structuralism is retained. Knowledge of the "real" is understood as socially constructed. It is language which provides the possible socially-available meanings through which to explain our experience within discursive practices. Language is not simply a neutral conduit for experience but is deeply implicated in building meaning. Knowledge of the world and of our position within it is always and everywhere mediated through discourse, because all of our thoughts and feelings pass through its filter. Deconstruction of the relationship between knowledge and "reality" reveals inherent power relations which constrain, reproduce, and compel human social practice (Henriques et al 1984:104-5).

In poststructuralism, the notion of *difference* is taken up and extended, so that not only is meaning arbitrary, but also cannot be fixed except retrospectively and temporarily. The meaning of a signifier "at any particular moment depends on the discursive relations within which it is located, and it is open to constant rereading and reinterpretation" (Weedon 1984:25). There can be no one true meaning, only multiple meanings, endlessly deferred.

Poststructuralism derives from psychoanalytic theory. The inclusion of unconscious mechanisms originating from the past shifts our understanding of the construction of meaning. Meaning becomes arbitrary and endlessly variable because what is signified may differ from person to person. No absolutely stable meaning can be formulated because subjects attribute meaning on the basis of historically specific understandings of their immediate discursive positions. The

variety of conceivable meanings makes possible a theory of social action without essentializing the subject.

Poststructuralist theory can be used to deconstruct the assumptions of mainstream theories, and to reinterpret the relationships expressed within their discursive practices. For example, I found that without exception, it is taken for granted that early childhood education discourses position teachers in authority over children. This profoundly affects the dynamics of these two subject positions. Such analysis critically exposes such unequal relationships. Equipped with an alternative interpretation of assumptions of social reality, we are also equipped to struggle towards solutions reflective of the kind of social reality we are seeking to build.

Analysis of linguistic structures reveals how discourse organizes and structures our understanding of the world around us, always systematically patterned towards important social ends (Poynton 1985:vii). Such analysis will consider what is spoken as well as what is unspoken to be significant, since silences point to power differences and to taken-for-granted truth claims. Within a discursive practice, it is in the gaps, absences and silences of a text that "the presence of ideology can be most positively felt...The text is, as it were, ideologically forbidden to say certain things" (Moi 1988:94). To not speak about a phenomenon suggests the limits of the ideological position of the writer/speaker.

Knowledge then, can only ever be partial and incomplete. No transcendent Truth can be articulated because knowledge is always produced from within a particular subject position. Thus, poststructuralist analysis will include analysis of

the position of the researcher as implicated in the research relationship; we must be able to account for our own positions of power and authority as we do research. Because the researcher sets the agenda with respect to topic, questions asked and significance of what is observed, the researcher is positioned discursively in authority over the "objects" of study.

Similarly, in the classroom, the teacher/student dynamic is discursively produced as a hierarchical relationship. Analysis of this pedagogical relationship is integral to understanding the dynamics created within the classroom.

Feminist Poststructuralism

In the preceding pages, I outlined the assumptions and basic concerns of poststructuralist theory. However, I have not differentiated a feminist poststructuralist position from the above framework. Why is a specifically feminist perspective needed? What intention is not captured in poststructuralist theory?

A brief critique of poststructuralism is required to respond to the above questions. This perspective insists on the arbitrary and relational nature of knowledge, and therefore insists that knowledge is always partial. This in turn disrupts the truth claims which are built, for example, on religious and political belief systems which hold centrally and certainly a single, inherent "Truth". When these claims are questioned, and exposed as historical constructs which serve to define social relations, the Truth which has guided our actions is shattered. Without Truth to guide our lives, is there any legitimate basis for action? We are

left in a seemingly endless sea of relativism where the answer to every question is reduced to "it depends".

Feminist poststructuralism responds to this charge of relativism. By definition, feminism has an agenda. Despite differences in understanding and therefore in strategy among feminists, there is a common understanding of gender-based social inequality, and a desire for social transformation. Thus, agency and political, non-relativist positions must be theoretically possible for a feminist. For myself, this must be without reappropriating an essentialist understanding of the individual. Feminist poststructuralist analysis considers the historically specific location of female and male subjects within discursive practices. Such research makes central the questions obscured by the relativistic statement, "it depends". It provides new explanations which stress the importance of relational contingencies.

It is difficult to talk about new theoretical understandings which interpret reality so fundamentally differently, because the language available to do so emerged as an expression of the relationships of rationality, individualism, and essential truths. It is difficult for me to think on the basis of non-essentializing truths because my own subjectivity is formed on the basis of the discursive absolutes declared around me. The language available to me to fight for what I have been discursively positioned to believe in is a language of dualities, of being Right or Wrong. What I believe in feels absolutely Right, and is discursively interpreted in those terms.

However, for me, the desire for social transformation is a struggle among competing discourses, or competing truth claims, by subjects discursively positioned within them. Like-minded people ally themselves in these struggles to create "alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience" (Weedon 1987:33). As human agents, ultimately, new ways of knowing hold the potential to be reflected in changed material conditions. Feminist poststructuralism for me is a point of identification.

In the power/knowledge struggle among competing discourses, I ally myself with other feminist poststructuralists (c.f. Moi, Ellsworth, Weedon, Walkerdine, Davies). In this position, maintaining a feminist project is legitimated. This resolves the problems I had with relativist charges. At the same time, poststructuralism insists that my knowledge of reality will always be partial. Thus, the struggle in which we are all engaged is a continual, reflexive process of critique. The substance of the struggle is not of mutually exclusive universal Truths, but of multiple discourses offering differing and provisional understandings of social reality.

Another related issue emerges as a consequence of deconstruction techniques. It is easy enough to practice critical analyses which expose the partial and subjective basis of knowledge. However, the discursive effect of such critiques may be understood as more destructive than deconstructive.

When the knowledge on which our lives is based is interpreted as a social construct which reproduces social inequality, it is difficult to not think in terms of absolutes and dualities. Deconstructive techniques not only reveals the subjective

bases of a body of knowledge; it is also easy to understand the knowledge as false because it is not true. This dilemma shows precisely how we are discursively limited by our language system because it is constructed around mutually exclusive dualities like true and false.

For example, oppositional linguistic structure has led many women to understand that the feminist critique of domestic labour means that feminists reject those who willingly take up full-time positions as wives and mothers in the home. According to the logic of humanist discourse, women must reject either the position "feminist" or the other "housewife" since the terms are discursively positioned as contradictory. There is no discursively legitimated option which allows both. Deconstruction and critique can result in this kind of true/false duality because our linguistic structure provides oppositional interpretations.

Thus, we need to hold the idea of partial truth in the foreground of our conscious minds, remembering that the truth claims of bodies of knowledge which we deconstruct may provide some useful knowledge of the world. We need not throw out the baby and the bath water. Feminist interpretations of social reality are also partial. Their strength lies in the fact that women may reinterpret their experiences from the position of a subject rather than an object (Weedon 1989:26). Widely held competing versions of social reality do not explain the contradictory nature of women's experience and serve competing interests. Poststructuralist feminism then, is engaged in the struggle for the legitimacy of many varied subject positions among competing discourses. Further, feminist poststructuralism suggests that you can work towards a common goal, but you

can't plan the outcome. Feminist poststructuralist research does not attempt to predict, but to legitimate alternative discursive practices and positions.

In contrast to feminisms which assert the fact of being female or of femininity, feminism in this work means "a critical reading of culture, a political interpretation of the social text and of the social subject, and a rewriting of our culture's 'master narratives'" (Davies citing de Lauretis 1991:48). Here, feminism is a form of deconstruction and reinterpretation, an opening up of alternative versions of social experience.

The focus for feminist poststructuralist research is understanding the female experience. This involves close examination of the relationship between females and the world around them. It shows how women are discursively positioned so that only certain social experiences are legitimated for us, and so that we come to desire these experiences in our everyday lives. Cultural practices participate in the formation of desire, channelling the desire of positioned subjects in relation to ideological norms, but the "reading" by subjects of discursive practices is an active struggle for meaning and identity (Walkerdine 1987:117).

Since early childhood educators are primarily women, feminist analysis is appropriate in this project, focusing on student/teacher/child relationships. How are the students, teachers and children positioned by the discourse of their early childhood education program? What can we learn from their struggle to find meaning and identity? Can feminist poststructuralism provide new interpretations of their experience? Can this perspective provide a new basis for understanding

the teacher-child relationship? These questions will be addressed at length in subsequent chapters.

First, however, our attention must turn to the theoretical perspective which underlies early childhood education programs and which in turn informs theories of gender identity construction. This information enables the reader to better understand both the position of the actors involved and the critiques made of those positions.

The Status Quo: Developmental Psychology

As I have argued, within advanced industrial capitalist society, there are numerous truth claims which structure and sustain our comprehension of the world around us. These claims are of the individual, of rationality, of objectivity, and of normalcy. Our way of life is structured by these unquestioned beliefs. Further, with these beliefs as the cornerstones through which we understand modern capitalist society, the truths they espouse delimit other possible interpretations of the world around us. As Walkerdine wrote: "There can be no truth which stands outside the condition of its production" (in Steedman 1985:238).

These truth claims obscure other ways of knowing and conceal relations of power and authority. The influence of these belief systems on developmental psychology has profound effects on the socialization of children, since mainstream understandings of childrearing practices derive from these psychological explanations.

A common-sense understanding of how we come to know ourselves as males and females derive primarily from popularized ideas originating from developmental psychology. Because preverbal children do not have direct access to the truth claims of developmental psychology, it is clear that the impact of this knowledge is mediated by those who socialize them. An infant's behaviour is interpreted through these understandings and influences how the child is treated.

As we might anticipate, because of its emphasis on young children, the foundation of the early childhood education program is contemporary developmental psychology. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of its theories to better analyze what the ECE students are taught.

For the purposes of this research, the status quo then, precisely because it has been naturalized as the Truth, represents the dominant ideology, which in turn supports the interests of those in social positions of power. In describing mainstream child development theories, I will show how its truth claims support and reproduce the status quo. This, in turn, has consequences for early childhood educators and their clients.

Childhood as Discursively Produced

The modern concept "childhood" is associated with the early years of human life during which time children are understood to go through particular stages of growth and learning. The meaning of "human development" is read as a process of systematic growth occurring throughout the life span. The development of each child is a combination of the physical body's maturation and the learning

which results from observation and interaction. As well, significant life-events may impact on development, altering either physical maturation or learning.

The modern preoccupation with childhood as a special privileged period is unique to western culture and theories of the developing child are a relatively recent way of looking at children and at that designated period of life. Literature, documents and art from prior historical periods in the west reveal that children from those times were viewed as miniature adults. This suggests that the concepts "childhood" and "child development" are cultural innovations.

Changed ideas about the features of childhood appeared as philosophers speculated about "human nature". Three competing perspectives ranged from understanding children as needing social control to regulate their "original sin", understanding children as "pure" at birth and contaminated by the sinful nature of society, to understanding children as "blank slates" who need discipline in order to learn how to be good citizens. Each interpretation of children's behaviour had corollary effects on actual childrearing practices. However, it was only in the late 1900s that any systematic view of childhood was formalized and became commonly-held understanding.

Four Contemporary Perspectives on Human Development

In the next few pages, I present four contemporary broad perspectives on human development which Schaffer outlined (1989:42-68). The psychoanalytic perspective is perhaps the earliest and derives from Freudian theory. According to Freud, unconscious, instinctive aggressive and sexual desires correspond to certain important psychosexual milestones. Gratification or lack of gratification at

each stage produces lasting effects on a child's personality. Although Freud has been accused of biological determinism in referring to "base instincts" and essentializing male and female child development, his radical theories were the first to stress the importance of emotional life in the early formative years of childhood.

Controversial as Freud's theory was and is, he broke the ground for further explorations of the unconscious and of human development which continue today. Erikson expanded from Freud's five progressive psychosexual stages, but viewed children as active and adaptive learners, rather than as responding to instinctive biological drives. He saw development as a lifelong process, and stressed the rational psyche rather than instincts. Erikson identified eight stages of life, or life crises, each of which must be resolved in order to be emotionally prepared to cope with the next stage. Although Erikson's theory has rational appeal, the stages outlined do not contribute any insights into **why** development occurs as he has described.

The psychoanalytic perspective on human development has fallen out of fashion in mainstream developmental psychology, most probably because of the latter's adoption of empirical scientific methods. A psychoanalytic perspective offers various interpretative understandings of reality. Because such an approach does not avail itself to the scientific method, those who adopt it are accused of speculative imaginings. Consequently a psychoanalytic approach has been

abandoned in mainstream psychology for theories which can be observed, tested, repeated, and ultimately, "proven".⁸

The second perspective outlined by Schaffer (1989) is ethology or sociobiology, which stresses the biological bases of human behaviour (c.f. Bowlby). This bio-evolutionary theory arises from assumptions of natural selection, or 'survival of the fittest'. From this viewpoint, human behaviour is biologically programmed in order to serve a function which increases the individual and the species' chances of survival. The disposition of humans to be sociable as explained by socio-biology may be a contribution to understanding human psychology.

On the other hand, like psychoanalytic theories, ethology is inaccessible to the scientific method because it too is highly speculative. As well, biological determinism ignores the overwhelming modifications of behaviour made by learning, especially the insignificance of evolutionary instinct in the face of human language. Biological explanations always exert a reactionary rather than a liberatory force because such explanations can only reinforce the status quo: only non-biological explanations of human development offer any hope of change through learning and adaptation.

The third perspective on human development differentiated by Schaffer (1989) is behaviourism or social learning theory (c.f. Bandura). Behaviourists argue that external influences rather than drives or instincts determine

⁸ Post-structuralism derives from psychoanalytic theory. Recent developments from this theoretical perspective will be outlined in Chapter III.

development. In contrast to stage-theories of development, behaviourists believe that the child begins life as a "blank slate" and is in a continual process of learning in response to environmental stimuli. Learning occurs through reward and punishment. From this perspective, the emphasis on external environmental variables suggests that behaviour is modifiable.

Revisions to the behaviourist approach were made which argued that humans were also cognitive beings, actively processing information about their environment rather than merely passively reacting to it. The ability to learn through the observation of "models" of human behaviour was emphasised. Thus, development from this perspective is a process of reciprocal interaction between the child and the environment. Although a great deal of what is customarily accepted as true about the development of children comes from social learning theories, they are inevitably criticized for a lack of consideration of the importance of both biological factors and cognitive formation.

Schaffer delineated a final broad perspective on human development, cognitive development, which is certainly the most influential one in contemporary mainstream psychology. First theorized by Jean Piaget, it rejected both theories based on instinct and environmental determinism. Piaget argued that children actively construct their understanding of the environment as they try to make sense of their world.

The child's ability to understand is based on "cognitive development": predictable, age-related changes in mental faculties such as attending, perceiving, learning, thinking, and remembering (Schaffer 1989:57). The human brain is a

biological structure with specific potentials at specific ages. Intelligence is believed to result from the interplay between the child's cognitive maturation and the environment. Cognitive ability is a birthright, and is believed to largely define a child's response to the environment, which in turn effects a child's development. Piaget has predictably been criticized by theorists of other perspectives as insufficiently stressing either the environment or the unconscious.

Independence of Self

The developmental stages of achieving identity are understood differently within each of developmental streams. With the exception of socio-biology, the main feature in common is that **independence of the self** is the goal of identity. This may be achieved through problem solving abilities and through the internalization of external structures. Cognitive psychology focuses on the subject's control over external objects and social relations. In behaviourist streams, performance is measured according to behavioral expectations grounded in cultural values. In ego psychology, it is the understanding of our inner nature, of both our intentional and unconscious motivations, which is important (Doherty et al 1987:278-9).

The Predominant Model: Cognitive Development

Although none of the above perspectives provide a complete theory of human development or of identity, each can be seen as contributing specific aspects of knowledge because of what each perspective considers most significant: biology, the unconscious, the environment, or cognition. Most developmental psychologists take an eclectic approach, recognizing that each theoretical

perspective contributes something to our comprehension, and that borrowing from various theories of human development creates some equilibrium between them.

Nonetheless, in the struggle between competing discourses, it is cognitive developmental psychology which has come to represent the predominant model of psychic explanation in modern Western society. The strong link of this perspective to biology supports the status quo, since existing conditions in social reality are legitimated as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable.

The truth claims of cognitive developmental psychology permeate the fabric of our existence. We understand our lives as systematically periodized by turning points which have happily productive resolutions or result in some form of psychopathology. Who among us can claim to be immune to this influence? Self-help books, psychiatrists, counsellors, family physicians, and social workers are all operating on the basis of an understanding of humans as developing according to certain universally consistent blueprints.

The maturational processes of developmental psychology which we learn can be traced from the points of production of research and theory among university-based experts to points of mass distribution which comprise the discourse and discursive practices through which the distribution of knowledge becomes "normative advice" (Harris 1987:45). This penetration, which Broughton terms a "hegemony of cognitive functionalism", persists even within the most recent innovations in developmental psychology (1987:7).

The ruling apparatus of any given period has historically legitimated their power through control over certain forms of knowledge. A glance backward in

time indicates that the legitimation of control has shifted from the authority of religion, to that of medicine, and now lies within the psychological domain (Foucault 1979). Social control is achieved through powerfully sanctioning certain institutions, first those governing the soul, then the body and now the psyche. This legitimation serves to give particular social practices normative status so that social control is internalized, once through either fear of damnation or illness, and now through fear of psychopathology (Harris 1987:35). Here, we can see how self-control can serve the interests of the ruling apparatus.

The discipline of developmental psychology has not substantively engaged in self-critique, beginning instead from within the assumptions of the discipline rather than examining the historical emergence of the discipline and its associated assumptions. As Harris puts it, "psychology has been and continues to be a massive interpretative apparatus, flourishing without internal critical restraint or comment as a tool for social and self-understanding" (1987:33). Widespread conformity to a modernist vision of progress flourishes in the developmental paradigm (Broughton 1987:4).

The uncritical application of the precepts of developmental psychology into discursive practices has many implications. Developmental discourse produces and defines its subject matter, in differentiating, classifying, excluding, ordering and coordinating phases of human growth. In so doing, it "engenders and preempts the range of conditions of possibility within which the human life course can make sense" (Broughton 1987:1). Through its claims to universal knowledge, child development has "come to be considered the 'norm' for all children of the

human species, independent of the economic and cultural environment which they inhabit" (Valsiner 1989:1).

Psychological study is not simply an objective instrument, but has "real constitutive consequences for the objects of that study" (Harris 1987:37).

Attributing rationality, intentionality, and purposive behaviour further and further into early infancy begins to structure that experience "so that rational and cognitively competent activity does arise earlier" (ibid). In turn, insistence on rational significance mystifies and obscures that which is irrational, ambiguous, resistant and chaotic (ibid).

As western capitalist society has become increasingly complex, so too has our conception of the human psyche. "The structure of abstract formal cognition reflects the social structure of commodity exchange" (Buck-Morss 1987:250). Harris points out the "compatibility of social policy needs" to a "strong requirement to reconstitute family life and move women out of the workplace" (1987:54).

When human behaviour is interpreted at the level of rugged individualism, social relations are rendered invisible, power imbalances are particularized, deviance is personalized, and each person is an island in a hostile sea of competition (Broughton 1987:2). When humans are considered to be "naturally developing" and urged to "submit to the process of development", "developmental practices... have become increasingly mystifying as we have come to feel more keenly the need for the reassurances they afford" (Broughton 1987:10).

Thus, contemporary developmental psychology carries the possibility of both emancipation and conservation. As an emancipatory force, it offers a view of humans possessed of "an active, structuring intelligence, engaged in transforming encounters with the environment". As a conservative force, contemporary developmental psychology increasingly offers a view of humans as "rational, goal-oriented and technocratic from birth" building habits of thought and consumption which reify goal-oriented behaviour out of an obsessive concern with activities and products which will improve performance (Harris 1987:39).

It is clear that the assumptions of developmental psychology which have become part of the repertoire of general social knowledge need to be examined by more reflexive and critical approaches to human development so that the unstated assumptions and hidden social relations of psychological discourse are revealed. Such deconstructive techniques can be used to better understand innumerable social relations, one of which is gender relations. We turn now to several explanations of how we achieve identity as gendered subjects.

CHAPTER III

Acquiring a Gendered Identity

As I was grocery shopping one day, I saw a woman carrying a newborn baby, surrounded by a group of cooing adults. I approached to take my turn at cooing, and was stunned to see the baby sucking on a pacifier in the shape of a large black moustache! There could be no doubt: this was a baby boy!

This incident made me consider anew how deeply gender saturates our lives. Why was it so important for the mother to publicly identify her child as a boy? What could explain her desire? In this chapter, I present various perspectives on the significance of gender, and offer explanations of how we come to know ourselves and others as gendered subjects. At the end of the chapter, I introduce three interpretations of the mother and baby described above, including the one which I feel explains the most.

The Feminist Challenge: Explaining the Difference

One of the first critiques of the notion of the universally developing subject came from challenges made by women attempting to explain the gap between women's experience and the claims of normal development. Why did females generally fall short of a "universal" norm? Although certainly not the first alternative interpretation of social reality to mainstream understandings (e.g. Marxism), this new line of questioning from the perspective of women represented an impressive challenge to the taken-for-granted universality of truth claims held by developmental psychology, particularly since the universality of identity formation is a central idea in this field.

Is there an "essential" female or male? Does our biological sex carry with it the substance constituting us as masculine or feminine? A rush of research followed to fill the spaces opened by these questions. Such research pursued several paths. Much of the earliest research was devoted to "proving" or "disproving" intrinsic differences between males and females. It is widely accepted today that, aside from genitalia and some hormonal differences, there are no consistently significant inherent differences between females and males.⁹ Differences in practice, such as math scores, remain largely unexplained on the basis of biology. If biological and cognitive structures cannot explain the persistent historical devaluation of females, then social context must hold the key.

Gender today must be taken into account. It has come to be regarded as a significant, if not decisive, factor in the process of identity formation. Various understandings of gender development theory are presented in classrooms, lecture halls, and self-help books, as well as widespread popular beliefs about gender identity. The gap between the female experience of social reality and the so-called universal subject was a challenge not only to conventional explanations of gender difference: feminists themselves had engaged in a reflexive process to hypothesize about this disparity.

For the first time, women had to position themselves as theoretical subjects, rather than as the objects of theory. Because I want to make explicit the

⁹ Gender differences in verbal, spatial, and visual abilities, and aggressivity have indeed been consistently found. However, these findings are neither exclusive to one or the other group but are generalizations across a continuum of behaviours and abilities for all children, nor do they take fully into account the impact of social learning practices on these findings.

connection between feminist theory and theories of gender construction, I outline three feminist theoretical responses to the gap between women's subjective experience and conventional explanations based on universal norms. These streams of feminist thought correspond to three explanations of the construction of gendered subjectivity. Each explanation informs its particular understanding of gender inequality which in turn has implications for practice.

I have adopted the categories of feminist streams of thought developed by Julia Kristeva¹⁰ (in Moi 1985:12):

1. Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality.
2. Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled.
3. Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical. Poststructuralism.

For each of these paradigms, I review its main assertions and offer examples of research. I identify the questions which are not addressed adequately according to each framework.

Equality: Sex Role Socialization Theory

At the root of research and activism from the first perspective is an unproblematic adoption of the symbolic order. The only obstacle to be overcome is the exclusion of women from that order. The general claims of humanism are maintained, including the autonomous individual with an essential nature, guided

¹⁰ Kristeva's own position corresponds to the third stream of feminist thought.

by rational and objective reasoning. The goal of such research is to remove the obstacles from the path to autonomy, and the "true" personality of the individual. Thus, while an essential male or female may be disputed, there is an essential human to be liberated. Social roles "can be peeled away like layers of an onion to reveal a repressed core, a true self, which has been inhibited, clouded by the layers of social conditioning which obscure it" (Walkerdine 1989:267).

The model for sex-role socialization separates "the biological self (sex) from the social self (gender)" (Davies 1989:5). On the basis of assumed "real" biological difference, children are socialized into socially acceptable sex-roles by primary adults, who are the primary agents in this drama. The child passively learns these roles and practices them unproblematically in a linear cause-effect relationship. This cause-effect dynamic not only implies a non-actively learning and negotiating child (which rebuts cognitive theory), but also tends to blame adults, especially women, for reproducing stereotypes.

Gender research focuses on how development and maintenance of a fixed gender identity in early childhood and the early acquisition of stereotypical gender roles excludes women from the male order. Research might show how this identity is perpetuated in relationships and through various social practices, such as parent's choice of clothing and toys, and children's role models.

Sex-role socialization has found that children can self-identify the gender group to which they belong, and have some awareness both of differences and socially prevailing biases by age two or three (Jones et al 1992:14). Research findings suggest that children learn what is gender-appropriate at a very young

age, and apply this learning in their practices (c.f. Berman et al 1985; Picariello 1990; LLOYD 1988; Pomerleau et al 1990; Honig 1983; Roopnarine et al 1985). Thus, it is the meanings which adults attach to children's behaviour according to the child's sex which strongly implicate adults as role models in gender construction (c.f. Blakemore et al 1991; Katz et al 1991; McHale 1984; Fagot et al 1991). A large body of research shows how teachers and caregivers are important sex-role socializers contributing to and perpetuating gender differences (c.f. Seifert 1988; Fagan 1991; Green 1985; Hildebrandt et al 1985).

Similarly, research shows how children's books reinforce traditional gender roles by representing stereotypes (c.f. Williams 1987). Early critics assumed that these distorted pictures of social reality could be countered by widening the range of experiences for characters in the literature. Representing people engaged in non-stereotyped activities would automatically transform the children's view of themselves. This assumption exposes the limits of role modelling because it implies a passive, rationalist learner (Walkerdine 1987:88-89).

The basic focus of sex-role socialization research is to identify the variables which result in gender differences. Once identified, the assumed result is that responsible adults will modify these variables to promote equal relations between the sexes. In this equation, it is assumed that people will behave rationally in the face of these findings which we know is not necessarily the case.

As well, the child is understood as a passive recipient of social structure, unquestioningly taking up positions which are given, copying adult models, and learning conventional biases and stereotypes. This view is on the one hand

pessimistic and deterministic. On the other hand, it is uncritical of the political, economic, and historical factors underlying social relations which preserves the distinction between "society" and the "individual" and obscures the fact that we are all incriminated in the process of producing and reproducing gender relations.

We know through cognitive psychology that children are active processor of the world around them, constantly locating themselves within it. However, they are not free agents, their identity is never fixed permanently, and their behaviour may not always be rationally based. Thus, children are deeply implicated in the construction of meaning and therefore of their own gender "identity". They themselves come to desire the positions socially prescribed for them, even when these positions may rationally appear to be disadvantageous (Davies 1989). Sex-role socialization theory is unable to explain our own collusion as social agents in producing and reproducing the world around us.

If the researcher fails to explain how he or she is implicated in the historically located social construction of meaning, then we can safely assume that dominant models have been adopted to understand gender identity. The great bulk of such research originates from within developmental psychology, primarily because it is "business as usual" for that model. Its truth claims are taken as given, and gender is simply one of many variables added on to the model to explain human behaviour.

Femininity Extolled: Psychoanalytic Approaches

The second perspective identified by Kristeva emphasizes difference and extols the feminine. Such research is founded on the premise of essential, inherent differences between men and women. Structural sexual inequality is theorized as originating from our culture's mothering practices, which create substantively different unconscious mechanisms for females and males. The symbolic order is problematized and theorized as a historical construct, but as a male construct: patriarchy. As such, it is seen to reflect male values, male goals, and the male psyche. Unequal power relations means that women have not been heard from in this ordering.

With the existence of unconscious forces constraining our choices taken as a starting point, its appeal to feminism is that it offers "an understanding of how subordination can be internalized deep in our personalities" (Frosh citing Cameron 1987:175). The unconscious is not a structure, but a psychic reflection of child-rearing practices and gender relations.

Object relations theory (e.g. Chodorow, Dinnerstein) understands basic mental structures in social terms, particularly emphasizing the importance of early infancy. Rather than driven by the aggressive and sexual instincts of Freudian theory, this theory postulates that the determining human psychic factor is the infant's desire for "objects" (personal relationships). In this account, the mother herself is the central actor, gratifying with intimacy, or frustrating the infant's desire for the "object" (her). Because the mother herself is under the influence of

social conditions and "fails" to gratify the child, the child internalizes the object in fantasy in order to try to control it more successfully (Frosh 1987:103).

Chodorow (1978) pinpoints how pre-existing social conditions -- patriarchy -- constrain what appears to be simple biology. In our culture where primarily exclusive female mothering is practised, the mother/child relationship is both intense and ambivalent. It is argued that this common early experience of an omnipotent and treacherous mother leads to particular views about women, experienced differently by boys and girls, but equally unfulfilling.

Gender differences in object relations theory stem from the conscious and unconscious impact of the child's sex on the mother. In a complicated transference in the mother-daughter relationship, girl babies, like their mothers, learn to lose their expectations of being nurtured and learn to become sensitive to other's needs. Girls later turn from the mother in favour of the father, who represents the possibility of separation and power.

By contrast, because of the mother's attitudes, boy babies experience themselves as different, albeit more valued and more powerful, yet at the same time, their male identity is defined by what they are not (female). The absence of a present father in early childhood leads to a fantasy and idealization of masculinity, and the frustrated intimacy with the mother confounded by a sense of difference leads to a desire for "the perfect woman to re-invent the mothering relation" (Frosh 1987:189).

Chodorow argues for shared childrearing in early childhood, a rather weak resolution in the face of the pervasive power of patriarchy. While she cast new

light on the effects of early mothering on the psyche, exclusive mothering cannot explain how exclusive mothering itself came to be, and thus rests on an assumption of the permanence of these relations. Some psychoanalytic theorists (c.f. Cixous, Irigaray) also emphasize the early mother-child relationship, but as a time when femininity has not yet been repressed by patriarchy and women have not yet been "man-made" (Weedon 1989:56). Here again, there is a dual and unequal relation between femininity and the social, where the former has priority.

Gilligan (1982) uses Chodorow's position to argue that, in making moral decisions, women show more responsibility towards the context and to relationships than men, whereas men rely more on an abstract sense of justice and an ethic of individual rights. She implies that women's moral decisions are superior. While challenging the male bias in commonly held (and taught) assumptions about moral reasoning, there are some flaws in her research assumptions which bring her conclusions into question. Further, I am deeply suspicious of any theory which generalizes a universal female identity and experience.

Other radical feminist research derives from Marxism and socialist feminism. For example, Richer (1990) argues that educational institutions should advocate more cooperative (female) play practices to combat the negative effects of competition (male) within capitalist society. Here, although the "traditional" differences between males and females are assumed to be socially constructed,

children are not seen as agents in their choices; their behaviour is interpreted as rational and as responsive to rational interventions.

At the heart of radical feminism lies the notion that what is needed is a (re)discovery of the female voice, which discovery will unharness tremendous potential for a new social order. The dominant order is so implicated by patriarchy that a new order is needed, and because the female is presumed to be closer to human nature than men, it is also implied in research that women's ways of knowing are superior to men's. Radical feminist work has remained, by and large, confined to women's studies and departments of sociology and social work with little research affecting the mainstream in developmental psychology.

Stories We Tell: Discursive Positioning as Gendered Subjects

As discussed in Chapter II, poststructuralist feminists reject the male/female dichotomy and the notion of a unitary fixed identity. Gender relations are seen as central to all social relations: there is no space untouched by gender. Gender relations are socially constructed but not irreversibly; they are in continual process, as subjects position themselves in specific social contexts within learned discursive practices. It is these practices which constitute and reconstitute gender relations.

Research from this perspective acknowledges contradictions. Power relations are not necessarily or inevitably on the basis of gender. Women are not always oppressed, but are sometimes positioned in relations of power. For example, as mothers women often are in authority over children. Children too

position themselves in relation to learned patterns of power which vary according to social context. Within this perspective there is constant conflict as subjects resist and subvert the known and expected power relations. For example, the work of Davies (1989) exposes the complex relationship between children's play and gender, at the same time as opening up the possibility of alternatives ways of being.

In any culture, there are stories¹¹ about men and stories about women; it is these stories which are important in constructing a gender identity. Stories are not simply texts; they are also narratives which offer a resolution of conflict. In our culture, stories about men tend to be very different from stories about women. Indeed, what it means to be male is often exclusive from what it means to be female and visa versa. The idea of masculinity or femininity (as opposed to the practice) in these stories provides ways to think about and act out these concepts. In our culture, hegemonic masculinity is celebrated. In stories celebrating this idea of masculinity, men are positioned as superior to and opposite to women (Davies 1989:14).

Stories about men and women are often embedded in liberal humanist discourse, which demands a unitary, rational and autonomous being. As we learn the stories as males or females, we learn to position ourselves within these stories so that our actions make sense to others within the established frames of reference. Failure to achieve and sustain a gendered identity is understood by

¹¹ see glossary of terms in Appendix A

others and oneself as an individual failure. So caught up are we in needing to correctly identify one another and ourselves as either male or female, that the meanings we ascribe to our behaviours, the stories through which we understand ourselves as gendered subjects, may overshadow our actual practices.

The discourse of the individual asserts that I can reach my full potential by tackling the obstacles in my way. Their presence in the first place, the process of upsetting them, as well as the experience of overcoming them create "me". As Freud asserted, living in the world is necessarily constraining and freedom is an illusion. Instead of talking about "potential", which suggests a fixed identity or some essential "true me", I prefer to speak of "desire" which changes along with conditions. From this perspective, obstacles in "my" way are in fact in the way of what I desire, not some inherent "me".

A girl's identity is fixed through sets of signifiers which position her in relation to regimes of truth and meaning allowing her to be publicly recognized (Walkerdine 1987:119). These are different sets of signifiers than those available to boys. A girl may exhibit "masculine" behaviour, but how this is construed will likely be consistent with stories about women. Her actions may be perceived by others and herself as aggressive, rude, or deviant, or they may be totally unseen, because they lie outside the positions established for women in cultural stories. As Walkerdine put it, the "actions of a girl are given various readings in order to locate her in relation to the normative evaluations embodied in the discursive practices" (1987:119), or, more simply, "being a naughty girl is very different from being a naughty boy" (Walkerdine 1987:114).

Texts, then, present their own reality, creating positions for the subject in the text itself by providing the occasions for identification, and thereby contributing to the definitions of "who and where women are, and to their **desire** to be who and where they are" (Walkerdine 1987:89). Despite the power of these texts in cultural production, there remains an unpredictability of human response as a result of desire, perception, will and expression which make us both resistant to and capable of change (Broughton 1987:17).

The consequence of understanding how forms of speaking and forms of truth have been produced and how they subsequently limit what can be said and known in discursive practice generates the potential for resistance and change. However, change is not a simple rational process for this circumscription not only determines who we can be, but also permeates who we want to be in the form of desire (Walkerdine 1985:2). In other words, we often come to desire to be who we are "told" to be. How can we explain this irrationality?

In the ensuing paragraphs, I offer a basic and simplified outline of feminist post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory. In it, subjectivity is born in the infant's painful consciousness of mother as separate and Other (Walkerdine 1987:119). The original pain of separation from and loss of continuity with the mother pushes the infant into a struggle to concurrently possess the mother, to be dependent on her, and to control her availability (Walkerdine 1987:90). The imaginary is created in the gap between possession and loss.

The child's entry into the symbolic becomes important because language offers the illusion of control. This is because meaning appears "fixed", and fixed

meaning offers control through certainty and knowledge. Truth value, in opposition to the imaginary and the maternal, is identified with the phallus, the paternal, "the guardian of the word" (Walkerdine 1987:91). The symbolic assumes great psychic importance in resolving the pain of loss and also creates a psychic drama between the imaginary and the symbolic, or the maternal and paternal.

Language acquisition allows the infant the illusion of control over the loss of the mother as well as an illusion of unity of self (Walkerdine 1987:92). The appeal of autonomous individuality is that it appeals to our memory of omnipotence experienced before separation from the mother and it is the mechanism of desire which is responsible for our persistence in seeing ourselves as individual free agents. It is a refusal to recognize the pain and loss associated with our separation from mother to Other (Walkerdine 1987:122). The power of the illusion of individuality feeds our fantasy that we are in control. From this view, "psychology...may be seen as...an attempt to construct a rationally ordered and controllable universe" (Walkerdine 1989:271).

Contrary to object relations theory which asserts that the mother can adequately meet the infant's needs, less rational accounts argue that this is impossible, because desire always exceeds satisfaction. Although dependency needs may be resolved by having men "mother", it is still the phallus which is the guardian of Truth.

As well, "satisfaction" is always temporary, for the object of desire is shifting and out of reach. Thus, the mother can never fully satisfy the desires of the infant and later, language can never generate the control it promises. The

imaginary is the "location of phantasy resolutions" to the desire for identity and wholeness (Walkerdine 1987:92). But the satisfaction of needs is an illusion sustained by practices which produce imaginary resolutions.

Because our understanding of identity is of a fixed and unitary subject, whenever contradictory significations of subjectivity occur, problems arise in relation to the reading of the subject's behaviour, creating anxiety around desire in the subject (Walkerdine 1987:119). This anxiety seeks resolution through control, often through the mechanism of imaginary closure in narratives. Thus, heterosexual femininity, for example, may be offered as the natural solution to a number of social relations in narratives. However, this relation may not necessarily be passively accepted without conflict and struggle (Walkerdine 1987:88).

Walkerdine asserts that in stories about women, most important "is the relation between the representations at the level of phantasy and the production of meanings through which desire is understood and in which desire is invested" (1987:113). In our culture, it is mainly stories about mothering which offer the fantasy of resolution to women. In these stories, total devotion to the needs of the infant is assumed. "Natural" characteristics of powerful omnipotence are ascribed to the infant, which are in fact the projections of adults' conceptions of reality (Lichtman 1987:147).

The lived effects of this obsession with the infant are anxiety for parents and caregivers, and perfectionist demands on the infant. As well, child-centred mothering legitimates early development as innately "rational and rationalizable"

(Harris 1987:46). The irrational aspects of infancy have been lost and child's play becomes work (Harris 1987:41). However, this is not (yet) a legitimate story about mothers and children being neither inscribed with desire nor offering any fantasy resolution.

In some stories, victimization, selflessness, and helpfulness construct resolutions for loss of the mother, relocating desire in an "ideal male saviour" making it necessary for the woman to become the object of the man's desire (Walkerdine 1987:115). For example, Walkerdine examines comic books as stories which appeal to women's desires for fantasy resolution. Comics show girls as victims of miserable and/or difficult circumstances which are resolved through dependent relations on a man. By the same token, romance fiction appeals to the female desire for an alternative, less complicated version of reality, which also reifies the notion of female subjectivity as pleasure deferred (Steedman et al 1985:134).

The resolution of the oedipal drama for female victims is dependency in a bourgeois family. This is in contrast to the autonomy through which the male resolves the oedipal drama. Thus, the female is offered a less than ideal conclusion than that of an independent free agent (Walkerdine 1987:110).

Bearing in mind the importance of stories and fantasy resolution, Davies researched children's responses to feminist fairy tales. What happens when new potentially liberating gender positions are opened to children? What Davies found was consistent with post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory, for most children rejected the "intended" meaning of the stories, and imposed meanings

consistent with their own desires. On the other hand, a few children, those who were less vigorously attached to a fixed gender identity and who were struggling to find a more nuanced position were able to locate themselves differently. These findings confirm a complex relation between the imaginary, which "constantly reveals a failure of identity", and the symbolic, which fixes a single identity simultaneously demanded and resisted (Walkerdine 1987:116).

It is "the ways in which femininity is read" which produce gender differences (Walkerdine 1989:268). "Gender difference is produced in fictional ways which have power in that they are part of the truth effects of the regulation of children in the classroom. They form a basis of the 'truth about women'" (Walkerdine 1989:269).

The ideal pupil is self-directed, self-motivated and self-regulated, creative and active, all of which qualities are stereotypically masculine. There is a different standard of expectation for girls: girls tend to be encouraged to be neat, helpful, polite and submissive, and are asked less challenging questions (Clark 1989:245). In the classroom, girl's performance is read as a lack, whereas boy's performance is read as potential (Walkerdine 1989:268). This begins to explain "how girls come to desire in themselves qualities that appear the opposite from those of 'the child' that the pedagogy is set up to produce" (Walkerdine 1989:273).

We now have in mind a contradictorily positioned subject, continually negotiating her/his gendered relations with others, and continually attempting to resolve conflict and fulfil fantasies originating from both known and unknown desires. The positions offering power and control best serve those fantasies.

How can we interpret the complex relations between the mother and baby with the moustache pacifier I observed? Sex-role socialization theory would have us understand the baby as learning the mother's attitudes and beliefs about masculinity through observation. He is a victim of socially prescribed stereotypes which obscure his "real" personality and nature. Radical feminism would point to this incident as an example of the pervasive influence of masculinity within a patriarchal culture, which sets the male apart and above. Neither of these are "wrong". However, the former fails to address how observers (like myself) are implicated in the process of constructing the masculinity of the baby and the mother's idea of the masculinity of the baby. The latter account does not explain how the mother desires the masculine positioning of the infant.

The feminist poststructuralist story identifies this incident as one of many points in which the gender of the subject (the baby) is negotiated. This negotiation is not only between the baby and mother but between the mother and others. The mother has used a clear sign, not for the baby, but for other relations, to signify the gender of her child. When we approach, we 'read the sign' and immediately 'know' that we must say socially-correct things to confirm the child's masculinity: "Isn't he handsome!" and "My, he looks strong" would be satisfactory. We locate the child in stories about masculine subjects. We also know that we should not make 'incorrect' statements which ascribe the child with "feminine" characteristics.

The mother may simply be tired of telling people that this is a male child, but nonetheless, her choice of such a symbol of maleness leads one to suspect that

the child will be discursively produced as a "typically" masculine subject, with little nuance in the positions available to him. It seems that the mother's desire is to fix the meaning of masculinity on her son as a means of control and to locate herself as a "good mother" by producing a "masculine" child. The infant's behaviours will be "read" as masculine. As the infant enters the symbolic, he will learn how to read his own behaviour as masculine, and will position himself according to the positions made available to him.

We may resist the meaning implied in the "masculine" sign, and say something which tells a new story about the child and creates a new position for the mother to take up with respect to her child. The mother may read these stories other than as we intended, and locate her child in her own stories, but the potential is there for new readings. In this scenario, everyone is implicated in constructing and negotiating the gendered subjectivity of the infant.

Spanning ECE and Gender

You may find yourself asking what all this has to do with early childhood education curriculum? I believe that in our culture, there is congruence between the positioning of the mother and the teacher. Both are expected to provide a facilitating environment for the production of rational subjects (Steedman 1985:209). Our society idealizes the mother/infant dyad, wherein mothering is "a staged drama of symbiosis, nurturance, and receptivity" (Harris 1987:43).

However, mothering is more than operant conditioning, in an equal relationship of stimulus-response; it is an **unequal** relationship in which "the

linguistically and socially powerful mother initiates her child into a social and linguistic system in which that child will discover, among other things, the powerlessness of women" (Harris 1987:43). Further, the modern family, with the mother at the centre, has become the site for intervention and reproduction of dominant ideologies (Steedman 1985:164). The role of the mother is increasingly dictated by experts outside the family, concerned especially with the well-being of children. The child-centred scientific knowledge espoused by these experts serves to regulate and normalize mothering practices by creating new stories for women which often bolster the old ones.

For example, in recent years, there has been a proliferation of articles in popular magazines and in Hollywood movies which stress the pitfalls facing working mothers. These stories did not exist when mothers stayed home with their children, but arose in response to other emerging social relations (which were themselves a historically specific response to other prior social relations).

Similarly, today's literature on child-rearing and child development, whether academic or popular, conflates the needs of the mother with those of the child. The appeal and power of this literature is that it reinforces and perpetuates fantasies and desires of mothering already maintained by women (Steedman 1985:195).

'Normal' cognitive and language development depends upon the presence of the mother. "Self-regulation through nurturance" by the mother has become the normative pattern, with conflicts resolved through the child's tolerance of

maternal presence and absence, "understood as the child's overcoming frustration" (Steedman 1985:213) and mother is the cause of all conflict.

Such theories of mothering have been incorporated into teaching practices, along with the wholesale adoption of Piagetian theory, which should not surprise us given that the autonomous child is supported by an invisible, ever-present, mother with no autonomous needs of her own (Steedman 1985:182-3). Adult interference (other than for the child's survival) is seen as interfering with the child's natural development towards autonomy.

As child-centred pedagogy becomes increasingly central to the classroom, with each individual child progressing at her/his own pace and with the teacher patiently watching and monitoring without intervention, the notion that development is natural is given concrete expression. "The very pedagogy itself produces the possibility of individualization" (Steedman 1985:208). In this scenario, women (mothers and teachers) are the hidden, dispensable price paid for autonomy (Steedman 1985:212).

But can a passive nurturant female teacher produce an active learner among both boys and girls? If so how? Do different versions of normalcy and pathology exist for males and females? Children's behaviour which falls within the parameters of acceptable masculine or feminine behaviour is seen as naturally emerging from within the developing child, but children who threaten this gender regime are not seen as self-directing and fulfilling their own needs, but as needing to be brought into line (Clark 1989:246).

"Women have power only insofar as they are positioned as mothers in relation to certain practices concerning the regulation of children" (Steedman 1985:220). Thus, the regulation of childhood comes not from the power of the mother but from the constitution of mothering practices which have extended into relations beyond the traditional nuclear family. With the common occurrence of other-care earlier and earlier in infancy, it becomes ever more urgent to explore these social relations. And how better to explore them than through the stories told by early childhood educators to future early childhood educators in their curriculum and in their everyday practices.

CHAPTER IV

The Significance of Structure

Even the most insignificant social relation is concurrently shaped by a wider social context of economic and political realities. Because I am primarily interested in the formation of ECE curriculum, I want to identify its origins in the social structure, and what factors constrain its contents. I begin at the general and macro level of the state, and work towards the program in question.

Because responsibility for education lies with the state, I assumed that the evolution of any given curriculum would be significantly regulated by the state. This regulation would not be immediately apparent, but would emerge from complex sets of social relations prefiguring and organizing the action and experience of educators and students before taking visible shape in the classroom.

Community Colleges and Curriculum Formation

In locating the formation of community college curricula within a broader social context, I examine some of the literature describing and analyzing Canadian post-secondary institutions. I reviewed documents relating to community colleges in general, and those which specifically pertained to Algonquin College. In all of these instances, I identified four factors which have an appreciable impact on curriculum formation. These factors blended into well-established patterns of control and are silently taken for granted.

Controlling the Purse Strings

First, control over the financial purse-strings by both provincial and federal governments influences educational outcomes, but these effects remain invisible until resource allocation is made at the local level. Elected and appointed school and college boards are accountable for ensuring that schools operate within their means. Here, the material effects of budget constraints become visible in such decisions as the purchase (or non-purchase) of new equipment and in student-to-teacher ratios. In responding to budgetary resource constraints, **growth** was understood as the means to balancing the books, resulting in an "enrolment driven financial formula" (Muller 1990:96).

Delivery of college programs was determined by the "needs" of the "community". These "needs" were assumed to be self-evident factors defined through the "proof" offered by statistics. How many, how often, and where, justified the action taken, with financial statistics accorded a special status. Although a great deal of lip service was paid to the less tangible goals of schooling such as quality and responsiveness to public concerns, decisions were primarily rationalized on the basis of financial resource availability.¹²

¹² While researching at Algonquin, I became aware that few funds are allocated to library resources at Algonquin College. The collection is old and limited as well as inconveniently scattered over several campuses. Although I do not know where the ultimate decisions to limit these resources are taken, the fact of their limitation reifies the practical, "applied" nature of college programs. Students do not have easy access to the current issues and debates in their field nor are they expected to understand the theories behind the applications they are taught.

*Proletarian Parking Lots?*¹³

Second, the structure of the local and central state reproduces class relations in education. In primary and secondary education, zoning laws match residential neighbourhoods to income levels. This ensures that relatively homogenous child-rearing practices correspond to income levels so that middle class neighbourhoods provide the conditions for middle-class classroom practices. Taxation practices of the local state allow wealthier communities which generate more educational revenue to reserve some portion of it to improve schools serving their own community (Smith 1987:174).

Boards of trustees primarily represent a middle-class section of the local community and a centralized bureaucracy represents the interests of the corporate sector of the economy, regulating resources, standards, and curriculum. This enables the interests of the dominant classes to prevail, reproducing class relations both by limiting teaching resources and by withholding resources unavailable in the home. Streaming intensifies the effects of resource-poor parenting through resource-poor schooling (Smith 1987:174).

These class relations continue to be reproduced in post-secondary education. Universities tend to draw a middle-class student population while community colleges tend to satisfy a more working-class student base. Despite similar enrolment rates, attrition rates, and graduation rates, community colleges

¹³ Hugh Armstrong (1992) used this term to describe community colleges.

receive fewer government dollars per student than do universities to deliver their programs.

Public values reflect these class relations. Community colleges have always been faced with a "barrier of prestige" for the university degree and a devaluation of the college diploma (Towards 2000 1971:84). Colleges appear to be associated with mediocrity, as "the last bastions of anti-intellectualism" (Armstrong 1992:seminar Carleton U.).

A university degree is regarded as more valuable than a college diploma. Colleges are believed to provide more practical training at a lower cost and to be more accessible than universities. University courses are perceived as more difficult and delivering a more in-depth education. On the basis of the "perceived lack of success" of college graduates, middle-class high school students tend to choose university (OCR I/1 1990:67).

Efficiency and Productivity

Demand for college education comes from the needs of workers updating their skills and of the unemployed. This demand, however, is generated by the requirements of industry. Responsiveness of the college to local community needs is an ongoing reflection of such factors as the unemployment rate and the projected needs of local industry.

Community colleges grew in response to a demand for a more highly skilled, better educated and more competitive labour force in a market system; they were designed by state officials to provide skills training to meet industry

demands (Muller 1990:16).¹⁴ Training is for "productive employment" (Cameron 1987:3) or for achieving an "effective standard of technical performance" (Towards 2000 1971:84). In all these cases, the labour skill emphasis is central.

The goal of the community college is to offer programs consistent with the kinds of industry found within the college's geographic area, thus coordinating the training market with the labour market of the province and the labour force requirements of industry (Muller 1990:77). This fulfils the college mandate to respond to "community needs", a euphemism referring to the needs of the private (or public) sector. Student orientation is deliberately towards practical rather than academic learning.¹⁵

Third, then, a factor identified as directly implicated in college program design is its ties with industry. Educational institutions must respond to the demands of the private sector and are patterned after market relations. "Human resource development", a recent management concept, reduces human workers to resources whose skills need to be optimized in a way that best enhances the goals of efficiency and productivity.

These goals are reflected in the delivery of education and in the expectations of the students. Educational administrations are increasingly

¹⁴ In the late 1960s, local trade and vocational institutions were transformed into what are now community colleges. By 1969, in Ontario, there were 20 of these Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs), with about 38 000 full-time students and 35,000 part-time students registered (Towards 2000 1971:16-18). By 1989, this had increased to 31 main colleges in Ontario (DSSC 1990:9) with 93,000 full-time students and 75,000 part-time students registered (DSSC 1989:112), roughly a tripling in enrolment in twenty years.

¹⁵ In 1989-90, two thirds of all full and part-time college students were registered in career programs (DSSC 1990:2).

hierarchical, as they strive for increased efficiency in meeting the needs of the market place. Students are more achievement orientated, valuing their education for the outcome, asking what financial and status rewards can it can bring them in the way of work. Students believe that, with the specific skills training offered in colleges, they will gain direct access to the labour market on graduation.¹⁶

Corporate management practices are employed in restructuring colleges so that market forces carry ever more weight in decision making.¹⁷ As a way of economizing, state managers have been treating the colleges as single administrative units with curriculum design increasingly located in administrative offices, and less and less the responsibility of instructors (Muller 1990:17). This tends to transform teachers into "educational technicians" (Muller 1990:96) and to reduce the role of teachers to making the "student-curriculum-job relationship" work (ibid:76).

¹⁶ In 1987, when the Ontario rate of unemployment was 8 to 9 per cent, about 90% of graduates were employed. Success in employment for graduates of applied arts programs was about 88 per cent at that time (Annual Report 1987-88:3). These figures obscure the fact that out of the 1100 who enrolled in applied arts in 1987-88, only 723 graduated the following year, which is an attrition rate of roughly thirty three per cent (MCU 1987-88:18; MCU 1988-89:24). The Algonquin Graduate Placement Calendar indicated that 90 per cent of graduates who were available for employment had found jobs, and that 78 per cent were in their field of study (1988-89:1). The ambiguous term "field of study" leaves it unclear whether graduates were under-employed within their discipline.

If we look at these figures in a less favourable light, we see that the rate of unemployment of graduates was ten per cent, higher than the national average at the time. This suggests that further training did not improve their employment chances. A further twelve per cent were unable to find work, under-employed or not, in their chosen field despite their training. These numbers give credence to the suggestion that college programs do disguise high unemployment rates, serving as "proletarian parking lots".

¹⁷ One idea which is being considered is the implementation of applied research in colleges, funded by the private sector.

The primary emphasis in the program is "to encourage or convince the student to take training for which there is the most likelihood of getting paid work" (Muller 1990:75). A college teacher remarked: "I'm there to make these people more attractive to the job market and to transmit valuable information to them that they can translate into skills that will bring them dollars" (Muller citing Hewitt 1990:130).

Thus, teaching at the college level is primarily for skills application rather than the university emphasis on generic skills and theory. Program contact with life outside the college tends to be restricted to specific employers who are affiliated with a specific program, such as field placement sites. It is through these prospective employers that college instructors remain up-to-date, thus reinforcing the status quo.

Professional Competencies

The literature I reviewed situated responsibility for educational priorities, including curriculum, teacher training, compulsory attendance, inspections and standards for graduation, as belonging to the Ministry of Education. Committees within provincial ministries agree upon school programs, course outlines, and text book authorizations (Gue 1985:75; MacKeracher 1984:5). ECE curriculum is ostensibly prescribed by the Ministry of Education, through a document which established guidelines to ECE programs: *Early Childhood Education Professional Competencies* (1991).

Specialized groups within the Ministry of Education define professional competencies, which are intended to standardize the particular skills deemed

necessary in specific occupations. A graduate from any college program in the province will have acquired the specified skills considered necessary to make them "competent" in their chosen occupation.¹⁸

Formalized communication among college programs is through provincial annual or bi-annual conferences and workshops. Faculty exchange information and ideas about the structure and content of their programs. However, there is no necessary collaboration among programs and with no standard blueprint for curriculum, each program must find its own interpretation of the professional competencies.

I have identified four factors which have an appreciable impact on curriculum. Financial constraints coming from various levels of government impact the resources available. Social class of the community served by the institution influences the resources made available for education and the values associated with educational choices. Managerial education modifies the goals which are most highly valued in delivering educational services. Finally, regulation of professional competencies organizes actual course content. Of the variables I identified affecting curriculum, only in the latter case is the process visible and specific to community colleges.

The ECE Program: A Paradox

Algonquin College seems to be a typical Ontario community college, embroiled in balancing quality education with budget cuts, and suffering from and

¹⁸ A detailed discussion of professional competencies ensues in Chapter 4.

struggling to resist an inferiority complex stemming from a devalued public perception of what it tries to offer. It has succumbed to the "corporate form", within which the managerial process mediates ownership and control.

The college is spread out over three campuses in the Ottawa area and three regional rural schools within a 100 kilometre radius of Ottawa, serving a community of about 800,000 people (Annual Report 1987-88).¹⁹ The college has four schools of academic discipline: Applied Arts, Business, Health Sciences and Technology and Trades. Within each school, departments co-ordinate and administer the programs falling within each school's discipline.

Any given program is offered on one campus only, ranging in duration from as few as eight weeks to two or three years. The longer programs offer post-secondary diplomas. The school year is divided into semesters, slightly longer than university semesters, and students may attend either full or part time.

The classroom experience is the primary means of college learning; program schedules demand that day students attend several compulsory classes each day and elective courses are rarely part of college programs. A classroom capacity of roughly fifty students holds the potential for each course to foster learning, healthy social relations and strong emotional ties to the college.

¹⁹ This number is now lower, since the community served is now predominantly English, the result of the opening of a new local French community college, La Cité Collégiale, in September 1990. From 1975 to 1990, along with six other CAATs in Ontario, Algonquin had an official bilingualism policy. Administrative services were available in both official languages, and several bilingual programs were available.

Within the college, there appears to be a great deal of variation among instructors' attitudes towards both teaching in their program and the calibre of students. The mood and morale of faculty seem to have more to do with their program director or dean than any inherent characteristic of the college itself.²⁰ Muller's suggestion that college deans are "more akin to the foremen in an industrial shop than the prestigious figures who lend scholarly direction to the activities of the idealized economy" (1990:96) may be true in some cases, but clearly other deans foster an environment more conducive to quality teaching and learning.

In the ECE department, morale of students and teachers seemed high. An air of optimism and energy is almost palpable in the department and classrooms. Within the ECE program, I found that the decision to hire particular teachers, the most recent addition being a feminist, was made internally. How was this possible? This contradicted the assertion that the board of governors was responsible for hiring, when, in fact, they simply approved the internal decision taken.

Similarly, the ECE curriculum was not imposed by the ministry, but developed within the ECE department. The impression of control rests with the board of governors, because final approval is theirs to give or withhold. However,

²⁰ Instructors from economics, business and finance decried the lack of morale, poor attendance, a generally poor level of teaching and lack of motivation among educators and students. Teachers from ECE, social science, and nursing had much more positive reflections.

faculty have learned to exercise their authority in these matters, making this system work to their advantage.

My training in sociology did not prepare me for this scarcity of structural constraint. I could understand these state controls as no more than defining a social context, within which particular, contingent, historically specific practices occurred. Practices were delimited, but actors within the field optimized their potential for developing progressive curriculum. I needed to find an alternative to a structuralist understanding.

I had expected to see several layers of bureaucracy involved in curriculum decisions, but the system established for community college curriculum development is, at least on the surface, less implicated in the process. The sole visible mechanism of state authority in college programs seems to be through application of professional competencies.

In the following section, I discuss the structural impact of these competency requirements on college programs. Second, I present the document which establishes the professional competencies for the Early Childhood Education Program. I also identify the ideological positions adopted in the document, because, as I argue, these will be reflected throughout the ECE curriculum. Lastly, I discuss how these professional competency requirements establish specific social relations between the ECE program and the ministry.

The Impact of Competency Approaches

Professional competency approaches are designed to standardize the outcomes of college programs so that college graduates will enter the labour

market with comparable skills. There are, however, at least three more muted consequences. First, competencies serve to justify the legitimacy of their administrative origins. Written records of student evaluations are a visible sign which establish that the competencies have been fulfilled and that the program is accountable to the state. The written evaluation of students' work is ensured.

A second consequence is that competency requirements emphasize skills acquisition, rather than education which may provoke questions as to why or whether a particular skill is needed. The former process tends to be quite technical, and to assume the imperative nature of the skill. The latter invites the student to question the bases on which these imperatives are established. Goal-orientation assumes rather than challenges the validity of the status quo.

As a third consequence, competency measures may "disrupt the use of teacher-based knowledge in decision making about curriculum design, and replace it with new forms of institutionalized, documentary, systems-based knowledge which are integral to bureaucratic and documentary forms of governance" (Muller 1990:123). However, although college faculty are required to be accountable to the Ministry for **what** they teach, it is argued that they have relative autonomy over **how** to teach in order to achieve these goals (OCR I/1 1990:26). Bearing these points in mind, in ECE classrooms, we might expect to find similar course content but somewhat different pedagogical practices.

Although the application of professional competencies appears to be a relatively minor factor in the structure of college curricula, I have argued that their existence validates the bureaucracy which gives them form, and both

students and teachers are constrained by an emphasis on pre-determined skills. An analysis of the actual 1991 document outlining professional competencies for ECE used currently in community colleges helps to substantiate these claims.

The Early Childhood Education: Professional Competencies (ECE:PC 1991) document was prepared within the provincial Ministry of Education by the Coordinators of Early Childhood Education programs in Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technologies. This was funded through a research grant by the Child Care Initiatives Fund, a organization from within the federal Department of Health and Welfare.

The first two pages of this document list nine underlying principles of early childhood education (*ECE:PC 1991*). These are expected to be reflected in ECE teachers' actions as they interpret and manage children's behaviour. For example, the first two principles state that "a thorough knowledge of child development is essential and provides the base for effective childhood education"; and "all areas of development (emotional, social, cognitive, speech/language and motor) interact and are interrelated". This listed typology of developmental needs situates their basis in conventional child development theory which assumes the instruction of this theoretical perspective within each ECE program. This is confirmed by the competency requirements themselves.

The text outlines eight broad competencies which students must demonstrate they have mastered prior to graduation.²¹ The eight competencies

²¹ Nowhere in this document is gender specifically mentioned.

are each divided into skills, which are further differentiated into the tasks associated with each skill. For example, *Competency 1* states that the student will be able to "articulate and demonstrate in practice the underlying philosophical elements of high quality early childhood education". *Skill A* states that the early childhood educator can: "express a professional philosophy of early childhood education that supports optimal development for all children". The *tasks* to achieve Skill A are as follows:

- a.) identify and define characteristics of optimal development for all children;
- b.) describe the professional role of the early childhood educator as a facilitator of optimal development;
- c.) articulate the components of high quality care and education;
- d.) articulate the value of high quality care and education for children, families and society;
- e.) articulate sources of and support for personal philosophy;
- f.) revise philosophy, and professional role, to facilitate children's optimal development" (ECE:PC 1991:3).

The seven remaining competencies are cited below:

- 2. Provide appropriate care and nurturance to all children;
- 3. Establish and maintain a safe and healthy environment;
- 4. Gather information, using both informal and formal methods;
- 5. Design and provide appropriate experiences and environments to meet the needs of the whole child, as an individual, family and group member, in all developmental areas: emotional, social, cognitive (including creativity and critical thinking skills), speech and language, and motor;
- 6. Promote the development of the children's self-regulation and self-direction;
- 7. Establish and maintain appropriate liaison with families, other professionals, and community resources;
- 8. Carry out non-programming professional responsibilities."
(ECE:PC 1991)

Despite distinctions made between each competency, the discourse used to list each task and skill remain extraordinarily imprecise. It would appear that the

implementation of these requirements is left up to each program. This contradicts the claim made earlier that teacher autonomy is lost.

However, frequent use of such terms as "developmentally appropriate" and "child-centred", and an emphasis on "individual capabilities" intimate that the goals are not ambiguous, but are assumed. In competency five, the specific list of the child's developmental needs coincides with the chapter indexes found in mainstream introductory child development texts. Emotional development is specifically defined based on Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (*ECE:PC* 1991:27). This "need" is clearly situated in mainstream theory. The culturally specific goal of individual "self regulation and self-direction" expressed in competency six above assumes that ECE students will adopt and apply this goal as teachers.

According to the competency requirements and ECE philosophy, a mainstream understanding of child development underlies the professional competencies. The truth claims of child development theory are taken as given, and this knowledge is assumed to be both shared by early childhood educators and passed on to the students. If professional competencies regulate the substance of ECE programs, and professional competencies demand "thorough knowledge of child development", then logically child development theory is the cornerstone of an early childhood education. As I have discussed in detail in Chapter 2, there are a number of problems associated with this approach.

Social Relations Established by Competencies

How are the early childhood educators positioned by this document? First, ECE teacher-child relations are implicated in the workplace, and second, teacher-student relations are affected in the classroom.

The following list of verbs used to preface expectations of these educators follows. They are expected to: "arrange, define, incorporate, encourage, use, support, facilitate, allow, balance, enhance, promote, organize, create, determine, negotiate, be flexible, participate, express, maintain, initiate, reinforce, communicate, demonstrate, design, interpret, monitor, identify, include, gather information, analyze, give feedback, follow through, revise, implement, acknowledge, model, modify, establish, plan, explain, evaluate, articulate, respond, collaborate, provide support and follow-up, refer, ensure consistency, and review relationships and personal practices".

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it suggests an ideal for ECE teaching. The educator is positioned centrally, as the interpreter and organizer of children's activities. She is the subject who knows and who, by extension, has control and authority. On the other hand, it is the child who is the central focus. As with high expectations of motherhood, the ECE teacher is positioned in authority, but limited by a contradictory position of service. Her own needs exist only in relationship to the child's. Her loving nurturance facilitates the child's development into full autonomy.

As an example, *Competency 1, Skill C* suggests that teachers incorporate self-understanding into the work environment. Self understanding is defined in

the glossary as: "one's relationship to oneself...one's knowledge and understanding of one's own prejudices, attitudes, and behaviours" a vital step "in order that the special relationship between teacher and child be an appropriately nurturing one for both child and teacher" (p.28). Satisfaction for the teacher is required in order to enhance the relationship with the child.

Thus, we have lists of competencies, skills and tasks laid out by the ministry which position the teachers in authority over children but also in service to them. The cost of the child's freedom is borne by the teacher (Walkerdine in Luke et al 1992:21). The humanist principle of free and autonomous individuality is supported by developmental psychology which provides the normative structure for this principle to be practised.

The relationship between faculty and ECE students is established by the grading process required by the Ministry to give concrete evidence of the student's "performance" as well as teacher accountability (Smith 1987:199). Records are kept throughout the students' program of their progress in achieving the required practical skills. Lists of the specific tasks the student must complete to show proficiency in a course or field placement are developed by instructors. Evaluation of these skills is ongoing, done by the student's faculty supervisor and field placement supervisor, with some room for self-evaluation as well.

Despite this latter input, the students are observed, monitored and graded continually, which allows the teacher to see where s/he is in relation to curriculum objectives, and to see individual student's "performance" through grades and written work. As well, the student is monitored by the teacher in the

same way that the students will one day be expected to monitor the children in their charge. A traditional hierarchical teacher/student relationship is taken for granted and reified in their everyday practices.

The task which remains for ECE faculty is the translation of the generalized statements contained in the professional competencies document into precise and specific practical skills which students must acquire during the course of their instruction and field experience, and prior to graduation.

From Abstract Principles to Concrete Tasks

In a discussion about this process with the ECE program director, she remarked that the translation of professional competencies into curriculum practices was a tedious process because the document's guidelines are so abstract that the relationship is not always easily determined. As well, there are increasing steps and skills required by the Ministry, and accountability to the Ministry makes a rigorous application necessary.

From her perspective, competency requirements appear to be a bureaucratic exercise with little meaning in the actual program except that they represent a lot of extra work. This is consistent with research findings which show how educational management uses written documents to legitimate its decisions, maintaining "an air of concern for academic quality and fiscal responsibility" at the same time as increasing faculty workloads and decreasing faculty autonomy and responsibility (Muller 1990:107).

One instructor has accepted as unproblematic the expansion of the program requirements. She feels that there is far too much information for students to absorb in a two year program. There is so much required ground to cover that teachers cannot leave much time for students to reflect on what they have been taught. Since she cannot see any redundant or unnecessary information, but would like more time to teach it, she would have the program be extended to three years. But rather than educators simply adapting to these increased expectations, it is important to view these expectations critically as part of a wider set of social relations.

The discipline of child psychology promotes child-centred perspectives. The "knowledge" produced in this field comes to be accepted as the new cultural standard. This permeates child rearing practices in the home and in the classroom. New and increasing expectations are placed on teachers, as surrogate mothers, with corresponding sets of demands in the curriculum workload as teachers apply these child-centred standards. The obscured effect of this profusion of information is that there is no time left for critique or contemplation.

I asked a faculty member whether she thought that competencies made a difference in the structure and content of the ECE program. She replied that she did not think anything in the program would be very different without their imposition, reasoning that there are certain skills which students need to learn in order to work well with children. Processes such as pedagogical practices might change, but the subject matter and therefore the competencies would remain the same. She was thus able to justify the program's basic structure and contents.

This begs the question of whether the competencies have been developed from existing ECE programs or whether the programs are designed around the competencies. That the 1991 manuscript currently in use is the result of "a research project" (cover page), suggests the former. The research committee have examined the practical contents of numerous ECE programs and abstracted their findings into concepts and principles. ECE faculty have to turn around and translate them back again.

Arguing that "the committee" is the only legitimate authority to speak on behalf of whatever subject is being scrutinized, Muller asserts that "the inputs are then treated as if they originated from the subjects rather than arising out of, and becoming a product of, the way in which the information was obtained" (1990:102). In this re-appropriation process, authority for the ECE program is seen to legitimately belong to the committee and the ministry.

CHAPTER V

Curriculum Formation in the ECE Program

While professional competencies serve as a visible regulatory control apparatus in ECE and establish the required ideological position for early childhood educators, they are only an abstract guide to the desired outcome. Competencies, rather than defining curriculum, seem to be part of a wider set of social relations which reinforce expected teacher/child relations. It is up to directors of each program to develop the specific structure and process of meeting these expectations.

In the following pages, I discuss the development of curriculum in the ECE program at Algonquin College. First, however, a brief analysis of a draft of the ECE department's mission statement helps us to establish the philosophical position of faculty members. From this analysis, we can anticipate the nature of the program and later, compare the program's ideals with its curriculum contents.

Mission Statement

The Algonquin Early Childhood Education Program for adults is in many ways consistent with our educational philosophy for children. We value the development of the individual as a whole person in four domains: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. We believe in experiential learning, where children and adults alike satisfy their curiosity for understanding by constructing explanations of meaningful experience. We also value the development of self-esteem, autonomy, personal empowerment, risk-taking, creative thinking, problem-solving abilities, and a love of learning. Our educational program provides real experiences and relevant information in combination with opportunities for question asking, reflection and the exchange of ideas.

By linking practice teaching to research and theory, the Algonquin ECE program prepares students to create developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive environments for children from birth to 12 years of age. Graduates have the requisite skills to become competent and effective early childhood professionals. Their thinking and actions reflect social responsibility and appreciation of diversity.

A statement of purpose is necessarily ideological in its contents.

Nonetheless, the preceding paragraphs make explicit some basic assumptions held by and about early childhood educators and indicate what we can expect to find in curriculum materials. The individual, whether child or student, is explicitly made central to the ECE program as is the concept of healthy child development. As discussed previously, these two features provide the building blocks for early childhood education.

The philosophy of a liberal educational experience is visible in the list of valued goals for learning: self-esteem, autonomy, and personal empowerment. Also visible are the characteristics of critical pedagogy: risk-taking, creative thinking, problem-solving abilities, and a love of learning. However worthy in principle, these goals contradict two basic assumptions about social reality which are taken as given, namely child development and the individual.

The emphasis on practical learning extends into the ECE program curriculum. Students must spend many hours working with or observing children of all age groups in their field placements and in observational situations. Abundant formal opportunities to reflect on these experiences are provided in field seminars, in self-evaluations, in journals and in classroom discussions. However, the theoretical framework within which to explain what they observe is taken for granted.

Critical thinking is in this way obstructed at an early phase. The goal "personal empowerment" is a contradiction in terms, since empowerment is not personal but involves a "shared understanding of the social construction of reality"

(Livingstone et al 1987:8). Further, if the goal of the program is to have empowered educators, but the learning focus is on an enhanced experience for children, little will be achieved in the way of empowerment for the ECE students themselves. The educational focus is on the empowerment of children; the early childhood education becomes an instrument in attaining this goal. If critical thinking is one of the most important bases of resistance (Muller 1990:131), then the tools they are being given enable the child, not the educators themselves, to resist.

A growing awareness of contemporary social issues is evident in the use of the terms "culturally sensitive" and "appreciation of diversity". Faculty are responding to the politics of identity: race, creed, gender, ethnicity, differential ability, and sexual orientation. In practice, as the ensuing chapter elaborates, the students were introduced to issues of gender identity in their second semester. However, it was not until their final semester that issues of diversity and difference were included in curriculum content.

Curriculum Development

Before embarking on an analysis of specific curriculum content, I address how it is developed within this program. I found that ECE faculty cooperatively develop the curriculum for the early childhood program they instruct. What has been offered in previous years serves as the model for revisions for the upcoming year. The program is gradually restructured to meet new competency requirements and to respond to criticisms. The director of the ECE program

plays a key role in this reworking, because she was an initiator of the program in 1969 and has been on the faculty since that time. As indicated in Appendix B, the students attend many classes, all of which are compulsory. They cover many topic areas during their two year program. Although there is an expectation in principle that ECE teachers learn about and become sensitive to "the diverse groups that comprise our society" (*ECE:PC* 1991:1), nowhere in the professional competencies is any mention made of sex or gender. To their credit, ECE faculty have interpreted the competencies so that this material is included.

Indeed, when I was initiating this research project, the director of the program expressed incredulity when I said I wanted to examine gender content in their program. She explained that teaching about gender was "everywhere" in the curriculum, implying that I would be wasting my time in my research. She showed me immediately what she considered to be the best textbook, *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (Derman-Sparks et al 1989). I understood her reaction to mean that she thought I would not be interested in the project if I found that the program addressed gender to the extent that it did. I was both surprised and pleased to find this content, however. Although it did alter my research focus, I felt that the project was all the more interesting.

Indeed, the more I discovered in concrete practice, the more my expectations based on theory and a literature review were contradicted and had to be revisited. At the end of Chapter IV, I asked how it was possible that the department itself hires their own faculty, the most recent addition being a feminist instructor. She herself claimed that her feminism was simply not an issue. She

was available to work on short notice and highly qualified with a PhD in education. She was hired at first on a temporary basis and has since secured a tenured position.

I do not know whether all the college programs are at liberty to hire (given the resources) and I was reluctant to probe, and risk drawing attention to the program I was observing which at the moment enjoys such relative autonomy. The literature suggested that a Board of Directors would make these decisions, although this may be a mere formality. All the same, I will speculate that the hiring of a feminist in an ECE program reflects the status of women, particularly those who care for children, in wider social relations. This work is largely invisible.

The dominant forms of thought and the images and symbols of our culture are products of and controlled by predominantly male cultural norms (Smith 1987:18). What women do with children is not significant, as long as children are socialized into accepted patterns of behaviour. By extension then, early childhood education programs are assigned to a small and insignificant corner where students will master the appropriate knowledge qualifying them to teach children the dominant cultural norms. The advantage of this marginalization is that no one is paying a great deal of attention, so this relative autonomy is possible. However, competency approaches, emphasizing the outcome of the program rather than the content, are a means of ensuring that dominant cultural norms are not questioned.

ECE Course Analyses

As Appendix C suggests, the examination of course content for each course would have been too time-consuming, and potentially not very informative. In analyzing curriculum, I chose to selectively focus on the content of three categories of courses: early childhood education courses, child development courses and children's literature courses. The ECE program is built around the former two core courses. I felt that these would be the most informative and theoretical in their approaches to the construction of gender identity. I included the Children's Literature courses because sexism in children's books and primary school texts has been a topic in the public domain for a number of years. I was interested to see whether these debates had been appropriated into the classroom.

My analysis consisted of the examination of the course outlines for the above courses. In the outlines, I searched for evidence of gender content in the planned curriculum. For each course, I obtained copies of the required text books for the course. I used the chapter index to identify relevant references to gender identity construction.

I also used the subject index at the back of the text to find further references to gender. Examples of key words I used to locate these references were gender, gender-role, gender-stereotypes, sex, sex-stereotypes, sex-role, sexism, and feminism. Despite the recency of most of these texts, I did not find the term feminism or feminist in any of the indexes, and "gender" was almost exclusively referred to as "sex".

After finding the applicable pages, I read them and categorized them according to their approach to understanding gender. Briskin (1990) distinguishes between non-sexism and anti-sexism in discussing possible curriculum approaches to gender identity construction. A non-sexist approach recognizes the importance of gender, but argues that anyone can be whatever they want to be. These approaches are embedded in liberal ideology: "discrimination is somehow incidental to the system - a result of prejudice - and good attitudes and intent can erase that discrimination and make sex, race and class irrelevant" (Briskin 1990:12).

The effect is a moral effort to appear non-sexist, which results in a particular kind of "gender-blindness". A non-sexist curriculum implies that individual teachers can liberate their classrooms from gendered social realities simply because they desire to do so. In this approach then, with the right attitude, sex and gender should not matter; consequently, when females come up against "the limits of what is possible, easy, or acceptable, they can only conclude that **they** must be at fault" (Briskin 1990:15).

Non-sexist approaches emphasize such things as role models, and sex-stereotypes as important factors in constructing or modifying gender. The individual agent is assumed to have full control over change. Such approaches do not challenge the status quo, because they do not identify the ways in which our participation in constructing, reinforcing, and reproducing gender relations in our day to day interactions is predetermined by our membership in complex sets of power relations beyond any one of our individual efforts.

An anti-sexist curriculum, by contrast, always assumes the relevance of gender because it argues that there is no ungendered space. Such approaches seek to identify the social relations which maintain sexism (as well as racism, classism, and a host of other 'isms'). They do this by explicitly bringing gender into consciousness and "working to eradicate sexism" (Briskin 1990:14). Rather than the position of 'wishful thinking' adopted in a non-sexist approach, anti-sexist approaches take a position of political practice, seeking to identify and change the existing order. Rather than telling women they can be what they want to be, anti-sexist curricula recognise the structures which position male/female relations unequally. Strategies might be devised to overcome these structural constraints.

None of the ECE material I examined was overtly sexist, but some was silent on the issue of gender. Even though silence on gender is almost guaranteed to be presenting the sexist status quo from a male perspective, nonetheless, such absences I classify as "gender-silent" rather than sexist. A gender-silent approach ignores gender as an issue worthy of consideration. I have used these three concepts - gender-silent, non-sexist, and anti-sexist - to locate the viewpoint on gender in ECE curriculum material. In addition to this categorization, in some instances I have also examined the use of pronouns, illustrations, and examples in the text. Identification of the text's perspective on child development (liberal or critical) gives an additional clue to the perspective taken on gender.

There were three textbooks which offered considerably more gender related content than other texts. These textbooks were also recommended to me by ECE faculty who considered them to be the best texts on gender identity

construction available to the students. I examined these texts in detail for two reasons; first, they offer the most content with respect to gender, and second, two of the three textbooks were assigned by the feminist instructor. I was able to compare the contents of these two textbooks with ones used by other faculty in other courses as a way of measuring the effect of her feminism on curriculum design.

Child Development I and II

In both *Child Development I* and *II* (*CD I* or *CD II*), students were exposed to mainstream theories of child development as described in Chapter II of this document. In the course outline for *CD I*, the emphasis was on physical development, emotional and social development, theories of personality, moral reasoning, birth, newborns and preschoolers. Only two explicit references were made to sex/gender. In the second week of the course, sex differences in children's physical development was the scheduled topic of study. During the fifth week of the course, the "development of sex-role concepts" was presented along with a video, *Gender and Relationships*.

A bibliography attached to the course outline included sources for further detailed study. There was no text or article listed relating specifically to gender development although one text addressed the cultural specificity of development (*Child Development within Culturally Structured Environments* edited by Joan Valsiner, 1988).

The textbook used in this course was the most recent edition of *The Developing Child*, by Helen Bee (1992).²² She understands gender construction to be a combination of observation, reinforcement, identification and cognitive development (1984:10-14). The text is organized into chapters which discuss distinct categories of child development: physical, perceptual, language, thought, intelligence, personality and sociability.

Each chapter has a brief section entitled "Sex Differences", which in one or two paragraphs outlines the state of research and thought in the category being examined. For example, the chapter on physical development discusses the various points of view regarding physical developmental sex differences between males and females. In all cases, it is inherent difference which are being measured. The author takes care to point out similarities between boys and girls, and is sceptical of findings of difference. Because "parents have stereotyped understandings about what girls and boys ought to be like", both similarities and differences may be masked by the way the parent perceives the child (Bee 1984:98). The author has alluded to the effects of a sexist society, but insistence on the insignificance of "natural" differences between girls and boys and the absence of discussion explaining inequality between them makes her perspective clear. She has implied that if women are not different, then there is no excuse for inequality. She is appealing to reason and to a liberal sense of justice.

²² I was able to obtain access only to a 1984 edition of this textbook.

Overall, Bee has adopted a mainstream yet thoughtful approach to child development and gender identity construction. Her critique of Piagetian theory questions different rates of development among children and inconsistency across so-called fixed stages. Her own view seems to be that cognitive development and the acquisition of gender are continuous, gradual processes, rather than sequences of immutable stages (1984:250). Nonetheless, on the basis of the presence of gender analysis which is treated as a discrete category incidental to other aspects of social reality, I have identified this text as presenting a "non-sexist" approach.

In Child Development II, cognitive and language development was the principal focus of study, featuring Piagetian theory. The main age group studied was four to eight year olds, referred to here as "the play years". "Gender differences and stereotyping" are listed as topics for investigation in the course outline. The text used was *Early Childhood Development* by Susan Alsemo (1985). No bibliography was attached, but since the instructor was the same for both of these courses, a second list of references was presumably redundant.

Forty per cent of the students' evaluation in both of the child development courses was based on "developmental charts". Students were required to record a specified number of physical and socio-emotional milestones of development, and observe individual children of various age groups, comparing their actual behaviour with these milestones. Although these charts claim to be only "signposts", since "each child develops at his/her own pace", they are used to "flag developmental delays and areas of weakness and strengths so that the educator can design a program to meet the needs of the individual child".

Students are expected to learn "normal" child development, compare this knowledge with actual children they observe, and then work with the child to overcome her/his shortcomings, here euphemistically referred to as "needs". The charts then become a normative guide which reproduce "appropriate" development. Despite the students' exposure to the text's critical distance from wholesale adoption of cognitive developmental theory, this evaluative process tends to outweigh her analysis. Further, teachers are identified as able to meet each individual child's needs through their program design. This ignores the structural effects of the gendered world we live in. Both child development courses adopted a non-sexist approach.

Children's Literature

In their second year of study, ECE students take two courses through the English department, *Children's Literature I* and *II* (CL I, CL II). I had expected that these courses would be more general in nature and that classes would be a mix of students from different programs. I had hoped that a course designed for a wider audience might offer a broader perspective on the subject matter. However, I discovered that not only do ECE students attend these courses in their customary cohort, but also the courses are specifically designed for the ECE program. CL I emphasized working with pre-schoolers while its companion course CL II emphasized school aged children.

The goals for these courses were to give early childhood educators skills in selecting age-appropriate books for young children and in presenting them to

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children in ways which "enhance language and vocabulary and elicit enjoyment" (*CL I*: course outline). Understanding "the speech and language potential of children" was assumed to be fundamental for meeting these objectives (*CL II*: course outline). Thus, students had to have a prior foundation in child development theory, particularly language development following Piagetian theory.

Through lectures, films, discussions, presentations and workshops, students learned "to recognize components which are basic to excellence in good children's books and films" and "to analyze the quality of T.V. for children to establish standards for determining its suitability" (*CL II*: course outline). Criteria defining "excellence", "quality" and "suitability" were not made explicit in the course outlines.

The same text books were assigned for both courses: *Literature for the Young Child* by Eileen Burke (1990) and *Early Childhood Experience in Language Arts* by Jeanne Machado (1985). I examined the latter text²³ for specific gender content and found only one paragraph on this topic. It proposed questions to ask when assessing children's books for "racial inference or stereotyping and sexism" such as: "Who are the doers and inactive observers?"; "Are character's achievements based on their own initiative, insights, or intelligence?"; "Who performs the brave and important deeds?" (Machado 1985:120). An entire chapter, entitled "Understanding Differences", was devoted exclusively to race,

²³ I was unable to obtain a copy of the former text. However, I understand that it is a resource manual of children's books.

culture and ability with no reference made to gender difference (Machado 1985:230-248).²⁴

On the basis of the course outline, and one of the text books, I have identified the *CL I* and *CL II* courses as gender-silent. Issues of gender identity in children's literature did not make up a substantive part of their curriculum, nor did an anti-sexist agenda appear to be a measure of "excellence", "quality" or "suitability" of children's literature. Two written comments by students on the questionnaires they completed (see Chapter X) indicated that gender stereotyping and sexism in children's literature was an important issue discussed in these courses. However, this content was not evident from either the detailed course outline or the text book. It may have been the students' own initiatives which resulted in these discussions and their own priorities which gave them significance.

²⁴ I found that the books published in the U.S.A. generally tended to place a much stronger emphasis on racism. This is likely because American race relations have historically been much more troubled than those in Canada, and because Blacks and Hispanics constitute a much larger proportion of the population in the U.S. than here.

CHAPTER VI

Early Childhood Education Series

Each semester, ECE students took one of a series of courses entitled *Early Childhood Education*.²⁵ In prior years, this series was taught by one instructor. However, last year when the first term instructor (who taught *ECE I & ECE III*) went on leave, she was replaced for the second semester (*ECE II & ECE IV*). There was therefore no logical progression between the four courses because each instructor had different goals for the series. The teacher for the second semester courses has a PhD in education, specializing in early childhood, and is the feminist discussed previously.

The following analyses examine course outlines and textbooks for this series. Comparison between the courses taught in the first semester and those taught in the second will identify differences in content between curricula designed by the two instructors.

Early Childhood Education I

ECE I was designed to introduce students to the connections between theories of child development and child care educational practices. Students began to learn what constitutes a "healthy play and learning environment" for children. An historical approach to both childhood and education were presented.

²⁵ The instructor for *ECE I* and *ECE III* was not available for interviewing. Since her course outlines were my main source of analysis, I had a number of questions which remained unanswered.

Some attention was paid to cultural differences, both in the context of children's rights and in the context of other early childhood education models.

Three text books were required for this course: Joanne Hendrick's, *The Whole Child: Developmental Education for the Early Years* (Canadian Edition)²⁶ (1988); *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*, by Dale Shipley (a Canadian ECE instructor) (1991); and *Workjobs* by M. Baratta-Lorton (1971). Students were also required to purchase a manual of developmentally-appropriate activities to be used throughout their program; *An Activities Handbook for Teachers of Young Children* by Doreen Croft (1990). According to the course timetable, both required readings and assignments were from either the Hendrick text or the activities manual. There was no evidence in the course outline that students had either readings or assignments from the texts by either Shipley or Baratta-Lorton during their semester.

In the course outline for *ECE I*, no specific mention of sex or gender was made and "the child" was used indiscriminately for boys and girls. Chapter 12 from the Hendrick text, "Providing Cross-Cultural, Non-Sexist Education" (1988:246-281), was assigned for reading and homework during the fourth week of the course. This chapter focuses on the ways in which teachers sometimes discriminate among children as a result of their habits and prejudices. It identifies strategies aimed at changing these attitudes, primarily by understanding the other person's point of view and accepting and respecting differences without

²⁶ The feature which made this a "Canadian edition" was the inclusion of a chapter which discussed the history and administration of child care in Canada.

devaluing them. Passing reference is made to Derman-Sparks' *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (1985), but little of its content is included. The curriculum goal is to have each child feel included and valued and to develop respect towards other groups.

The first twenty pages of Chapter 12 in the Hendrick text discussed cross-cultural aspects of education, while the latter ten pages (excluding summary, study questions, and references) discussed sexism. Over three of these pages discuss ways in which teachers can explain physical sexual differences between boys and girls and help them understand their sexuality. A further page is devoted to "Meeting the Special Needs of Boys in the Preschool". Hendrick's thesis is that boys' need for physical activity is greater and that female teacher's must be careful to provide this needed space. She expresses concern that this will be misinterpreted as "advocating sexist practices" (1988:269). Her experiences and some research indicates that boys are reprimanded more than girls for aggressive behaviour, and given positive attention for their involvement in feminine activities (1988:269).

While this may be true, it is when Hendrick discusses the absence of male role models for boys from single parent, mother-centred homes that her own position becomes clear. Although she admits that research results on the effect of father-absent homes on a boy's identity are unclear, she suggests that "common sense cannot help encouraging one to believe that the presence of a father facilitates sex-role development" (1988:269). Common sense refers to accepted ways of understanding social reality. Modelling seems to be of central importance

to Hendrick. She recommends ways of including men as often as possible in preschool care, but adds that these contacts are "not as satisfactory as a father's continuing presence in the home" (1988:270). In this phrase she has exposed her own partiality towards the "traditional" nuclear family and her unspoken but implied view that the mother-led home is inadequate.

For Hendrick, a non-sexist curriculum involves the teacher avoiding sex-role stereotyping by providing opportunities for all children to participate in all learning activities. Suggestions as to how this might be accomplished and lists of resources for non-sexist materials and literature are given.

Although in the final pages Hendrick discusses research findings of various studies on sexism, she is inclined to report only the positive findings. For example, when discussing research on sexism in children's literature, Hendrick notes only that a more healthy balance between male and female characters now exists (1988:274). The research she fails to cite report that these female characters frequently continue to be engaged in stereotypical activities and to have poorly developed characters (Williams 1987:156).

From this brief examination of gender content in Hendrick's textbook, her suggestions provide evidence that she advocates a liberal approach: teachers must become aware of their biases; opportunities should be made available to all children; male and female role models engaged in non-stereotypical activities should be available and/or presented. While these approaches are all positive and have been shown to be of some benefit, the effects are nonetheless limited.

In such a behavioral account of children's acquisition of a gendered identity, the child is a passive spectator, simply absorbing what s/he observes like a sponge and reproducing these observations in her/his behaviour. This contradicts the developmental approach taken elsewhere in the book where the child is a more active agent. My interpretation of this internal inconsistency is that Hendrick holds a primarily biological view of gender (despite her claims to the contrary), rather than a view of gender as flexible and actively processed by each child. This would explain her lapse into a behaviourist understanding of gender identity.

Further, Hendrick's tendency to minimize the effects of sexism and to present an overly-optimistic view of "breakthroughs" in anti-sexist struggles does not help young teachers-in-training to develop either self-awareness or the tools they will need to continue the struggle. Indeed, such an attitude may add fuel to a favourite argument of those who sustain the current backlash against feminism, which asserts that women have now achieved the equality with men sought in the 1960s and 70s.

Although I do not think Hendrick has consciously sided with this movement, her desire to present a rosy picture, probably to be encouraging to would-be child care workers, has a similar effect. Rather than empowering these young students with new awareness of both themselves and those in their care, this text does not alert them to the depth and pervasiveness of sexist behaviours and attitudes they will face in their careers. Further, students who might otherwise contradict Hendrick's optimistic analysis may be silent, finding

themselves isolated against the authority of both text and teacher. For the above reasons, I have cautiously categorized the Hendrick text as non-sexist.

The Activities Handbook (Croft 1990), used frequently for homework in *ECE I*, offers suggestions of hundreds of developmentally appropriate activities "to reflect our understanding of how children learn" (Croft 1990:xi). In this phrase, Croft has, I assume inadvertently, highlighted the relationship between constructed knowledge and everyday practice in her use of the term "our understanding". This leaves open the possibility of alternative ways of understanding children's development.

Children are referred to as "they" or as belonging to a specific age group, such as "two-year olds". Children's development is not differentiated according to sex in this text. The only section with any gender content or reference to gender content proposed ways to help children be familiar and comfortable with physical genital differences between girls and boys. In an attempt to deal with the topic of sexual abuse, Croft included proposals to help children say "no" and to learn the difference between a surprise and a secret. Categories of children's literature were recommended, but no heading dealt with gender difference, and no books were included with feminist content.

The Activities Manual accentuates the importance of developmental-appropriateness, a key concept in the ECE program. It does not differentiate between activities preferred by boys or girls. This silence on the issue of gender reifies the universality of developmental theory. With activities as the primary focus, this text does not help students with the application of these activities

except according to children's "normal" development. The activities are not presented as strategies to help children understand themselves and their world, but as ways to keep children happily occupied. This handbook, I have classified as gender-silent.

Early Childhood Education II

Early Childhood Education II, a second semester course, was taught last year by the feminist. The emphasis in this course was on young children's play and creativity, and the role of the teacher in fostering all aspects of children's development. Students observed and recorded information about children and their families, and began to design learning environments. Among the topics listed for presentation and discussion, one was entitled "encouraging children's non-sexist play", which was strategically scheduled just a few days before a reaction paper to the textbook relating to this topic was due.

Students were required to read two textbooks for this course; *Total Learning: Developmental Curriculum for the Young Child*, a "supplemental" text by Joanne Hendrick (1990) to *The Whole Child*; and Vivian Paley's short work, *Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner* (1984) regarding which the students wrote a brief essay. Because of the specific gender content of the latter text, I have paid particular attention to it both for its own merits, and as it stands in relation to other material on gender presented to the students.

Total Learning

Hendrick's text, *Total Learning* (1990), was recommended as an excellent presentation of early childhood education curriculum because it is organized according to the developmental needs of the child. A developmentally-based curriculum design centring on play is emphasized with the goal of fostering independent, creative children (Hendrick 1990:v). Hendrick argues that competence is the "cornerstone of self-esteem" (1990:4) and it is this characteristic which curriculum should advance. This text may be the most explicit example of teaching a child-centred curriculum organized by mainstream theories of child development.

With the individual child as the central focus in this text, the author speaks of the child in the singular. It seemed appropriate to try to identify the gender of this child by examining the use of pronouns and content of photographs in the text. The pronoun used most often for "the child" was "he", although this was frequently alternated with "she" and "he or she". The author did not appear to be alternating pronouns on the basis of gender stereotypes. However, the result was a somewhat contrived and stilted language structure, because "he" and "she" are gender specific.

This gender specificity tends to defeat the purpose of the pronoun debate, the goal of which is to have language become increasingly gender inclusive rather than differentiated. The use of "they" as a singular pronoun is grammatically acceptable (Bodine in Cameron 1990:166), as is sentence structure which avoids the singular, although this latter is difficult when the central focus is the individual

child. To be fair, the author is sensitive to the issues and has clearly made an attempt to respond positively by using more gender inclusive language.

In the illustrations, a good balance between what appear to be male and female children's photos was used, as well as numerous pictures representing members of visible minorities. There seemed to be an attempt to avoid stereotypical depictions of males and females. For example, a boy and a girl are shown cooking together (1990:120), a girl is shown expressing anger to a boy (1990:197), and a boy is shown feeding a doll (1990:236).

The teacher was not surprisingly referred to as "she" in this text. While this reflects the reality of child care, it also reinforces the gender specific nature of the work. I noted only one photo which might be of a male caregiver (1990:205), the selection of which (if it is indeed a man), however limited, may indicate an awareness of the significance of male caregivers. With respect to gender perspective, the emphasis was on the individual child's development with a deafening silence on issues of class, race and gender. At the same time a reasonable balance of boys and girls of various races are represented, and referred to as he or she. Because of this sensitivity, I have categorized this text as non-sexist.

The text emphasizes "hierarchical learning", where children learn one thing at a time in a series of steps (1990:6). Access to and agreement with the discourse of "developmental appropriateness" is central to understanding this text. The focus on children's play as central to curriculum is based on the author's assumption that "preschool children learn by using play to translate experience

into understanding" (1990:6). Hendrick defines play as activity which is "intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, process-oriented and pleasurable" (1990:18).

The role of the teacher is to provide a curriculum of "carefully selected learning opportunities based on the children's needs and interests" (1990:11), balancing authority with warmth, support, encouragement and respect for the children. "Total learning" for the child incorporates the physical, emotional, social, creative, and cognitive aspects of the child's personality into the curriculum (1990:13). Children's "needs" are not specified as particular to western middle class children. Rather, they are reified as universal to all children.

This book reinforces to student the belief that a child-centred curriculum is the norm. It generates an expectation of an ideal teacher who is almost omniscient in her perceptions of each child and who has no needs of her own. How will these students feel anything but inadequate when they join the labour force and are confronted with their own limitations? What happens to caregivers who cannot fulfil these impossible expectations in a world where people are supportive of a child-centred ideal but are unable to recognize caregivers as people in their own right? Hendrick's idealism in this text works against the students.

Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner

In this second text for *ECE II*, Paley (1985) compellingly focuses on children's fantasy play, specifically the very different kinds of fantasy play engaged in by boys and girls. From her observations over many years, she argues that boys tend to fantasize about being superheroes and girls tend to fantasize about being

princesses and playing house. In their pretend play, she argues that the children are working out the "lingering confusion about the roles they play" as girls and boys (1984:xi).

Paley admits that prior to her research, her curriculum suited girls better than boys, lending support to notions of the feminization of teaching and to research showing that aggression in boys receives more negative attention than aggression in girls. Paley's self-examination revealed that she had perceived the boy's noisy, violent superhero play as authentic rather than fantasy play, but had easily seen the girl's doll corner play as pretend. This had caused her to limit rather than expand free play time, in order to curb the boy's boisterous superhero play.

A tape recorder helped her to see that her own attitudes and fears blinded her to seeing children's play more clearly: the girls' play was also full of violence and noisy running; the boys were never really violent but simply played at it, pretended; the magical powers of princesses and mothers were as satisfying to girls as superheroes were to boys; when given more time at free play, the boys drifted towards the "work" tables and art which they had previously avoided.

Paley made some interesting and perceptive interpretations of the children's behaviour. She was reflexive and self-critical of her own interpretations of their behaviour and came to understand that they were actively constructing meaning in their play. Her emphasis on both fantasy and the actual words of children implies that in play, some very deep desires are being attended to. However, Paley was less interested in how children came to be the way they were

in the classroom than she was in identifying how to manage them there. She saw her job as accepting the pupils as she found them, "without becoming overly concerned about how or why they came to be" that way (1984:foreword,p.v). Unfortunately, on the very last page of the book, Paley gave away her own philosophy when she stated that superhero play "is the **natural, universal and essential** [my emphasis] play of little boys" (1984:116). So despite her emphasis on fantasy, desire and language, in the final analysis, Paley understands the differences between boys and girl's play as biological. Gender content falls into the non-sexist category, and moderately borders on sexism.

There are some other areas in which Paley's analysis is flawed. She did not provide any analysis of social context, tending to universalize from her particular experience. The school supplies and amount of space available suggest that this was a middle class group of kindergarten children studied. No mention was made of the significance of racial or cultural context, although the children celebrated conventional western holidays such as Halloween and Christmas. I assumed that most of the children were English-speaking and white-skinned on the basis of Paley's comments that a child who previously had a different "manner of speaking" (carrying the grammatical structure of "Black English" [for example, see Bee 1984:193]) adopted the more conventional way of speaking.

After reading this book, students were to write a short "reaction paper" to it, discussing how the book "relates to their own experience, what you learned about child development from the reading, if the book will be useful to you and how, what aspects of the reading you disagree with and why, and anything else

you want to say about the book" (*ECE II*, course outline). I was given a copy of one of their papers which, in the teacher's assessment, was both one of the best and expressed the sentiments of many students. Even though the student believed that it was "society who teaches boys how they 'should' act", her reflections suggest that Paley's underlying biological assumption of children's play is consistent with her own. She wrote that she now understands "boys' need to be the most aggressive superheroes" and recognizes that this is an "important stage in children's development". Her use of both the word "need" and the phrase a "stage" of "development" implies something fixed and intrinsic.

According to this student, the main benefit of the book was the recognition of her own biases in her work with children where she too had automatically "rewarded girl's domestic play while discouraging boy's adventurous fantasies". While this was an important awareness for her to make, to interpret children's play as natural suggests to me that she will be more tolerant of the behaviour of "superhero" boys but will perceive those boys who do not easily fall into this category as deficient. Paley has not advocated an anti-sexist approach because this interferes with the "natural" needs of the child.

Reflecting on the same-sex play of kindergarten children she has observed, the student wondered whether this was because they had learned to "differentiate between the two sexes" or whether "the boys are too aggressive and destructive and the girls do not want to get hurt". She articulated her own position on the subject: "I do not mean to be sexist towards the boys, but it is in fact reality that boys are overall more aggressive, destructive, and stronger than girls."

This student's positioning as a female allowed her to explain this phenomenon by imagining being overwhelmed by boys' play. She understands this as innately gender specific for herself and projects this onto other females - the little girls. The teacher's own bias about learning to tolerate differences between girls and boys play habits was one of the strongest points Paley tried to make, but the above sentence suggests that this was lost on at least this one student.

This book was presented in the second term of the first year and was the student's first sustained encounter with gender issues. It is not surprising that her ideas about gender are sometimes contradictory and unclear. On the other hand, student exposure to the Paley text was not apparent in a discussion with first year students following the completion of questionnaires and only one student mentioned the Paley text in her response.²⁷

The text appealed to the students' wishes for simple interpretations of gender difference. Clearly, on the basis of this student's writing, the material seems to have been presented outside the context of feminism. By default, this book lent support to areas of the curriculum fostering child-centred learning based on the individual child's natural development. The student has adopted the non-sexist (and flawed) perspective offered by Paley.

²⁷ This is discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter.

Early Childhood Education III

Curriculum for *Early Childhood Education III* was developed and taught by the same instructor as for *ECE I*. Students continued to learn theories of play and to design learning environments, with special emphasis on "preoperational cognitive development". The age group under examination was therefore pre-school children. Students continued to use Hendrick's *Total Learning* (1990) and Croft's *Activities Handbook* (1990) described above. The course outline's return to universal assumptions of children's development relegated gender to secondary importance once more.

Early Childhood Education IV

Coincident with the feminist perspective of the teacher, in *ECE IV*, the student's final semester, a notable return to gender identity issues was made. Again, developmental-appropriateness of curriculum design and practice for all age-groups of children is central. An added component of this course was the examination of "ways that early childhood teachers can integrate the anti-bias and multicultural perspectives into every aspect of the curriculum" (*ECE IV*: 1992 course outline).

Required readings for *ECE IV* as described in the course outline were:

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8 by Bredekamp (1987); Selma Wassermann's *Serious Players in the Primary Classroom* (1990); *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children (ABC)* by Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task

Force (1989); and Vivian Paley's *White Teacher* (1979). Numerous handouts, such as a "Checklist for a Non-Sexist Classroom" were distributed during the term.

For each major reading, students had to write a reaction paper as part of their evaluation. One effect of these short papers is that they make it difficult for students to not read the textbooks. A further assignment for students was to form small task groups which collaborated to develop a program for a specific age group meeting criteria for both developmental-appropriateness and for anti-bias content. Both a written discussion and oral presentation were required at the end of the term. Thus, students had to make an attempt to unite these two potentially contradictory concepts into practice.

In the schedule of topics, the students appeared to have spent three weeks discussing gender identity, stereotyping, discriminatory behaviour and anti-bias curriculum (*ECE IV*: course outline). These discussions coincided with the due dates for reaction papers on *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (1989).

I chose to concentrate on this text in my analysis of course content for *ECE IV* because the material reflects a contemporary ideal for teaching young children. The other required texts in this course also offer thoughtful and somewhat critical understandings of teaching young children, lending support to the substance of *Anti-Bias Curriculum*. For example, the Wasserman text offers some important reflections on the realities of the classroom, arguing that only when teachers are themselves empowered can they empower children (1990: chapter 3). In the following chapter, I first describe the contents of the *ABC* text, after which I present an analysis of these contents.

CHAPTER VII

Anti-Bias Curriculum

Philosophical Perspective

Following in the footsteps of such activists as Paulo Friere, the *Anti-Bias Curriculum* text adopts the traditions and philosophy of humanist education, the fundamental concept of which is "empowerment". This refers to "people having the intellectual and emotional ability to confront oppression and work together to create a more just society" (Derman Sparks et al 1989:5). Anti-bias educators understand that ascribed differences such as race, ability and gender are connected with privilege and power. They also understand that children absorb the spoken and unspoken messages of these differences at an early age, learning about social hierarchy.

Curriculum goals of an anti-bias education are "to enable every child: to construct a knowledgeable, confident, empathetic, and just interaction with diversity; and to develop critical thinking and the skills for standing up in the face of injustice" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:ix). Becoming empowered with a positive identity depends upon each child's circumstances in the "prevailing bias" of their society.

Children with an anti-bias identity and attitudes are children who are respectful of differences and who "speak up when they perceive something is unfair" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:ix). Ultimately, freedom for "the development of each child to her or his fullest potential" is the goal of such education, nothing less than social democracy. Therefore, the children's perspective in the classroom

must be taken seriously, as a necessary component to their sense of empowerment.

Anti-Bias Curriculum takes a pro-active stance towards discriminatory practices because the ultimate goal is social change. Such practices include sexism, racism, heterosexism, and handicappism. In Derman-Sparks et al's opinion, to be silent in the classroom about these practices leaves the status quo comfortably intact. "It is not differences in themselves that cause the problems, but how people respond to differences" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:6). Thus, silence, which is at best a form of denial, "allows children to adopt the socially prevailing attitudes" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:8).

Similarly, when a "color-blind" or "gender-blind" position is taken, arguing that we are all the same, the experience of difference is trivialized and the normative position of the teacher is denied. The authors argue that this "blindness" erroneously assumes "that the issues of development are the same for all children and that they all share similar contexts for growth" (Derman-Sparks 1989:6). The dominant experience continues to be reproduced as the norm, while those identified by difference marginalized in token positions.

The authors cite research findings which support their activist position. In constructing identities, children acquire incomplete categorizations of difference, including evaluative judgements, termed pre-prejudices, as early as the second year. These are well-internalized by four years of age (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:2). Research findings suggest that a child who is a member of a minority or subordinate group may have a negative "reference group identity" as a result of

their experience in the dominant culture. It is argued that these children need to "construct a strong group identity for healthy development" while children who belong to the dominant group need to have their biases confronted (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:4-5).

A page of definitions further locates the authors' philosophical viewpoint. Sexism means "any attitude, action, or institutional practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their sex". Stereotypes refer to "an oversimplified generalization about a particular group, race, or sex, which usually carries derogatory implication". Bias is defined as "any attitude, belief or feeling that results in, and helps to justify, unfair treatment of an individual because of his or her identity".

Prejudice refers to "an attitude, opinion, or feeling formed without adequate prior knowledge, thought, or reason" against "any person, group, or sex". And pre-prejudice is the "beginning ideas and feelings in very young children that may develop into real prejudice through reinforcement by prevailing societal biases". Children's misconceptions may be based on their "limited experience and developmental level", or "imitations of adult behaviour" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:3).

Thus, anti-bias is defined as "an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the 'isms'. In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism and handicappism, it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge,

and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression" (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:3).

These definitions set the tone for the straightforward agenda of an anti-bias curriculum (abc). For example, the authors criticize most multicultural programs of degenerating into a "tourist curriculum" wherein "exotic" differences between cultures are emphasized rather than the day-to-day problems of different peoples living in another culture (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:7). An anti-bias approach cannot simply be added on to existing curricula because it challenges the traditional assumptions of the whole. Integration throughout re-evaluated curricula is the goal.

An Anti-Sexist Approach to Gender Identity

In the chapter entitled "Learning About Gender Identity", the authors present the goals of an anti-sexist curriculum:

1. "to free children from constraining, stereotypic definitions of gender role so that no aspects of development will be closed off simply because of a child's sex."
 2. "to foster children's healthy gender identity by enabling them to gain clarity about the relationship between biological identity and gender roles."
 3. "to promote equality of development for both sexes by facilitating each child's participation in activities necessary for physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth."
 4. "to develop children's skills for challenging sexist stereotypes and behaviours."
- (Derman-Sparks 1989:49).

These ideals are located within a context of active adult intervention. Traditional theories of children's gender identity formation help to inform teachers of appropriate responses to children's questions and comments. These theories differentiate stages of gender identity development: children who know their biological sex, children who know that their own sex is constant, children who understand that sex is constant for others, and children who have adopted societal norms for gender roles (Derman-Sparks 1989:50). Although "the socially prevailing beliefs about gender are powerful", the authors believe that providing a rich anti-sexist curriculum will eventually change children's beliefs and behaviours (Derman-Sparks 1989:51).

The authors offer practical suggestions for changing the environment, such as reorganizing or expanding play areas and equipment so that they are not gender specific in content and location. A challenge to contemporary liberal understanding that free choice in play is a key element in "healthy individual development" is given. They argue that "complete reliance on children's self-directed activities may limit rather than expand development" because children are generally already constrained in their gender roles (Derman-Sparks 1989:52). Their belief is that actively involving children in new activities helps to break down sex-role stereotyping, although they offer a cautious reminder that the goal is exposure to new activities, not coercion. Neither girls nor boys are given higher priority; the authors merely suggest ways to expand gender-typical play for each group.

Other suggestions made are designed to help children comprehend that it is their anatomy, not their behaviour, which makes them male or female. The authors recommend the use of books, photographs and pictures which contradict gender stereotypes and family stereotypes in order to expand children's awareness of new possible positions for themselves and others.

Teachers act as role-models themselves, sharing classroom maintenance tasks equally among boys and girls, and attempting atypical skills themselves. Derman-Sparks et al also cautions that teachers must be sensitive to the "ethnic and cultural background" of children which may impact on expectations about gender roles. The "creative tension(s) between respecting diversity and countering sexism" are resolved through compromise and finding alternatives (1989:54). Discussion with parents may help alleviate homophobic fears about encouraging non-traditional gender behaviours.

One chapter is devoted to strategies for intervening in discriminatory interactions, "Learning to Resist Stereotyping and Discriminatory Behavior." The focus is on young children's "pre-prejudices", helping such children recognize their discomfort over unfamiliar difference and offering alternative explanations of perceived difference. Guidelines are offered for teachers who can help children by setting clear limits, by intervening immediately at the time of the interaction, by supporting the excluded child, by reinterpreting the reasons for discriminatory behaviour, by supporting children when they notice discrimination, and by planning more long-term strategies for children who continue to engage in discriminatory practices.

Activities are suggested to help children learn to think critically about bias. These involve comparing stereotypical pictures with more authentic pictures, identifying what they like and don't like about stories which show socially unacceptable stereotypes, and role playing. The key philosophy of an anti-bias curriculum is open acknowledgement and direct confrontation of discriminatory behaviours (Derman-Sparks et al 1989:69-76). The authors' reasoned arguments are consistent with Briskin's definition of an anti-sexist curriculum.

Teachers of young children who are unaware of their own discriminatory attitudes and biases cannot empower children to deal with theirs. The chapter, "Getting Started: A Self-Education Guide" considers this problem and offers ways to move towards teacher self-awareness. The main vehicle suggested is involvement in support groups' consciousness-raising activities. For example, one recommended activity to pinpoint sexist attitudes is to "write down your list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours for girls and boys, men and women", comparing and discussing these with the group (Derman Sparks 1989:111-118). With self-awareness and a commitment to the need for an anti-bias curriculum, the teacher is presumed to be well-equipped to set up an anti-bias classroom.

The final section from this text which I outline is a three page Appendix entitled "Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Sexism and Racism". These guidelines range from checking the illustrations for stereotypes, tokenism, and character agency, to determining the author's background and bias. Other steps are checking the story line for more covert aspects of discrimination and watching for "loaded" words. The authors ask the teacher to question such

particulars as whose dominant standards are upheld for "success", how problems are presented and resolved, and how females are represented. Each of the ten points is described briefly, and each gives examples of what sexism and racism might look like in practice. These means of analysis appear to be a practical tool which students could easily refer back to in their practice.

Evaluation and Critique of ABC

Anti-Bias Curriculum is a readable textbook, written in simple language and typed using a large font on oversized pages. Short chapters punctuated with headings in bold type keep the reader clear on the topic under investigation. Goals of each chapter's theme are highlighted in an outlined box. Each suggested activity is emphasized with a large dot in the margin. A few select illustrations reinforce the meanings of the text's contents. The text seems designed to be a resource guide for those working with young children; some theory precedes numerous practical suggestions and is something one could return to again and again.

This text offers a presentation of gender identity construction and of the role of the teacher in challenging sexist social relations which is more complex than others in the ECE program. As well, this is the only ECE required text which has presented sexism as emerging from specific cultural contexts. It is alone in the ECE program in its recommendation of an anti-sexist approach to curriculum. Notwithstanding this relative praise, I also present some discussion and critique.

In chapters not considering a specific "ism", examples of discriminatory behaviour tended to be about racism. Thus, the main emphasis of the text's contents, perhaps inadvertently, tended to be anti-racist. It is also true that sexism was not presented as a secondary problem (nor were other discriminatory practices). Each problem was given more-or-less balanced consideration. The book's American context makes racism a more relevant source for examples.

The text's humanist agenda is very explicit, with the democratic values upheld by the authors in evidence throughout. Educational theorists would identify this position as "critical pedagogy", whose goals are "critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change" through empowered citizens (Ellsworth 1989:300). The authors' idealism about anti-bias curriculum are grounded in examples and practical suggestions.

A Guide for the Converted

This textbook is primarily a guide for the converted, however, for those who are already committed to or minimally interested in an anti-bias agenda. Well-meaning teachers who think that teacher-intervention means interfering with children's free choice might reconsider their position on the basis of their reading of this text.

No persuasive argument for anyone with unexamined racist or sexist beliefs to change is offered. Those who exploit the power and authority of their position or are seeking to do so, will not easily be persuaded to give this up, certainly not because of the rational, anti-bias arguments given. Students and teachers of

young children are already in marginalized positions with very little power, so the document's arguments are appropriate to their objectives.

There is an element of elitism and hierarchy in the chapter entitled "Getting Started", in the author's use of the pronouns "you" and "your" (e.g. Derman-Sparks 1989:111) which may have wider implications. This usage subtly differentiates the authors, as the ones who "know" and are free of bias, from the readers who are being enlightened to shed their biases. Since it is my understanding that anti-bias can only occur in an environment which is also anti-hierarchy, this attitude startled me and caused me to reconsider the authors' intent. Perhaps this explicit use of "you" demonstrates an overall attitude of superiority in general towards the reader.

Sins of Omission

On the subject of social class, the authors were silent. In our haste to address issues of race, ability, and sex, have we forgotten about social class? This is particularly disturbing since the roots of theories of oppression usually originate in a Marxist class analysis. Rather than integrating class with all the other forms of oppression, it is left out. Why? It seems to me that the absence of any discussion about a group as substantive and as marginalized as the poor in a book addressing anti-bias is significant. Similarly, other forms of oppression known to harm children were not mentioned such as lack of attractiveness and obesity. Why not?

This book is the result of a task force specifically set up to develop an anti-bias curriculum. The humanist values it advocates are also middle-class values.

Although the authors analyze oppressed groups with sensitivity, questioning the partiality and investment of mainstream "knowledge", they do not question the construction of their own middle class values. Perhaps the authors are simply unaware of their "classism", as is so often the case with well-meaning people. I have no doubt that this task force was very well-intentioned but they have failed to address one of the most basic aspects of critical pedagogy: the power imbalance between students and teachers.

Teacher Knows Best

Ellsworth suggests that this power imbalance must be examined as an integral part of critical pedagogy and that educators must recognize the ways in which privilege makes their "knowledge" always only partial (1989:314). There is no pure we/they polemic and no easy victim/perpetrator dichotomy. The teacher, by virtue of her position, is always at least potentially in authority over, not one with, the students.

Ellsworth's conclusion is from a poststructuralist perspective: we are all positioned in multiple and contradictory ways which defy any simple fundamental, universal, absolute, moral principle. If we hold multiple positions, then the goal of group unity is impossible and must be replaced by one of interdependency. This requires the building of "a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the classroom" (Ellsworth 1989:317). Difference then becomes a strength to be incorporated, not a weakness to be erased. Since each story or

narrative is always partial, more contribute to our understanding, and an ever wider array of possible solutions.

The power imbalance between teacher and pupil is more problematic when the student is a young child who has very limited power precisely because their knowledge and experience is so limited. The ABC goal is the development of each child's fullest potential through a process of empowerment. But how empowered are children when the agenda for what they may and may not say or do has been dictated by someone in authority over their lives?

Can Teachers Empower the Very Young?

It seems to me that this question runs the risk of conflating socialization with teaching. As children grow, they are actively trying to comprehend the world around them and their relation to it. Is the attempt to open up new possible positions which children can take up (or leave) should they so desire so terrible? Is this coercion? The goal to remove as many barriers from their path as possible requires active intervention.

If we are agreed that to do and say nothing carries the full weight of the beliefs of the status quo, then providing alternatives is not a violation of freedom. Ellsworth argues that the disruption of "business as usual" opens up "semiotic space for discourses normally marginalized and silenced" (1989:320). Identity emerges from historical experience, not fixed, but in continuous process, as a vehicle for "making more complex the subject positions possible, visible, and legitimate at any given historical moment" (Ellsworth 1989:322).

In the case of the teacher of young children, even though she herself cannot fully know the child's experience of their reality, she does have the conceptual tools to put herself in the child's position, however imperfectly. The teacher can be aware of the authority she holds, and exploit this by taking up the discourse of the excluded child, by giving the child words, a vocabulary with which to speak and to resist discrimination. The child is not obliged to take up this position opened to her/him. Such a use of authority is not to be faulted since it tries to correct unbalanced power relations among the children.

The Omnipotent Child

This text can be faulted along with virtually all of the ECE texts, for putting the teacher in the untenable position of the one who "knows". The teacher is both the child's servant, and in authority over them. The responsibility for detecting, interpreting, and confronting bias and being sensitive to children's multiple positions lies with the teacher. This is in addition to all the other demands being made upon her.

Walkerdine argued that the "autonomous" child in the classroom is a fantasy made possible only by the loving, "total gaze" of the teacher who is "responsible for the freeing of each little individual" (Luke et al 1992:16-20). Thus, the authority of the female teacher carries the meaning of the loving mother rather than the strict father. In a child-centred pedagogy, the teacher is the servant of the omnipotent child. The child is encouraged to live in the imaginary, where satisfaction is guaranteed through the all-giving mother. Furthermore, "the child-centred discourse does not disrupt the natural difference

discourse because the logics of naturalism and individualism inform both" (Clark 1989:248).

*Guardians of an Impossible Dream*²⁸

The minimal treatment given to the teacher's naming of their own biases, the unspoken assumption that awareness of biases is enough for them to be conquered, and the non-recognition of the privileged position of the teacher lead me to conclude that the ABC teacher is positioned to fail. As has happened to so many good ideas, anti-bias curriculum runs the risk of becoming another oppressive regime of truth: institutionalized, standardized and bureaucratized. Such a consequence would be antithetical to the spirit and intent of an anti-bias curriculum. In comparison with the other texts offered in the ECE program, this one is clearly the one which best addresses gender identity. The authors understand gender to be socially constructed, and make a clear distinction between gender and biology. On the surface, the goal of an anti-sexist curriculum is not liberal feminism, where equality between women and men using a male standard is demanded; nor are women viewed as better than men, as a radical feminist position argues. The goal is empowerment and extends to all children so that each can attain their fullest potential.

This text was no exception to the rule of taking mainstream child development theory as the norm. At first, I interpreted the authors' usage of these tenets as a clever and deliberate appropriation. With developmental theory

²⁸ I credit this term to Valerie Walkerdine, "Progressive Pedagogy and Political Struggle" (p.22), in Luke and Gore, 1992.

in which the individual is sovereign as the backdrop, the authors then challenge the assumptions of universality in developmental theory by claiming that they inhibited the development of the individual. Children can develop a positive identity only when opportunities that sabotage their growth are removed (Derman Sparks 1989:x).

But perhaps this was not their deliberate intention. In spite of the authors' ability to contextualize every-day life and to elaborate the constraining effects of institutional practices, the individual is still at the core of their humanist values. An essential "me" and "you", a fixed identity, is assumed which, given the correct environment, will become free and empowered. The phrase from the previous paragraph exemplifies this: something is standing in the way of the emergence of the child's positive identity. The *abc* teacher is positioned as the "guardian of an impossible dream" (Walkerdine in Luke 1992:22).

In Balance...

This is the only text offered to ECE students which offers substantial contents devoted to sexism in theory and in practice. Concrete examples and suggestions about what can be done to help may empower students to better understand sexism in their lives and in their work. The authors identify some of the nuance of sexist behaviour, and propose ways of counteracting it. The language and format are accessible and serve as a useful resource.

Unfortunately, *ABC* was not presented until very near the end of the course, and indeed the last weeks of the early childhood program. In contrast to the director who believed that gender content was "everywhere", I found that

gender content occupies a marginal position in the overall curriculum.²⁹ Its centrality to early childhood education seems to correspond to the instructor of the course. The feminist instructor provided much more gender content for students to explore than a non-feminist instructor. However, there was no evidence of opposition to the course changes the feminist made on the part of other faculty members.

Since the presence of a the feminist instructor coincided with the introduction of the *ABC* text, I asked her how this book came to be used at the college. She explained that she had proposed it for use when the course outlines were being finalized and the other instructors were ready and eager to agree. She felt that she was merely a catalyst providing fuel to an existing desire to incorporate the ideas expressed in the text. She remarked that her feminism was never an issue for the faculty, since a feminist perspective is acceptable and to some extent, the norm among ECE educators.

Within the context of "normal child development" which has comprised the student's program to this point, the addition of these issues at "the eleventh hour" does not significantly challenge their previous learning. Rather, diversity is situated as deviant, quite apart from what is "normal". It is not integrated into their whole learning experience, but is added on. This leaves the foundations of individual child development intact, even though theories of diversity emerge from challenges to these very assumptions.

²⁹ An analysis of curriculum content for 1992-93 academic year when the same feminist instructor is teaching all four section of ECE would help resolve this question.

On a related note, with one exception, the textbooks for the ECE courses were written and published in the United States. Although a Canadian edition of *The Whole Child* is offered, what makes it 'Canadian' is as short chapter on the history and delivery of child care in Canada. Within a context which presents "the child" as the universal subject, there is no need to offer specifically Canadian material. If child development is a natural, incontrovertible process, and early childhood educational practices are presented as ways to enhance this process, then the source and context of the text's knowledge need not be questioned. If, on the other hand, child development theory is a cultural construct, then this is a salient point. The permeation of American material in Canadian schools reproduces the American model of childhood.

Retrospections of A Former Student

I had occasion to discuss the ECE program with a former student who completed the ECE program in the early 1970s in its earliest days. While reminiscing about the program, she did not remember any course material directly addressing the construction of gender identity. At that time, she said that there were few text books available for any of the courses, and could not recall children's gender identity formation as a topic of study. This is consistent with the fact that only later in the 1970s and 1980s was the idea that gender is socially constructed an acceptable and legitimate perspective.

On the other hand, she said that this early program was conceived and developed by feminists from the 1960s women's movement who believed that the establishment of collective co-operative day care was central to women's

emancipation. From her perspective, feminism permeated the whole program in a "sift-down effect of the teacher's orientation". What she recalls was the stress on becoming self-aware as women through consciousness raising. She recalled an incident which she found disturbing when she was a young woman when students were expected to look at their genitals with mirrors. This occasion, she felt was typical of the then-popular approach taken: self-awareness and a celebration of the female experience.

During the early 1970s when she was a student, she believed that it was not gender but world politics - conflict in the Middle East, the war in Vietnam, and the Cold War - which shaped the ECE program in important ways. She remembers a strong emphasis on teaching and learning cooperative means of resolving conflict. Today, she feels that this emphasis was the result of the teachers being exclusively female as well as having adopted a relatively radical feminist perspective, so that only the female experience and interpretation of "reality" were available.

She reasoned that the ideal of cooperation reflects the optimism and idealism of the early women's movement: adding women and women's (better) ways of knowing into a male-dominated world would change society and eliminate sexism. She felt that these beliefs limited the offerings of the ECE program, affected the way in which day care programs were organized and structured, and definitely influenced the way in which day care children were socialized.

This woman entered the child-care profession because she "adored children". She felt it was an easy choice, a natural extension of her desires as a

young woman at that time. She felt that her education did not prepare her for how very hard the work was, both scheduled working hours and inevitable committee work. She mentioned the "relentless responsibility" in professionally caring for children. For example, she said that just for a teacher to go to the washroom must be planned since the children could never be left unsupervised.

Such workplace constraints on her activities were quite a shock for her. She felt her schooling did not prepare her for the realities of child care. She worked in and coordinated a day care centre for many years, and although she has recently launched a new career, she still speaks passionately about the importance of collective child care. The sorts of constraints this former student mentioned, when seen from the present context of the ECE program where ever-increasing demands are made on the students in terms of responsibility they must carry, and information they must absorb, I find myself wondering whether a great deal was lost from those early days of ECE. Contemporary ECE students have been presented with an unrealistic ideal for early childhood education which they cannot possibly meet.

Looking Ahead...

Were those earlier students better off with less formal curriculum and more attention to process? Was a curriculum which was not surrounded by conditions established by the ministry (e.g. professional competencies) a better one? Have the additional requirements for ECE resulted in a better program? Have the priorities of its early idealism been replaced with the priorities of the

state? In short, has what was initially a feminist project been appropriated into the status quo?

That the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities is currently moving towards standardizing the curriculum for all college programs in Ontario gives some indication of the direction it envisions for community colleges. This proposal is presented as an effort to allow some students to be exempted from certain courses on the basis of their life or work experiences, and to allow students to transfer from one college to another within the province (CBC news, Oct 13, 1992). This step has been designed to address the vast numbers of returning part-time college students. The benefits of such a move would be few for the ECE program, because students who already have related education can enter an intensive one year ECE program. The relatively young age of students means that very few would benefit.

However, such a step would severely curtail the relative autonomy I found within this ECE program. There might be collaboration among the various ECE programs to arrive at a suitable and agreeable curriculum. This could lead to a more stream-lined program. State control would almost certainly increase, probably in the form of more bureaucratic regulation. It is impossible to say how such changes might change each individual program and how much autonomy would remain once instituted. It is unlikely that the anti-bias curriculum content I found in this college program would be wholeheartedly adopted across the province.

On the basis of literature regarding community colleges and my own set of biases about the nature of the college experience, I had a number of expectations about what I would find researching within a community college program. I expected that fiscal restraints, state determined curriculum, and a sense of 'second-class' status would produce apathy and mediocrity in both faculty and student populations, and that out-dated, prescribed materials and traditional pedagogical practices would be used in an undemanding program. However, my research into the early childhood education program proved that these expectations were unsubstantiated. In fact, my findings contradict many general assertions which have been made about a community college education.

However, because I examined only this program, and found that a number of highly contingent circumstances contributed to what I found, there is no way I can assume that the positive aspects of this program would be found anywhere else. Neither can I assume the opposite. However, in the final chapters, I will show that contingent circumstances are critical not only to the curriculum contents, but also to the classroom experience. It is the unpredictable, internal, relational components of the program, such as student:teacher dynamics, which greatly modify the structural components of the program.

With early childhood educators contradictorily positioned by the curriculum as all-knowing and all-serving, it becomes increasingly important to identify how the students see themselves as gendered subjects, and how they understand themselves in relation to the children in their care, who are also gendered subjects. In the next chapters, I show that the relationship between the students

in historically specific positions and the curriculum contents is a process of interaction and interpretation. This element of process is one factor which cannot be either controlled or predicted.

CHAPTER VIII

Student Voices

As discussed in Chapter VI, both first and second year students were exposed to at least some of the issues constituting the debates over how children come to know themselves as girls or boys in their curricula. Because I understand meaning not as fixed, but as actively constructed by subjects positioned in discursive practices, I wanted to know what meanings the students were themselves giving to this material.

Thus, I do not assume that the students passively learn what they have been exposed to, nor do I assume that what they remember corresponds to what they have been taught. Rather, each particular historically located subject interprets what has been presented in such a way that not only makes the most sense within her/his social world, but also best coincides with their desires and allows her/him to preserve their knowledge of that world.

With this in mind, I wanted to make a preliminary investigation into the feelings and attitudes of students towards the course material they had been exposed to on gender identity. How did they understand this information? Did they retain it? Did it fit with their own perspectives? How did they situate themselves as gendered subjects and as future child care workers?

Justifying the Method

The research technique I used to probe the relation between the curriculum and the meanings constructed by the students was a brief questionnaire.³⁰ The social organization of speech coordinates ideology in lived activities. As such, I wanted the students to choose their own words for their answers because these words reveal how they see themselves in relation to the world around them.

The above methodology was not intended to stand alone. Many aspects of survey research are contrary to my understanding of solid research. This is primarily because survey results are often used to quantify categories which obfuscate the quality of responses and the social and historical contexts from which they emerge. My original proposal was to observe several weeks of classes with the students in addition to administering some questionnaires. This would have given me a richer sensitivity to discursive classroom practices, providing a social context within which to situate completed questionnaires.

However, the students' school year ended much sooner than I had been led to believe, and, in the interest of finishing my work sooner rather than later, this unforeseen time constraint forced me to abandon any lengthy observation period and to concentrate on obtaining such primary source data as I could. In analyzing responses, to the extent possible I have considered each written response in the context of all the answers of that particular student and in the context of what I

³⁰ see Appendix B

observed of classroom dynamics rather than aggregating responses or lapsing into generalizations. As well, although I was aware that there would be a few minutes devoted to discussion, there was no way to anticipate either the lengthy discussion which followed the completion of questionnaires, or the striking difference between the first and second year student groups. As a result, I did not bring a tape-recorder to the class.

I was also very much part of the discussion with the students as they rapidly fired their questions. I did not take notes during the discussion, since I did not want to disrupt the flow of conversation nor could I have answered all their questions and also been a part of the exchange had I been note-taking. As it was, the students were unaware that their discussion would be part of my analysis as well. This was not hidden from them but neither was it made explicit.

After the first day's discussion, I spent time reflecting on the student's various points of view with the instructor of the group. It was only after I met with the class on the second day that I wrote down in detail my observations of the two groups. Thus, some particulars were lost in the interim and I had only a few direct quotes from their verbal input. However, the spirit of the discussion and the content were conserved.

Because I had to act quickly to obtain these data, the questionnaire was not pre-tested for reliability of responses to the questions given and I have identified some flaws and biases in the questionnaire design. All the students were exposed to the same questions and since opinions and attitudes offered in the students' written responses for the most part correspond to the group

discussion, this provides evidence that the questionnaire responses are reliable. In cases where there appears to be some discrepancy, I have introduced arguments to explain these differences.

In defence of this methodology, I had discovered no other research in this area. There was no way to anticipate what I would find, except through a literature review and by plunging into the field. The opinions and data arising from student perspectives on gender issues were initially intended to be a minor part of this thesis, as a means to reflect on the impact of curriculum content.

It was only after I had gone into the field, collected the data and had begun to evaluate my observations that I recognized that student agency was more significant than anticipated. In particular, the discovery of a feminist teacher on the ECE faculty was a surprise, altering the sorts of questions it became important to ask. When I found that gender identity construction was a meaningful part of the curriculum, the students' reaction to this material and student attitudes towards feminism became the next obvious questions.

The process and results of data collection described in the following pages are the result of the compromise forced by circumstances rather than adherence to any particular methodological model. A profile of the two groups of students I encountered is given, as well as a brief description of our meetings to provide some social context. I have organized and discussed the students' written and verbal responses thematically on the basis of topics introduced in the questionnaire as follows: student career desires, student understanding of gender

identity construction, student expectations about mothering, and student attitudes towards feminism.

Student Profile

Both first and second year students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire during scheduled class time at the end of their academic year. All 52 students complied with this request. Completion time for each group was about twenty minutes. I met with the former group first on a Monday morning and the latter group the following Tuesday morning.

In both groups, prior to the distribution of questionnaires, I identified myself and gave a general outline of my purpose which was a reiteration of the preamble at the top of each questionnaire. After the students had returned the finished questionnaires, I spent about half an hour to forty five minutes responding to questions.

A demographic profile of the "typical" ECE student was derived from their answers. All but one student was female, there was one university graduate, all but one student (from the second year group) claimed to be full-time, and there was one student (also from the second year group) who had recently graduated from the program.³¹

The ECE student's age is consistent with the average age of other Algonquin college students. Although the students' age ranged from 18 to 40

³¹ The workshop on infant and child care was not a regular class but an intensive review. This explains the presence of the two students who were not normally part of the second year group.

years, the overwhelming majority were between 20 and 24 years of age. Six of the first year students were either 18 or 19 years old, and only one second year student was still in her teens. Thirty-eight students were in their twenties, three were in their thirties, and one student was forty. Two students declined to answer the age-related question, and one response was indecipherable.

With respect to the prior education of the ECE students, thirty six had completed high school³² and one had completed grade ten. Of the remaining twelve, all reported some post-secondary education, including one with a university degree. Three students over thirty said they had completed post-secondary education, indicating to me that child care was a career change for them. Three students wrote that they were taking ECE courses while waiting to get into teacher's college.

The last question on the questionnaire asked the students if they would be willing to participate in an interview with me at a later date, and fourteen students agreed. Three students wrote *why* they were unable to meet with me. For example, one wrote: "No. Unfortunately I have no time available. Sorry." Such explanations indicate the difficulty some women have with saying "no", without offering an explanation. This tendency has been interpreted as a relational sign of insecurity. Although in a few instances I would have liked to

³² Since it is possible to be a high school graduate from either grade twelve or grade thirteen in Ontario, I combined the responses of students who said they had completed either grade twelve or grade thirteen with those who said they had completed high school.

establish a more precise meaning for some individual responses, I found that I had more than enough data to appreciate the ECE students' perspectives.

Group Conditions

The first research group consisted of 29 female students, one of the two cohorts of first year students whose first year was almost complete.³³ Class time was designated for review to prepare for their final exam in the course. It was the last time these students were meeting for this course and they were in the midst of exams for other courses.

The 23 second year students³⁴ were attending an intensive one day workshop on infant and toddler care in preparation for their final exam. Having just completed their last field placement, many of this cohort had not seen each other nor had they met as a class for six weeks. They expected to graduate the following week. There was one male student among twenty-one females. This group was very animated and talkative, perhaps as a reflection of their teacher's relaxed and spontaneous conduct.

Three students who arrived late were given questionnaires to fill in after class which they later handed in to the teacher. They seemed pleased to have the opportunity to complete them and clearly trusted the teacher to respect their

³³ An instructor remarked that the other first-year group whom I did not meet had several older students in it. She felt that their maturity would have generated significantly different responses and discussion. Because the students were virtually finished for the year, there was not an opportunity to meet with them.

³⁴ Two students were not regular members of this cohort, but were attending the workshop on their own initiative.

privacy. I kept these questionnaires separate from the others since these students had participated in the group discussion prior to completing the questionnaires. In one instance, the student was clearly influenced by the prior discussion and her responses are discussed later in the chapter. I did not note any significant difference in the quality of response of the other two latecomers.

In both groups, the students sat in a semi-circle and had clear views of each other and of the teacher who sat or stood at the front. I was seated near the teacher but within the semi-circle. Some desks were empty, typically near the front of the classroom. Teachers took attendance in both classes by passing around a sheet of paper to be signed by the students.

The instructor of the first year group has many years of experience. She tended towards "mothering" the students. She also tended to control the students' interactions. This latter characteristic made the traditional teacher-as-authority-over-student dynamic apparent. For example, when more than one student at a time spoke, she scolded them. When a student expressed an idea which she had not reflected on carefully, the instructor gently mocked her. In spite of these traits (and quite possibly because of them), she seemed to be well-liked and to have a warm and positive rapport with the students.

As the first year group filled in the questionnaires, they were very quiet with no discussion amongst themselves. The room was so quietly intense that one student who came in late whispered to me that she was afraid she had mistaken the date of the class exam.

In contrast to the solemn hush over the first year group, filling in the questionnaire for the second-year students involved a fair amount of chatting and laughing with one another. I had not asked them to not discuss their answers, nor did I stop them. The noise and conversation stopped only for a few moments at a time as they worked.

Initially, I was concerned that the noise level indicated that the students were not taking my questionnaire seriously. In a subsequent conversation with the instructor of this group, she said that there is always a lot of boisterous discussion in her classroom. She understands this noise level to be an important factor in the learning process and did not think the students had not taken the questions seriously. Rather, they felt free to express their exuberance in her classroom.

During the discussion, the teacher for the second year class contributed very little verbally to the interactions in the group, although she was actively attentive. Vocal students carried the dialogue and needed no prompting from either myself or the teacher. She intervened once to invite quiet students to participate but did not press them. From the little I observed of this teacher's pedagogy, she appears to treat the students as adults, giving them room to speak without controlling them. I saw no evidence of a traditional teacher/student model of pedagogy.

After the students had handed in their responses, I invited the students to ask me questions. In the first year group, almost the entire class time was devoted to this discussion rather than their scheduled review. A lively discussion continued after the class was adjourned and a few students came and thanked me

for coming and bringing "such an interesting discussion" to their class. Less time was available for discussion in the second-year group because they had a lot of material to cover in their all-day workshop. I had no interaction with or feedback from students although I did discuss my observations with the instructor at a later date.

The first question asked by a student in each group seemed to establish the parameters of the discourse. In the first year group, a student innocently asked why I had asked if they would call themselves feminist and a great deal of their subsequent discussion centred on this question. This established the discourse as student-teacher: students asked questions to which I responded. I believe all the students from this group spoke at least once, even though the group was quite large. They did not seem to be inhibited either about asking me questions or interacting with each other.

In the second year group, the first student to speak out remarked she was disturbed that research on gender in ECE had not been done before. She was referring to the preamble on the questionnaire which mentions that "how gender is connected to early childhood education" has "not been studied". This query established the discourse as pro-feminist and factors influencing the formation of gender identity became the prevailing theme of the group interaction.

In spite of the earlier noise level in the classroom, the discussion over the next half-hour continued to be quite serious. However, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, there were a number of students who did not participate in the discussion. The seating arrangements in the classroom bore a

direct relationship to who spoke and who was silent; discussion was predominantly among students in closest proximity to the teacher. The further students were away from the front, the less likely they were to participate.

Our Future Caregivers

In order to grasp something of the desires of the students in their career choice I asked them: "What reasons were most important to you when choosing the Early Childhood Education Program as your post-secondary education?" Students generally wrote three or four short explanatory phrases indicating their reasons.

Why ECE at Algonquin

Responses showed that this open-ended question was interpreted by the students on at least two levels. Several responses focused their reasons for choosing the specific program at Algonquin, rather than their reasons for choosing a career in early childhood, which was what I had hoped to find out. Here, the lack of pre-testing was evident.

For example, "the program is an excellent recommendation", "the program is knowledgeable, interesting and keeps you informed", "the program was highly recommended to me", and "the courses this program includes" were literal answers to my question. They took it as given that they would desire to work with children: "to learn teaching skills. To be qualified for work I wanted to do."

Often what is **not** said is as significant as what is said. In this case, the fact that they took their desires to work with children for granted suggests that it did

not seem important to them to mention the relations they have or would like to have with children as a factor in their choice. They sought a different level to understand the question because their desire to nurture children is not part of their conscious understanding of their choices. Indeed this desire may be so deeply engrained as to seem completely instinctive and natural to them.

Some students communicated their belief that the ECE program held promise for the future. For example, such phrases as "to be happy in my career in the future", and "ECE has many open doors for other choices in the future" suggest that these students believed that their desire to work in this field would last. It also implied that they were actively striving towards future goals. A few students expressed uncertainty in their program choice, and were taking the program on a trial basis. For example, two students wrote: "to decide what field I would like to go into (in teacher's college)" and to "see if it was definitely my area". But again, in these types of response, the fact that they would work with children was taken for granted.

I think this question would have avoided some ambiguity if I had worded it as follows: "What reasons were most important to you when choosing to study early childhood education?" The capital letters, the specificity of the words "the" and "Program", and the emphasis on the "post-secondary" nature of the program in the original wording produced a literal and concrete level of interpretation which I was not expecting.

Love of Children

Most of the reasons given as most important were related to the student's choice of early childhood education as a profession rather than the actual program. The most important reasons expressed were their love of and desire to work with children. "I enjoy working with children", "Children are a joy to be around", "Children are wonderful people" and "my love for children" were typical reasons given.

Students mentioned that this career choice involved physical activity, and would not be boring. For example, a student wrote: "Its an active career...You never have the same day in a classroom. There is always something different or new." A reason another student gave was, "I wanted a drastic change from office work!" Mention was made of the ECE program offering practical, specific skills. For example, a student referred to "placement as part of course" indicating that she likes the field placement aspect of the program. Another expressed it as liking the presence of "hands on learning for children".

Teachers as Benefactors

To explain their choice, many students listed such phrases as "the knowledge that I'm helping their [children's] development". They felt that their work as teachers would be of value to the children, and in particular, their value as role models. The following phrases indicate the qualities these students believed they would bring to this profession: "how I can benefit the children I teach"; "to give the children the benefit of my education and life experiences"; "to help in educating children"; "our children need qualified, caring, committed

caregivers. Parents need direction/role models/people to trust and talk to"; "the well-being of all children - more people properly trained"; "providing children with nurturing care"; "desire to make a difference in the lives of young children"; "educating by modelling to others"; and "desire to make a difference in the lives of young children".

These responses demonstrate how oriented the students are to the service of others. As well, the use of words such as "benefit", "help", "need", "nurturing care", "modelling", "making a difference" and "properly" imply that the students position themselves above the children and perceive children in care as less-than-fortunate. As I have shown, they have certainly been so positioned by their textbooks and course material. Although it is important that these young women want to nurture children and feel they have a lot to offer, the desire to rescue the children and parents suggests that the students see themselves in a hierarchical relationship with their clients. Because control of children is one legitimated area of power for women (Poynton 1990:30) these young women seize rather than question this relationship.

Needy Students

In a conversation with one of the teachers, her perspective was that many ECE students are emotionally needy, and that a lot of time is spent with them working through their personal affairs. She argued that, contrary to what the students think when they come into ECE and contrary to common opinion, child care work is not easy. Early childhood educators have to be very strong to provide quality child care in this demanding field.

She felt that many students choose child care as a profession in order to meet their own needs. Because children are demonstrative with their affections and willingly share them, she felt that the ECE students expect the children to meet their own needs for comfort and love. Certainly, such phrases as "I find extreme pleasure in the child care field", and "enjoyment I get from teaching young children" suggest a high level of fulfilment for these students. The instructor said that instead of having their own babies, these girls [sic] become surrogate mothers, but like so many young mothers, they are not emotionally capable of being responsive to the children's needs. As I observed this teacher's rapport with the young women in the classroom, I felt that she herself was a surrogate mother to the students.

Future Ambitions

Question four asked students to choose what they would like to do after graduation from a selection of positions typically available to ECE graduates, continued education and "other". Most students' responses indicated that they wanted to work in any or all of the areas I listed. Many also wanted to continue with post-secondary studies, but I do not know why or in what area.

Several students specified other career objectives. One wrote that she would like to "go to a third world country to work with children there." Another expressed a desire to "work in the government aspect of day care ie. licensing etc." An older student with her own children wrote that she wanted to "teach teens childcare and parenting skills" while another wrote that she might "possibly be involved with Children's Aid". The male student wrote that he wanted to be a

child care advocate.³⁵ Outside of these few students, these young women's ambitions were quite conventional and fell within the parameters of my list. This conformity was more likely a flaw in my questionnaire design than a lack of ambition on their part.

For most students, their desire to work in the ECE field is related to their love of children. Some students may feel that they can rescue young children from inadequate nurturing and others may desire the unconditional love children offer to meet their own needs.

Desires for Motherhood

Not surprisingly, a common theme both in many questionnaire responses and in the first year discussion group was the students' typical wish to have children of their own someday, particularly the students in their teens and early twenties. Although a few students indicated either in the discussion or in their questionnaire responses that they are parents already, most were not.

Several students wrote explicitly that they felt the ECE program could benefit them when they had their own children: "Great background and knowledge for myself in the future - i.e. children of my own"; "Being a great mom"; "experience for when I have kids"; and "to prepare for parenting" were such answers.

³⁵ This difference is discussed at length in a later section

Most student's desires to have children and be married were more covertly mentioned or simply assumed. I had hoped that students would include such desires in the list of things they wished to do after graduation. But by listing primarily work-related choices, I biased the responses towards further work-related answers, when my intention had actually been to **not** lead them into this answer. Thus, not offering other choices such as "have children", "get married" and "travel" meant that such positions were not legitimated. Either a more complete list of possibilities or a completely open-ended question would have been more fruitful.

Motherhood Assumed

Some students wrote about their desires to be mothers when explaining why they do not call themselves feminists. For example, one student wrote: "I'm old fashioned. I would prefer to have the man out working and myself at home keeping the home fires burning (working)." Another wrote: "I believe that women have all the rights that men have, but I also believe that they should be the one at home, if financially possible, caring for the children." Another stated: "Because I see nothing wrong with women who believe they should be at home raising their family and being a housewife." And yet another, I like equality among men and women in the work force but I also enjoy more traditional roles." These women all assume that they will have children and be part of a "traditional" family configuration.

Several students wrote that after graduation they hoped to open day care facilities in their homes. One direct response stated, "When I have my own

children would like to have [my] own daycare services in my home." Another young woman wrote, "open up my own home as a centre - later on" and another wrote: "do home day care (later when I get my own house)." Home care is most often provided by women with their own young children.³⁶ The statements of these young women reveal their desires and expectations to someday have a home and family.

Many students wrote that they desired to learn about child psychology and child development so they could understand children. For example, three students wrote: "I wanted to learn how to teach the young appropriately", "I was very interested in child development", and "understanding and knowing child development". I propose that these responses are a socially acceptable way to express the student's expectation and desire to one day have children of their own.

Maternal Instinct?

In the first year discussion group, at one point the desire to have children was equated with maternal instinct. One young first-year student said that of course she wanted to have babies but asked me to affirm her belief that that desire was "maternal instinct". I challenged her to question the existence of maternal instinct.

If something is an instinct, I reasoned, then it has to be an inherent part of all of us. How then do we explain those women who seem to lack this so-called instinct? Are they deficient? How do we explain the fact that some women go

³⁶ One 1978 study showed that 84 per cent of in-home caregivers were married women; 64 per cent of these had at least one child under fifteen (Fichler 1988:327-8).

back to work comfortably, some women never wish to have children, and some women need to be taught how to care for a child? Is there something wrong with them? Can we use such a concept "nature" when there are so many exceptions? Although most students in the group understood my argument, this woman seemed unable to understand that I disputed to the word 'instinct' because it cannot adequately explain exceptions without devaluing them.

Bringing up Baby

In the first-year discussion group, one courageous student expressed her desire to stay home and have children and stay with them until they were all in school. She described her fantasy to the class: she could picture herself happily "grocery shopping and taking the kids to the park and walking the dog". That she would marry was understood, and she had it planned that this would be to "a policeman or fire-fighter - someone with a well-paying job". This student maintained that nowadays "girls" were ashamed to admit these desires, because staying at home with children is not highly regarded, especially not by feminists. Her statements provoked a lively discussion.

Although several students seemed to agree with her evaluation, others challenged her position. One student retorted that it was all very well to want these things, but that a friend of hers was very happy with her [different] arrangement. This friend had a baby and went back to work three weeks later while her husband stayed home and looked after the child. The focus of discussion turned around on whether the students thought that this was also

acceptable, or whether mothers of very young children who went to work were somehow deviant.

Those who spoke up on this topic all said that they wanted to be with their children when they were very young, but that others might feel differently and they should have the choice. One student remarked that they might have to work out of economic necessity in spite of their desires so they might not have a choice. I suggested that what might be important was that if a woman changed her mind, she would have a choice. The students nodded their agreement and the student who first brought the topic up seemed reassured that I had not rejected her desires.

It appears that most of these future child care workers do expect to be married and have children some day. They tend to see themselves in traditional roles as mothers and wives, although they also maintain the social acceptability of other kinds of arrangements. As the discussion with first year students indicated, the students feel defensive about choosing a "traditional" path such as marriage, having children, and especially, staying at home with a child. This is no longer a "politically correct" position for a young woman of the nineties.

A career in ECE allows these women to override this conflict. They can fulfil their desire to be with children and to learn about children as professional child caregivers, while living up to contemporary social expectations that they develop careers for themselves as women.

CHAPTER IX

On Becoming a Gendered Subject

In order to discover how the students understand gender identity construction and how this relates to what they have been taught, the students were asked two questions. In the first, students were asked to list the factors they considered important to account for children developing a sense of being a boy or a girl, and in the second, the factors they felt the ECE program stressed.

A number of students did not differentiate between the two questions, answering only the first question and either left the second blank or indicated that their response to the second was the same as their response to the first. I have taken this to mean that these students did not differentiate between what they were taught and what they themselves believe. It is possible that prior to the ECE experience, they had given it little thought and their thinking corresponded to this recent exposure.

Societal Influences

For the most part the students wrote lists of "factors" which they saw as influencing gender identity formation. The following components were mentioned at least once in their answers: stereotyping, television, role models, media, peers, literature, peer pressure, parents, society at large, expectations, conditioning, imitation of heroes, toys, parental attitudes, clothes, the environment, social learning, toys, school, teachers, advertising, fashion, and referring to children as

boys and girls. Without exception, the students indicated that they believe social influences are important.

Instinct and Biology

In addition, several students indicated that they also think "instinct", "inborn knowledge", "biology" or "genetics" plays an important role in gender determination. Four students indicated that the biological factor was most important. The first wrote, "I think it is genetic but also I feel that society has an affect [sic] on gender." The second simply put several stars around the word "instinct" to signify its importance at the top of a list of other factors which were: "society (school, media, peers), parents". These students were both from first year.

"I think a child knows their gender as he/she grows older - it comes from within - also think that society, (ie T.V., toys, stores), parents, other children has impact". The distinction made by this first year student between society and "within" (nature/nurture) shows that she understands gender identity to be primarily biological, but modified by social influences. The fact that the child "knows" over time is not understood as social learning, but as an innate process of development. Only one second year student mentioned "natural instinct" as a determining factor, but she added that "in today's society the media plays a major role in defining what is male and what is female".

A number of students mentioned various aspects of child development as the ECE emphasis. For example, "different stages children go through". Another

wrote that the emphasis in ECE was "automatic transition in children", while another mentioned the stages "gender constancy, gender consistency, sex-stereotyping". The concept of stages of gender development has certainly been emphasized in their program. This way of understanding, as has been discussed in a previous chapter, has its origins in biology.

Teachers as Role Models

Many students noted that the difference in the ECE program was on how they, as teachers, have an influence on how children develop their sense of gender identity. "Day care and school are the two factors that help reinforce them [gender stereotypes]" was one student's comment. Several students mentioned the importance of factors such as the structure of the play and learning environment to avoid stereotypical activities, avoiding stereotypes in pictures and books, awareness of the kinds of praise and reinforcement given to children, and teachers as role models.

One student was impressed with the importance of "discussing physical gender differences openly". Another mentioned as a factor the "attitudes and biases of adults/ teachers/parents etc. Without realizing it, many (almost all) adults have biases the children learn these". Self-awareness for teachers was understood as important for providing an anti-sexist curriculum by this student.

Several students mentioned that sexism in children's literature had been a strong ECE emphasis. Only one first-year student specifically mentioned Vivian

Paley's text as a program emphasis, although several other first-year students mentioned the importance of children's play.

Treating Girls and Boys the Same: Non-sexist Approaches

Two first year students misunderstood question three. One wrote: "Most things have been fairly equal. I don't think that we have emphasized on how to treat boys and girls differently. We just accept them the way they are and help them develop as a whole." Another wrote: "I found there has been no factors. The instructors have been trying to gear us away from this." Although these responses indicate a misunderstanding, they also support a first year discussion about the ECE program trying to de-emphasize gender differences.

In this interaction, an older first-year student said she thought that what was being taught in the ECE program thus far was "androgyny". When I asked her to expand on what she meant, she related that they were being taught to treat all children as though they were the same rather than focus on difference. Several heads nodded their agreement. It seems the students have accepted the mainstream non-sexist approach to gender identity taken in their textbooks.

The following quotes further support this interpretation: "I find that the ECE program is trying to gear us away from this [society's] type of stereotyping but instead is encouraging us to bring them together and let the children grow together as individuals"; "to encourage both boys and girls that they can be anything they want (ie male nurse)"; "all children should be treated equally not

separating sexes"; "encouraged play and activities that would cater to both male and female".

These comments were all from first year students. Only one second-year student mentioned that it was important "not to differentiate the two very much. Have toys for everyone to play with. Encourage all children to play with all toys." The prevailing opinion among these first year ECE students is the belief that noting gender differences reinforces gender stereotypes and gender inequality.

The Anti-Bias Classroom According to Students

I infer from the absence of second-year students mentioning non-sexist approaches, that they developed a more complex view of the construction of gender identity in their second year. Several second-year students specifically mentioned anti-bias curriculum as the main program emphasis regarding the development of a gendered identity. "We have been encouraged to provide a non-bias curriculum to let children decide what they have interest in and develop their talents in those areas - not what a boy or girl should do or be like" was one student's comment. Another wrote: "In the ECE program we have learned a lot about having an anti-bias curriculum and how to set up your classroom etc. so there won't be any stereotypical activities etc."

However, both of these students have interpreted anti-bias as providing an environment for children where they are free to choose. It is not apparent that they have understood the active interventionist role of the teacher in anti-bias curriculum which differentiates it from other approaches to which they have been

exposed. On the other hand, my expecting such detail on a survey is unrealistic and would require further investigation to develop a more full appreciation for their understanding of this text.

Some of this uncertainty was clarified in the second-year group discussion which mainly centred on gender identity. The vocal second-year students seemed to be comparing the material from their *Anti-Bias* texts with their recent observations in the field.

Severz! students mentioned that they had been very shocked to see two different standards in day care teachers' treatment of boys and girls, confirming the information in their textbook. One student said that she felt caught in a dilemma because, as a student, she felt she could not interfere with the teachers, but on behalf of the children, she wanted to step in and tell the teachers to stop. Here, the powerlessness of the subject position "student" is made visible.

Another student expressed her opinion that language was one of the most important factors in forming gender identity. She argued that what was said to the children reinforced notions of gender stereotypes. She gave examples of teachers always emphasizing the activity of a boy and the appearance of a girl. A number of other students confirmed that they too had frequently observed this sort of behaviour during their field placement. These were also identified as examples in *Anti-Bias Curriculum*.

Several students had a dialogue about their observations of the segregated play of girls and boys. On a related topic, the students showed an appreciation

for the complexity of gender issues when cultural and economic differences also had to be considered.

The instructor raised these questions in a discussion about how to handle an East Indian female child who was perfectly fastidious in her dress, refused to get dirty, and this position was supported by the child's family. Should we impose our own cultural ideas about how children should play on this child? The consensus after the discussion was that it was important to respect differences both within and outside our own culture, but that each situation would have to be separately evaluated.

The questions and answers given in *ABC* are similar to this inquiry and discussion. The opportunity to reflect on the complexity of questions which arose when other "identities" were juxtaposed with gender identity issues seemed to be appreciated, probably in view of their recent field placement. Their dialogue showed that at least some students had reflected on and had integrated the anti-bias material as I believe Derman-Sparks et al intended.

One student was critical that the arguments presented in *Anti-Bias Curriculum* had not been introduced early enough in the ECE program. When asked what she would prefer to see, this student said that the issues should be presented right away in the first semester of the program, as part of child development courses rather than added on at the end to which several other students nodded and murmured their agreement.

From this dialogue, at least some second-year students felt that anti-bias material should be integrated into the ECE program from the beginning, and that

adding it on at such a late date was a great disservice to the importance of the problems addressed. It appears that they were conscious of the fact that the issues of race, gender, ability and heterosexism were added on to existing theoretical frameworks, rather than transforming them.

Although there were many different factors listed as responsible for children developing their sense of gender identity, all the students indicated the importance of social influences. A few students, mainly from first year, believed that biology was of primary importance, and modified by social factors. On the basis of what students wrote, in second year, the significance of social influences affecting gender identity increased. The identifiable factor to account for the variation between first and second year seemed to be the ideas initiated in the *Anti-Bias Curriculum* textbook. Some students felt that simply "adding on" these ideas was a disservice.

The differences noted between the student's personal beliefs about gender differences and the ECE program's emphasis on gender differences were related to the students' learning to position themselves as teachers. The students reported that in their program they were learning a number of techniques which would help them not contribute to sexist stereotypes.

The Token Male

Although it may seem inappropriate to make an exception of the one male student, it is also important to recognize that his presence provided an opportunity to compare his positioning as a male with those of his female co-

students. His contributions to the group discussion and his responses were different from his female counterparts and it is these differences which I will explore.

This thirty-three year old student had numerous things to say during the group discussion, and even while the other students were completing the questionnaire, the male second-year student spoke with me. After establishing that I had designed the questionnaire, he very confidently scolded me for having "such biased questions". When I asked him to be specific about what he felt was biased, he scanned the questions one by one, muttering "that's all right" until he came to rest on the question about whether he was a feminist. This question was biased, he exclaimed because as a male, he was excluded. When I pointed out that some men do call themselves feminists, he was surprised but seemed to incorporate this information and the interaction ended. In retrospect, I wish I had investigated why he thought this was the case, rather than correcting his misunderstanding.

As it stands, this was the only student who confidently questioned the inherent design of the questionnaire. If we assume some correspondence between a lecture context and the classroom I observed, then his remarks are consistent with research showing that "males are twice as likely as females to ask a question during a lecture and are more likely to ask a question going beyond the text of the lecture" (Poynton 1990:33).

He was referred to as, and jokingly but defensively referred to himself as, a "token male". He also articulated that he found this label slightly irritating, which he had apparently mentioned before.

The reasons he gave for choosing ECE were "my love of children" and "my belief that children need positive role models". This indicates a genuine desire to make a difference in child care. It has been found that male care-givers seem to have a desire to meet their own expressive needs by providing experiences to children they would otherwise miss (Robinson 1988) and this young man seems to be no exception.

With respect to his ambitions for the future, he wrote that he would like to work in a day care centre or "be an advocate for early childhood education here at the college or on an ECE advisory board". He was one of a very small handful of students who offered very specific career ambitions in his response to question four. Further, he was the only student who pictured himself in a position of authority. As an advocate he would be not only in authority, but he also assumed that he could represent others who would by and large be women.

While I have no dispute with this young man's desire to make a difference, it is evident that he perceives more available career options for himself than any of the female students. At least he is willing to commit these ambitions to paper. In part, this may be due to experience which comes with age.

It is also true that even as a "token male" in a line of work most often associated with women, he feels comfortable and confident. Although men who move out of traditional roles do not necessarily have it easy, males are socially

defined as more competent. Hence "they are less likely to feel powerless, inadequate, or unable to achieve desired goals" in non-traditional positions (Poynton 1990:38-9).

With respect to gender identity formation, this student listed several factors: "society's stereotyping of gender and beliefs - that girls are more nurturing than boys thus are directed towards more nurturing toys (dolls etc); also our referring to children as boys and girls as opposed to children". This latter phrase shows a sensitivity to the power of language, but his own belief is that the problem is with differentiation, rather than devaluation of difference. His is a gender-blind approach.

This was confirmed in the group discussion, where he repeatedly asserted that all children should be treated equally and should be "allowed to be themselves" regardless of gender. In response to opposition from some of his classmates who argued that he had oversimplified the issue, he upheld that improving the design of a day care program's curriculum would provide the opportunity for this to happen. He believed that changes in the physical environment such as the strategic placement of activity centres and toys would resolve inequality between boys and girls.

His ideas were virtual duplicates of the concrete proposals put forward in *Anti-Bias Curriculum*. From his selective appropriation of these practical suggestions but his refusal to accept the text's more complex theoretical understanding of the construction of gender identity, we can see that this student

has taken only the aspects of the text which are consistent with his own views, which are also consistent with the dominant ideology.

If ideology only becomes visible when established power relations are challenged (Poynton 1990:18), it follows that the taken-for-granted everyday meanings of his world are unquestioned. On the basis of his comments and assertions, we can see that this man has not deviated from a perspective which understands gender identity as constructed on children's free and rational choice. He has resisted the challenges made by Derman Sparks to the ideology of equality of opportunity, and has by default asserted the importance of biological difference in children's choices. His exposure to *ABC* did not require him to examine or reassess these underlying assumptions.

Given this student's inability to imagine that a man might call himself a feminist, his insistence on an ideology of equality which denies difference rather than recognizing it, his atypical career aspirations, and his ability to freely speak in contradiction to the dominant discourse, it is evident that this young man's relation to the world is quite different from that of his female contemporaries. His position as a male has made available different possibilities for socially sanctioned behaviour, which behaviour, if taken up by a woman would carry other, often derogatory, meanings.

CHAPTER X

Equality, Not Feminism!

In order for gender to be considered significant in child-rearing practices, it seemed to me that a feminist frame of mind was imperative. Thus, in question five I asked: "Would you call yourself a feminist?" and asked them to explain their answer. I expected to find a relationship between the student's perceptions of the development of children's gendered identity and their perceptions of their own gendered subject positions, and that their reasoning would serve to explicate this relationship.

Responses offered a great deal of material for analysis because students expressed a wide range of definite opinions from which I gained insight into the students' perceptions of gender relations. This was enhanced by group discussions.

With few exceptions, responses on the questionnaire showed that students do not position themselves as feminists. Out of the fifty-two responses, only four responded "yes", they would call themselves feminists; thirteen students "don't know"; and the remaining thirty-five responded "no", they would not call themselves feminists. Twenty of the "no" group were from first year and fifteen were from second year. Eight first year students and five second year students said they didn't know if they were feminists.

In the ensuing discussion, I have grouped the students' positions on feminism on the basis of both their circled response and a similar perspective in their explanation. Reasons for responses ranged from embracing feminist ideals

to intense hostility, although the majority of students have adopted a much more moderate position. I address and interpret the issue of the second-year students' silence in the classroom and consider this in relation to some questionnaire responses.

"Yes" Feminist Positions

Of the four students who did say they would call themselves feminists, three were from second year and two were over thirty. The reason given by the twenty-three year old first year student for her affirmative answer was as follows: "I believe that I can do the same things (to an extent) as males (I can play football). I think males and females have the same standards (have same curfew)."

This student's mention of "curfew" and "football" shows very concrete thinking which may be a reflection of her age as well as her "liberal" understanding of feminism. She appreciates equality as the ability to do the same things that men can do, and even this she has modified with "to an extent". One student in the first year discussion had talked about her mother being a feminist, and if this was the same student, this may have given her a broader definition of the label "feminist" than other students typically gave.

The second year students gave reasons for their "yes" answers which were more complex. One wrote: "Women need to be seen as equal to men and have as many rights and opportunities in society as men do. Ban sexism in literature, society etc." Although equality with men was the goal for this 31 year old student,

the student has identified that there are structural constraints which obstruct the realization of such an equality. There is a hint of anger behind her words.

Nonetheless, her desire for equality with men positions her as a liberal feminist.

The second "yes" response came from a woman who chose not to identify her age. She wrote: "I am a woman. I want equality. I don't want any limits on me and future women. (I am a lesbian as well and this probably has a major impact on being a feminist.)" In the first half of this reply, the student identifies herself as a female and an individual who wants equality for herself and others and who wants "limits" removed. Like the above student's response, her goals seem to be from a liberal feminist perspective.

The "major impact" of her sexual orientation on her feminist positioning suggests that her lesbianism was a marginalizing experience. She was faced with the inconsistency between the ideology of equality and the reality of her everyday life experience of exclusion, regardless of whether this was public knowledge.

The mainstream is organized around compulsory heterosexism (G. Smith 1992:lecture). This woman would have felt she did not belong from the time of her own acknowledgement of her sexual orientation. Within a gay and lesbian community, however, she would have felt a bond of identification, and would have been exposed to a number of feminist perspectives, including radical feminism. I will speculate that she has modified her standpoint on equality because of her sexual orientation, although this is not evident from her words.

The forty year old student arrived late for class, and her answers had the benefit of the prior group discussion. Her responses to questions one and three

indicated that gender has been an important factor to her throughout the ECE program. Her single reason for choosing the ECE program was expressed as follows: "To give female and male children equal learning opportunities; i.e. opportunity for both to nurture as well as master all types of skills". As well, this woman chose to examine gender issues further in group projects, looking at the influence of children's books and of "how the environment can contribute to reinforcing the differences that may exist".

This student had the benefit of the class discussion which gave her a fuller knowledge of my project, and influenced her responses to be precisely on topic. However, because she came in late and her written responses were kept separate, I was able to identify her as one of the more vocal students, and as one speaking from a feminist perspective which was consistent with her written responses. Thus, despite the advantage she had in participating in the discussion prior to completing the questionnaire, I have taken her responses as reliable.

In response to question five, she stated: "I believe in equality for women and men. I recognize that there are differences now between the genders of our generation and we should try to see these differences as such, not that one is better, while still promoting equality." Her emphasis on "equality" might have indicated a liberal standpoint, but this is qualified by her statement that neither women nor men were better. The idea that one should "try to see these differences as such" suggests that this student understood that recognizing difference was not the same as a doctrine of equality. It is the devaluation of difference, not the actual difference that is the problem, she seems to be saying.

Thus, of the four women who said that they would call themselves feminists, only this latter student has adopted a perspective other than classical liberal feminism. The woman who felt that her sexual orientation had influenced her answer may also have a more complex understanding of feminists although this is not clear. The other two women call themselves feminists because they strive for equality with men.

A Norm of Equality

Students who claimed they did not know and those who said, "no", they were not feminists often gave similar reasons for their answers. Many differentiated the struggle for equal rights from feminism. One student explained her "no" answer simply by writing: "I believe in equality". Evidently, the belief in equality was enough reason not to be a feminist because feminists want something different than equality.

Similar reasoning is evident in the following "no" answer: "I like to think of myself as a person who believes that all are considered equal and each sex can perform any task they choose". Free choice is also part of this next student's belief system: "There are some things that I believe that I can do and some I can't. I'm not afraid to ask a man to help. I don't take the major role but I'm not subservient either, I enjoy an equal partnership."

The above students' belief in and desire for equal rights has not been contradicted in a way that they are forced to adjust their personal position with

their everyday social reality. Ideology remains taken-for-granted and desire is stronger than reason.

Feminists Go Too Far

Many other students had images of feminists as "radical" or "extreme" and wanted to differentiate themselves from this group. For example, one student who gave an uncertain response wrote: "I feel that I am right in between. I am not an extreme feminist but I am not an extremely "old-fashioned" type of girl." Another who didn't know wrote: "In some ways yes: I believe in equal rights for women. In some ways no: I believe in some ways feminism is carried much too far; men and women are different and I feel it's impossible for them to be treated exactly alike."

Another student who gave a "no" response wrote, "I believe in equality but not "feminism". I think women have gone overboard". Or this reasoning: "I believe in equality among men and women. I don't think my thoughts [unclear] dominate either group and I don't always agree on some of the feministic views."

Students' belief in the radicalism of feminists is also evident in the following phrases: "I think that feminists are going too far too fast. They are overdoing it and getting a bad name for themselves. I think everyone should have the choice to do or be whatever they want and should not feel pressured into anything"; "I believe in equality but feminists seem to go too far"; "I feel women should have the rights that they have but I think some feminists go too far"; "I am but not to an extreme, I believe that women should be treated equally and paid

equally"; and "I believe that women sometimes push it to an extreme that I hate. I do believe in women's progress in society - and that any woman can do what she sets her mind to do - no one should be denied something because of their gender."

Thus, feminists "go too far" or to "extremes". The implication of all these responses was that students feel that feminists want more than simple equality (with men). Some also feel pressured by the feminist agenda. The students desire equal treatment and equal pay, but feel that this should be a product of their own choice and merit rather than the result of activism. They do not recognize that feminists have created and continue to create the very spaces which generate the opportunities for such choices. For these students, it is taken for granted.

Identify as Individuals, Not as Women

Other students were more moderate in their standpoint. A first year student (who did not circle her choice) wrote: "I would not really call myself a feminist, but I like to think that women could one day be as equal as men and be shown respect". Another student explained her "no": "because I believe in equal rights, all human beings are unique but similar in a lot of ways". The male student responded that "no" he was not a feminist, but "sensitive to issues regarding women and children and people in general". These students have not rejected feminism and see its value, although they do not perceive themselves as feminist.

The ensuing quote is a student's no reasoning: "because I believe we are all individuals; though men are men, women are women; there are things men can do that women can't and can; there are things that women can do that men can and can't". She has found a balance between women and men based on individual ability. Another young woman objected to categorizing people with labels: "I believe in equality and individual rights. I thinking putting people into categories, such as feminist, chauvinist etc, is unfair." Another who didn't know wrote: "to a degree - believe in equality, believe in my own abilities as a person and as a woman". These three women perceive their individuality as the basis of identity, not their gender.

Feminists as "Better Than"

A few students expressed open hostility towards feminists. This was exhibited as resistance to changed relations between women and men: "I still like men paying for the dinner" one wrote. Another student circled "no" and added: "because I see nothing wrong with women who believe that they should be at home raising their family and being a housewife." This student believes that feminists think there is something "wrong" with these activities and that feminist goals are superior to her own.

In the Eyes of Men

In these next examples, the women blamed feminists for the way they believe they are perceived by men. This student explained her "no" saying, "I

believe in equality; however [I] view the word feminist as negative because some so-called feminists seem to blow everything out of proportion giving the rest of us a bad name." In this phrase, this is implied in her anger over "giving the rest of us a bad name".

While the slur, "so-called feminist:", may be directed at a particular person, with the claim that "everything" is blown out of proportion, this student has rejected all feminist arguments as exaggerations. In the remaining sentence, the student created a triangle between feminists, non-feminists ("the rest of us" [women]), and men who think badly about women because of feminists. With the missing agents reintroduced, the sentence might read as follows: "a feminist I know has blown everything out of proportion and has given the rest of us women (non-feminists) a bad name with men".

A second argument was posed as follows: "I am an old fashion time [sic] who enjoys being treated like a lady and not like a piece of meat - which the feminists seem to be making women out to be in the eyes of men." She has implied that feminists are spreading false information about the way that men treat women - "as a piece of meat".

Here, she linked her desire to be "treated like a lady" to her rejection of the feminist claim of men treating women badly. In her wish to believe that men treat women like ladies, she has blurred the boundary between the world of what she wants and that of material reality where a great deal of violence is undeniably perpetrated against women. This woman is angry with feminists for confronting

her desire that men will treat her like a lady. She in turn has denied feminism along with its challenges.

This next student's "no" response offered a different rationale involving men. "I believe that men and women are equal in many ways, there [sic] capabilities. But there are differences and for the most part I respect them and like them. I believe that the relationship I have with my fiancé is why I feel this way." If I have understood her meaning, this woman recognizes differences between men and women, but likes and respects men in spite of these differences. For her, this is because she is in a positive relationship with one particular man.

What is implied is that she believed that feminists do **not** like these differences and that feminists want to eliminate differences (since she has said she is not a feminist). Also implied is the idea that she did not hold these differences against men "for the most part". This is because she met a man who falsified the images of men she perceives were created by feminists. She has adopted a position of different but equal.

Feminists Have Big Mouths

One student's explanation for her negative answer suggested that feminists are too outspoken about their views on the world: "I am who I am and do not feel that I have to take a stand on defining my role as a woman. I have choices as we all do and I take the right to exercise those choices without letting everyone else know why." She sees herself as making autonomous choices which have nothing to do with her gender, and are no one's business but her own. Another

student wrote: "I'm an egalitarian. I believe in equal opportunity but don't go on about it." She certainly believes that feminists **do** go on about it.

Fence Sitters: Multiple Meanings

Students who didn't know if they would call themselves feminists often expressed more uncertainty and ambivalence about whether they positioned themselves as feminist. For example, an uncertain student wrote: "I have strong opinions for both sides of the issue and feel that both have something to offer. I really work hard at being open-minded (but I'm not perfect)." This next student also didn't know and candidly explained: "I never really thought about it. I guess if there is a job available - whoever is best suited for it whether it would be male or female should get it."

This next student also indicated that she was unsure: "A feminist is a very strong term that has many connotations. I would prefer to be called a comfortable female meaning I am comfortable with my whole self including my gender." Here, the student has distanced herself from the label "feminist" because it has too many meanings, some of which are negative or she would not want to differentiate herself from them. This woman's individuality is her primary identity, and although part of her identity is her gender, she prefers to see herself as a "whole" rather than a product of only one identity. Her desire is to be called a "comfortable female" rather than a feminist. The unwritten implication is that feminists are **not** comfortable with themselves. Her female identity is central, but it is self-acceptance or "comfort" as an individual which is her primary goal.

One student who was unsure whether or not to call herself a feminist wrote: "am in feminist's frame of mind - express my feminist beliefs - am not an activist but I support those who are". She is uncertain whether activism is a necessary part of feminism and is not sure whether her verbal support and her belief system are enough to give herself this name.

As all of the students' responses and discussion illustrate, there are multiple meanings associated with the word "feminist". Not surprisingly, very strong feelings are associated with feminism. No matter how the students have positioned themselves in relation to their perceptions of feminists, most of them have taken the time and effort to provide some of their rationales for these positions.

First Year Discussion: Superficial Stereotypes

In the first year group discussion the stereotype of a "typical feminist" emerged of a "butch", "radical", "man-hater". They demonstrated some surprise when I identified myself as both married with four children and a feminist, subject positions which seemed mutually exclusive to them. Students did not seem to have any appreciation for the many divergent positions which are taken in the women's movement, although my own positioning may have opened a new space for those who expressed uncertainty about where to position themselves.

One student remarked angrily that a feminist who had loudly "told her father off" when he opened a door for her was enough to turn her against

feminists.³⁷ Without condoning this woman's actions, I asked the students to think about why women might be upset over having doors opened for them, the historical origins of this resistance. The student who responded expressed that women wanted to be seen as capable and independent, and the etiquette of having a door opened for them by a man originates in a view of women as dependent and weak. Nobody objected to this interpretation.

Feminists are Biased

Another student said that in answering the question about feminism, she thought to respond "yes" would be "wrong" because it would "bias her interactions with children". A number of other students indicated their agreement. This remark revealed the common perception that the dominant view is neutral and that alternative viewpoints are biased. Their education had not thus far challenged this assumption. Their belief in objectivity maintains that to not be a feminist was to not have a bias. This student's comment also suggested that she thought there were right and wrong answers even although I had tried to convey that I was seeking their sincere opinions.

Gender and Language Issues Trivialized

Several first-year students expressed their hostility towards feminist demands to have gender-neutral language such as "The Museum of Man" changed

³⁷ The teacher later told me that this particular student comes from a very religious background, and has consistently resisted new ideas which contradict her belief system. After the discussion, this student approached me to say that she had indicated on the questionnaire that she would be willing to discuss the ECE program with me at a later date. She wanted my assurance that this interview would not be like the class interaction and "all about feminism".

to "The Museum of Civilization" or "policeman" to "police officer". They thought these changes were silly and trivial. I told them a joke about my friend whose mother warned her to watch out for man-eating sharks, and how she was never afraid of them because she was a girl, not a man. Although they laughed at this trivial joke (suggesting that they "got it"), on the whole they were resistant to challenges to language which, I will speculate, is because they assume language to be neutral and objective.

Appreciating Women's Rights in Context

In a gesture towards praxis and inspired by a recent lecture by Naomi Wolf, near the end of the discussion I rhetorically asked the students how many of them could read, write, drive, vote, own property, had access to education, access to birth control etc. I pointed out that it was feminists who achieved these rights, legions of women who fought hard-won battles on behalf of the women of the future.

One student's final response to my recommendation that they not take these gains for granted was to say that she would not (take them for granted), and that she even had a new appreciation for where these gains came from, but she wanted to be very clear that that did not automatically make her a feminist.

It seemed to be the first time the first-year students had encountered the word feminist in a classroom context and their tendency towards simplistic understanding was representative of the view of feminism expressed in their questionnaire answers. However, the highlights of the first year group discussion

described above shows not only this naivety, but also that their candid dialogue stands in marked contrast to that of the second-year group.

Silent Resistance

Of the fifty two questionnaires, twelve students gave no explanation for their circled response to question five. Three first year students gave no explanation; one response was a "no" and the other two circled "don't know". Nine second year students gave no explanation for their answers. Three of them "don't know" where they stand on this issue. But six students circled "no" without any explanation. From a class of twenty three students, these "nos" represent a significant twenty five percent rate of failure to respond; the total percent of answers without explanation from the second year group is roughly forty percent.

These absences deserve some attention and explanation. It may be that the students simply did not have an explanation and didn't make the effort to consider one, and with two of the questionnaires from second year, one and two word answers throughout indicate that they expended a minimum of effort.

A faculty member mentioned that the second year group had gone through a number of major changes in their program, such as a move from one campus to another and program and faculty changes. The effect of these changes on a number of students was that they became hostile and resistant in the classroom.

It may be that my first impression of the group was reliable, in contradiction to the teacher who said otherwise, that the noise level did indicate that the students were not particularly attentive and did not take my research

seriously. My position as a university student may have triggered antagonism or defensiveness because of their own status as college students.

As well, the presence of a verbal male may have influenced their willingness to speak freely. Or was it simply that they were so close to graduation? Did they discuss amongst themselves the fact that they would not bother to answer that question?

Even taking all the above factors into account, why did most of them answer all the other questions, often quite thoughtfully? Why was **this** the question that they could not or would not explain? I cannot help but see this repeated selective non-response as anything less than a refusal.

It is my belief that this refusal to answer was one way in which students' resisted both the feminist position of their teacher and the feminist classroom discourse. As my earlier discussion noted, this discourse, at least while I was present, was appropriated by vocal pro-feminists. This public position was not consistent with these young peoples' views of social reality. They resisted by refusing to participate.

Dominating the Discourse

Some of the second year students were very quiet, and seemed less interested in the discussion, chatting amongst themselves and not seeming to pay a great deal of attention. A group of older, more mature students monopolized the discourse. Their questions and perceptions were thoughtful and certainly more considered than those of the previous day's students.

The combination of a feminist instructor, a feminist guest (myself), and questions about gender identity and feminism, positioned those with a pro-feminist perspective as having more right to speak. Although the teacher did not (and would not) devalue any expressed opinion, her position as a feminist was clear. The students with different opinions may have felt they could not contradict the arguments which coincided with those of their teacher and the vocal students.

Contributions from Other Perspectives

Although only an isolated incident, the scene described below may well represent what has happened in the past to those who offer opinions outside the group's dominant (in this case, feminist) discourse. A student made the following contribution to the discussion about observations in their field placement; she claimed that there had been no evidence of gender-segregated play in the four year old kindergarten where she was placed. She explained this absence by arguing that this was the first experience with group care for most of the children so they "would not have learned gender-role stereotypes". Several students challenged her hypothesis and her observations.

The male student, by virtue of being male, is assumed to have a different perspective. However, this female student's comments, which differed from those of the vocal majority, were not only unsupported but also were brought into doubt. This interaction implied that she had been an inferior observer.

If I have read this scene reliably, we should not be surprised to find that those others who also had different opinions - as were reflected in their

questionnaire responses - felt that to speak about them was too threatening. They responded to this threat with hostility, perhaps because it was a familiar situation. This could help explain why, when both the teacher and I, at separate points in the discussion, invited students who had not spoken to contribute, they remained outside the discussion.

Orner argues that a "culture of silence" is "common when oppressed groups come face to face with authority", including in emancipatory politics (Orner 1992:88). Working people and students talk a lot among themselves but often grow quiet in the presence of authorities, perhaps because of the many different readings that others may give such talk. Speaking may be seen as a "collaboration with the enemy" and there may be a high price to pay for talking. Silence in the classroom becomes a form of self-protection (Orner 1992:88). The enemy in this instance was feminist discourse.

Feminist Coercion

However, the students answered the questionnaire **before** the discussion transpired. I will postulate that because my research topic was introduced as involving gender, and because I was openly friendly with their teacher, my research was associated with a feminist position as soon as they began to read it. This standpoint had already been rejected by these students. Unlike the first-year group, this group had had several weeks of intensive immersion into anti-bias content, taught by the newly-arrived feminist teacher.

On closer examination of the questionnaires, fifteen second-year students said they would not call themselves feminists. Six of these gave no explanation

and six others gave responses which I definitely have interpreted as hostile. While the same number of disapproving answers came from first year, without exception, the first year students focused on feminists as extremists and radicals while they positioned themselves as seeking equality.

There was something in the quality of the second year students' remarks that was different. They seemed more specific and more angry. Consider these phrases: "I take the right to exercise those choices without letting everyone else know why"; "I dislike extremists - yes I am prejudiced against the radicals (not the people as much as what they do)"; "I find that many feminists do not want equality, they want superiority"; and "Non-totally! I still enjoy having my chair pulled out for me. But I am equal to all [underlined three times] others". These students felt that feminism was forced on them, and that their own positions were not respected and valued.

A nineteen year-old second year student's hostility towards feminists is self-evident when she wrote: "I myself feel that men and women have separate roles (not necessarily men go to work and mothers stay at home), but it is **my** choice to stay at home with my children. It upsets me when feminists look down on me for my choice. I support them in their choices (career etc). I do believe in equal rights."

She explained further in the space provided for comments: "I feel that everyone has their personal feelings about gender roles. It is important to educate, **not** pressure or force opinions" [her emphasis]. Despite the fact that "anti-bias curriculum has really opened our eyes", she felt that she had been

"pressured" by feminists into taking up a particular perspective on gender identity and she resented this. Like the above women, she has tried to be more than tolerant of the feminist position but feels unfairly judged for her own.

Although all of these students were part of the second year group, as I have pointed out earlier, in the discussion there were no comments made either about this sense of pressure or the sense of a new double standard. The classroom discourse was pro-feminist.

Contradictory Subject Positions

The student quoted above felt forced to adopt a public position with respect to gender with which she disagreed. When she wrote that "everyone has their personal feelings", she implied that hers are different and private, but she felt either unable or refused to express these aloud in the group.

She felt she had been equitable in tolerating feminist choices, but that her own choices (desires) would not be accepted by feminists. The power of the feminist discourse within her class left her feeling positioned as either unable or unwilling to express her disagreement. She felt caught between two contradictory identities and had to choose. There was no room for both.

This student's anger and frustration I believe were typical of the majority of students who remained silent during the second-year group discussion and offer a good example of the contradictory subject positions in which many of the ECE students find themselves. Many are young, inexperienced, and full of idealism. They love children and desire some of their own. They want to nurture children, for a myriad of reasons. The ECE curriculum gives them tools and opportunities

through which they can fulfil their desires. Within their textbooks, the teacher is positioned as essential to enhancing children's development and is given the highest status in early childhood education. The students are internalizing these positions for themselves and learning to master them.

Outside their program, students recognize that child care is not well-paid or highly valued in society at large. They would like this to change; hence their support for "equality". But arguments which disrupt their fantasies of marital and familial happiness are rejected. Their desires to live out the fantasies are stronger than any rational arguments anyone can offer.

Because media images have portrayed feminists as radically anti-family, anti-male, and pro-career-woman, most of the students refuse a feminist position. The students feel caught between their belief in equality of opportunity and what they see as extremism and as a rejection of their own personal desires. The contradiction between their perception of these subject positions is too great for them to comfortably incorporate.

It is possible to interpret these negative and uncertain responses in a more favourable light. The students, by and large, believe in equal rights and support women's struggles towards this goal, and as future caregivers for other women's (and men's) children, this is all to the good. But their image of a feminist (without going into physical stereotypes) is of a radical, man-hater who seeks more than equal rights.

However, my question read: "Would you **call yourself** a feminist?" As their answers have indicated, they have distanced themselves from the word "feminist"

while adopting some, perhaps much, of the feminists' agenda. Although they rejected the label 'feminist' for themselves, this did not keep them from preserving feminist goals; they simply refused to identify this as feminism.

This is consistent with findings that 17 year old English students all expressed discontent with their experiences of masculinity and femininity but often refused a feminist analysis to understand this experience (Frazer 1989:281-289). The ECE students have appropriated feminist goals, but have situated them in the context of individual rights and choices. In short, liberal feminism has become the status quo.

CHAPTER XI

Teaching The Very Young in the Mainstream:

Implications for Feminist Poststructuralist Pedagogy

Personal experience led me to question the "black box" of "quality child care". Did this quality include anti-sexist approaches to children in collective care? Were child care workers perpetuating the very gender relations among children that mothers and fathers were struggling to redefine in their careers and studies? I strove to answer these questions in an examination of early childhood education curriculum at a local community college.

On the basis of literature regarding community colleges and educational theory, my expectation was that the impact of state apparatuses on the structure of the educational system would be considerably determined. Such involvement at many levels would in turn be presumed to circumscribe both the structure and content of any given program's curriculum. However, contrary to these expectations, I found significant autonomy within the Early Childhood Education program at a local community college.

The single concrete factor I identified through which the ECE department was held accountable to the state in determining curriculum content was the document outlining professional competencies for its graduates. However, this document was seen to be a mechanism which shifted legitimate authority and control away from the ECE program over to the Ministry rather than determining curriculum contents. An emphasis on graduate skills almost guaranteed that a

dominant ideology was taught. The program's mission statement illustrates how this ideology indeed formed the basis of the program.

Although the general skills required by graduates were articulated, there was extensive latitude for departmental autonomy over both the content of curriculum and pedagogical process. I found that teachers were hired internally by other faculty members and that the program and course design was a cooperative and coordinated venture among the staff.

As long as professional competencies and departmental decisions about the basic goals of each course were met, instructors were at liberty to select their own text books, develop their own course outlines, and introduce the material as they deemed fit. Approval for course outlines by department heads was a formality.

Examination of course outlines showed that gender identity was a subject which was studied, but as a separate topic added on to a mainstream paradigm. By contrast, the feminist teacher made consistent attempts to integrate gender questions into many areas of study. These practices result from her awareness that there is no ungendered space.

Contents of text books used in the courses varied in terms of their understanding of gender identity. Most texts presented a non-sexist approach. The accepted norm was that gender is socially influenced. This was presented within a framework of rationality and teacher non-intervention so that when children were given "free choice", gender-typical choices were explained biologically.

The one exceptional text, *Anti-Bias Curriculum*, was introduced by the feminist teacher. It gave a more complex construction of gender and also provided more complex solutions. Teachers were positioned with the right, and possibly the responsibility, to use their authority to intervene in sexist social relations. However, this was done within a rational framework so that exercising this authority was voluntary.

ABC promotes a child-centred curriculum, discursively positioning early childhood educators both in service to and in authority over the child. However, sensitivity to children's multiple positions is presented as a privilege, not as a service. I have argued that the autonomous child is a fantasy made possible only by the willing sacrifice of the teacher, whose needs are assumed to be synonymous with those of the child.

I do not assume however, that students passively learn what they have been exposed to, or that what they have been taught corresponds to what to what they remember. I argue that each particular historically located subject is an active interpreter of what has been presented. This interpretation corresponds to what makes the most sense within his or her social world and best coincides with their desire to preserve this understanding.

I found that the students held a number of subject positions in the ECE program. The majority are young and inexperienced. Most of them overtly or covertly desire traditional positions of motherhood and marriage. These positions are perceived as less legitimate than they once were and the effect of this delegitimation is twofold.

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First, students tend to seek a career in which these desires to nurture can be fulfilled. Although there are sound economic reasons for women working, career choices cannot be explained by economics. particularly in this instance, since child care work is poorly paid. This career is not only prescribed as legitimate for them; many have come to desire the positions for which they, as women, have been nurtured.

Second, the students tend to hold feminists responsible for de-legitimizing their desires to care for children. There is a naive understanding of feminism based on popular cultural images from the mass media. This construct is a trivialized, radical feminism, not the highly literate, activist, and critical movement with which I am familiar. Students feel they have been judged and found wanting by feminists for liking children and for choosing a stereotypically feminine "caring" occupation.

As an effect of the women's movement in the past decade, young women experience an enormous amount of social pressure to aspire towards high-status careers. It should not surprise us that women who chose more traditional and lower-status professions feel a level of hostility and defensiveness towards feminists because of these impressions.

Their program highly esteems the role of the teacher. It did not (from what I examined) alert them to the contradictory positioning of teachers of young children. Control of children is a "legitimated area of power for women" but at the same time they "are held responsible for everything that goes wrong with children" (Poynton 1990:30).

Culturally, women are not seen as authority figures: Because the main pattern of interaction women have been socialized to employ is cooperation, in the classroom they often must resort to coercive control because this method fails (Poynton 1990:31). Contrary to positions upheld in their text books which rely on reasonable cooperation, teachers of young children commonly meet with a great deal of frustration.

The students have generally adopted the aspects of gender identity construction which coincide with their beliefs about individual equality. Embracing the developmental aspects of gender identity construction as many students did, has reinforced the underlying belief that gender is immutable and natural. While a few students expressed an anti-sexist position, most described a non-sexist one. They are positioned as early childhood educators to treat all children the same.

Given these young students' attitudes of animosity towards their perceptions of feminism, the myths which are perpetuated about and through their role as teachers of young children, and the liberal understanding they are given through the curriculum about the process of becoming a gendered subject, it is unlikely that many of these students will do more than reproduce the existing gender differentiation as child caregivers.

Their education has not challenged the existing social order, but rather has reinforced it. The firm belief in autonomous individuality held intact through child-centred pedagogical practices allows students to perceive the activities of girls and boys as of the child's own choosing. Even though the students had

access to alternative resources, their responses to my questions about gender identity in conjunction with their understanding of feminism suggest that the theoretical depth with which *Anti-Bias Curriculum* was written was either not presented or not accepted by the students.

Only two students specifically identified the devaluation of difference rather than equality as the problem. The students were free to interpret the material within their existing world view, at the level of liberal ideology. The text itself is not free of this ideology because it is premised on mainstream child development theory.

Even though the anti-bias content was the most complex material presented and held the possibility of challenging the status quo, according to the course outline and the students' input, the ideas were introduced over a short period during the last few weeks of a two year program. This structural constraint served to marginalize the content when compared with the emphasis over those two years.

But perhaps it is not the amount of time dedicated to content, but the **legitimacy** of content which marginalizes it. Seen in this way, the fact that the material came from a text book enhanced its legitimacy; published texts are symbols of significant achievement in our culture. As well, its introduction in a classroom context had the same effect. Alternative and legitimate positions were created for those students who were open to the ideas offered in the text. I understand the fact that so few took these up, at least on the basis of my observations, to be a function of desire.

Equality between men and women seems to be the normative belief and/or desire among ECE students. With one exception, equality is not understood as a feminist position. Most of the students who wrote an explanation for their response expressed their belief in or their desire for equality with men. Several asserted their desire to be valued and respected no matter what their choices.

Feminism is equated with bias. When topics are presented from a feminist standpoint, some students feel they are being coerced into taking up this position. Because they understand discourse to be located outside of life, as a tool, they do not recognize how they have been positioned from birth by so-called neutral language which itself organizes social activity.

Unlike the first year group, the second year students felt unable to challenge the feminist views expressed by the older, more vocal students in the class. To argue against them would have been "politically incorrect". Many feminist arguments are powerful; they challenge the truth claims of western ideology and demand a radical re-assessment of our entire culture. Such re-evaluation also demands a personal re-evaluation and re-positioning.

Rather than simply paying lip service to collaboration with and participation of research subjects, I made an attempt to put this into practice by giving a draft of the last four chapters of this thesis to the feminist on the ECE faculty at Algonquin College. I was looking for both confirmation of my observations and feedback with respect to my critiques. She replied in writing because she knew I was using her responses as part of the research. Besides two minor comments she made about her recollection of the class discussion which I

have incorporated into the text, she made several statements and asked several questions about the implications of my findings.

Below, I have listed the eight points she made which were directly related to analyses I presented. I do not take up the substance of her comments, but do reflect on how they locate her as an educator. I appreciate that what she read of this thesis was not only new and exciting, but also somewhat threatening:

1. I am responsible for the degree to which students feel they can express themselves in the classroom. I said I would like to sit in on a class you might teach about feminism,³⁸ as much to learn about how you draw out many different perspectives, but also challenge the status quo without threatening it?
2. I must find ways to discuss the principles of child development (Erikson and Piaget) that we espouse as one view of child development and not necessarily universal. I have to communicate this to my colleagues as well.
3. I must help the students understand the activist role in anti-bias curriculum. I am aware that I skirted this last spring, thinking that this perspective could evolve more effectively after they understood issues of stereotyping and prejudice more clearly. I think the activism part of this approach should be integrated from the beginning.
4. Anti-bias must be integrated from the beginning rather than "added-on". We as a faculty need to find ways that we can offer a more inclusive curriculum - inclusive of minority perspectives, concerns, child-rearing practices, needs. I agree wholeheartedly with your comment that the time and positioning of abc served to marginalize anti-bias content.
5. I need to be more aware when students "buy into" only those aspects of anti-bias curriculum which are a match of their own philosophy (i.e., dominant culture perspective). I want to find ways to challenge this without offending. I want to help students examine or reassess their underlying assumptions.
6. I did not explicitly describe my position as a feminist and feel remiss in not having done so. I would have given them another image of feminist to factor into their existing category.

³⁸ She asked me to do this on another occasion.

7. "Their education has not challenged the existing social order, but rather has reinforced it" (quoting the draft text) - I agree with you and I take it to heart. I want to find ways to challenge the existing social order for these students.

8. I need to listen carefully in discussions so that students do not feel uncomfortable expressing only a "politically correct" position. I do not want to shut down the discourse.

From these comments, it is clear that this teacher has thought very carefully and self-critically about the analyses I made, indeed taking them "to heart". She is prepared to consider new ways of interpreting both teaching and early childhood and wishes to incorporate them into new practice in the program as a whole. It is also clear that she feels highly responsible to the students about what is taught, but seems to appreciate that she is not responsible for them. This distinction may be an important one for teachers to make because it reflects what is and is not in their control.

In addition to the question posed in #1, in closing she asked three further questions: "How do we acknowledge the existence of the power structure, how can we work to change it without being perceived as a threat to it, and how can we create a more equitable relationship with students without betraying their trust?" These are probing questions which indicate the force of her own critical processes. Unfortunately I cannot address them in the scope of this research paper although they are important questions to be taken up elsewhere. Below, I outline the solutions proffered by other critical feminist pedagogues who have grappled with these questions, and my own reflections.

Luke proposes a feminist critical pedagogy which recognizes the always partial nature of knowledge. Consequently, it would be based on a foundation of irreducible difference. However, despite the obvious danger of generalizing and universalizing, continued critique of historical structures of domination and exploitation are needed (Luke et al 1992:48-9).

Connell reminds us that it is not school, but the childhood family, the adult workplace, and sexual relationships, which are the more potent influences in forming masculinity and femininity but that it is a most strategic location to debate democratic gender relations (1989:301). There is an enormous social context which is well beyond our control. This is a reminder to not take ourselves too seriously.

Nevertheless, he asks how we can make feminism more accessible to a wider audience (ibid). He argues for an "across the curriculum" examination of gender relations in classes, among peers, and in administrative practices (ibid). One suggestion is to widen the scope of sexuality "to the range of gender patterns across the world", so that more positions are considered legitimate (ibid). Minimally, "issues in practice cannot rest upon a rationalistic base of choice or equal opportunities" (Walkerdine 1989:277).

Clark argues that one answer lies in "unpacking the child-centred discourse" (Clark 1989:252). "Teachers need access to a discourse which provides them with the language and ideas which will enable them to provide a critique of child-centred discourses, and which acknowledges gendered production and the accompanying relations of power" (Clark 1989:254). Similarly, new discourses are

needed to replace the universal autonomous individual which encourages "the construction of stereotypical female subject positions which limit women's understanding of their textual inscription and encourages them to see such inscriptions as 'natural' and 'normal'" (Gilbert 1989:263).

For example, within child-centred discourse, children are viewed as innocent and natural with no recognition that the relations of power between adults and children go both ways (Clark 1989:254). In her research, being able to name what was happening from the position of subject (as in feminist discourse) enabled teachers to see patterns of gender difference. This extended to adult/child gender relations so that boy's violent play came to be seen as a form of male sexual harassment (Clark 1989:253-4).

New classroom discourses could replace the following common understanding of good and bad teaching: "In the 'good' classroom, language learning is 'natural', 'personal', 'individual', 'spontaneous', 'truthful', 'involved', 'emotional', 'real', whereas in the 'bad' classroom, language is associated with the unnatural, the impersonal, the premeditated, the contrived, the artificial" (Gilbert 1989:259). We must learn to see differences based on gender as problematic.

Orner asserts that we must learn to listen to one another without either creating a hierarchy of oppression and victimization, or without reifying the voices as speaking some absolute and unchanging truth (Luke 1992:86). In a sense, we must relearn how to use and listen to discourse as temporary and contingent understandings of reality. Words must become for us a dialogue rather than an assertion. Of course, this goes against everything we have learned culturally about

the power of discourse. But until we incorporate the notion that meaning is always shifting and temporary into everyday practices, nothing will fundamentally change.

The main contribution to critical feminist pedagogy of Gore and Ellsworth is the argument for reflexivity on the part of the teacher. She has to be able to account for herself. She must subject her own truth claims to the same critiques as are applied to other regimes of truth. She can no longer position herself as 'the one who knows'. She can no longer arrogantly assume that her truth is always a gift for the student, who may or may not agree with her version. The reflections of the feminist ECE instructor are a positive example of this reflexive process.

Nonetheless, there remain some fundamental problems in a poststructuralist account of critical feminist pedagogy. First, is the problem of difference. Can we prioritize difference, in a seemingly endless stream of differences? Is there some common relation within the classroom without descending to an essentialist conception of the subject? Orner [citing Gentile] argues that we are all, at some level, victims, that at times "everyone is someone else's Other". We must find the empathetic common ground in the experience of difference without trivializing either the lived effects of marginality or the reality that some of these effects are worse than others. One commonality within every classroom is the student-teacher relationship, and as a hierarchical relationship, this may be the common ground for a critical pedagogy.

Another question I have puzzled over involves teachers of young children such as early childhood educators. Young children do not have the critical faculties necessary for the critical pedagogy described above to work. What would the role of teachers of the young be in "empowering" children? Is a critical pedagogy possible at this age level? Is there a difference between socialization and teaching?

If there is any group susceptible to normalizing practices, it is the very young, who do not have the skills necessary to resist others' exercise of power. Is there some pedagogy for them which is not inherently a normalizing practice based on some regime of truth? On the other hand, does a liberatory pedagogy for the young necessarily involve the subjugation of the teacher? Do we need a different pedagogy for teaching teachers of young children?

Young children may exercise power through temper tantrums or screams of joy, for example, but they do not have ways to verbally express their desires. The teacher's role in this is clear to me: she can provide words to help children identify or interpret their feelings. She can help children verbally negotiate in relationships. However, she must use discretion when exercising her own power, since she is authoritatively positioned above the children.

This leaves the problem of the teacher as in service to the children. Perhaps, as I found among the ECE students, when the desire of the teacher is to nurture young children, I must accept that this is their legitimate desire, antithetical as it may be to my experience and understanding of child care. I recall similar desires as a young woman.

The meaning I have attributed to the concept "service" is unnecessarily negative. This relates to my own experience of motherhood, responsible for nurturing four children, and my experience as a nurse, positioned in service to both patients and the medical profession. I would not do now what I wanted to do then on the basis of what I now "know". I would love to "enlighten" other women who seem to be taking the same "unsatisfactory" path.

But here I must recognize the partiality of my truth; it is true for me here and now on the basis of what I have experienced and learned; what was once unconscious is now conscious. I must affirm their different truths, recognizing that these too are shifting and partial. Things will happen to them. They will change their minds. Their desires too will change. They may or may not change in ways similar to myself.

But what can we do in the classrooms in the meantime? Perhaps it is only telling our stories that really teaches, because they open up new ways of being, perhaps useful someday to interpret their experience. I can pass on to them some of what I have learned. As well, we can teach about the "big picture", about how we are positioned by structure through patriarchy and capitalism, for although they do not tell the whole truth, they offer some powerful explanations for inequality. But in a critical pedagogy based on irreducible difference, we can teach, but we cannot plan the outcome.

A coalition of social forces which have been threatened by feminist arguments denounces them as unfounded and unbalanced. The mass media attacks such feminists by painting them all with the same brush. The emergent

"feminist" stereotype is of a "butch" "man-hater". The first-year students' stereotype is not atypical, but representative of a much wider audience. Often, when feminist arguments are put forward in the media, they are identified not as feminist and representing women, but as the voice of a single individual.

The effect of this selective identification of "feminists" on ECE students is apparent. What most of the ECE students understand as feminism disrupts their hopes, dreams, and desires for marriage, children, a valued career etc., as well as their belief in gender equality. Most women have been positioned from birth to desire these circumstances. Their desire to take up these positions outweighs any rational feminist argument for change. But if this is true, then how do desires change? Can anything shatter our world view, forcing us to build a new framework within which to operate?

In my experience, we do not willingly change the way we see the world unless we perceive no alternative, with our "backs to the wall" so to speak. I believe we all desire to make sense of our lives and to find meaning for our existence. When there is a contradiction between our world-view and our personal circumstances which is so great that it cannot be denied, we are forced to seek some new way to explain our subject position.

Women and men who identify themselves as feminists have been faced with conditions not explained by conventional ideology or contradicted by myths such as "true love" or "married bliss". A feminist perspective helps us better make sense of our subject positioning in the world.

The ECE students, for the most part, do not feel that their subject position is better explained by feminism, but rather feel alienated by it. From their discussion and comments, the pride the students felt towards their career choice of working with children contradicted what they understood as a feminist position which they felt devalued such work. Many students' desires for a "traditional" life with marriage and children contradicted their understanding of feminism which they saw as belittling their desires.

The ECE program has not forced them to re-evaluate their subject positions. Rather, the curriculum reinforced their own world-view through mainstream child development theory which is rationally theorized on the assumed truth of the equal, universal individual. Feminist content is consistently from a liberal perspective and also upholds these truths. Neither is this content identified as feminist, separated as it is from its historical origins. Liberal feminism has been appropriated by and become part of the mainstream.

As well, most of the students were relatively young and much of their life experience has thus far involved schooling and family dependence. The older students were much more likely to think of themselves as feminists. This supports my belief that people change only when old coping mechanisms are ineffective. This occurs when the contradictions between desired fantasy and a lived reality which cannot be denied are so great that they must be dealt with. Then people try to make new sense of their world with new ideas. I believe this is why people change. Some find feminism.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Discourse refers to a "regulated system of statements" (Henriques et al 1984:105). *Discursive practice* captures the notion of a context-specific activity, constrained by taken-for-granted rules of what is doable and sayable within a particular social practice. Discursive practices are not discrete or exclusive entities, but exist in relation to other practices, often other competing discourses, and are interpenetrated by larger complex sets of practices and power relations.

The concept *subject* (replacing individual) captures the experience of being a person. The subject is understood to be motivated by conscious and rational motives, as well as unconscious and irrational ones. Orner argues that "the term 'subject' encourages us to think of ourselves and our realities as constructions: the products of signifying or meaning-making activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious" (in Luke 1992:79) rather than thinking of ourselves as autonomous individuals.

As subjects, we are constructed from historically-specific experiences understood in terms of the multiple, discursively produced positions available to us within particular discursive practices. These *subject positions* are often inconsistent, resulting in multiple and contradictory identities. As subjects, identity is never fixed, but is reconstituted in discursive practices each time we think or speak (Weedon 1987:33).

Subjectivity then, rather than identity, is the concept used to capture the multiple and shifting nature of the subject participating in particular discursive practices (Davies 1991:43). The term *stories* tries to capture the notion that our subjectivity and subject positions are fictions or narratives which construct us discursively rather than a truth about who we are (Davies 1989:229).

I understand *ideology* to mean the dominant forms of thought available to think about ourselves and our society. These ways of knowing coordinate, manage and control social structure, originating, not spontaneously within each individual, but through powerful ideological apparatuses such as the media and educational institutions (Smith 1987:19). These dominant forms of thought exist as the unquestioned, taken-for-granted truths around which we build our everyday lived activities. The possible ways of pursuing our interests are circumscribed by established social relations which sustain the status quo. Ideologies may also be referred to as *truth claims*.

Desire captures the notion that subjects are motivated by unconscious, irrational "needs" as well as conscious ones. Further, human activity is not all rationally-

based nor can it always be explained in rational terms.³⁹ The concept "desire" sheds light on the perplexing reality that subjects willingly take up positions circumscribed for them, when in rational terms, these positions may be oppressive. Poststructuralism thus takes into account "our unreasonable selves" (Ingleby 1987:209).

Power within a poststructuralist paradigm is always a relation (Weedon 1987:113). Power refers to something which is always and everywhere present, but which is exercised or made manifest only in lived activities. This reformulates the humanist and the structuralist notion of power as property or as a commodity, as something which can be withheld or given away.

³⁹ This concept is further expanded upon in Chapter II.

APPENDIX B: COURSES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM 1991-92

01	Daycare legislation	01	16	16
02	Child Psychology	02	16	32
03	Integrative Seminar	02	16	32
04	Observation I	02	16	32
05	English I	03	16	48
06	Music and Movement	02	16	32
07	Art and Children	02	16	32
08	Family Issues and Child Abuse	03	16	48
09	Early Childhood Education I	04	16	64
10	Nutrition	02	08	16
11	Health	02	08	16
	SEMESTER II (16 weeks)			
12	Practice Teaching I	days	07	
13	Field Seminar I	02	07	14
14	English II	05	09	45
15	Infants and Toddler Care	04	09	36
16	Early Childhood Education II	06	09	54
17	Child Development and Observation II	06	09	54
	SEMESTER III (16 weeks)			
18	Practice Teaching II	days	06	
19	Field Seminar II	02	06	12
20	School Age child and Care	03	10	30
21	Observation III	03	10	30
22	Child Development II	04	10	40
23	Children's Literature I	04	10	40
24	Early Childhood Education III	06	10	60
	SEMESTER IV			
25	Psychomotor - Laboratory	03	08	24
26	Integration & Special Needs Children	05	08	40
27	Administration and Day Care	05	08	40
28	Early Childhood Education IV	06	08	48
29	Children's Literature II	04	08	32
30	Practice Teaching	days	08	
31	Field Seminar III	02	08	16

APPENDIX C:

Questionnaire: Early Childhood Education Programme for ECE Students

R.E. Lowe
Sociology Department
Carleton University
School Tel: 788-2582

I am a graduate student in the Sociology Department at Carleton University. In my research for my Master's Thesis, I am looking at how gender is connected to early childhood education. To date, this area has not been studied and your responses to the attached questionnaire will greatly help my research.

This research is independent of the Early Childhood Education program and your responses have no bearing on your status as a student. All questions are optional. All answers are confidential and your anonymity is assured. Please do not consult your textbooks. There are no right or wrong answers. Your sincere opinions will be the most valuable for my research.

The results of this research project can be made available to you through a brief summary submitted to the Early Childhood Education Program Director or through the Interlibrary Loan service at Carleton University. All written records will be destroyed. No names will appear in the final report.

Completion of the following questionnaire indicates your understanding and consent. Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. What reasons were most important to you when choosing the Early Childhood Education Program as your post-secondary education?

(list as many as you wish)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

2. It has been found that young children have a strong sense of being a boy or a girl. What do you think are the major factors accounting for this?

3. What factors, if any, have been emphasized in the ECE Program to account for young children developing this sense of being a girl or a boy?

4. Upon graduation, I hope to: (please check all that are appropriate)

1. work in a day care centre
2. work in a nursery school
3. be a kindergarten assistant
4. continue with other post-secondary education
5. other (please specify) _____

5. Would you call yourself a feminist? (circle one)

- a. Yes b. No c. Don't Know

Please indicate the major reasons for your response:

6. If there are any comments you would like to make at this time about any of the questions I have asked, please do so.

6. Are you:

1. Female
2. Male

7. Please write your age

in years _____

8. Are you completing:

1. First year
2. Second year
3. Other _____

9. Are you a:

1. Full-time student
2. Part-time student

10. What level of education did you achieve before entering the ECE program?
(choose one)

1. high school to grade _____	2. completed high school
3. some post-secondary (not including now)	4. completed post-secondary
5. some university	6. university degree
7. other (please specify) _____	

Would you be willing to participate in an personal interview with me after your exams? The focus would be on your experience in the ECE program. An interview would take about half an hour. Your anonymity would of course be assured.

YES NO

If yes, please write your first name and phone number so that I can contact you.

First name: _____ Phone number: _____

I appreciate the time and effort you have taken to complete this questionnaire.

END

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FIN