Understanding the Teacher Self: Learning Through Critical AutoEthnography

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Résumé</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laying the Cornerstones</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Am I Going and What Are the Questions?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Am I?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Field Guide</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Distinct Heritage</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Teacher Professional Competencies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgia: Avoiding the Pitfalls</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives That Provide Context</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Class Structures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelines: Removing the Shutters</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Enigma of Framed Experiences: Looking in the Mirror, Reflections</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold Moments: Opening the Door</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Position of Privilege</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Voice and Authenticity to Teaching</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Displacements</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting Cultural Capital</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections as a Teacher Thus Far: The Foundation

New Directions

Doing Critical AutoEthnography and the Place of Memory Triggers

The Role of Personal Narrative

Memory Sites in the Doing of Critical AutoEthnography

Overview of the Thesis

Narrative Inquiry and Memory-Work in Teacher Education

Introduction

Narrative Inquiry in Teacher Education

Pedagogy: More Than Just Teaching

Significance of Literacy

Addressing the Self: Roots of Narrative Inquiry

Lived Experiences, Knowledge Landscapes, and Place

Narrative Inquiry and the Importance of the Self

Self-Study and the Teacher

Filling the Gaps: What Is Needed?

Teaching and Learning As Linked

Studying the Past to Influence the Future in Teacher Education

Memory Makes Us

Working Back Through Memory in Teacher Education

Role of Images in Memory-Work and Teacher Development

Critical Questions

Summary
Critical AutoEthnography:
Theoretical & Methodological Considerations

Introduction: Setting the Stage

What is AutoEthnography?

Roots of Autoethnography

Autoethnography as Method

Different Paths, Similar Destinations

What is Critical Pedagogy?

Roots of Critical Pedagogy

Significance of Cultural Literacy to Critical Pedagogy

Importance of the “Voice”

Problem-Posing Teaching and Research

Critical AutoEthnography: Boundary Crossing

The “Critical” in Critical AutoEthnography

Importance of Affirming Our Biases

Bricolage

Development of Content, Appearance, and Process Qualities

Critical AutoEthnography: Learning and Schooling

The Need for Critical AutoEthnography

Methodologies in Critical AutoEthnography

Writing as Research

Importance of Memory Triggers to Critical AutoEthnography

Critical AutoEthnography and Fieldwork
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Will We Know When We Know It? Assessing a Critical AutoEthnography</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Self-Study</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Autoethnographies</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memory Site 1: Schools As Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Matters</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Triggers: Working With Photographs</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working With Family Photographs</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working With School Photographs</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Schools, Different Experiences</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Sweet Home</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Play</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolyard Conditioning</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture of Touch</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Royal Academy</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Grade 1 Teacher</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Grade 2 Teacher</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Schoolyard</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Move</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Side of the Tracks</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolorès: The Daughter</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred, the Uncle</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mao, the Adopted Child</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo, the Grandfather</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Laden, the Dog</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory-Work: Excavating Themes on Class in <em>Les Bougon</em></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical AutoEthnography in Teaching: Where Am I in This Story?</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Use of Humor</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproducing and Reinforcing Class Structures</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Les Bougon</em> and My Teacher Identity</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Memory Site 3: Unpacking the Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Triggers: Working With Teaching Texts</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology: Revisiting the <em>Go Program</em></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking Back</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Memory Work: Writing 1</em></td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Memory Work: Writing 2</em></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Memory Work: Writing 3</em></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Myself in the Classroom</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory vs. Practice and Institutionalized Positivism:</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Personal Orientation Program (POP)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Critical AutoEthnography and Teacher Education</em></td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Research Questions and How I Addressed Them 206

Assessing My Critical AutoEthnography 208

Toward Better Teaching 211

Contributions to New Knowledge 211

Implications For Further Research 213

Limitations 214

Towards a Framework for Critical AutoEthnography and Teacher Education 215

Proposition One: Development Education and Reflective Teaching 216

Proposition Two: Critical AutoEthnography is a Viable Alternative to a Teacher Competencies Model 217

Proposition Three: A Critical AutoEthnographic Model (as Opposed to a Teacher Competencies) Addresses the Context of Learning 219

Proposition Four: Quebec’s Insistence On Seeing Education as a Science Fails to Acknowledge the Role of Subjectivity 220

Proposition Five: Critical AutoEthnography in Relation to Integrity as Wholeness 222
Proposition Six: Knowing Who We Are as Teachers Can Lead to Better Teaching

Significance of This Framework

Final Reflections

References

Appendix A: Core Professional Competencies for the Teaching Profession
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Schools and homes visited (starting from left to right) 83
Figure 2: Brian waiting for his brother to return from school (circa 1984) 86
Figure 3: 772 Champagneur 89
Figure 4: Brian (middle right) and family 89
Figure 5: Guy Drummond Elementary School, Outremont 91
Figure 6: Guy Drummond Yard (North view) 95
Figure 7: Mount Royal Academy, Town of Mount Royal 98
Figure 8: 6957 Bloomfield, Montreal 105
Figure 9: 6226 Gaspe, Rosemont, Montreal 107
Figure 10: Luke Memorial Challaghan Elementary School 108
Figure 11: Bars on windows 108
Figure 12: Nazareth Elementary School, Montreal 111
Figure 13: 5793 2nd Avenue, Rosemont, Montreal 112
Figure 14: Aunt (right) and Cousin (left) in front of house with dog 113
Figure 15: Nesbitt Elementary School, Montreal 114
Figure 16: The Bougon Family 130
Figure 17: Leo, Dolorès, and a Comedia 131
Figure 18: Junior, supervisor of a home for people with intellectual disabilities, and a resident 132
Figure 19: A fourteen-year-old and her mother’s ex-boyfriend 132
Figure 20: Paul Bougon 135
Figure 21: Rita Bougon 138
Figure 22: Junior Bougon 141
Figure 23: Dolorès Bougon 143
Figure 24: Frederic Bougon 146
Figure 25: Mao Bougon 148
Figure 26: Leo Bougon 150
Figure 27: Ben Laden Bougon 151
Figure 28: The Go Program home DVD with instruction packet 174
Figure 29: Unpacking stored notes from undergrad and first year teaching 176
Figure 30: Uncovering the Go Program from storage 178
Figure 31: Notes scribbled on test sheets 188
Figure 32: Notes on first Go Program quiz, questioning stereotypes 191
Figure 33: Quiz 3 of Go Program, encouraging static thinking 195
Figure 34: Go Program Quiz 4 on point of view 200
Figure 35: Criteria for assessing my work 210

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Schools attended and grade level 87
Table 2: Pictures, positions and comments 88
Table 3: Homes and when I lived in each 88
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how past memories can shape how we see the present and future in the context of teacher education and professional development. Using qualitative inquiry, drawing in particular on self-study and memory-work, I explore the ways in which Critical AutoEthnography can serve as a tool for personal and professional growth in the context of teacher identity. I investigate the relationship between and among Autoethnography, Critical Pedagogy and Critical AutoEthnography.

For the fieldwork I visit three memory sites. The first memory site is an arts-informed study of the memories associated with the elementary school grounds and neighborhoods I frequented growing up as a child in the 1980s in and around Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I identify and expand on three important Narrative Inquiry approaches; a) looking at memory and story as a pedagogical tool; b) focusing on place as identity markers; and c) doing self-study as a form of professional development. The second memory site draws on my personal viewing/close reading of a television series, Les Bougon, a popular series shown on Quebec public television that aired for three seasons from 2004 to 2006. I look at how concepts of gender, race, and class were used to provide a thin veneer of normalcy that contributed to the manufacturing and reinforcing of a specific type of cultural oppression within Quebec. The third memory site addresses the development of my own ethnography as it relates to professional self-conscious reflexivity. I present narratives related to my teacher education and experiences in order to map out my lived experiences as texts leading to a greater understanding of my professional development as a teacher educator.
Identifying and incorporating memory as pedagogy through the employment of Critical AutoEthnographic narratives plays on the symbiotic relationship between the process and product that allowed for the incorporation of my own voice within my research. Gaining greater awareness of my professional teacher self through the use of Critical AutoEthnography has allowed me to simultaneously deepen an understanding of my personal self. The study has implications for the use of memory-work in Critical AutoEthnography as a tool for teachers’ personal and pedagogical renewal. Teachers must be able to situate themselves within their own cultural power dynamics to see themselves critically within the larger context of issues such as class and race; this can bring them closer to uncovering injustices in their work with students.
RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine comment les souvenirs peuvent façonner la manière dont nous percevons le présent et l’avenir dans le cadre de la formation des enseignants et du développement professionnel. En utilisant une enquête qualitative, en m’inspirant de l’auto-apprentissage et de la mémoire-travail, j’explore les façons dont l’autoethnographie critique peut servir d’outil de croissance personnelle et professionnelle dans le contexte de l’identité des enseignants. Cette thèse étudie la relation entre l’autoethnographie, la pédagogie critique et l’autoethnographie critique.

Dans mon travail sur le terrain, j’examine trois lieux de la mémoire. Le premier site de recherche est une étude influencée par l’art des souvenirs associés aux terrains de jeux de l’école primaire et aux quartiers que je fréquentais durant mon enfance dans les années 1980, dans la région de Montréal. J’identifie et apporte des précisions sur trois importantes approches d’enquête narrative : a) en me penchant sur la mémoire et les histoires comme outil pédagogique; b) en me concentrant sur les lieux comme marqueurs d’identité; et c) en utilisant l’auto-apprentissage comme forme de développement professionnel. Le deuxième lieu de la mémoire est tiré de mon observation personnelle et de ma lecture attentive d’une télésérie, Les Bougon, une série populaire québécoise ayant été diffusée entre 2004 et 2006. J’observe comment les concepts de genre, de race et de classe ont été utilisés pour fournir un mince vernis de normalité contribuant à la fabrication et au renforcement d’un type spécifique de répression culturelle au Québec. Le troisième lieu de la mémoire porte sur le développement de ma propre ethnographie qui se rapporte à la réflexivité de l’auto-conscience professionnelle. Je présente des récits liés à ma formation d’enseignant dans le but de définir mes expériences vécues comme des « textes » menant à une plus grande compréhension de mon développement professionnel en tant que formateur d’enseignants.
Le fait d’identifier et d’incorporer les souvenirs comme de la pédagogie en employant des récits autoethnographiques critiques joue sur la relation symbiotique entre le processus et le produit qui a permis d’inclure ma propre voix au sein de ma recherche. Prendre davantage conscience de moi-même en tant qu’enseignant par l’utilisation de l’autoethnographie critique m’a permis d’approfondir simultanément ma compréhension de mon identité auto-professionnelle et personnelle. L’étude a des implications pour l’utilisation de la mémoire-travail en autoethnographie critique en tant qu’outil pour le renouvellement personnel et pédagogique de l’enseignant. Les enseignants doivent être en mesure de se situer au sein de leurs propres dynamiques culturelles, en étant capable de se voir de façon critique dans un contexte plus large en abordant des questions telles que la classe et la race. Ainsi, cela peut les amener à découvrir les injustices dans leur travail avec les élèves.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support and guidance of so many people over the years. As I look back over this journey special memories surface.

In one frame I can see myself coming home from school jumping into the arms of my smiling mother; in another I am sitting next to her as she goes over my letters with me, in another she is cutting out pictures from books so that I can complete my projects. I know she is on my side and is ready to fight for me.

I love you, Mom.

I see my grade seven Drama teacher, Ms. Kegal, challenging me to express myself, helping me to learn and become a stronger person.

Thank you.

I see my father coming getting ready for work but sitting down and helping me with my math, making jokes, making me think hard about things from another perspective. I see him getting scared when he thinks I am hurt. I know he cares.

I love you, Dad.

I see my grade six teacher, Mr. Fuoco, taking the time to go over the assignments with me, reminding me that I can do them.

Thank you.

I see my grade eight Science teacher, grade 10 economics, and grade 11 English teachers all rooting for me.

Thank you all.

I see my university teacher, Dr. Elizabeth Wood, demonstrating what it means to be empathetic, brave and unafraid to question one’s self.

Thank you.
I see Junko Toyota (Toyota Sensei) teaching me that a teacher’s responsibilities do not end at the end of the school day, that students take center stage, and that one should never be afraid to speak up. She is like another mother to me.

Domo arigatou gozaimasu.

I see Ikuko and Kyoko Toyota ensuring that I remain on course and reminding me that teachers who care are the backbone of a good society.

Domo arigatou gozaimasu.

I see my good friend Irene Antypas having coffee with me while we discuss the most mundane things, supporting me in everything I decide to do.

Thank you.

I see my alter ego Signe Jakobsen sharing a meal with me at the local diner, reassuring me that I'm a better person and teacher than I give myself credit for.

Thank you.

I see my siblings Marcel Jr and Katherina checking in on me in order to make sure I am doing all right.

Thank you, sis. Thank you, bro!

I see numerous other family members helping me along the way. Among them, Pier-Philippe is offering a hand when I need it. The Cyr's and Grenier's are providing me unmatched optimism when I need it. My aunt Carole asked me if I needed anything and reminded me that I am special.

Thank you all.

I see Rejean and Denise’s welcoming me into their home during my trips to Rimouski where I can get some of my writing done. They are treating me as if I am their own son with home cooked meals made with love.

Thank you.

I see colleagues over the years in various schools, teachers, principals, support staff being the ear I needed to remain sane and committed to my profession while simultaneously engaging in this study. There are so many brave souls, amazing educators, people, all inspiring in their own way.

Thanks to you all.
I see my students from the different schools in Canada, Japan and Tanzania that are teaching me so much.

Thank you.

I see myself sharing a meal with Dr. Shirley Steinberg and Dr. Joe Kincheloe after an evening class. When Joe speaks to me I feel that I’m the smartest person in the world and Shirley has always looked out for me. Their encouragement provided me with the confidence to embark on this voyage.

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I see Dr. Spencer Boudreau taking the time to explain his views on teaching and learning, on living, and on living with integrity.

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I cannot thank him enough for not giving up on me.
Laying the Cornerstones

Where Am I Going and What Are the Questions?

Lives and their experiences, the telling and the told, are represented in stories which are performances. Stories like pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible. (Denzin, 2005, p. 1)

Through a portion of the writing of this thesis I have been seated at a small desk in a room reserved for doctoral students in the McGill University Library’s McLennan-Redpath Building, just a stone’s throw from where I used to hang around as a child growing up in and around Montreal’s downtown core. I remember riding my bike on and around the narrow streets, often alone in full wonder of the views, smells, and feelings of what I experienced. The starting point for this journey is the construction and development of the concept of self through the use of personal narrative. The use of personal narrative sets the stage for the development of the situations and events that have influenced the development of my identity. My autobiography, as seen through memory-work, is the starting point of my journey to locate myself. Essentially the main questions addressed in this thesis relate to the experiences I have had that have shaped me into the researcher and educator I have become. This autobiography has helped me to understand myself and my development in relation to several themes related to education, such as power and knowledge, and its effect on my identity.

First, I aim to uncover how my memories have shaped my identity and how Narrative Inquiry can contribute to my personal practice and to my practice as a teacher. What are the main decisions that I have taken and why have I taken them? What are the central events that have
shaped my personal and academic worldview? Through critical pedagogy and post-formal thinking, following Kincheloe (2008a), I seek to identify and expose the vulnerabilities of other (traditional) approaches in order to create a solid concept of what really goes on in a classroom. Post-formal as used here is defined as involving “our ability to engage in ideological disembedding, the ability to remove ourselves from socio-interpersonal norms and expectations” (Hayes, Steinberg, & Tobin, 2011, p. 60).

Second, how can I use memory triggers to draw upon autobiography, autoethnography, and memory-work to help develop and examine my place in terms of the space I inhabit? What do the memories associated with the journey I have taken to get here teach me about myself?

Lastly, how have the relationships between knowledge and education, power and society, as well as the social policies relating to education and diversity in Quebec influenced the development of my concept of self and how has this affected my teaching? How do I place myself within my pedagogical theory and practice and how can this work be researched within a framework of Critical AutoEthnography\(^1\)?

**Who Am I?**

Our conception of self and world, therefore, can only become critical when we appreciate the historicity of its formation.

(Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999, p. 62)

As a student, teacher, consultant, and community leader I have spent much of the last decade trying to improve myself. This “self” is not necessarily defined as a specific action or movement but rather a manifestation of empathy and understanding as well as a commitment to service. This journey is neither framed by a specific ideology nor is it the response to an external pressure. I have an inner

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\(^1\) The Capitalization of the “E” in Critical AutoEthnography delineates my contention that the self, other, and culture should be of equal importance and stature when we are performing such research. The differences between Critical Autoethnography and Critical AutoEthnography will be further discussed later in this chapter.
motivation to work towards a greater good, one that allows me to become a better person - to become more humane. Part of the goal of this academic writing exercise is to establish where the motivation comes from and what I can learn about it. As Bambara (1992) puts it in a dialogue in her short story *The Lesson*:

Miss Moore: Imagine for a minute what kind of society it is in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven.

Sugar: I think...that this is not much of a democracy if you ask me. Equal chance to pursue happiness means equal crack at the dough, don’t it? (p. 95)

Miss Moores is attempting to teach the children under her temporary care that knowledge and awareness of economic inequality might be difficult but it is a central part to social justice education. In my case I was not aware of the inequalities that surrounded my personal situation until I returned to my past and was confronted with this through a critical education.

**Hybrid Study**

**A Field Guide**

Given that there is a lag between the experiences we have and the understanding of them (Strong-Wilson, 2013), how can teacher researchers construct a method that incorporates self-conscious reflexivity into the research they are attempting to undertake? We can begin by acknowledging that we cannot take for granted that the “embodied center from which we feel, touch, and hear” is an integral part of who we become (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse, & Allnutt, 2011, p. 3). Identifying and incorporating memory as pedagogy, through the employment of autoethnographic narratives, plays on the symbiotic relationship between the process and product which in itself allows for the incorporation of one’s own voice within the research.
A Distinct Heritage

Education in the province of Quebec has taken a different path than its Canadian counterparts, mostly because of its distinctive cultural heritage (Dickinson & Young, 2008). The Catholic Church played a large role in the province’s education policies until the creation of a Ministry of Education (MEQ) in the mid-1960s. Based largely on the recommendations of the Parent report (Gouvernement du Quebec, 1963) which looked at reforming the entire education system, the newly formed MEQ, later renamed MELS, outlined a provincial curriculum that was needed in order to increase literacy rates as well as school attendance, as well as to prepare its residents to acquire the skills needed to ensure the economic prosperity of the province (Corbo, 2004, 2008; Dufour, 1997). In 1978 the creation of free public colleges (CEGEPS) ensured that students who graduated from the new schools could continue with their post-secondary education. Although the establishment of secular school boards would occur only at the turn of the 21st century in Quebec, some scholars argue that public schools had already *de facto* broken their connection from religious control (Corbo, 2008). Curriculum standards were centralized and designed with a focus on the knowledge, made up of a set of facts that students were supposed to acquire as they passed through the various levels of schooling. The Estates General on Education in the late nineties led once again to an educational reform, which was itself designed to prepare students for a knowledge- and technology-based society (Guimont, 2009). The focus of the curriculum was to be changed from one based on knowledge to a more competency-based one.

Educational reforms are often presented as being based on preparing students for the future but end up treating them as if they were skeletons, as it were, of life “without the flesh

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2 The Ministry of Education of the province of Quebec has recently changed names and become the Ministère de L’Éducation, de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (MEESR). For the purposes of this study the former acronym MELS will be employed.
and consciousness of being” (Muncey, 2010, p. 57). Despite the recent educational reform based on competencies, teachers in Quebec have been increasingly assigned non-teaching tasks, such as student supervision, while their independence and influence as to how to teach in the classroom has slowly been eroded. The relationship between knowledge and education, and power and society has changed and the social policies relating to education and diversity in this province have progressively moved to the right (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Burstyn, 2004). I am particularly interested in the question of the recent pedagogical reforms in Quebec and the relationship between social, cultural and political capital in shaping teacher identity. What are some ways to define this area, and who are some of the key researchers working in the area of teacher identity? How might this work be applied to Quebec? In particular, how has the cultural, social and ideological mood in Quebec shifted since the last educational reform? As I observed these shifts, I formulated some guiding questions: Since teachers are the primary agents in the educational domain, are they being left out of the current educational formalist climate? Is the introduction of overtly behaviorist materials in the classroom a new concept? How can Critical AutoEthnography as I define it help to address the concerns discussed in order to have an impact on teaching, learning, and personal development?

Core Teacher Professional Competencies

Over the last three decades there has been a shift towards competency-based learning in the Western world (Audigier & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2008). Politicians looking for a solution to the high student dropout rate in Quebec decided to revamp the education system in order to prepare students for the modern world. The previous reforms of the 1960s had not foreseen the modern advancements in electronics which, some have argued, may have contributed to more students dropping out because of their technological illiteracy (Baillargeon, 2009).
In order to be able to implement a new curriculum, the province of Quebec’s Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS) developed 12 core professional competences that new and practicing teachers were henceforth expected to develop (see Appendix A). Quebec’s MELS has identified the need for increased teacher understanding of the shifting nature of their roles in and out of the classroom (MELS, 2000). If teachers are to progress they are expected to develop their teaching in accordance with the increased social, economic, and racial diversity in the school system. Each competency deals directly or indirectly with the teacher’s ability to integrate his or her own concept of identity in order to adjust to the continually evolving landscape of the public classroom. In other words, in order to become a teacher all pre-service teachers must undertake some form of self-reflective work so as to situate their own learning and understanding of their present and future teacher practice. Divided into four parts dealing with foundations, the teaching act, social and educational context, as well as professional identity, the core professional competencies were designed to help teachers develop a stronger professional identity as well as to become able to teach from a cultural perspective (MELS, 2000). Furthermore, competencies are seen as ones that exist in real-life settings, following a progression from simple to complex, based on a set of resources in situations requiring professional action, and as part of internal practice that is a successful, effective, and recurrent performance (MELS, 2000). Teachers and schools were to be given an increase in autonomy in order to be able to prepare their students for the changing world. According to MELS (2000), teachers are viewed as agents who transpose culture by defining meaning for their students. Teachers are expected to act as professional inheritors, critics, and interpreters of knowledge or culture when teaching their students (2000), but are not given the tools required to fulfill the task (Baillargeon, 2009). More specifically, Baillargeon argues that teacher education without the philosophical, pedagogical and political consciousness is just a waste of teaching time. Although he
stresses the need for teachers to be more functionally and cultural literate, he does not put emphasis on the importance of critical literacy. Essentially, the focus is on the how rather than the why behind what we learn.

Whereas the 12 core professional teacher competencies place little focus on the teacher self, Critical Pedagogy as a theory of cognition within qualitative methods can act as an extra layer in creating more contexts and perspectives, thus allowing for a better understanding of the process of memory construction and its relevance to our personal development as well as to pedagogy. Combining the elements of personal narrative with the hermeneutic focus of critical pedagogy within the context of memory-work in teacher education allows for the establishment of a new subcategory within qualitative inquiry which allows, in turn, for an equal emphasis on the Self, Other and Culture. This, as I describe in later chapters is called Critical AutoEthnography.

**Nostalgia: Avoiding the Pitfalls**

Using memory in order to evoke understanding that will help, in turn, to construct a better understanding of teacher practice inevitably leads to questions of trustworthiness and rigor (Boym, 2001; Strong-Wilson, 2013). This study builds on the assumption that “how we remember is as important as what we remember” (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 220). It therefore draws on a number of different approaches such as Narrative Inquiry through memory triggers, and seeing schools as artifacts to allow for a qualitative construction of understanding and knowledge, while at the same time, avoiding the dangers of using nostalgia to dwell on the past (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). As Boym (2001) makes clear, “nostalgia is never literal, but lateral”, and should never be taken at face value; it can be seen as a type of selective memory (p. 354). Narratives as tools for inquiry enable the teacher research to return to the past in order to reanalyze and interpret past events in relation to the contemporary context.
Narratives That Provide Context

Identifying Class Structures

In the city during the summers, the public had to pay in order to have access to the city pool. I remember on some occasions being asked by my mother to pass under the turnstile in order to bypass the entrance fee. Even at five and six years of age, I already felt different from the people I lived around; they didn’t have to cheat to get in, at least not in the same way. Interestingly enough, despite my family’s economic situation, my parents took comfort in the fact that we were not in Africa, and therefore we had to eat all the food on our plates. Besides encouraging an over-dependence on food, this also provided me with the notion that I was different from Africans. Although I would later hear that same argument from the parents of other friends in the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods I would eventually occupy, I do not remember hearing it in the big houses of the affluent Outremont residents I was invited into. Although I was aware of the differences between the other children and myself, I did not grasp the gravity of the divide between us.

My parents never complained about money as an inhibitor to social progression. In fact, we were continually reminded of how “well off” we were. It is only later on during my graduate research work that I could begin to appreciate the significance of establishing a culture of possibility despite the harsh reality with which I was provided. Freire (1970) mentions the need to maintain hope even when the harshness of reality might suggest the opposite. More importantly, my parents ensured that I knew my place in society without having to give up rational hope that I could change my place within it. The only thing they demanded from me was that I complete my high school education.

Lifelines: Removing the Shutters

It was not until college that I had the opportunity to begin to reconceptualize my lived experiences through different lenses. I had transferred from a science program into Liberal Arts. A professor introduced me to the writings of Lise Noël (1994) who challenged established historical truths and ways of seeing the world. This professor spent a lot of time in our classes challenging our
assumptions surrounding race and privilege mostly through the use of the Socratic method. Issues such as racial theory, equality vs. equity, homophobia, and entrenched discrimination were closely examined and, initially, this caused much discomfort in my thinking. Until that course I had not engaged in any real type of reflectivity that Kirk (2009) described as necessary in order to begin to critically explore my experiences, perceptions, and positions, a fundamental part of developing shared understandings of educational issues.

The Enigma of Framed Experiences: Looking in the Mirror, Reflections

A researcher is encouraged to be cognizant of his or her role as a researcher and also to recognize that researchers cannot place themselves “above or beyond what they study” (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 19). The experiences that have enabled me to get to this stage in my professional and academic career have all contributed to my worldview. As Ellis and Bochner (1996, p. 28) ask, can critical autoethnography allow for the researcher to reflect on his or her own experience, “enhancing [the]... capacity to cope with life’s contingencies?”

I am a 36-year-old French Canadian from a lower-middle-class working family in Montreal. I am the only one of about 45 grandchildren to have earned a university degree, and the only one pursuing graduate studies. I believe these factors have affected the way I see the world. Since my parents chose to place me in the English public school system (coupled with the fact that we moved often), I had to change schools a number of times as the English population in Montreal quickly started to decrease and their schools began to close during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, I had the opportunity to attend both Catholic and Protestant schools in very different neighborhoods. By the time I reached College, I had attended 8 different institutions. Each time I began at a new school, it took a while before I adjusted to the new community. More specifically, I had to instantly assimilate into the new environment - often losing a bit of myself in the process. Questions such as what did I feel I lost, and why, as well as what this said about the institutional environment to which I was continually exposed were essential to discovering more about
what has shaped my teaching. I quickly realized that the official curriculum was not always taught the same way. Rules and procedures changed drastically depending on the teachers, school, and community. In most cases, I was not aware that my school community might be judging me based on my cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background. More significantly, I was oblivious to the fact that I was also judging my new acquaintances based on the same basic stereotypes I had brought with me from previous schools. Once I became a schoolteacher, I increasingly became aware that all these factors pertaining to my upbringing and membership in particular groups were contributing greatly to my Weltanschauung or worldview. Unfortunately I did not have the scaffolding necessary to frame what I was feeling within a philosophy of learning such as Critical Pedagogy. Although my socio-economic background was different than that of the other students, it was easy for me to be accepted by all the schools, by my peers, and by school staff members. I believe that the fact that I had a bilingual name and that I was Caucasian helped me greatly in this respect. Since I rarely spent more than two years at a given school, it was always taken for granted that my family flew to Disneyland every summer, and that my parents drove an expensive car, never mind that they did not own one at all. At that time I recognized the need to play into the stereotypes that they had, but I was not aware of the greater implications such as the construction and acceptance of my own cultural heritage. Did my identity as a white male play a role in the manner in which I saw myself in terms of social privilege?

As the first member of my immediate family to have successfully completed a post-graduate degree, let alone a university degree, and in the absence of academic role models, I have often had to navigate academia without these traditional role models to help scaffold my journey. This became very apparent to me when I surveyed my classmates during the first week of my education degree. So many of them hailed from a family in which one parent had been a teacher, or both parents had, and almost all had at least one parent who had graduated from College. Consequently I became dependent on colleagues and professors to encourage me to pursue higher education. As a teacher I have been affected strongly by the experiences that I have lived as well as by the people
I have met along the way. As Bruner (1996) argued, the mind is not an empty mechanism but rather something that is attached to the body, and part of a greater whole or consciousness. Who are the people who have influenced my journey? What are the main decisions that I have taken and why have I taken them? What are the central events that have shaped my personal and academic worldview? Autoethnography allows for the examination and explaining of one’s place within one’s society (Chang, 2008). Critical pedagogy and post-formal thinking seek to “identify and expose the vulnerabilities of other (traditional) approaches such as Newtonian-Cartesian thinking” (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 27) in order to create a solid concept of what really goes on in a classroom. Both together provide for an effective tool to deal with the constantly changing reality, as we perceive it. How has the relationship between knowledge and education, power and society, as well as the social policies relating to education and diversity in our lives influenced the development of our concept of self? How do I place myself within my pedagogical theory and practice and how can this work be researched within Critical AutoEthnography?

**Threshold Moments: Opening the Door**

A recollection that develops through productive remembering can act as a gateway towards greater in-depth understanding of one’s past, thus leading to a better understanding of our future (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2013).

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One example from when I was in grade two stands out in my mind as a threshold moment into the manner in which my race played a role in my eventual mild social mobility. At a school in the affluent Town of Mount Royal, my teacher often gave more attention to John during classroom instructions. I remember because he sat behind me meaning I could not goof off as much as I would have liked to since she always seemed to keep an eye on him. Eventually I

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This is a pseudonym, as are all the names I use in this thesis for the various characters who populated my schools and who feature in my stories.
asked the teacher if I could sit in front of Ronald because I claimed that the seat had a better view of the blackboard. At the time I thought that it was normal for John to need extra help because he always seemed to expect it, but his being the only Black student might have meant there was more at play. The language used by my teacher about John was often vague and neutral but there always seemed to be a hidden message. “You can do better John,” and “Why can’t you make an effort,” and “You don’t understand anything” were some of the phrases I distinctly remember her saying to John. Other students were treated differently. Ronald, for instance, was of Asian heritage, and seemed to be rarely, if ever, asked to answer questions first. Only after the teacher had chosen other people to respond would he be asked. John’s family owned a successful fruit store, and lived in a big house, but my race was a bigger influence in the way I was treated. It was not uncommon for the teachers to presume that a student such as Ronald would become a scientist, while John was often discussed in relation to employment in the service industry.

I was expected to be able to read and write at a high level, and I was often given the benefit of the doubt in situations that were grey such as my not performing up to the expectations that teachers had of me. This helped me to challenge myself; if I was expected to actualize my potential how could the teachers be wrong? Why wasn’t John encouraged in a similar manner? In a grade three French class test, the teacher got very angry at me when I couldn’t remember the names of all of the months in French. He lectured me about the importance of knowing one’s own language, and said that I should have done better. Even though everyone in the class received the same amount of time to practice for this oral, nothing was said to the other three students who also failed that test. They were all second generation Canadian. I remember crying that night in front of my mother. I was sad not because I did not know the months, but because I should have known them.
My Position of Privilege

Only statements formulated with detachment are truly worthy of belief. When expressed with too much emotion truths risk provoking incredulity.

(Noël, 1994, p. 72)

Despite the official rules I was allowed to take a compulsory grade ten math exam after having woken up late for it. I arrived 40 minutes after the exam had already begun but the provincial rules specifically stipulated that no one could be allowed into the examination room after 30 minutes had elapsed. I remember my father talking with the vice principal in order to allow me to take the exam. Interestingly enough, I had witnessed this same vice principal refusing others entry in similar situations the week before. I knew better than to point that out at the time but I remember thinking I was incredibly lucky to be allowed to enter the examination theatre. It was a provincial exam, which meant that the rules had to be applied uniformly across the province. Despite this I was given the opportunity to write the exam. Was this related to my race? Was it a coincidence that the other students I saw refused entry were Native American? They were most likely told that the rules are the same for everyone. Had I not been allowed to take this exam I might have had to repeat a grade in school that might have had more serious consequences for both my education and for my later career.

My experiences in my various schools over time had made me realize that many of the facts that were sold as being detached from bias were in themselves tied to a greater bias based on various factors that were invisible to me at the time. The concept of science being both detached from, and untouched by, the scientist’s own views was still part of my worldview despite my having small suspicions to the contrary. It was not uncommon for me to overhear school staff members discuss that it was necessary to ensure that students were kept in line. As Noël (1994) rightly pointed out “The oppressor often seeks to hide himself behind the veil of humanity by professing to be the defender of rights, but these rights are often discriminatory in the first place” (p. 52). Whose best interest did these teachers really have in mind?
My experiences had taught me that depending on the environment in which I was located, the belief regarding who was in charge and who was correct varied greatly. Sometimes the same rule or procedure could be interpreted differently from school to school and organization to organization. As I studied researchers and philosophers at university it quickly became apparent that much of what I read and was taught in grade school was tainted by what the so-called experts thought.

**Providing Voice and Authenticity to Teaching**

Oppression is multiple, interconnected, and ever-changing.  
(Kumashiro, 2002, p. 52)

On the first day of my first full-time teaching position, I learned that (according to the principal), the majority of my 200 students lived close to or below the poverty line. Coming from what I thought was a similar background to them, I was looking forward to presenting them with the information they could also use to succeed. Principally, I taught Geography, History, and Moral Education, as well as acting as a resource teacher for students having difficulty adjusting to the academic realities of their particular grade. As the first weeks passed, I soon noticed that the students were not responding to the traditional curriculum. I provided my students with examples from my own life and hoped that it would help them in the construction of their own worldviews. A good teaching method has a lot to do with storytelling and story evoking (Nash, 2004). While discussing peer pressure in one of my Ethics classes I shared my experience of being the new student in several schools and the necessity of adapting to each school’s particularities. I felt that these lived experiences provided a good introduction to the concept of accepting oneself and understanding and not allowing others to define one.

I had shared what Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) describes as my identity and selfhood and had brought what she refers to as voice and authenticity to the issues being discussed, but I had not taken into consideration the multiple shifting identities of the students or the communities with
which they identified and that made up their reality.

Memory gets set in the stories we tell. They gel in the telling, and then it is hard to remember the not-told, the peripheral, the shadows. (Allnutt, 2013, p. 160)

I address both the doing and the conceptualization of memory-work in the context of narrative and autobiographical approaches to teachers studying their own lives, an area that is well-grounded within teacher education (Cole & Knowles, 1995, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, 1999; Goodson, 1990, 1994; Mitchell & Weber, 1999).

Looking back on my experiences as a first year secondary teacher I remember using personal stories from memories as set introductions for my courses to help get my secondary school students into the right frame of mind. However, the stories I shared did not get the reaction I expected. I did not get the impression that they were very receptive to any advice or stories I shared with them about several of the experiences that had shaped me into the teacher I was. Fortunately by the time the second term arrived during that first teaching assignment, and I had had a better chance to get to know the school population, I gained credibility with my students and fellow teachers. The stories that I shared were based on memories that stood out in my mind which I thought were directly related to the lessons that needed to be taught. What I had failed to take into consideration was that the circumstances surrounding these experiences lacked the environmental particularities needed to establish meaning. If context is central to determining meaning (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009), my shared experiences could only become relevant once I was able to intertwine them with the current realities of my students. I ended that year on a good note, having been a successful member of a team that was responsible for piloting the provincial government’s educational reform, an active member of the teacher council, as well as supervisor of several extra-curricular activities.
Cultural Displacements

I moved to Japan to teach English as a second language after my first year of teaching. During my second month there, I walked into the school’s office and was shocked when I looked into a mirror and didn’t see a face with Asian features staring back at me. It had only been a short period during which I had lived in Japan and I had already started to assume that I had become a member of the majority and that I looked like these people. I began to think about the parts of my identity that I had assumed were normal while growing up in Montreal and how this reflection of the self might differ from the reality that others saw. Moreover, I was concerned about how this internalized view of myself reflected on my teaching practices and which components of my memory played a part in the formation of this identity. Taking stock of which memories we rely on and why we do so encourages the development of self-understanding that Mark Freeman (2010) argues occurs in large part through narrative reflection, “which is itself a product of hindsight” (p. 4).

Over the next two years I would grow to learn about myself in relation to the race I had always thought I was part of. When dealing with issues such as discrimination and prejudice I had always assumed that my students were on the same level as I was. I figured that my socio-economic background and my perceived minority status when I was a child was enough to make links between what I had experienced and what they would be encountering in their lives. I didn’t realize that my ingrained assumptions about whiteness might have had deeper implications for my students. I had never asked myself the questions Ellis and Bochner (1996) suggest should be asked about whose voices were being privileged and at what cost to whom. For instance, although I tried to present a neutral interpretation of the past events, I was in fact only presenting a traditional view of history that might have robbed my students of the tools required to construct their own worldview. Perhaps I had just naturally accepted I was white because there was really nothing else I could really describe myself as being at that time. Even now the concept is difficult to articulate.
Exporting Cultural Capital

In the summer of 2008, I was able to see how positivist thinking leads to ignorance when accepting the importance of studying the relationship “between knowledge production and educational practice” (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 7) continues to plague how much of Western academia thinks about Africa. As a leader of eight American pre-med students, I had the opportunity to see how their Ivy League educations and upper-middle-class upbringings were tainting how they saw the world. It was not unusual for them to quote modern day conservative slogans without realizing they were doing so. Comments such as “Why don’t people stop sitting on their butts and just get a job” or “Are these people waiting for the government to help them?” were made during our stay. On numerous occasions some of my group members would question the extreme poverty and deny that the west had anything to do with it, saying, “If they just got up and worked a bit they could build a nation.” Since my mission was an educational health-related one, my team often worked alongside local staff such as nurses, doctors, and teachers. Jessica, an Asian American student from California, went as far as telling a maternity nurse that she was hurting the baby that she had just helped deliver in the birthing room. When I discussed the inappropriateness of her questioning the nurse’s judgment, Jessica could not grasp how she had been inappropriate. She responded, “I know when a baby is being hurt.” This racist behavior was not uncommon. Jessica also stated on numerous occasions that the Africans needed to “let God into their lives in order to save them from their tribal ways.” Although it is easy to pick on Jessica because of her uniquely hegemonic view of the world, she seemed only to voice what the others demonstrated more covertly.

James, a 26-year-old graduate of a Master of Public Health program offered in a prestigious university asked me if he could do an extra graveyard shift because he wanted to attend a birth. Initially, I agreed. After his regular shift ended rather than going home he decided to go to the bar with some of his friends. When I explained to him that he was not to go to the hospital after being at the bar, he could not understand what the problem was. I had to explain to him several times before he understood the gravity of his proposed actions that he would have never gone to work in his hometown after having been drinking alcohol (he worked as an emergency medical technician) but he
felt that it was ok for him to go to the African hospital drunk because “they needed him”. How could these graduates from some of America’s finest schools have such naïve views of the world?

As a French Canadian teacher in Japan, and then in Africa, I had to re-evaluate my own thoughts and beliefs constantly. I was sometimes provided with beneficial treatment when traveling around areas because I was a foreigner. In Africa I got to sit in the front seats of the taxi mini-buses and was given the best seats in the small makeshift restaurants that I visited. Although, as a white person, I was often charged more for certain goods and services, I was often given more leeway as far as adjusting to their culture was concerned rather than the other way around.

Reflections As a Teacher Thus Far: The Foundation

After a decade as a teacher I have come to accept certain foundational ideas. Education is a political machine that has the ability to do lots of harm under the guise of common sense and good pedagogy. Governments are increasingly looking at education to solve social issues which in turn transforms the teacher’s role from that of a professional to that of a technician (Kroll, 2012; Zeichner & Ndimele, 2008). Whereas schools are often seen as being the central places in which students learn, Monchinski (2007) argues that they are not the only sites of education; media can play a role in socialization as well. What is my role in this cycle? How have I been affected by playing the game of teacher stakeholder in this context?

In 1999, I was sitting in the back of a large auditorium in the Stewart Biology Building at McGill University. It was my first experience of being surrounded by so many other students. It was a compulsory event designed to motivate the newly introduced education students to their program and professors. Dr. Ratna Gosh, the Dean of Education took the stage and said, “You are here because you have a calling; if you have not received the call you should not be here.” I was in shock; I felt as if I were in the wrong place. I had never received a calling to enter the teaching profession; it was more a practical decision based on what I seemed to be good at and enjoyed
doing. Why did I feel so out of place? From the start I did my best to justify my existence in the program. I had a particular view of the roles of schooling based on my personal experiences. At the end of my first semester in the Faculty of Education, I withdrew from the program because of a philosophical and personal crisis. I could not find a way to mesh my experiences in schools as well as my personal struggles to get to university with what seemed like the disconnectedness of the positivist literature I was assigned to read in my education classes. I felt as if “nothing took into consideration the multidimensionality and interconnectedness between individuals and across disciplinary borders” (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Molestane, 2009, p. 7). I eventually learned to adapt to the material being presented, specifically ensuring that I was doing what was expected of me as a student being initiated into the teaching profession. Each course dealt with a different topic that seemed to me to be disconnected from the last one.

New Directions

In order to study the construction of cultural capital, it becomes necessary to study “the interplay of three narrative voices: the personal I, the referential they, and the collective we” (Zandy, 2001, p. xiv). Do our schools encourage our students to become more humane and to think critically? If stereotypes influence public opinion are they systematically structured by the official education that children receive from adults (Noël, 1994)?

**Doing Critical AutoEthnography and the Place of Memory Triggers**

**The Role of Personal Narrative**

Grounded as it is in the idea that learners will learn more effectively and efficiently when they recognize their own personal experience in school (Connolly et al., 2009), and that teacher development is an ongoing process (Mitchell, 2005; Kirk, 2009; Mitchell, et al., 2011), Narrative Inquiry allows teachers to “live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed
possibilities, and relive the changed stories” (Connelly & Candinin, 1995, p. 12). Similar to what Coia and Taylor (2006) did, my data collection methods for the three memory sites are all tailored to meet the contextual and pedagogical needs of this thesis. Narrative Inquiry has its roots in the sociology practiced in the Chicago School (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Chase, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Memory triggers help to identify the “elements of the past that link to race, class, gender or anything else on the margins” (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 59.). Writing about a lived experience can provide rich, thick descriptions (Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Prosser, 1998), but writing about the experience of remembering those same events from a different perspective can produce an even greater representation of our own learning and developments over a specific research site. Marianne Hirsch (1997) used family photographs to solidify connection to family but the memories produced as a result of memory triggers such as television shows can also make the unfamiliar familiar.

**Memory Sites in the Doing of Critical AutoEthnography**

In this thesis I visit three memory sites that are organized under the umbrella of memory triggers. These sites act as memory triggers because, as O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000) promised, they help to promote my remembering events and memories which lead to my uncovering new memories. The first memory site, **Working with Photographs**, is a study of the memories associated with the elementary school grounds and homes I frequented as a child in and around Montreal. Taking into account that photographs can be the “locus of corporeal - embodied - memories” (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006, p. 2). I returned to the school sites and homes I lived in and photographed them in order to then interpret the memories that were prompted. I did this to begin to answer the question of how they shaped the way in which I developed and who I have developed into as a teacher and teacher researcher.
The second memory site, Working with Televison Texts, draws on my personal viewing/close reading of a television series, Les Bougon (Larouche, 2004).

The third memory site, Working with Teaching Texts, uses personal narrative to examine the intersection between the official educational discourse in Quebec with the reality of classroom experiences and their impact on teachers and their teaching in public schools. It looks at different ways in which neoliberal discourses are infiltrating the classroom through various avenues such as official government curricula as well as unofficially through the private sector such as the Go Program4.

**Overview of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the main research questions revolving around who I am and where I am going that prompted my research. I have mapped out the general direction of my work.

In Chapter Two, “Narrative Inquiry & Memory-Work in Teacher Education”, I outline and analyze the work on Narrative Inquiry in relation to teacher education, particularly in relation to self-study and memory-work. These are both areas of teacher education that might be described as subsets of Narrative Inquiry. Chapter Two is divided into four sections that address different approaches within qualitative research that has to do with what Knowles and Cole (2008) describe as the personal and professional in teacher development.

Chapter Three, “Critical AutoEthnography”, examines the relationship between Autoethnography, Critical Pedagogy and Critical AutoEthnography as a qualitative research method. I outline the development and application of each research approach in order to then compare and contrast the most recent and best techniques of research in this subset of Narrative Inquiry.

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4 The Go Program is an educational curriculum created by a private company which will be studied in Chapter Six.
Similar to a traditional literature review, this chapter demonstrates knowledge of the contributions of previous investigators in each particular subset of Qualitative Inquiry in order to compare and contrast their importance to Critical AutoEthnography. I discuss and acknowledge why I have selected this research field and then account for issues such as trustworthiness, authenticity and meaning.

Then in Chapters Four, Five and Six I map out the evidence for my Critical AutoEthnography through three different memory triggers. In **Chapter Four**, “Schools as Artifacts”, I look at how arts-informed inquiries into photography of schools as artifacts can act as place markers in order to establish my location. Arts-informed inquiry into photography used to extract place markers contributes to an analytic toolbox that is part of the greater AutoEthnographic endeavor. This data is then used along with more data from other forms of productive remembering to allow for the fusion between arts and qualitative research which lead to a better understanding of the meaning and development of the teacher self.

In **Chapter Five**, “Episodes from a Television Series”, I look back at the highly popular television show, *Les Bougon*. This chapter draws on my initial analysis of the series as well as the memories that they prompted in order to unravel the assumptions I have as an individual and as teacher in order to be better prepared for the future.

In **Chapter Six**, “Unpacking the Curriculum”, I begin to address the development of my own ethnography as it relates to professional self-conscious reflexivity to address the questions: What is Quebec’s Ministry of Education’s role in the establishment of positivist ideologies? How do I position myself within my research as a teacher researcher? What role can Critical AutoEthnography play in the promotion of a more socially just school system? I use the most recent educational reform in Quebec as a springboard in order to elaborate on issues of privilege, voice,
social inequality, and social action in schools. I also describe how particular academics, experiences, and policies as well as hidden curricula have created the interpretive paradigms that have led me towards Critical AutoEthnography as my main strategy for inquiry into my teacher practice and, ultimately, a more just society.

Finally in Chapter Seven, “Discussion”, I bring together the four key elements that have developed throughout the study in order to answer the questions asked in Chapter One. I look at how my memories have shaped my identity and how Narrative Inquiry can contribute to my personal practice and to my practice as a teacher. How can my research aid in teacher pedagogy and teacher education?
Introduction

An awareness of self and the forces which shape the self is a prerequisite for the formation of more effective methods of research. 

(Kincheloe, 2006, p. 51)

This chapter looks at the relationship between self-study and memory-work, both areas of teacher education that might be described as subsets of Narrative Inquiry. It is divided into four sections that address different approaches in qualitative research that have to do with the personal and professional in teacher development. The first part of the chapter is devoted to identifying and discussing the field of Narrative Inquiry as it pertains to teacher education. Focused on the concept that effective teaching means valuing the self (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Tidwell, 2002, 2006) it tracks the development of Narrative Inquiry as an integral part of teacher preparation and professional development by drawing on the work of researchers concerned with including the self and the personal. The second section looks at the field of self-study in teacher education. These two sections pave the way for looking at memory-work and studying the past as significant to present and future teacher development (Coia & Taylor, 2006). Finally, the chapter will end in a discussion of some of the critical questions that arise when engaging in memory-work.
Narrative Inquiry in Teacher Education

The ‘self’ is nothing more than the narrator’s creative construction...[it] is whatever story we construct about who we are...the best way to think about the self is as a storyteller who needs to narrate a number of stories in order to create meanings... [which] do not fit conventional scientific categories.

(Nash, 2004, p. 19)

Pedagogy: More Than Just Teaching

The mind is not just a computer that stores data in order that it may, when requested, spit out the information in the same form in which it was taken in (Freire, 1970, 1974). Rather, the human mind should be looked at as a creator of narrative meaning (Bruner, 1990). Contemporary work in Narrative Inquiry in teacher education dates back to the 1920s as practiced by sociologists of the Chicago school. According to Butler-Kisber (2010), Narrative Inquiry was developed first by anthropologists and then appropriated by other liberal movements during the mid-twentieth century. It became renewed as a site of research in the 1980s in relation to teacher education as can be seen in the work of Butt and Raymond (1987) and Clandinin and Connelly (1987), and then refined in the following decade (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1994, 1999; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Weber, 1993). As various authors highlight, contemporary Narrative Inquiry allows for a conversation about and with oneself with the goal of humanization and bringing meaning to everyday events (Denzin, 2008; Loughran, 2006). John Loughran (2006) stressed that the nature of self-image and issues of identity formation matter if learning about teaching is to “take hold” rather than being seen as a superficial contact with a set of pre-organized tasks and procedures - easily forgotten and poorly incorporated into practice (p. 110). Whereas teacher development has traditionally been designed around what Kincheloe (2003) refers to as the false promises of positivism others have argued for the importance of teachers’ stories and stories about teaching as a treasure trove of data that is both

**Significance of Literacy**

The 12 core teacher competencies (see Appendix A) as outlined in Chapter One in the most recent reform by Quebec’s Ministry of Education (MELS) ignore, in my view, the main tenets of modern Western education. At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (1935) established the basis from which future North American academics would construct critical pedagogy. Du Bois’ work, specifically related to education, stressed that “schooling should ground itself...[in] a transformative vision of...society” since it is important to construct rather than simply reinforce social arrangements of the status quo (as cited in Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 60). However, none of these 12 core competencies goes deep enough to provide the teacher with the tools needed to achieve this. Du Bois spent much of his life writing about the state of education in the United States but his main tenets are still relevant today. Firstly, Du Bois argued that all students (especially Black students) needed to have the basic skills of literacy. Once literacy is attained then students, Du Bois argued, should be provided with a quality education based on critical understanding and awareness. In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), he pointed out, as Aldridge (2008) had made clear, that the pedagogical materials that are provided to students must encourage them to think critically. As a social theorist Du Bois was at the forefront of identifying the link between class and race. Moreover, Du Bois believed in the need for what Giroux (2011) described as critically educated citizens if a true democracy was to develop. For Du Bois, language played a large part in allowing one to self-actualize one’s own situation in the world. For him, a thorough education can be the liberating force needed for one’s emancipation. Essentially, according to Aldridge (2008) his writings suggest the
need to “challenge the social economic and political status quo of a given society” (p. 125).

**Addressing the Self: Roots of Narrative Inquiry**

The role of the self and personal narrative can be seen in work that specifically seeks to address personal issues. As Wood (2009) points out, some personal narratives in teaching can be critical to the examination of serious issues such as HIV and AIDS prevention education. Similarly, Ellis (1995) writes about the role of narrative in teaching about personal loss. Kosnik, Beck, Freese, and Samaras (2006) note that many “scholarly narratives are a combination of both depth and height, darkness and light; not all topics are heavy, not all experiences traumatic” (p. 31). What the various studies of Narrative Inquiry in teacher education all have in common is that they put the self at the front and center of their methodology while highlighting that this type of educational research can help us better understand our professional and teacher identity (Nash, 2004; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Jean Clandinin (2013) makes it clear that Narrative Inquiry is a way of “understanding and inquiring into experience and is situated in relationships and in community... and it attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways” (p. 13).

It is essential that the narrative process be done in a methodological way. Researchers doing Narrative Inquiry must ensure that they can justify their research both within themselves and within the research (Clandinin, 2013) and, in so doing, create a research tool for contributing to our understanding of teaching and teacher education (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Norman Denzin (2008) uses biography as a learning tool that allows him to insert himself into his past in order to create the conditions for both rewriting and re-experiencing past events. The work then presents information regarding the researcher’s experiences that can “resonate with the readers so that they reflect on their own lives, their own values, and beliefs (Trahahr, 2013, p. xii). Since learning is a combination of experience and thinking about experience it is vital that qualitative
methods such as Narrative Inquiry play a role in instructing both our students and teachers to promote self-understanding (Freeman, 2010). Jerome Bruner (1996) points out that although we spend most of our time as educators teaching and learning about scientific realities, we spend most of our lives in a world built on the rules and devices of narrative.

**Lived Experiences, Knowledge Landscapes, and Place**

We mean that their way of being in the classroom is storied: As teachers they are characters in their own stories of teaching, which they author.

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1995, p. 12)

In the early 1990s Max Van Manen (1990) argued for a phenomenological approach to human science research that is hermeneutic and language oriented. Finding value and validity in human interactions allows for the construction of a project of the self which tries to “make sense of the relationship between the experiences of being human and the practices of making and using knowledge” (Sumara, 2002, p. 240). Since most of our day is engaged in activities that have become almost repetitive, it is through the self-study that we can look for meanings behind our everyday existence (Van Manen, 2014) that are behind what and who we are. Essentially, professional knowledge landscapes are stories regarding teacher practice and personal experience, which, when combined, inform learning about the self and the profession (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987). The importance of putting a personal face to professional life is central to helping a teacher to think about professional knowledge landscapes in educational terms (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995).

Through Narrative Inquiry like the hermeneutic phenomenological approach teachers can engage in Narrative Inquiry with the goal of improving understanding of their lives in and out of school (Clandinin, 1985, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In more literal terms other teacher researchers use place as the common ground onto which they construct an understanding of the elements of the past that have formed their understanding of their current
and future self.

### Narrative Inquiry and the Importance of the Self

Since the late 1990s there has been an emerging body of work that is sometimes seen as Narrative Inquiry and sometimes seen as self-study and sometimes framed as memory-work that seeks to use the past to study teacher identity and teachers’ work. Building on the work of feminist scholars such as Frigga Haug (1992), June Crawford, Susan Kippax, Jenny Onyx, Una Gault and Pam Benton (1992) and Susannah Radstone (1993, 2000), the most critical aspect of this work is that it is methodological and that it seeks to be what is described by Mitchell and Weber (1999) as a “future oriented remembering” (p. 221).

Introducing memory and self under the umbrella of Narrative Inquiry into our research has the ability not only to enhance a teacher educator’s understanding of practice (Aubusson & Schuck, 2006) but may also contribute to pedagogic practice and research in different contexts (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2012). The goal of focusing on the self in teaching should be to enhance students’ learning and teacher educators’ understanding of practice (Aubusson & Schuck, 2006) as well as to encourage us to continue to learn (Bass, Anderson-Patton, & Allender, 2002). It is oriented towards creating the necessary conditions to construct and support learning both inside and outside the classroom. The overarching power of Narrative Inquiry as methodology is that it can create the conditions from which true learning can take place. Researching one’s own story with the goal of establishing a greater understanding of the self that Robert Nash (2004) refers to as being about storytelling and story-evoking allows for good teaching. Since research should start with the self, acknowledging the “I” in Narrative Inquiry becomes essential. A teacher enters the classroom with a lot of technical knowledge regarding the curriculum, which makes up only part of the learning process; true pedagogy lies in the relationship between the teacher and the learner necessitating
greater mutual understanding of the conditions and contexts both participants are navigating.

Teaching and learning are in fact strongly linked; Loughran (2006) argues that “teaching purposefully influences learning and vice-versa” (p. 2). At the center of the reflective practitioner’s thinking, for Whitehead (2000, 2005), should be the question: How do I as a teacher or teacher-researcher improve my practice? The other question is: How can I explain my own lived educational theories and living contradictions (Whitehead, 1993, 2000) within the context of my teaching? Learning, teaching, and researching are reciprocal harmonious processes (Pithouse, 2007) and this interrelationship allows for the development of a better understanding of teachers’ practices (Allender, 2005) and therefore an improvement in student learning.

The consequences of reading narrative research that Weber refers to as “ripple effects” (2014, p. 8) hold within them the possibility of promoting educational change in current teacher practice by providing the emotional and theoretical impetus needed to encourage the development of meaningful knowledge. This ripple effect is described as a “series of ever-expanding concentric circles, gentle or not so gentle waves, which extend our influence outward” (p. 9) and which encourage the reader to be affected by the researcher’s own investigations. As Nash writes it is important that we keep in mind that “the trouble with trying to discover truths in our world is that we are constantly distorting them with our own narrative truths” (2004, p. 38). Narrative Inquiry can be an effective tool to extract understanding of the teacher’s own professional practice thus leading them to improve their teaching.
Self-Study and the Teacher

Good quality teacher education requires self-reflective attention to pedagogy and to the human experiences, relationships and emotions that are at the heart of teaching and learning.

(Pithouse, 2007, p. 209)

An important area in teacher education in relation to looking at the self has been the burgeoning body of work called self-study. Why study the self? How is it related to teaching? Coming to know oneself matters in learning about teaching (Aubusson & Schuck, 2006; Kosnik et al., Beck, 2006; Loughran 2006; Mitchell & Pithouse, 2014; Mitchell, Weber, & O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2005). As various authors have noted, there is a relationship between the construction and understanding of one’s own personal identity and one’s teacher identity (Kelly, 2008; O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000, 2002; Penny, 2000).

Self-study is about looking at ways in which researchers and teachers can re-imagine themselves so that any change can have a positive effect on others (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2014, p. 1). Anastasia Samaras (2002, 2011) looks at Vygotsky’s belief that we need to understand the social and cultural contexts in which students develop as well as the importance of self-study in order to build teacher efficacy. Similarly, Bruner (1996) argues that the mind can reach its full potential only through participation in the culture and ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and carrying discourse.

Pithouse (2007) uses narrative self-study to explore and value teachers’ self – study in the context of lived, relational experience. Her study looks at the importance of teachers’ experiential-scholarly inquiry in the development of their teaching. Her concept of learning through teaching is central to teacher development since it forces an educator to re-examine his or her own journey. Through the use of a textual collage in which she studies her conceptualization of her teaching-learning-researching experiences as educative engagement, Pithouse is able to both represent and engage with data derived from the field texts that were produced during her research. She argues that our teaching philosophy and the techniques we employ in creating and implementing curriculum
continue to develop through a process of self-reflection.

Pithouse (2007) focuses on the need for teachers to empower themselves by looking at their own stories from which they can draw meaning, and identify their own objectives as well as take the time to re-evaluate their own teaching while engaging with other members of the education discourse community. The link between personal, professional, and academic growth through scholarly writing based on one’s own journey is inherent to discovering one’s professional academic voice. Teachers who re-examine their own schooling while incorporating the numerous exchanges they make along their educational journey are given the opportunity to develop a keen conceptualization of their teaching-learning-researching experience as educational engagement.

As fascinating as the ‘looking in’ or ‘looking back’ might be in relation to our own teaching, there are a number of critical questions: How can my study into my teaching practice be of benefit to others? What application do my personal stories and experiences as well as their subsequent analysis have within the realm of teacher education? As noted above, self-study allows for the “examining and learning about our practice while simultaneously developing opportunities for exploring scholarship in and through teaching” (Loughran, 2004, p. 7).

Filling the Gaps: What Is Needed?

The postmodern/postcolonial conception of the self and society is one of multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacements, and of shifting axes of power. (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2)

Western public education systems are under increasing pressure to increase student performance, which leads to an emphasis on results-based learning (Eisner, 2004a). In the educational landscape certain subjects such as science and mathematics are given prominence at the expense of arts and social sciences (Eisner, 2004b). Simultaneously, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse spaces that insist on schools and teachers being able to adapt to a diverse range of needs (Starr, 2010).
Teachers who turn to academic writing in education may have difficulty finding the resources they need which are context-specific and allow for them to become better equipped through self-study to understand their own practice as well as begin to comprehend the world from their students’ perspective. In academic writing, researchers often forget to identify or at least acknowledge the elements of their own lives that make it into the finished product. As Kincheloe argued (2006), “knowledge that purports to reflect an independent, external world is ensnared in a web of reductionism” (p. 8).

Qualitative researchers also work with a well-defined approach which, once defined, establishes the set of concepts and methods which will make the study relevant as well as answer the question of how texts are reconstituted during research (Silverman, 2005). Carolyn Ellis (2008) pointed out that the “Autoethnographer is both the author and focus of the story, the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and created” (p. 13). Both Silverman and Ellis outline how to illuminate one’s analysis through autoethnography. However, the practical answer to the question of why study teachers’ lives can be defined as a necessary activity involving self-reflection and self-understanding, with the goal of promoting teacher learning and teacher education. Trying to better understand teacher knowing, teachers as professionals, and teachers as an integral part of the learning process is essential to educational research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Kincheloe, 2003).

Anastasia Samaras (2002, 2011) warns us that “self-study is a difficult yet emancipating process” (2002, p. 5). Similar to Pinnegar & Hamilton’s (2009) identification of theory, experience, and practice as vital categories when one is engaging in self-study, Samaras uses, rather, context, content, and the learner. In both cases there is the underlying importance of examining the elements that make up our identity. This acknowledgement of our own stories within the context
of others (Strong-Wilson, 2008) provides for the establishment of a research framework, which is equitable, just, and humane. If moving towards emancipation means creating scaffolding in our teaching, research, and practice framework (Brown, 2005) then self-study plays a vital role in “taking responsibility for the past and care for the future” (Strong-Wilson, 2013, p. 26).

In conceptualizing my study, I have drawn on the self-study work of Claudia Mitchell (2005, 2013), Sandra Weber (1993, 2011), Robyn Fivush (2003), and Tessa Muncey (2010). When asking the question of what difference does self-study make in teacher education a good response would be that “self-study opens up a space for illuminating significant social questions and making the avenues and tools for social action or intervention more visible and more possible” (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Weber, 2009, p. 21).

**Teaching and Learning As Linked**

The essence of effective teaching centers on the idea of valuing the individual. (Tidwell, 2002, p. 31)

*During one of my first teaching field experiences in a public school I had the opportunity to interview my seasoned co-operating teacher about her biography as well as views on teaching. Although I do not remember the specifics of her answer I do remember that teaching was not her first choice but the only one that could provide her with the social mobility she yearned for. She talked about her first year of teaching as a great learning experience since it was fraught with several errors that she learned from. Hearing her talk about the past made me begin to question my motives for becoming a teacher. While I listened to her story I remember thinking about my past as well as how and why I had decided to sign up to become a teacher.*

Essentially, an undergraduate assignment that had been designed to encourage learning about the teaching profession had exposed me to the importance of the relationship between the student and teacher. My co-operating teacher’s story encouraged me to evaluate my own experiences.
with students in order to look at improving my own practice. Effective pedagogy should encourage teachers and students to share stories because good teaching relies heavily on storytelling and story-evoking (Nash, 2004). Pedagogy personalizes the relationship between teaching and learning which, together, “encourage knowledge and understanding through meaningful practice” (Loughran, 2006, p. 2).

Schools are increasingly being asked to conform to modes of learning that do not take into consideration the students or where they come from. Having worked at all levels of grade school as a teacher I can understand why there is a great need for teacher pedagogy that gives as much importance to what the self is as it does to the student or community. It was not uncommon for me to hear teachers discuss their lives as if they were not connected to their teaching, as if they could just “turn on” their teaching only to turn it off again at the end of the school day, week or year. Many colleagues have had to take time off work or leave the teaching profession because they have become disenchanted with the educational process that is based increasingly on the product. Pre-service and current teachers alike must come to accept that their own stories and the manner in which they developed - the account of their journey - is as important to the educational experience as the structuralist cannons they were schooled in.

Scholarly personal narrative writing is the unabashed, up-front admission that your ‘own life signifies’...your own life has meaning, both for you and for others.

(Nash, 2004, p. 24.)

I remember my grade 5 teacher telling us about her experiences apple picking and about the need to take care of the trees from seeding them until they are ready to flower. My junior high drama teacher shared with her students issues and concerns from her own life, many of which I still sometimes think about. Students and teachers need to ensure that they take the opportunity to reflect on their past realities in order to inform their future practice. Teachers are
storytellers; through the sharing of their stories and anecdotes they provide their students with the tools necessary to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their own worldviews. The need to acknowledge the importance of the teachers’ life stories in the learning process is as important as the facts they are expected to teach. Since “we do not live in reality itself but rather in stories about reality” (Nash, 2004, p. 33), personal narratives can play an important role in establishing the context necessary for true learning to begin to take place.

Returning to the classroom as a teacher, sometimes only as few as six years older than one’s students, can be of much concern to a novice and even a veteran teacher practitioner. Deciding to engage in self-study can also be the cause of much anxiety to the researcher. As Robert Nash points out, it is “essential for teachers...to be aware of the serious pitfalls implicit in [scholarly personal narrative] writing [as some] might need outside professional support” (2004, p. 32). Often the need to write about the self comes out of a sense of dissatisfaction with existing teacher practice (Loughran & Russell, 2002). After having spent a semester in my undergraduate teacher education program I deregistered from the program. I felt as though the courses I was taking focused on getting students to learn about the technical parts of teaching rather than the importance of teachers to inspire learners to better themselves and become more humane. It was the first time that I was not registered in full time study and I decided to use my tuition money to fly as far away from my hometown as I could. Upon my return to Montreal I registered again for the teacher education program having gained important insights about the world and my place in it. Essentially including elements of student knowledge within the classroom allows for better engagement in the learning process. My trip overseas provided me with the distance from my own reality to begin to identify which parts of my understanding were culturally specific and why. For instance, I began to question why different schools operated differently in comparison to those I had attended. I was applying
what was normal for me to other contexts.

**Studying the Past to Influence the Future in Teacher Education**

**Memory Makes Us**

Memory work focuses on the reinterpretation and re-contextualization of memory, in the service of revised understandings of individual or collective selves. (Radstone, 2000, p. 12)

Memory contributes to how we see ourselves and others as well as the world. It is not simply a recalling of the past, or based solely on self-reference but rather “both phenomenon and method in the study of childhood in relation to educational practice” (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 1). Another function of memory-work is to relocate oneself using different types of memory triggers such as images or photographs which can help to deal with previous traumatic events. Professional and personal improvement is related to the revisiting of our past under the auspices of Narrative Inquiry using self-study and memory-work methodologies (Cole, 2011; Kirk, 2009; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Following Hargreaves (1999) who describes academic knowledge and teachers’ knowledge as having similarities, I contend that both academic and teacher knowledge should be founded on the understanding that the stories that we tell are as important as the events and facts that make them personal and real to us. Some researchers have looked at collective memory from a feminist perspective in an attempt to organize context and use it in a constructive and deconstructive manner (Haug, 1987; Haug, 1992), while the work of hooks (2003, 2009), Hampl (1996) and others has focused on more personal approaches to memory-work.

Engaging in memory-work allows us to return to our roots in order that we might deconstruct our past experiences so that it becomes possible to evaluate our own identity. Returning
to the past can create the conditions which may permanently alter the way we look at the past, present, and future. If we look at productive remembering as a form of relearning though critical reflection (Kelly, 2013) the act of bringing memory forward allows for the reinterpretation and reevaluation of past events and how their formation has been and is being storied (Crownshaw, Kilby, & Rowland, 2010; Gutman, Brown, & Sodaro, 2010; Strong-Wilson, 2008). For instance, the goal of memory-work should not only be to adhere to norms that are set by positivist thinkers and organizations concerned with discovering the one truth, but, rather, must focus on the mission of self-study itself to facilitate a “heightened consciousness of how social forces and practices...affect human experiences and understandings...and that can make a qualitative difference to the present and the future” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012, p. 1).

Employing self-study methodologies can offer a range of tools and methods that can enable productive unknowing in research which “involves stepping aside from our conventional ‘expert’ role of researcher in order to engage productively with doubt, ambiguity and the unexpected” (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014, p. 94).

**Working Back Through Memory in Teacher Education**

Important questions such as “Where does memory lead us?” or “Where do we lead memory?” and “What sets off memory?” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 123) can act as scaffolding necessary to guide a researcher engaged in memory-work. In *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers: Beyond Nostalgia*, Mitchell and Weber (1999) look at various ways of using memory to explore the teaching self. Building on their book, *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Like a Teacher!* (1995) in which they examine teachers’ images in popular culture, Weber and Mitchell concluded that a critical teacher’s gaze can sharpen both the individual and collective professional identities of teachers by providing contextual, historical and political background that makes self-interpretation more meaningful and identity
more complete. Through their use of childhood as a memory space, Mitchell and Weber (1999) and Weber and Mitchell (1995) present various strategies for reading memories while avoiding some of the pitfalls related to taking past events at face value. More specifically they discuss the importance of contextualizing memory construction to ensure that the appropriate lenses are used when re-evaluating past memories. They point out that working with childhood memories of school, however, is also about not remembering, not recording particular events in the first place and so on (1999). Instead, teacher memories (of playing school, of posing for school photographs, of remembering particular teachers) can inform the present. Once exposed and explored they begin to influence how we view others and ourselves. The use of individual and collective stories of remembering when writing about lived experiences give us the ability to work back through these personal memories of school with the goal of bringing memory forward.

Naomi Norquay (1993) draws on the works of Frigga Haug (1987) to inform her writing on memory and the role that it takes in our ability to deconstruct our teacher identity through researching our lived experiences. As an anti-racist activist Norquay turns to self-study with the goal of shining a light on the elements of her past which have brought her to where she stands in relation to the dominant discourse that she identifies as having shaped her identity. She argues that the personal self is something that is neither static nor given and then investigates how what is known to be personal can shift as new meanings are acquired through the hard work of remembering. As she writes, “By uncovering and calling attention to these practices, I hope to create a location from which I can move forward” (1993, p. 241). Mitchell and Weber (1999) point out that Norquay uses her understanding of her past to better understand her present in relation to her personal and professional identity.

Similarly, Jane Miller (1996) uses her past experience as a London schoolteacher to bring
out her perceptions and ideas pertaining to teacher’s expectations and concerns regarding their professional practice with a focus on what their intentions are when they are entering a classroom. As a feminist, she is writing about government policy and its (negative) effects on (female) teacher autonomy. However, her focus is on teacher self-study as opposed to gender inequality and discrimination.

In her doctoral thesis Kathleen O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000) looked at memory within the context of narratives in teacher education. As she writes, “Through careful consideration of the past, there lies the potential to understand more fully why and how those memories may be constructed” (p. 3). She examined the remembering process and how it shapes our memories. She was particularly interested in how the various elements of remembering can shape the way in which we see the world as well as how the memories of past teachers continue to play a part in their lives whether they realize it or not. In one particular example O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000) discusses her return to a former school she attended and how she responded to a tree she had remembered from her childhood. She points out that as a child she had collected some of the tree’s fallen leaves not because she wanted to remember it but rather because she was afraid of forgetting. Her work identifies and recognizes the existence of teacher’s personal knowledge as a guiding force to teacher professional practice. This knowledge is used to aid the teacher during the many decisions she or he has to make during classroom time (O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000). She argues that acknowledging the past is a prologue for our future and therefore we need to examine and question how our understanding of what we have learned about our past and how the formation of ourselves can effect change to make us better people and better teachers.

Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) in her work with memory develops the idea of “bringing memory forward” (p. 63). As she writes, “Two methods of self-study [excavation and relocation]...
show how intertextual threads of storied formation become embedded in teacher narrative on practice” (p. 7).

Through the application of *currere* (Pinar, 2004) (critical self-examination) in the context of collective memory to storied formation, Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) looks at memory as more than a simple repository of past experiences but rather a complex set of ideas towards which we strive so as to understand ourselves but due to these memories enigmatic nature can never completely grasp. Teachers need to construct their own paths towards their literacy history so that they may begin to rediscover and understand their past (Strong-Wilson, 2008). Her book, *Bringing Memory Forward* (2008) acts as a testament to the need and usefulness of memory-work methodology in teacher education. Since as teachers we all carry our own ideas, preconceptions, and worldviews (touchstones) it is only after interacting with those of others that we can begin to understand who we are and come to realize that in this process our own touchstones have changed (Strong-Wilson, 2008).

More recently, an edited volume on memory and teaching, *Memory and Pedagogy* (Mitchell et al., 2011) attempts to answer the question, “How can we bring the past and memory forward so as to inform the future?” (p. 1). Through the exploration of five critical spaces for remembering and looking to the future - Memory and Place, Revisiting Childhood, Legacies of Political Conflict, Memory and Embodiment, and Intergenerationality - the contributors create a method in educational research and social inquiry that demonstrates how working with the past can inform the future in teacher education.

In this collection, Michele Tanaka (2011) makes the case for teachers to understand their own dispositions, which guide them in their everyday classroom activities especially in the context of multicultural classrooms. Drawing on the work of Chambers (2006), Tanaka believes in the
importance of moving towards a curriculum of place in which teachers can include elements of
the natural landscape they inhabit into their teacher identities. Tanaka builds upon Teresa Strong-
Wilson’s (2008) concept of literary touchstones in order to construct the notion of formative
constructs, which can aid in teacher identity formation, understanding, and practice (Tanaka, 2011).
Lisa Taylor (2011) deals with memory-work and how to excavate literary experience to inform
teaching for social justice education. She points out that grade school teachers’ use of stories is often
looked down upon and argues, therefore, for critical response-based pedagogies that use memory-
work. Ingrid Johnston’s and Kathleen Pithouse’s chapters both deal with how narratives can help
teachers begin to re-examine the elements of their past which have influenced their particular
journeys so that they engage critically and reflexively with their future students. Johnston (2011), for
her part, looks at the role of imaginative fiction and includes her own autobiographical memories.
Pithouse (2011) demonstrates how narrative self-study can play a vital role in teacher professional
development particularly as it affects teaching in post-apartheid South Africa. This demonstrates
why and how teacher education students should engage critically with their past experiences so that
they may begin the journey of mourning the past in order to move forward with compassion and
hope for the future.

A themed issue of the Journal of Education on “Memory and Pedagogy” (2012) provides
insight into how future oriented remembering can be used productively in diverse educational
contexts in South Africa. Although the authors conduct their research in different contexts ranging
from student memories of cross-racial mixing to exploring anxiety related to studying mathematics,
all the contributors demonstrate the interconnectedness between memory-work and self-study, and
teacher identity and practice. Rob Pattman (2012), for example, explores and compares students’
stories through collective memory-work in order to use the past to inform the present while helping
his students learn from each others’ experiences. Sally Hobden (2012) uses memory-work in order to deal with student anxiety regarding Mathematics. As the editors of the themed issue conclude, ‘future oriented remembering’ in relation to memory-work can be adapted and utilized in a variety of contexts such as in South Africa and that although bringing forward the past may be painful the pedagogical value of undertaking such research can be beneficial (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

Another edited volume Productive Remembering and Social Agency (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2013) focuses on the idea of agency and social action or “productive remembering” (p. 5). As the editors acknowledge in the introduction, memory is built around nostalgia (see also Stewart, 1988). Strong-Wilson (2013) explains “one of the devices that moves the narrative beyond the self is the detail, which situates the memory as grounded in a particular time and place” (p. 21). Using three conceptualizations - memory for the future, nostalgia and belatedness - the book builds upon recent work (Allnutt, 2009, 2013; Bodone, 2005; Chase, 2005; Crawford et al., 1992; Crownshaw et al., 2010) which has looked at the implications of constructing meaning from memory-work, and research concerned with self-study and teacher education (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2008; Kincheloe, 2003, 2004; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

As with self-study there are many different methods and tools for engaging in memory-work in teacher education (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Lungile Masinga (2012), in her work with a group of women teachers in Lesotho uses story-telling, audio recording of sessions, and reflective journals as her methodology in order to generate the data needed for her study. She demonstrates how closely identity is linked to our memories and stories and how, when we retrieve them, they give meaning to our present and future actions. Mathabo Khau (2009) uses one-on-one interviews, journals, focus groups, and personal narrative to conduct
her self-study research. Interrogating her memories and the actions that accompanied them allowed
her to identify the stumbling blocks in her practice in order that she might be able to use her past
experiences to improve her teaching. She also used the idea of collective viewing of the film *Dirty
Dancing* (1987) which linked different themes that were related to issues and topics that were under
investigation so that there could be informed reflective discussions and inquiry. Khau places herself
at the center of her inquiry, which allows her to build up a strong understanding of the realities of
the other participants in her collaborative study.

**Role of Images in Memory-Work and Teacher Development**

A number of researchers working in the area of memory-work and teacher education have drawn
Rose and Tolia-Kelly (2012) and others write, can act as a gatekeeper between the past, present,
and future. Building on the works of past researchers who looked at the use of images in memory
work (hooks, 1996; Haug, 1992; Kuhn, 1995; Pink, 2007, 2009, 2012; Ruby, 1980), Lyn Daniels
(2013) looks at the use of images as tools that allow for the construction of memories to link
the experiences of children in residential schools to contemporary teaching. In addition, visual
research as an interdisciplinary approach can be the catalyst for social action (Mitchell, 2005).
Increasingly, digital memory-work methodologies are proving to be effective and appropriate ways
of encouraging teachers to become transformers and agents of social change. The use of laptops in
the creation of books, cellphilms and other digital texts allow for highly codified, audience-specific
messages to be transmitted about the culture of education (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Morrison,

Mitchell and Weber (1999) looked at how the knowledge and images embedded in popular
culture, especially movies and television, can sometimes be taken as common ground and can provide an entry point for teachers to reflect on their own practices. Similar to Khau’s (2009) collective viewing of movies, others researchers have used film as a springboard from which to conduct memory-work. Through his study of the popular American television show, *Glee*, David Lewkowich (2013) points out that the images in a popular television series can offer a unique opportunity for developing methods of productive remembering which can bring the past forward so as to allow the researcher another chance at reliving and bringing forward his or her fantasies and past desires. Identifying and studying why we react to popular media texts can aid in our understanding of how we have developed our understanding of the roles teachers and students as well as their often contradictory nature. When Lewkowich (2013) asks, “How can we ever orient ourselves to a future through a present that glances only, obsessively at the past?” (p. 173), he is pointing out the role that productive remembering plays in enabling us to reflect upon how our own views of teaching and learning have been formed.

**Critical Questions**

Although there are some worrying trends in education which seem to be shifting away from qualitative inquiry towards standards and procedure-based studies, it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to know more about the self and the self in relation to learners if we are to make a difference. Good teaching means being able to connect our views of pedagogy with the idea of valuing the individual (Tidwell, 2002). Self-study opens the door to developing one’s sense of understanding, moving forward, building on that which one already knows (Loughran, 2006). At the same time, we might ask questions about the validity and trustworthiness of carrying out this work. As Bass, Anderson-Patton and Allender (2002) note, the main point to remember when we are discussing validity or the trustworthiness of studying the self in educational matters is that self-
study challenges us to learn, it encourages us to become reflective practitioners or what Max Van Manen (1989, 1990, 2014) refers to as hermeneutic phenomenology or gaining a greater knowledge of lived experience. Coia and Taylor (2006) look at data using different lenses in order to lead to trustworthiness. Through the uncovering of important events in our past and our subsequent study of them we enable ourselves to create a dialogue that can be used to sharpen our knowledge of the self. Moreover, self-study is a stance towards better understanding the world (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) through the exploration of context, content, and the process of remembering. These “nodal moments” (Kosnik et al., 2006, p. 6) of teaching and being, enable the reader to have insight into their own teaching which can lead to the development of a greater sense of professional satisfaction.

**Summary**

Some teachers claim to be able to disregard the elements of their own lives that have shaped their own journeys. Clearly delineating the scope of the study is fundamental since there is an overlap and complexity in situating self-study practices within a particular perspective so it is useful to separate “ontological perspectives from the epistemological perspectives that the researcher brings to her or his work” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 5). This chapter served to review the development of the academic fields of Narrative Inquiry and self-study. It looked at how pedagogy should be linked to teaching and learning, as well as at the role that personal narratives can take in building the foundation needed to develop a better understanding of our teaching practice. It also examined how some researchers are employing different forms of self-study and narrative inquiry. In the next chapter I examine the relationship between autoethnography, critical pedagogy, and Critical AutoEthnography.
Critical AutoEthnography: Theoretical & Methodological Considerations

Introduction: Setting the Stage

The previous chapter looked at the frameworks that guide Narrative Inquiry. It addressed relevant qualitative research approaches, in particular, self-study, and memory-work that have to do with personal and professional teacher development as an integral part of teacher preparation. Increasingly, a form of academic writing, the autoethnographic, has provided for a way to incorporate personal self-conscious reflexivity in positioning oneself within one’s own research (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). The main questions addressed in this chapter relate to the relationship between and among autoethnography, critical pedagogy, and my own concept of Critical AutoEthnography. In the first section I discuss autoethnography, its roots, and its relevance to my research while in the second I consider the ideology and fundamental parameters of critical pedagogy with a focus on the significance of literacy, voice, and education. Then I discuss the methodological issues pertaining to this type of research. Finally, the notion of Critical AutoEthnography as it relates to my thesis is further developed in order to distinguish it clearly from autoethnography and critical pedagogy. Essentially, the intersection of autoethnography and critical pedagogy creates the rich environment needed to produce Critical AutoEthnographic research which is transformative, promotes humanization, and acts as an appropriate tool for the excavation and processing of one’s professional and personal development in relation to others as well as to their lived experiences.
What is AutoEthnography?

Life informs work informs life.

(Ellis, 2004, p. 156)

Autoethnographic research revolves around the relationship between process and product while simultaneously incorporating voice and authenticity. As Heewon Chang (2008) argued, autoethnography “transcends the mere narrative self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 43) along with narrative detail. It is a form of active text that acknowledges the existence of bias in academic writing by embracing the inclusion of personal assumptions as well as reflections into one’s research. It aims to critically challenge the culture in which one is immersed while simultaneously promoting voice and reflexivity in research (Christians, 2005). Unlike autobiography, autoethnography must be culturally and discursively situated in order to ensure that its rigor and complexity as well as its commitment to social justice are not lost (Bruner, 1996; Feldman, 2001). In other words, it becomes difficult for a researcher to create an autoethnographic work in isolation since his or her story is inextricably linked to those who influenced his or her journey. It is an “amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods - all revolving around and interest in biographical particulars as narrated” (Chase, 2005, p. 651) by persons embarking on the journey. Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as the art of combining literary and ethnographic techniques to engage the reader while ensuring the incorporation of the “I” into the research. Whereas Ellis stresses the ideal of autoethnographic work as part self, part culture, Harry Wolcott sees it as part art, part science (Wolcott, 1995). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) remind us that research that includes autobiography and personal narratives such as autoethnography must remember to remain committed to studying the world from the perspective of interacting individuals. Autoethnography
concerns both the writer and audience inasmuch as it develops a relationship that enables connections and realizations to become apparent within the parameters of the research or subject being observed.

Tami Spry (2001) defines autoethnography as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that there is no one way to interpret qualitative research since we are all *bricoleurs* (p. xv) studying in the present and working against the past. His interpretation of the *bricoleur* as it relates to autoethnography is analogous to the worker who searches in a tool box to find the appropriate tool for a particular task when it is needed. Joe Kincheloe takes it further by embedding the concept of the *bricoleur* into educational research by stating that we must account for the complex relationship between reality and human perception (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) when, for so many, perception is reality. Autoethnography is a way to tell stories to yourself which casts the self within a social context; you are both the researcher and the researched (Reed-Danahay, 1997). As Chang (2008) observes, autoethnography is “particularly useful and powerful for researchers and practitioners who deal in human relations in multicultural settings [such as education]” (p. 51); this makes it all the more relevant to me and my work.

**Roots of Autoethnography**

Until the second half of the 20th century most academics worked under the conviction that the researcher had to ensure her or his detachment from the subject being examined in order for the research process and findings to stand the test of rigor. Greatly influenced by 19th and 20th century psychology personified in the work of Freud, Skinner, and Piaget, researchers had to ensure that they followed the canonical formulae by which science was practiced (Muncey, 2010). The birth of autoethnography as a method has its roots in the work of anthropologists who increasingly began to focus on the ethnography of speaking, and the rules of commenting verbally and non-verbally
Researchers started revisiting their own studies in order to comment on the reasons why they had chosen certain processes as well as on their own positioning in relation to those whom they studied. Karl Heider (1975) first coined the term while Daniel Hayano (1979), with his introduction of the concept of insider status, established the necessary scaffolding needed to guide those interested in studying the self in relation to their work at the academic level. Increasingly, the employment of qualitative research within the humanities and social sciences began to gain recognition from academia albeit that it was still challenged in some domains (Muncey, 2010). What I think of as Critical AutoEthnographic research can draw upon several qualitative methodologies - biography, ethnography, biography, phenomenology, critical social research, poetic inquiry and visual ethnography - that inform and ensure its robustness and relevance to both the researcher and the participants.

**Autoethnography as Method**

The mid 1980s to the early 1990s saw the beginning of an academic interpretation of ethnography that set the stage for the later development of autoethnography as its own distinct field. John Van Manen (2011) sees autoethnography as being one of four alternatives to ethnographic realism alongside confessional, dramatic, and critical ethnography. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) identified the autoethnographical method as one that focused on the researcher as the protagonist within his or her own work. According to Denzin (1989), autoethnographic texts are a combination of ethnography and autobiography. Placing the self in one’s own research increasingly gained institutional acceptance as academics such as Van Manen (2011), Ellis (1995, 2004, 2008), Ellis and Bochner (1996), and Goodall (1994, 2000) set out to help define and shape the field. They all outlined the argument that autoethnography is a research approach that privileges the individual and aids to dispel the myth that a display of subjectivity will have a bad effect on the quality of one’s
research (Muncey, 2010). Autoethnographic accounts are not uniquely based on the opinions of the person doing the research but are also supported by other data that can support those assumptions (Duncan, 2004). Autoethnography is a balance of autobiography and ethnography that is ultimately determined by the research sites that are involved in any particular project.

**Different Paths, Similar Destinations**

Although the development of autoethnography as a method developed into several different branches such as personal narrative, indigenous/narrative ethnography, confessional/ethnographic memoirs, and contingent ethnographies, common features are employed among researchers engaged in autoethnographic texts (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnographic work refers to both the process and the product and appears in several different forms from written memoirs to performance pieces (Ellis 2004). Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) points out that the differences in how an autoethnography performs depends on how much stress is put on autobiography and how much on ethnography, arguing that pioneers such as Pratt (1992), Van Manen (1995, 2011) and Hayano (1979, 1982) dealt specifically with native ethnography in one category while Denzin (2008), Brandes (1982), and Lejeune (1989) are more rooted in the realm of autobiography proper. All these researchers understood the need to “retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that...[came from] being part of...[or]...possessing a particular cultural identity and then analyzing these experiences” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 3). Ethnographers and autobiographers put the accent on different aspects of their interests. Autoethnographers seek to produce aesthetic and evocative descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences which they accomplish by identifying and studying patterns or cultural experiences discovered in their field work (Ellis et al., 2010). Autoethnographers include the recognition and exploration of identity in their work to provide it with what could be called a more human face, thus bringing it more in line with other attempts that
seek to give form and meaning to experience (Freeman, 2010).

Although experimental sciences are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western civilization in that their practice is presented as truth which can transcend opinion and personal bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), qualitative researchers accept that the ultimate truth can never be fully comprehended. Qualitative research is criticized by some as being too exploratory, as well as incapable of establishing or verifying fundamental truths. Autoethnographers respond by pointing out that their work cannot verify the truth since what counts as truth changes depending on the form of writing (Ellis et al., 2010).

**What is Critical Pedagogy?**

Post-formalism as a critical theory of cognition within qualitative methods, seeks to explore and create different contexts and perspectives from which to understand knowledge and the processes of learning. Post-formal thinkers such as Kincheloe (2001, 2004, 2008a), Freire (1970, 1974, 1988, 1992, 1997), and Macedo (2006), discover new ways of looking at the traditional canons of thought. The previously established and unmoving benchmarks of general consciousness are not taken at face value but are treated, rather, as only parts of a larger picture. It becomes important for a post-formal thinker to look at the differences between opposing and similar epistemologies. For example, if the formal level of cognition were the only method by which to study the ability of a person to formulate abstract conclusions, then there would be little need for anyone to continue to research the learning process itself. It would be universally accepted that a child’s development could be measured based solely on the criteria set out by 20th century thinkers such as Piaget. Post-formalists challenge this universal statement by going further and identifying the areas in which traditional approaches to learning, such as the humanistic, cognitive, and behaviorist, fail to present a holistic view of the learning processes. Similar to autoethnography, critical pedagogy challenges the status
Roots of Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has its roots in critical theory developed by the Frankfurt School. This critical theory “formulated by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse was particularly interested in the changing nature of capitalism through the mutating forms of domination that accompanied these changes” (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 46). In North America, critical pedagogical scholars, inspired by Paulo Freire and the Frankfurt School, organized critical pedagogy into a force that could be used to make schools and society more socially just by providing educators with the philosophical foundations to challenge existing educational dogma.

Born in Brazil in 1921, Paulo Freire was the first to develop the concept of a critical theory of education as it pertains today. Sometimes referred to as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy (McLaren as cited in Kincheloe, 2008a), Freire stressed the need to work alongside those who were oppressed in order to enable them to actualize their own emancipation. In his pivotal work, Pedagogy of The Oppressed (1970), Freire identified the numerous methods that are employed to keep people oppressed. At first the oppressor takes anti-dialogical action to impose his objectives on the oppressed. Once conquered, the oppressed are encouraged to fragment into smaller and less cohesive groups. Then manipulation is employed to keep the oppressed complacent with their status. In the end, the oppressor infiltrates the oppressed through the use of cultural subversion leading to the latter’s adoption of the oppressors’ worldview.

Freire (1970) stresses that students must be included in their own meaningful thematics; they cannot separate themselves from the world in which they live. It is not uncommon for school curricula to be developed without consideration of the students’ needs. Freire argues, too, that we should move away from the banking or transmission method of teaching since it does not promote
critical thinking. Instead, it serves only to anesthetize and inhibit creative power thus stifling the emergence of a consciousness and of any critical intervention into reality. At the center of Freire’s pedagogy is the quest for humanization. This quest is an inherent necessity in the fight against oppression. Freire stressed the need for a conscientização which he described as learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions in order begin to fight against repressive forces in society. As he argued, “One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (Freire, 1970, p. 84). This questioning of the truth is an integral part of critical pedagogy.

In How We Think (1910), John Dewey mapped out his doctrine that deals with the relationship between how we think and what type of knowledge schools encourage. Ultimately, Dewey feels that a good education comes down to a teacher’s being able to know his or her students well (Mooney, 2000). Autoethnography requires one to have a firm grasp of one’s own identity before attempting to understand others. Similar to Dewey’s notion of what pedagogy involves, autoethnographic research involves process as opposed to simply arriving at a product.

In Pedagogy of the Heart (1997), Freire reiterated the need for massive involvement in the political sphere. His position is that schools must be made accessible to all children regardless of culture, class, or social capital. In this work he continued to touch on the similarities between his pedagogy and what he saw as an attack on true education. Like W.E.B. Du Bois, Freire stressed the need to provide students with a strong basic education so that they might have the tools necessary to begin to decipher their world (Aldridge, 2008). As he insisted, having the necessary literacy tools to be able to read oneself and the world is an integral part of both critical pedagogy and autoethnography.
The human being is a conscious body. His or her consciousness, with its ‘intentionality’ towards the world, is always consciousness of something. It is in a permanent state of moving towards reality. Hence the condition of the human being is to be in constant relationship to the world. (Freire, 1974, p. 130)

Contrary to other academics of his time such as Piaget (1968), Freire (1997) stated that students need to be made aware of their social capital (or lack thereof). This connection between knowing the word and knowing the world is important for the oppressed to understand so that they may begin to fight against their oppressors. In order to promote humanization, we must work with the oppressed and not for them.

**Significance of Cultural Literacy to Critical Pedagogy**


In his book, *Literacies of Power* (2006), Donaldo Macedo discusses the need to identify the inequalities in North American educational systems. Macedo incorporates the concept of manufacturing consent and relates it to contemporary world events. Teaching critically means being able to acknowledge that claiming that education is not political is in itself a political act (Macedo, 2006).

Rather than turn to the canon as suggested by Bloom (1987) students should be encouraged to discuss the main issues that are affecting their lives. Macedo feels that encouraging students to discuss, openly, their thoughts on issues is central to allowing them to develop the ability to see the obvious - that they are being lied to. Teachers must not fail to provide the tools students need to protect themselves from the ideological doctrinal system that manipulates language in order to falsify and distort reality thus making it possible for individuals to accommodate to life within a lie. Understanding the value of our own experiences enables us to find our voice.
Importance of the “Voice”

Language is the real stuff of culture and constitutes both terrain of domination and field of possibility.

(Giroux, 1988, p. 136)

Henry Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz contributed greatly bringing social theory to North American educators as well as disseminating it so that it could be more easily accessible to teachers and researchers. Like Freire, they make links between what they call the postmodern tendency to equate diverse forms of class, race, and gender based oppression with learning how to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970). Giroux (1988) stressed the need to have a philosophical discussion of the purpose of education and the direction in which unquestioned policies may lead our youth and “it has been precisely because of the presence of such an idea that a rationale eventually could be constructed which linked schooling to the imperatives of democracy and classroom pedagogy to the dynamics of citizenship” (p. 174). He argued that “schools establish the conditions under which the oppressed then define the terms by which others live, resist, affirm, and participate in the construction of their own identities and subjectivism” (p. 169). The relationship between power and knowledge and the push towards efficiency and regulation with respect to learning are key tenets of critical pedagogy. Macedo (2006), Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) feel that the responsibility of the current state of affairs must be acknowledged before the tension between tradition and modernity or post-modernity can be ameliorated. The need for teachers as public intellectuals and others to work together in order to transform the schools into more democratic institutions is central to his pedagogy. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) both argue that popular language and texts must not be ignored when we are developing a curriculum, and this is directly in line with the characteristics of autoethnography. They even argue for parity between the canonical texts and popular texts. The concept of schools providing the tools that help students
find their voice is central to Giroux’s view of research. Once people find their voice they are then able to begin to identify who controls dominant discourse. This critical discourse of ethics can be constructed around what Giroux calls a “radical provisional morality” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 40).

Giroux’s work informs philosophical discussion of the purpose of education and the essential examination of the method in which unquestioned policies may lead our youth onto the wrong track. He felt that the work of Freire (1970, 1974, 1988) and Bakhtin (1981), like many producing autoethnographies, points to the need to inquire into how human experiences are produced, contested, and legitimized in the dynamics of everyday life as “a major task for critical theory of education is to analyze how historically constituted experiences of moral and political activity can contribute to developing an ethical discourse with an emancipatory political intent” (Giroux, 1988, p. 60).

**Problem-Posing Teaching and Research**

Real teaching in any classroom necessitates an active relationship between teacher and students, as discussed above. It is the acknowledgement of the existence of a connection between feelings and thought that is key to Ira Shor’s notion of pedagogy. In his book, *Empowering Educating* (1992), Shor deals with the state and function of critical thinking in schools. Similar to Dewey, Shor argues for the importance of incorporating students’ needs into the dynamics of a democratic education system. He stresses the need for a paradigm shift from a state of cultural deficit to one of cultural democracy in the classroom that respects the knowledge, experience, and language of the students. Shor provides specific examples of teaching techniques based on posing problems rather than on traditional lecturing. Within the framework of critical pedagogy Shor is promoting similar maxims. As he points out, the students bring their culture to school but this culture is often ignored. In order
to free themselves from the dominant discourse teachers and students must free themselves from 
the traditional school structure. This does not a call to anarchy but is, rather, a view of education 
that is designed around good teaching:

1) Listening to students so the teacher knows about the key issues in society.
2) Dialogue on themes - let students co-develop themes for study.
3) Find ways to act on problems together. (Shor, 1992, p. 43)

Scholars such as Joe Kincheloe, Donaldo Macedo, and Henry Giroux have continued to examine 
similar themes as well as their effects on our students. As Kincheloe (2003) pointed out “teacher 
researchers can revolutionize professional practice by viewing themselves as potentially the most 
sophisticated research instruments available” (p. 52). Giroux (2011) mentions “students need it to 
transform knowledge rather than be consumed by it” (p. 7) and Macedo (2006) warns us that it is 
“through manipulation of language that the ideological doctrinal system is able to falsify and distort 
reality making it possible for individuals to accommodate to life within a lie” (p. 39). The relationship 
between knowledge and education, power and society, as well as the social policies relating to 
education and diversity in the west has progressively moved to the right. For instance, we can take 
note of Shor’s blunt assertion regarding the absence of minorities in higher education.

Critical pedagogues study the several parts of thinking and reasoning, four of these, 
etymology, pattern, process, and contextualization (Kincheloe et al., 1999) are used to avoid falling 
victim to the dichotomous “true or false epistemologies” Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 37). People who are 
concerned about issues of social justice must accept the role of other factors and their effect on the 
mind (processes of thinking) and the soul of an individual. A compliment to post-formalism is the 
recognition of imagery as a major component of autobiographical memory (Thompson, Herrmann, 
Bruce, Read, Payne, & Toglia., 1997). Autoethnography, when combined with the basic tenets of
critical pedagogy, create the rich environment from which research and learning can take, and which I call Critical AutoEthnography.

**Critical AutoEthnography: Boundary Crossing**

A profound cynicism is at the core of dominant cultures wherever it reviews in the world.

(hooks, 2003, p. 11)

In this section I investigate the relationship between autoethnography and critical pedagogy with the aim of answering the question: “How does what I have experienced and thought about, what I remember and omit, and who I am, relate to me as a researcher/teacher?” It takes into consideration the local context as well as the importance of voice as it relates to the construction of self. If Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) argues that the autoethnographer is a boundary crosser, a role that can be characterized as having a dual identity, and Kincheloe (2008a) argues that it is the critical pedagogue’s role to understand the politics behind identity construction, then Critical AutoEthnography should take on the challenge of boundary crossing while addressing the inherent political nature of the journey.

Ethnography is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles (Pink, 2007). Autoethnography is a research approach that consists of an artistically constructed piece of work that tries to portray an individual experience in a way that evokes the imagination (Muncey, 2010). Critical AutoEthnography is concerned with the understanding of self, in relation to the other and culture. Essentially, Critical AutoEthnography allows for the use of data to analyze and interpret one’s cultural assumptions and its effect on one’s development as a researcher/teacher. Robert Nash (2004) argues that personal writing matters to the academy, particular to colleges of education, as much as any other kind of writing, especially when it is done well. Other researchers
such as Ellis (2004) start by writing field notes organized chronologically into a memoir and then attaching meaning to what they wrote. Critical AutoEthnographic projects can be formulated and redesigned using various data sources, for example, visual television, photographs, and personal narrative in order to create the context for deeper analyses and metacognition.

The “Critical” in Critical AutoEthnography

Unlike autoethnography that puts the focus on writing about the personal and its relationship to culture (Ellis, 2004; Muncey, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 1997), Critical AutoEthnography, as I frame it here, looks at the reflexivity and voice surrounding text with the main goal of framing my (the researcher’s) knowledge and understanding of its impact on my own development as a researcher/educator while ensuring that this development is an ongoing process. My Critical AutoEthnography uses self-study to open up a space for illuminating significant social questions making the avenues and tools for social action more visible and possible (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Molestane, 2009). It combines the “critical” of critical pedagogy with my ethnography, as the researcher, as an integral part of its ethos.

Cate Watson (2009) defines critical autoethnography as participant self-observation that is uncomfortable to employ because it illuminates the dark places of our own lives. As opposed to how I define Critical AutoEthnography, she sees it as the product of using “participant self-observation...[as] a critical form of autoethnography offering an approach to the study of self as event...which extends beyond the metaphysics of selfhood making use of ‘a transcendental form of empiricism’” (Watson, 2009, p. 3). Although Watson’s description of critical autoethnography does describe part of the central goal of such research, it is itself based on the notion that autoethnographic accounts are themselves too comfortable and focused on one’s fascination with one’s personal story. Soyni Madison’s (2005) description of critical ethnography approaches
the version of Critical AutoEthnography that I use in this thesis in that she feels that it begins with the ethical responsibility to address unfairness and injustice within a particular lived domain. Critical AutoEthnography goes beyond asking “what is” or “what could be” in order to focus on the researcher’s own relationship with others and with culture through the application of critical reflexivity in her or his work. David Kahl Jr. (2011) argues that autoethnography is in itself a form of critical pedagogy as praxis. He stresses that autoethnography can be used as a less pragmatic alternative to critical pedagogy to ensure that the effect of hegemony in research and the classroom is not overlooked. Critical AutoEthnography recognizes that there are obstacles to working towards the humanization of institutions and research but does not step back from the challenge. W. E Roth (2008) uses the slash in Auto/Ethnography since he argues that the individual and society have a natural symbiotic relationship. Besides the self and his or her culture, there is also the other, therefore, for me, autoethnography does not need that slash because they are inherently linked to themselves, others, and the culture that encompasses them. Instead, the capitalization of the “E” in [Critical] AutoEthnography delineates my contention that the self, other, and culture should be of equal importance and stature when we are performing such research. John Quicke (2007) sees the “Critical” as ensuring that a work is more than just focused on what is good; he sees it in the everyday sense as containing “more ambiguity, self-doubt and even some self-condemnation [and in the more formal sense as] how actions taken measure up in terms of...moral and political ideas” (p. 3). He also sees the use of “critical” as utilitarian in nature, ensuring that the good of all students is taken into consideration while simultaneously ensuring that the relationship between knowledge and power is espoused (2007).
Importance of Affirming Our Biases

Both critical pedagogy and autoethnography stress that researchers should acknowledge that their research techniques cannot be completely detached from their own biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In *Ideology and Curriculum*, Michael Apple (2004) claims that schools, as institutions, must realize that they contribute to the re-creation of inequality. Both Apple (1994) and Noël (1994) developed a method of studying society by segmenting the various terms that are used to control the public discourse. Apple takes his arguments about the nature of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci and builds on them in order to develop the notion of arguing that we need to look for social interests embodied in the knowledge form itself (Apple, 2004). Concepts such as social control and who controls what as well as the hidden curriculum are developed and described as being intricately connected to the failure of democracy. Apple, unlike Noël, is more concerned with schools. He stresses the need for educators to get involved in the classroom rather than just study input-output models (Apple, 2004). Education as part of a larger system of control is stifling true learning that can lead to an end to human suffering. Unlike Noël but similar to Freire, Apple adheres to a level of optimism that he feels is necessary for a better world. However he warns, “Now we have to act on this hope” (Apple, 2004, p. 209). This ability to disclose and affirm one’s biases is an integral part of any critical ethnographic research.

Bricolage

With his concept of *bricolage*, Joe Kincheloe was able to bring together much of the work of contemporary critical theorists and pedagogues into a coherent, more democratic form. Creating a multi-methodological approach to research, the *bricolage* is, in itself, a socially equitable enterprise (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Essentially, the use of varied research strategies such as ethnography and urban ecology, among others, can help provide a fuller study of a particular issue. The
A bricoleur, for Kincheloe, can use several different methods and techniques with the goal of understanding the enigmatic nature of reality, and this lends itself wholly to my concept of Critical AutoEthnography. In his *Critical Pedagogy and the Knowledge Wars*, Kincheloe (2008b) sets out to discuss the increasing relevance and importance of critical pedagogy. Specifically, he discusses this concept of *bricolage* as a process of rigorously re-thinking and re-conceptualizing multidisciplinary research. He also equates the need to include “ethnography, textual analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, historiography, discourse analysis combined with philosophical analysis, literary analysis, aesthetic criticism, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning typically [all of which] constitute the methodological bricolage” (p. 4). Similar to what autoethnographers like Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue, Kincheloe does not advocate the traditional paradigm of mixed methods. Rather, he promotes the notion of rigorous knowledge and methodology within several or all of these research pursuits in order to create the *bricolage*. Incorporating Kincheloe’s notion of the *bricoleur* into autoethnography is key to producing, and, in the process, becoming, in Critical AutoEthnography research.

Kincheloe used contemporary political events as examples to re-assert the need to re-conceptualize the manner in which power is held and distributed by the governing classes. He then argued that diversity is slowly eroding as the world is coming increasingly under the power of a few wealthy people and multinational corporations. Kincheloe draws upon the works of academics such as Paulo Freire (1970, 1974, 1992), Donaldo Macedo (2006), and Henry Giroux (1988, 2011), along with other philosophers and social theorists and has become an invaluable resource for students looking into the ideas behind critical pedagogy as well as the reasons why it is necessary. The need to recognize the role of politics in contemporary environments identifies the third distinction that makes Critical AutoEthnography necessary and relevant and that furthers the notion of bricolage.
Understanding the students being and experiences opens up the possibility for the teacher to initiate dialogues designed to synthesize his or her systematized knowing with the minimally systematized knowing of the learner. (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 74)

The importance of Kincheloe’s work to Critical AutoEthnography is that it lays the fundamental framework for understanding critical pedagogy and provides the perfect fit for performing work that is autoethnographic in nature. Concepts such as the culture of positivism and post-structuralism are defined and discussed in relation to contemporary research in knowledge, social justice, and education. Moreover, Kincheloe’s concept of bricolage in relation to critical pedagogy also further develops the ideas presented by Freire that serve to give robustness and consistency to Critical AutoEthnography as a viable and rigorous tool.

Development of Content, Appearance, and Process Qualities

As an alternative to mainstream research, Critical AutoEthnography encourages and highlights the researcher’s subjectivity rather than ignoring it. Questions such as whose voices are privileged are not ignored but accepted as part of the ideal of reflexivity. As Shor (1992) reminds us:

> Education is an experience of human beings in a specific community at a certain moment in history and in their lives, it is a social interaction involving both thought and feeling. (p.23)

Carolyn Ellis, in her book, *The Ethnographic I* (2004), argues that autoethnography is a reflexive record of one’s own experiences found within one’s reality. It is important to write about the personal and one’s relationship to culture. Furthermore, Ellis promotes the idea of creating plural texts, open to many interpretations, and says that academics should not “be afraid to make ethnography dangerous, political, and personal” (p. 42).

In the context of the west, qualitative research has created a niche for itself as being able to produce “a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). This bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001) is formed using the
visual data collected in order to construct a network of understanding of the past. This interpretive *bricolage* takes into consideration my identity and how it was shaped as well as its effect on my development as a teacher. Using autoethnography as a benchmark and critical pedagogy as a beacon, Critical AutoEthnography paves the way for research that is personal and political, delicate yet robust. It ensures that the hidden is viewed and that the truth is acknowledged to be ever changing. Within critical pedagogy, “visual methodology is a set of approaches to working with the visual in research, and with representations that are constantly changing” (Pink, 2012, p. 4).

**Critical AutoEthnography: Learning and Schooling**

Rather than taking a linear look at learning, Critical AutoEthnography accepts the role of other factors and their effects on the thinking mind and spirit of an individual. “The potential for linking self-study and social policy is rich, and, we might add, radical in relation to linking the personal and the social” (Pithouse et al., 2009, p. 18). For Lise Noël (1994), we need to deconstruct how power is wielded and maintained in society if we are to gauge the political and philosophical mood. Since Noël, many scholars such as Kincheloe (2001, 2004, 2008a), Macedo (2006), and Giroux (1988, 2011) have continued to examine how cultural production as a form of learning affects knowledge. Others, such as Ellis (2004), Bochner and Ellis (2002), and Chang (2008), have designed a process that includes cultural analysis with narrative work. Critical AutoEthnography looks at the question of popular cultural literacy and the relationship between the social, cultural and political in shaping human identity. It enables researchers to examine ways to redefine their work and, in the process, themselves. Performing research that ignores one’s own so-called baggage is like teaching only the canon when it is, rather, the critical teaching of the canon that is needed.
The Need for Critical AutoEthnography

Prior to the 1960s in North America, theorists provided the main ideological points in terms of which curricula were designed and implemented. Cultural pluralists such as John Dewey (1910, 1916) who incorporated the idea of socio-economics and its relation to class also failed to accept difference as a positive factor in developing educational theory. The successive educational reforms in Canadian Provinces such as Quebec have all dealt with a different level of back-to-basics education (MELS, 2000). These reforms have been characterized by large budgets with small real effect. More recently, governments are implementing school reform projects that are based on specific thresholds for success. These Special Projects are meant to ensure that schools are held accountable to their students. Increasingly, schools are being forced to develop new curricula that enable students to improve their educational outcomes. As Shirley Steinberg noted when discussing the North American education system, this kind of top-heavy approach to improving results forces schools to “[p]lay the game in order to receive accreditation [by] creating bogus curriculums” (as cited in Macedo, 1993, p. 221). Critical AutoEthnography, as part of a larger educational reform, would allow students and teachers to engage in real dialectical discussions that build mutual respect and trust, and that promote humanization.

Methodologies in Critical AutoEthnography

Although there is no standard way to conduct Critical AutoEthnographic work, there are numerous roads a researcher can take. For instance, Cate Watson (2009) uses participant self-observation as a methodology to help answer the question: Why do we desire what oppresses us? She argues that participant self-observation offers a way to:
...uncover the pattern of the zones of intensity distributed on the surface...that organise our desires, holding out the possibility for re-organising those patterns; for discerning the points of weakness and the lines of flight along which travel might be possible. (p. 25)

Her study deals with her concerns and anxieties at becoming a teacher in higher education.

John Quicke (2007) uses stories from his professional experiences as a member of an educational psychology service for schools. His work reviews his interactions as well as his own views and feelings on his profession through the study of the ups and downs of his day-to-day experiences. His critical autoethnography is concerned with engaging in conversations that traditional professional development frowns upon, allowing for a deeper understanding of himself.

Underpinning his personal narrative is the idea that:

...in identifying barriers to education progress we should be aware of those that pupils as socially constructed selves ‘bring in’ with them, so to speak, from home or outside school. The barriers are not just constructed by teachers in school systems, but also by pupils. (p. 11)

Quicke is not a teacher but he uses critical autoethnography in a manner that can be used by his colleagues in the school system.

Although not explicitly identified as a critical autoethnography, Tony Kelly’s (2008) study of cultural identity in Atlantic Canada draws on literary anthology, self-study, autobiography, autoethnography, and geopolitics to answer the question: What am I doing here? As Kelly writes, “The process of story-making through textual encounters is far removed from a mere psychological phenomenon and is situated within a particular historically determined conjunctures which are themselves structurally framed through presence and past, now and then” (Kelly, 2008. p. 66). As a result of the study, Kelly makes recommendations regarding teacher education that argue for the importance of including students in their own learning experiences. In other words, teachers must tease out aspects of their identity “as they are revealed through the interplay of lived texts” (p. 74).
Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs (2011) uses performance autoethnography to explore the elements of her past that have affected how she sees herself in academia. Her autoethnography allows for the evaluation of her personal and professional development through reflection, writing, and performing. Her ability to use poetry to express and examine the past, present, and future not only informs her work but can also affect the reader. Similar to a song that can bring back a memory long forgotten, her words gave me a glimpse into my own story.

The preceding examples are just a small sample of the different methods that other researchers have used in teacher education. Critical AutoEthnography provides the walls, as it were, that can ensure a stronger sense of security when we are conducting research that can sometimes bring forth emotions and memories that we might have put aside for a reason. Critical AutoEthnography is an effective tool for educators since “in order to develop the professional self as teacher, there is a need to acknowledge and better understand the personal self for it seems unlikely that the core of the personal will not impact the core of the professional” (Loughran, 2006, p. 112).

**Writing as Research**

For my investigation, writing itself is key feature of the work. As Van Manen (1989) observes, writing is research, in phenomenology. It is also the case in the way that I approach my Critical AutoEthnography, and although as I describe below I worked with various visual images as ‘memory triggers’, representation through writing memory-work pieces, many of which I have put in italics throughout the thesis, alongside written pieces where I have tried to convey the story, form a significant part of the telling. This of course is central to Narrative Inquiry itself. What stories do we tell? How do we move readers to believe what we are saying? I don’t have one method or approach for talking about writing. I have worked on stories and memory-work pieces which I have shared
with my supervisor for collaborative advice on how to incorporate them meaningfully into the text.

**Importance of Memory Triggers to Critical AutoEthnography**

Given that Critical AutoEthnography is meant to be transformative, and to promote humanization and encourage one’s professional development in relation to others as well as to one’s own experiences, it is essential to build in memory-work and self-study. Critical AutoEthnography exists at the intersection of how the self, other, and culture interact with and inform each other. All three parts of the triad are fundamentally dependent on self-study and memory-work which provides the foundation for deeper reflection and understanding.

The act of bringing memory forward as a form of re-learning through critical reflection (Kelly, 2013) allows for the re-interpretation and re-evaluation of past events (Crownshaw et al., 2010; Gutman et al., 2010; Strong-Wilson, 2008) which in turn enable Critical AutoEthnographers to begin to recognize the formation of their personal and professional identities. The active text that makes up one’s lived experiences cannot be created in isolation and is essential to beginning to identify and evaluate the events and experiences which have contributed to the formation of one’s understanding of one’s self. Critical AutoEthnography concerns the self as much as the audience within an understanding of the cultural environment in which the research is situated. Since the relationship between reality and the human perception of it is always shifting and is culturally grounded (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) self-study and memory-work provide the necessary balance needed to ensure understanding and context.

Teresa Strong-Wilson’s (2008) interpretation of memory as a complex set of ideas towards which one strives to understand one’s enigmatic nature closely resembles the ethos of my notion of Critical AutoEthnography in that it points out the constantly shifting nature of our identities. Critical AutoEthnography, however, does not limit itself to the self and the other but allows for
the fact that culture plays a major role in the formation of identity and understanding. This is not to say that researchers conducting memory-work and self-study do not take into consideration the social, economic, and political realities onto which their study is entrenched but rather that Critical AutoEthnography makes them play a more dominant role.

Critical AutoEthnography and Fieldwork

In Chapter One I introduced the idea of doing Critical AutoEthnographic fieldwork with three memory sites: schools as artifacts: working with a television series, and looking back at a curriculum initiative. As a teacher I spend much of my time observing the daily goings-on of the learning process. Students spend much of their childhood in these places of learning. Thus, discussing going “back to the school” as I do in Chapter Four, provided me with a great deal of information about my own development as a teacher. Then, in thinking about the links between schooling and popular culture, I chose to study the television series Les Bougon because of its popularity in Quebec. Finally, as a teacher I wanted also to think about the uses of memory in my everyday teaching, so I chose to look at teacher texts since they are a means of gauging what is expected of the teacher as well as what students are expected to “know”. While I devote a separate chapter to each of these three memory sites, and offer a detailed description of how I went about doing the fieldwork, I want to explain here why I choose these sites and something about the process and time frame.

Three years ago I returned to the schools I had attended and homes I had inhabited during my elementary years in order to photograph their exteriors. Over the years I had passed these locations, sometimes by chance and other times by curious design. Why did I want to see what these places looked like now? I decided to take that desire to know further by documenting their facades in order to prompt memories of my time spent there. As a result of looking at the pictures I began to remember other events surrounding my schooling and I proceeded to look for images of that
time period. With my parent’s permission I looked through their closet in order to find pictures that helped chronicle this.

I was first introduced to *Les Bougon* upon my return in 2006 from having been in Asia for two years. In my absence the show had become popular, especially among the people who inhabited the neighborhood into which I had moved. At first I just watched some of the episodes in an attempt to discover what it was that made it so popular. At about the time that I was returning to take the photos of the schools I decided to watch all the episodes of all the series. Afterwards, I viewed each series separately to then decide upon the episode from each series that had had the greatest effect on me.

Building on the previous two approaches, I then proceeded to use memory and personal narrative in relation to teaching texts to examine the relationship between what the official curriculum calls for, what actually is taught, and where I fitted into the equation.

**What Will We Know When We Know It? Assessing a Critical AutoEthnography**

Finally, I touch on here what could be called the *so what?* of Critical AutoEthnography, I am reminded of how my supervisor, Claudia Mitchell, frequently quotes the well-known feminist physicist, Ursula Franklin: “What will we know when we know it?” (as cited in Mitchell, in press). In search of answering Franklin’s question, and in the absence of a clear set of principles or evaluative criteria for Critical AutoEthnography, I found myself returning to two bodies of literature: assessing self-study and assessing autoethnography and what it allows us to do in our teaching. Both, it seems to me, help to shed light on what it means to do a Critical AutoEthnography and, so, in this section I return to these bodies of literature.
Assessing Self-Study

Mokhele (2014), building on the work of Samaras (2011) and others identifies six criteria for examining self-study action research projects. Although I describe my study as Critical AutoEthnography (as opposed to self-study action research) I offer them here as entry points for assessing the value of the work:

• The opinion and insights of the candidate should take priority over other people’s knowledge. It is essential for the researcher to provide an account of his or her values and beliefs to establish the benchmark from which we can measure whether he or she has changed and why. The use of the first person voice in this type of self-study is key in “fulfilling an important quality of standards of interpretive paradigm” (Taylor & Medina as cited in Mokhele, 2014, p. 6)

• There is an obligation to demonstrate insight about self-study action methodology. A self-study project should showcase the purpose, the criteria, and standards that were used to conduct the research.

• Educational and social influence should form the primary goal of self-study projects. The researcher should be able to explicitly demonstrate how his or her research has influenced his or her own practice.

• The self-study candidate should demonstrate knowledge creation and originality. This can take the form of something being done, for instance the use of different research sites, in the course of the research.

• The awareness of the role played by self in the problematic situation should be the criterion to which candidates are held. Throughout the study the identification of the researcher’s own issues and concerns regarding his or her own development must be
clear, along with the acknowledging of any weakness. The manner in which he or she improved his or her craft must be demonstrated.

- There should be a balance between new and old sources. Because of the uniqueness of such research it should be expected that self-study researchers use a wide range of sources to craft their autoethnography.

Assessing Autoethnographies

Mitchell (in press) puts forward a number of propositions, as she terms them, for considering the value in engaging in autoethnography. By extension I would see these as criteria for assessing my own Critical AutoEthnography. In her first proposition “doing something different” she refers to Kathleen Stewart (2013) who writes that “autoethnography can be a way of doing something different with theory and its relation to experience” (p. 659). The second proposition that Mitchell offers is related to positionality. As she writes, “Autoethnography can contribute to the ways that we address/build in/and critically engage with positionality in our research (including researching our teaching)” (in press). Dutta and Basu (2013) write about the ways in which as researchers we need to navigate our various positions at any one time, and note that we are seldom ever occupying just one position. A third proposition refers to ethics. As Mitchell writes, “Autoethnography can contribute to the care with which we research and teach” (in press). As Tullis (2013) notes, we need to think explicitly about the role of others in our stories. A fourth proposition refers to social justice. Mitchell asks how “looking inward” (in press) can contribute to social change. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2013) argue that autoethnography helps us turn our attention to “experiences of exclusion, degradation and injustice, and in so doing create work that not only makes the case for change but also embodies the change it calls into being” (p. 669). Finally, Mitchell refers to advocacy. Citing Adams et al. (2013), she notes, “Autoethnography sets up its own ‘call for action’ in relation to
The one area in which my study is less in keeping with conventional autoethnography, at least in an explicit way, is the area of collaboration. As Mitchell (in press) writes, “Autoethnography by its very nature invites us to seek and test out new collaborations through interdisciplinary projects as well as new writing collaborations with non-scholar collaborators in our lives.” Although a key feature of developing this thesis has been the collaboration with my supervisor, and this collaboration is perhaps more implicit than explicit, a feature of autoethnography, self-study, and doctoral supervision that is taken up in other writing (see Mitchell & Khan, in press). The supervisor often acts as a critical friend (Samaras, 2011; Samaras et al., 2014) to provide the encouragement as well as the critical engagement necessary for this type of research.

In summary then, although I am not able to offer a checklist of instructions (Bartolome, 1994), I have followed two sets of criteria in assessing my work. My Critical AutoEthnography has emerged partly out of what Muncey (2010) identifies as the juxtaposition of my own experiences, outside experiences, and the interaction between them, and I have incorporated throughout my thesis narratives related to politicization, de-humanization, and instrumentalization (Smyth, Down, McInerney & Hattam, 2014).
Summary

This chapter reviewed the main tenets of autoethnography, critical pedagogy and my own Critical AutoEthnography. Critical pedagogy as demonstrated in the literature examines the relationship between knowledge and education, power and society, as well as the social policies relating to education and learning. It is, as Giroux (2011) mentions, “A new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing the world” (p. 69). It acknowledges that people in modern societies reconstruct their personal past, perceive the present and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized and evolving self-story (Fivush & Haden, 2003). Critical pedagogy combined with a coherent and rigorous autoethnography allows for research that is self-reflective and that encourages transformative learning and teaching.
Introduction

My parents both worked in the service industry and neither possessed a high school diploma. During my early childhood, the two things I remember most is that we moved often and that I attended numerous schools. This allowed me to discover new neighborhoods and friends. This meant that although I had the opportunity to explore a new neighborhood annually, it also meant that I would have to keep breaking existing relationships and making new friends. The first neighborhood I remember my family living in was made up of mostly middle- to upper-middle-class individuals. We lived in Outremont because my maternal grandmother was renting to us; this allowed my parents to benefit from an advantageous rent. I remember playing with other kids who looked like me but who lived in larger and brighter dwellings. Although I did not understand the socioeconomic differences, I was able to understand that our families were different.

Memories such as this outline some of the events that have shaped my identity. The numerous schools I attended and homes and neighborhoods I inhabited during my years in primary school shaped the way in which I developed and helped determine who I developed into.

The focus in this chapter is on an arts-informed inquiry into using photographs of schools as artifacts. In using this term I emphasize the notion of schools as real objects and places rather than the notion of schooling. Following Rose & Tolia-Kelly (2012), I take into consideration the criteria for critical visual methodology: taking images seriously; thinking about the social conditions and effects of them; and considering my own way of looking at them. The fusion between the arts and

**Place Matters**

Since rephotography quite consciously forces an engagement with both time and place and a consideration of the placedness of our identities, through it, I sought to render visible, both to myself and to others, some of the storied influences of place, the imprimatur of my childhood landscapes.

(Allnutt, 2009, p. 28)

Susann Allnutt (2009) studies the evidential and embodied usefulness of photography in creating topographical intimacy with place and then using this place as a medium to explore her own identity. Similar to her use of rephotography, the later photographing of places previously photographed, my rephotographing of the schools I attended so many years later enables me to study the concept of place in relation to my childhood and the landscapes I inhabited. Through this photography I have attempted to excavate my childhood memories. According to Allnutt, investigating place, landscape, and space enables us to examine our relationship with our past and how this relationship affects our current identity. This will change depending on where we are looking since when we decide to look in a particular direction, we already carry with us an interpretive stance.

We cannot retrieve childhood, but it informs our very identity. So retrieving our impression of childhood, writing memory, gives essence to our current dailiness as beings-in-the-world. (Allnutt, 2009, p. 28)

Allnutt argues that the fusion of memory and imagination with place enables us as researchers to study what we remember and why since, although we cannot retrieve childhood we can try to establish something of what formed our identity. The process of photography is as important as the product; an auto-photographic study that is arts-informed should value the act of photography itself as well as the photographs so that the study can provide a connection to the
author’s presence in the photographed places.

Tony Kelly (2008) also calls on memory and place as a way to study the construction of identity. In his study of a rural life teaching in the same area of Nova Scotia where he grew up, Kelly writes about the commonalities between autoethnographic texts and literary anthropological accounts that both provide narratives to help us understand the presentation of the self in the world. For Kelly (2008), his project “is not quite self-study or fiction, not quite memoir or pure fantasy and which, as a study in reading and culture, stands as a contribution to better understanding aspects of the development and lived experience of a teacher in a rural place” (p. 21). He argues that teachers who write are involved in a process of identity formation and that these writings provide for a better understanding of commonalities with others, including students. Experience is the stuff that gives rise to language, therefore writing about our memories and addressing the questions that are developed in the process enable us as researchers to begin to identify the feelings that might be attached to a particular place. Producing a study that encompasses several genres related to self-study enables the researcher to go beyond the official policy discourses that are traditionally called upon in order to focus on what is central to the development of the teacher by attempting to answer the question: What am I doing here?

The photographs of these places, these artifacts, that I was connected to and remain connected to along with the experiences associated with them that formed my identity have helped, even encouraged, memories to surface. As a result of the increasing political and demographic pressure on the English public school system in Quebec, several of the schools I attended as a child closed so I attended up going to five elementary schools. The change of schools came with a change of residence, as my parents would relocate to areas closer to the school. Often a new neighborhood and the culture of a new school as well as its clientele varied significantly from the previous one.
My Critical AutoEthnography draws on autobiography, photography, media, and memory-work in order to expose those elements of my experiences that have shaped my development as an educator. The physical landscape of Montreal public schools that I attended as a student, as well as the scenes from the television series *Les Bougon* that will be examined in the next chapter provide a primary site for the analysis of identity in relation to culture and environment.

**Memory Triggers: Working With Photographs**

**Methodology**

Something in the picture will suggest an idea or hint at a link to theory. It is from such moments that insight is born and from such insights that full-blown interpretative and research strategies can be constructed. (Grady, 2004, p. 27)

Following Prosser (2007) I recognize that it is fundamentally important to ensure that my research is concerned with the production, organization, and interpretation of images. I chose to return to the schools I attended and the houses in which I lived in order to photograph their exteriors so as to then have them act as memory triggers which would allow me to begin to construct a narrative about identity and teaching. I choose to work with these images because images can be used to capture the ineffable; can allow us to pay attention to things in new ways; can evoke stories; can be accessible; and can facilitate reflexivity in research design (Weber, 2008). As a form of inquiry, as LeBlanc (2014) points out, this process allows for the opening up of a space from which I can construct and generate more questions about the interpretation of the images. Similar to some other visual researchers, like Prosser (2007), for example, I have put the focus on the political or economic aspect of the architecture of schools; I focus on their exteriors in order to reconstruct the critical incidents, no matter how trivial, that shaped my professional practice and identity. The schools I attended have become, in a sense, memories hiding in plain sight, accessible but not penetrable.
without my using memory itself as a tool for extracting past experiences in order to bring them to the forefront and help to explain my practice. Whereas the use of cameras have traditionally been to describe objects because of their stationary character (Collier & Collier, 1986), photographs can act as evidence to address research questions in a manner that is consistent with a theoretical framework (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012). During the taking and analysis of these images I followed three critical criteria for visual methodology; I took the images seriously; I thought about the social conditions that affected the objects; and I considered my own way of looking at the objects (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012). Using images in this manner was about my looking at ways that, as a teacher, I can imagine and re-imagine myself so that I can have a positive effect on others (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014).

Returning to these sites of learning, even after several decades, can have a profound effect on an individual. When O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000), in her experience mentioned earlier, returned to a former school and saw a tree from which she had taken a leaf upon hearing that she would be moving she rediscovered questions she had had as a child. She wondered how the memories of teachers manifested in our later lives and, though this, in the lives of our students in years to come.

Returning to my past through the study of images has been a more difficult task than I had envisioned. For example, as a child, I constantly felt awkward with my fellow students, possibly because of the fact that I changed schools so often. As a mode of survival I constructed a system of reading people in the school, in a manner of speaking, in order to understand their role there. The schoolyard was a place where social structures amongst student and staff were made apparent. This is where you knew who was really your friend and who was not, and which teacher would help you if you needed help and which would look away. Given the relationship between the construction and understanding of one’s own personal identity and one’s teacher identity (Kelly, 2008; O’Reilly-
Scanlon, 2000; Penny, 2000), I have benefited from this experience, however uncomfortable it was, because it has helped me analyze how I see the schools in which I now work and it has helped me to better understand the students. Looking at my own experiences has provided for an understanding, as Samaras (2002, 2011) experienced, of the social and cultural contexts in which students develop as well as the importance of self-study to building teacher efficacy.

Images have the ability to bring back memories, which, in turn, can be re-analyzed using a contemporary gaze with the goal of learning about the development of one's teacher self. Since “our recognition of cultural phenomena is controlled by our ability to respond and understand” to what we are presented with (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 1), photography aids in the understanding and reinforcing of one's identity that can then act as the benchmark against which one's teacher persona can be judged. By taking a methodically planned series of photographs in order to document and analyze my own story through text I have visually constructed, as Rose & Tolia-Kelly (2012) puts it, a new interpretation of the social situations of my lived past emerges. Image-based research employed as part memory trigger and part visual ethnography allows for a dialogue within the self, a dialogue that can then be studied from a semiotic perspective. Similar to other researchers who have looked at photographs as both phenomena and method (Mitchell & Weber, 1998), I outline the many different interpretations of my past and how my memories are both prompted and shaped by them. I have tried to avoid making the error of using an image to establish meaning in one context at the expense of others (Knowles & Cole, 2008) and have instead focused on the importance of constructing my own versions of events and how they relate to the present. As teachers we have been schooled to see ourselves in a certain way in relation to schools (Mitchell & Weber, 1998) but my study illuminates the ways in which my teacher identity was both formed and is applied. As Weber (2008) argued, “It is the paying attention, the looking and the taking note of what we see that
makes images especially important to art, scholarship and research” (p. 42).

**Data Collection**

**Working With Family Photographs**

In addition to taking photographs of the actual schools I attended, I also worked with family photographs, building on the work of researchers such as Patricia Holland (2000) and Annette Kuhn (1995) and their work with domestic photography. I have experienced, as Holland puts it, “moments of taking, organizing, viewing and sharing an image, as well as searching and re-viewing - looking back at a single picture or across a collection of images” (p. 137). Kuhn refers to family photographs as the “raw material” of memory work. Underpinning her study is the idea that the person viewing the photograph brings to the image a wealth of “surrounding knowledge” (p. 121).

Susann Allnutt (2009), in her study of place and memory, used family photographs in several ways. First she used existing pictures collected in a commonplace book, which then prompted her to re-photograph known spaces that led to the mapping of what she refers to as “not-yet-known, but knowable spaces” (p. 14). She also used the existing photographs to help prompt conversations with her siblings, which helped her excavate shared childhood place memories.

Like Allnutt, I used existing photographs that prompted re-photography. I first went searching for photographs in family collections of photos related to the schools I went to and neighborhoods I inhabited. I found images that were stored in a closet in my parent’s house. In a medium-sized brown packing box I found a large number of picture sleeves and some albums. Although I could tell that everything had at one time been placed in this box with care, after several moves the box and its contents had begun to suffer some damage. About a hundred pictures had fallen out of their sleeves - photographs that chronicled my family’s history up to about a decade
ago when the last of my siblings moved out. Of these pictures that had fallen out I found about ten pictures of me. I was very selective and chose only those that were taken in or in front of my homes during my elementary school years (1985 to 1990). I decided to select the pictures that had fallen out because they were exactly the memory prompts I had set out to find.

![Map of Schools and Homes Visited](image)

**Figure 1:** Schools and homes visited (starting from left to right).

**Working With School Photographs**

The next step in the process was to photograph the schools I had attended as a student in the order in which I attended them, starting with grade 1 and going up to grade 5. This stage of the process draws on the work of Caroline Wang (1999) on photovoice. Typically for Wang and others, the process of engaging in photovoice involves research populations who are marginalized in some
way. In my case the taking of the photos was a way to re-engage with childhood, somewhat in the same way that Allnutt did when she returned to photograph her family home. On a crisp Sunday afternoon, 9 September 2012, I went out on a photo shoot, taking pictures of the schools I had attended as well as the houses and apartments I had called home during my elementary school years. My process was very simple. First I made a list of the five schools I had attended as well as the addresses of the four homes I lived in while attending them. I choose a Sunday because it was the day most likely to have the fewest children around. An adult male taking pictures of schools while children were playing may have looked suspicious. Also, since it was the beginning of the school year the yards and schools themselves were at their cleanest. In the summer the schools would have been used by the summer day-camp programs and photographing them would have looked just as suspicious. Similarly, the pictures of the former homes I lived in were taken as quickly as possible so as not to cause too much suspicion in the current residents (see Figure 1).

**Similar Schools, Different Experiences**

As already mentioned, I attended five elementary public schools in the greater Montreal region during the late 1980s. English public schools were either switching to French language instruction or closing permanently because of lower enrollments that came about as a result of political decisions (see Stevenson, 1999). Although this transition from English to French political and economic control occurred with a great degree of civility (Stevenson, 1999), nonetheless the English population that had not emigrated were left in many cases with half-empty schools. As a child I remember having to experience being the *new kid* almost every year. Similar to the way in which the main character is forced to re-live the same day over and over again until he begins to learn from his previous actions in the popular Hollywood movie *Groundhog Day* (1993), I had to adjust to new procedures, school cultures, and the physical schools themselves in new neighborhoods.
In my own sessional teaching at McGill, I have found that when pre-service teachers return to their former schools they comment that they often have a different perspective on what they remembered the school to be like. This is because they have already begun to see these schools from the standpoint of the young adult who has now met the requirements of these schools. The manner in which similar schools operate differently was imprinted onto me before I had even graduated from grade seven. Most telling for me was how rights and responsibilities and the concept of what was right varied from school to school.

What is remembered and how it is remembered presents some interesting questions in terms of how we construct our memories (Mitchell, 2005, 2013). What I remember is that some of the schools required uniforms and others did not; some were more punitive than others. School spirit was strong in some while virtually non-existent in others. The school clientele varied from school to school, and the manner in which the teachers treated students differed. All these memories had an effect on how I see teaching and the role of the teacher in promoting student well-being and development. Similar to the protagonist of *Groundhog Day* (1993) I began to see patterns and themes between schools that allowed me to predict and adapt to the classroom settings and school cultures as well as to the neighborhoods in which I lived. I can see now that schooling became a game for me; I was always trying to adjust to what was normal for whatever school I would find myself attending. Looking back at my memories in relation to this time presents some interesting questions such as: Why have the buildings helped me to remember events that I had forgotten? Have my memories changed as a result of looking back or have they just been highlighted? How has trying to fit into what was considered average in the different schools affected my current teaching? I will try to answer these questions (and others that I will go on to raise) in the last section of this chapter.
Figure 2: Brian waiting for his brother to return from school (circa 1984).

My goal in taking the photographs was not to return to the former buildings and interact with their contemporary inhabitants but rather to engage with the physical structures that would help me recall my educational experiences as a child. Long before I went to school waiting for my older brother to come home from school (Figure 2) became part of my daily routine and this is one of my stronger memories. I looked forward to going to school but when I did, it quickly became routine. This memory made me recognize that my always wanting to make the learning experience the highlight of a school day for my students might well stem from my early experience of school as a disappointing routine. For me, as a child, school was a procedure rather than a learning adventure. Looking back at this photograph and remembering how I longed to go to school triggered a host of memories associated with my educational experience. For me, then, curricula, procedures and people changed but the actual structures remained, usually with little change to their overall presence.

Since “memory is both a material piece of knowledge and an active process by which the knowledge itself is constructed” (Cole, 2011, p. 225) the pictures themselves provide the foundation from which memory is prompted and then analyzed. The criteria I chose to employ for choosing the
angle of the photographs revolved around where I had spent the most time as a child outside the schools.

Table 1

*Schools attended and grade level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Guy Drummond Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mount Royal Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mount Royal Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Luke Challaghan Memorial School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nazareth Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nesbitt Elementary School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For instance, in photographing Guy Drummond elementary school I took a picture from the front left side of the school and another from the point in the schoolyard where I would usually play. I put emphasis on the view from which I most commonly remembered seeing the school as a student.
### Table 2

**Pictures, positions, and comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Reasons and Comments</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Benoit</td>
<td>In kitchen</td>
<td>Waiting for my brother to return from school.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champagneur home</td>
<td>Front (steps)</td>
<td>I played on the stairs after school.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture of my siblings and cousins</td>
<td>In front of Champagneur home</td>
<td>Steps were a central meeting place for family.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy Drummond Elementary School</td>
<td>Front side and back yard corner</td>
<td>I approached the school from this side and spent much time in the playground there.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Royal Academy</td>
<td>Inner courtyard</td>
<td>I played in this part.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomfield home</td>
<td>Front</td>
<td>Trees blocked my view from the side.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspe home</td>
<td>Front right</td>
<td>I arrived from school in this direction. It is how I remember the home.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Challaghan Memorial School</td>
<td>Front left, and window front</td>
<td>I arrived at school and passed this window every morning.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth Elementary School</td>
<td>Front</td>
<td>I arrived and played in this section.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Avenue</td>
<td>Front left</td>
<td>I arrive home from this direction.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin, Aunt and Dog</td>
<td>Front of 2nd Avenue</td>
<td>I spent much time on the front porches.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesbitt Elementary School</td>
<td>Yard side</td>
<td>I played and spent most of my time in this section of the yard.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

**Homes and when I lived in each**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Homes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981-1986</td>
<td>772 Champagneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1987</td>
<td>6957 Bloomfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-1989</td>
<td>6226 Gaspe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1994</td>
<td>5793 2nd Avenue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* When I moved in 1989, I ended up staying at 5793 2nd Avenue for junior high school.
I took the photographs of the apartments in which my family lived from the front of the building and from the direction I would usually have approached them on my return from school. The photographs of the buildings themselves acted as the memory prompts that enabled me to look further into the fundamental thoughts I had regarding my development as a teacher. Photography is an essential tool to ensure that subtleties of artifacts do not elude the researcher (Riggins, 1994). Since it is important for ethnographers to make every effort to make their photographs as close to reality as possible I took the photographs from the streets without staging the scenes.

I looked at each photograph of the relevant school chronologically along with the photograph of the home in which I lived at the same time. Since I once lived in the same home while attending two different schools I chose to study first the pictures of the two schools I attended and then the home that I occupied.

**Home Sweet Home**

*Figure 3: 772 Champagneur.*

*Figure 4: Brian (middle right) and family.*
Champagneur was a very quiet street on which children used to play on the sidewalks and in the small parks that lined it. My family lived on the first floor of the building (see Figures 3 and 4) when I was six years old and I remember waiting just inside the door for my brother to come home from school. I was fascinated with the stairs located in front of the building and would spend time sitting on them with my siblings and other family members. The building was consistent with all the other buildings on the street but it had some minor differences such as the size of the front stairs, the color of the bricks and that of the doors. As Allnutt (2009) observed, “Place matters, it enters our bodies, as well as our minds and hearts but the places we inhabit are most often background to the foreground attention that we assign to the self, the subject” (p. 3). I remember our cat sitting in the front window as I returned to the house after playing outside and thinking about how lucky it was to be able to have a front seat view of whatever was going on outside. When I was younger the front yard and the stairs seemed enormous to me. I would hide in between the plants when my parents were looking for me. The back of the house was fitted with a small balcony that overlooked the lane. Unlike the front of the building the back lane was almost completely paved leaving only the weeds that could make it through the cracks of the old cement. It was important for me to have a place that I felt I could escape to. The front was a place where I could hide between the flowers and the back allowed me to find small backyard storage compartments. This ability to find comfort in different environments has influenced my ability as a teacher to adjust to the different school landscapes in which I have worked. For instance the inner city school at which I first worked reminded me of the lanes I had played in as a child. When I entered the school it felt as though I were returning home. The school and its students were like members of my extended family of whom I had been put in charge of temporarily while their parents were at work.
“Teachers are seasoned travelers whose work is informed by travels through their own schooling as well as their teaching” (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 48). The earliest memory that I have of schooling was walking with my mother and older brother towards Guy Drummond Elementary School (see Figure 5) in order to drop my brother off and then pick him up. I was spellbound by the size of the building as well as by the number of children present. I got to go into the school briefly only when it was parent conference evenings or to pick up my brother because he had been sent home for misbehavior. Seeing my brother leave for and arrive from school made me inquire into what he was doing all day. I remember wishing that I could attend school and my mother assured me that I would. As a child I had been exposed to other children through sports as well as community day camps and I was hoping to be able to continue to make new friends. After two years of seeing my brother leave for school and return alone I was about to have my first day at school.
It is the first day of school and there is a chill in the air. My father is cooking me his homemade oatmeal and making buttered toast. My brother is leaning against the living room window watching the neighborhood kids walk to the bus stop. I am scared to be leaving the house for the day, leaving my parents. The kitchen is a room that I feel comfortable in; it’s where I eat with my family, and it is where I feel the most at ease. Will I feel the same way at school? I leave the house behind, holding my mother’s hand. My father must go back to bed since he is working tonight. I turn and look back at the house as I walk to the school. As it gets smaller I feel more hesitant, anxious, and sad. Once I get to school my mother brings me to the schoolyard fence. A woman with a big smile reads my nametag and welcomes me with a big hug. She tells me to stand in the corner of the yard with the other children as she talks to my mom. I put one hand on the fence and suddenly I feel safe again and, as my mother leaves, the yard becomes my new home. As a little girl waves goodbye to her parents I wonder why my dad can’t be here.

Looking back at the picture of my first home (Figure 3) and then the school that I would go on to attend (Figures 5 and 6) helps me understand that my identity has been shaped by the schools that I spent so much time in. The schoolyard is an important space for me as is being able to physically touch the new environments that I enter. Although I smile when social convention demands it, I realize how important it is to always be as warm to my students as possible, especially when it is their first time meeting me.

I remember arriving at the school on the first day and being sent to the basement of the school. The kindergarten class was located on the bottom floor of the building in what I remember to be a darkened classroom. The first thing that I noticed was how green the school seemed. The walls were painted with various shades of green and the division of the room did not encourage the distribution of light. The windows seemed old and in disrepair as did most of the structures. The floor, however, always seemed to be clean and I enjoyed sitting on it while playing with the provided educational toys. As a teacher I try to transform my classrooms into bright places because,
in part, of this remembered experience. When I began teaching in high school I had to share many classrooms with other teachers. I quickly took the opportunity to find ways to ensure that I was given space to make the classroom more cheery. I would ask for student volunteers to decorate my reserved section of the classrooms I was in so that the students could play a part in the construction of their space. In another school my students were given a classroom with no access to natural light. I noticed that their interest in learning declined in comparison to the other classes I taught that at least benefitted from having a window.

**Classroom Play**

I have no specific recollection of the teachers throughout my time at Guy Drummond but I do remember that there were rules and that we had to follow them. Kindergarten seemed to be about learning how to follow a particular routine and learning how to socialize. As a teacher I have sat through several compulsory meetings discussing the need to adjust, change or strengthen rules. I have never been partial to creating rules to try to create a quick fix to a solution. Even though students need to get used to routines, the memories I have dating back as early as kindergarten have made me question, always, the reasons behind any perceived need to change the rules. Not dealing with the underpinning issues that contribute to the need to discuss a change in rules can do more harm than good, the effects of which I will discuss later on in this chapter. My best memories of the classroom are of the wooded blocks that lined the walls of one of the so-called play stations and the small indoor sandbox in another. The limited variety of the blocks did not stop me from reconstructing the world as I saw it at the time. The creation and demolition of structures allowed me to escape into creating the type of house that I would want to live in. As for Pink (2012), the reconstruction of the memory through the visual image became for me a way of “arriving at the particular types and layers of knowledge or ways of knowing” (p. 7). The feeling of the sand in
the sandbox passing through my fingers had a calming effect on me. This kind of grounding was more than just a passing state; it became necessary for me to be in the sandbox to feel relaxed in the classroom.

Small projects, assignments, and mini concerts were all part of my kindergarten experience. Learning to understand the social cues as well as the school’s expectations was difficult. Drawing and coloring were less important than holding the crayons the right way. I could see my classmates mostly being able to stay in the lines when we were practicing our letters but I did not find it as easy. My brother had been diagnosed with a form of dyslexia and although I did not know what it meant I knew that he had difficulty reading but I was determined to learn how to read. Getting better at reading was not a minor goal but rather a way to make sure that I avoided the same attention my brother was getting. I started going back to the books I had just read in order to read them again. Even though the books I was reading still contained few words, it was the going over them again and again that made me feel as if I was getting somewhere with them. Learning to read became a process of finding different strategies that would get me to understand the language. For instance, I remember passing my fingers over the letters to get used to the shape of them as well as looking at the shape of the teacher’s mouth as she read from the classroom set of giant story books. I knew I was different from most of the other students in this respect and I will touch more on this presently.

Although most of my time at Guy Drummond was spent inside the school, most of my recollections come from the schoolyard.
Schoolyard Conditioning

I spent most of my time in the schoolyard near the north end fence. It was close to the front of the school as well as close to where my parents would come to pick me up. My memories of the student supervisors are much more vivid than those of any of the teachers. I remember that they often made what seemed to me to be arbitrary decisions regarding student behavior. Some gave preferential treatment to certain students while others ignored misbehavior all together. I learnt that there were certain people I could go to for assistance but that most issues that came up needed to be dealt with independently amongst my cohort of students. It was only when the principal walked out of the building during recess periods that the lunch supervisors would become more assertive. I also understood that bringing anything up to the principal without having gone to the supervisor was not recommended since it would result in later repercussions that would affect me. As Mitchell and
Weber (1999) suggest, returning to and re-examining the time spent in the school yard lends itself to rich, thick descriptions of situations and moments that might have been forgotten before they were ever remembered. This was certainly true for me. Why did the supervision staff react so differently when the principal made an appearance? As a teacher I have always been cognizant of the power relations that go on between the various stakeholders in the school. Based on this I have constructed the belief that the presence of a principal in person throughout the school day plays an important role in ensuring that the school functions smoothly.

**Architecture of Touch**

I enjoyed sitting in the corner of the schoolyard watching the manner in which the sun hit the school building (see Figure 6). I was enchanted by the way the bricks were stacked as well as with how the reflection of the sun on them exposed the subtle differences in their colors. Whereas our sense of smell can enable us to remember situations and feelings that we have had in the past, touch can have the same effect. Sight might come before words (Berger as cited in Knowles & Sweetman, 2004) but the act of touching can reinforce the reality of the past and bring it into the present. As a child, I would rub my hand along the wall in order to feel the small bumps along the bricks as well as the smoothed out sections of the mortar that held them together. Although the exterior play area was large I enjoyed staying near the building, close enough to be within touch but far enough to be able to see as much of it as possible. When I think about my memories at Guy Drummond I begin to realize how important touch was. The newly developed constraints that were imposed upon me in school in order to socialize me seemed to prompt me to keep what was real to me close. The absence of chairs in the yard meant that sitting on the ground was necessary when I needed a break. I enjoyed studying the cracks in the cement and comparing how they changed throughout the year. I followed the path of the leaves in the fall as they gathered in the corners of the yard. I picked them
up and admired their colors, shapes, and texture. Some were dry and crisp and needed to be handled sensitively while others were still wet and plump. During the winter I would sit against the fence, holding firmly onto it as I studied the falling snow or fought against the wind. As I revisited the school to take the pictures I realized that I still felt the need to touch the fence, sit on the pavement, and run my hand along the brick wall. The sense of connectedness to both my past and the building itself felt real, unchanged, and natural.

Reflecting on my primary school ways of seeing the world through my experiences helped uncover what was hidden within me that has contributed to the development of what Mitchell and Weber (1999) called a “teacher gaze” (p. 7) in me. Going back has helped me realize why I think students in schools need to feel safe and that it is the responsibility of all adults to ensure that their needs are met. This safety does not need to come out of an authoritarian model of supervision but should, rather, be built on a relationship that begins when a student starts school. Unlike the lunch supervisors’ changing responses depending on the student with whom they were interacting, the school’s physical presence remained a constant. This provided me with a sense of security and led to the development of an attachment in me to my surroundings. Midway through the year I remember my mother mentioning that I would be changing schools the next year. I was disappointed to have to change school but I was excited about getting to take the school bus.
Mount Royal Academy

According to our morning circle activity, it is fall and I am beginning to be able to spell my first words. I am a little worried because most of the class has begun to read whole sentences and I am still struggling. According to the teacher we should all be at the green reading level but I am only at yellow. I know that Joey and Kenny were below me and of course, John, but most of the girls and Ronald were ahead. After morning circle was completed we would return to our desks because it was Monday, the day we would receive our new book assignments. As the Teacher read our levels out loud I remember hoping that by some miracle I could be at the same level as the others...maybe the teacher would make a mistake and assign a higher level.

This memory is fundamental to reaffirming the importance I place on ensuring that students understand that they should focus on their own progress and challenges rather than focus on how others are doing. Even though we were in grade 1, the students knew, or at least I knew, that I was not performing as well.
Guy Drummond Elementary School was closed because of the dwindling numbers of English students and the remaining ones were relocated to other schools. I was placed at Mount Royal Academy elementary school (see Figure 7) located in the center of the Town of Mount Royal. My parents had chosen the school from the others that were available to me because it provided a catechism course that my older brother would need to take for his First Communion. This community was more affluent than that of Outremont and I, even as a young child, immediately saw the difference when it came to getting ready for school. I could see the differences between the neighborhoods as well as those between these students and those at my previous school. Students had to wear a uniform that their parents had to purchase. I remember my mother mentioning that the clothes were rather expensive. Not having all the required parts of the uniform or wearing it differently meant some sort of reprimand ranging from going to the time-out corner or getting a detention. The school staff spent what seemed to be a large amount of time ensuring that the dress code was enforced. Although one of the major reasons for having the dress code was (supposedly) to ensure that all the students had the same opportunity to integrate despite their family’s socio-economic situation I had a good idea of which students were from more affluent homes. As Weber (2011) argues, clothes can provide some of the impetus required to recover memories since the “wearing of certain garments in specific pedagogical contexts...[can conjure up memories and feelings which in turn can be studied as part of one’s reflective practice and as part of what one brings to] educational policy analysis” (p. 250). Remembering the feel of the uniform as I put it on, the tightness of the pants in relation to the ones I wore out of school brought me back to the first days at the school when wearing the proper clothes seemed to be more important than learning. In my current teaching I find it amusing if not disconcerting when I discuss the issues of mandatory dress codes with my colleagues. Although there is merit to both sides of the debate about whether
or not school uniforms affect learning, based on my own experiences I have advocated, as a teacher, for time and resources to be spent elsewhere any time the issue has arisen.

It is the new school year and I am waiting in line to get the school bus. My parents can’t bring me to school on the first day because my dad is working nights and my mother has decided to return to school to complete a diploma. I am worried, but excited to get to meet new friends. The new school has a uniform, which is much warmer than the clothes I would usually wear at this time of the year. I keep to myself as I get off the bus and immediately find myself standing in the corner of the yard until the bell rings. As I wait in the designated grade area I hear other students getting re-acquainted. I am new, and cannot relate to what they are saying. “I went to Florida” one states proudly, “I went there last year, this year I went to Italy and Greece,” responds another. This continues into the classroom when the teacher asks us to write about what we did during our summer vacation. When the students started drawing the numerous places they had been I wondered why I had not gone anywhere. I explained to my teacher that I had not been anywhere but she insisted I write about a trip I took. After some reflection I decided to just lie and talk about a trip to Switzerland. I remember my mother having mentioned that she had always dreamed of visiting it.

Looking back at this time and all these new schools and new boy experiences, I understand why I now insist on providing students with many options when I am designing my evaluation methods. A student should not feel like he or she has to lie to fulfill the assignment’s criteria.

Although I had taken school buses a couple of times before in order to go on school field trips, my first day on the bus to school was a remarkable experience. I remember the steps of the bus being very high and my being very worried about falling down. Once in the bus I sat behind the first seat and leaned back into the seat. I was fascinated with the size of the seats and the amount of space I had to sit on. I remember holding onto the sides of the seat because feeling the grooves in them seemed to calm my nerves as the bus left. Any worry I had regarding my first day at this school evaporated as I let myself melt into the seat. Upon arriving at the school I remember the
yard being smaller than that of the previous school. The houses around the school seemed to be very similar however, just slightly larger. As a teacher, I see the importance of students being able to find a way to anchor themselves in the classroom. My need to have a place to hold onto the bus seat has translated into my view that students must be given ways to feel grounded within the classroom especially when they are just starting out. Once they find this place/space where they can let themselves open up, learning is facilitated because they feel safe.

**My Grade 1 Teacher**

Even without the prompt afforded by a photograph, I remember the names of my grades 1 and 2 teachers and how they taught. Mrs. McDougal was the grade 1 teacher who was very insistent on work being completed. She did not seem to have a sense of humor, which was something that I had to get used to. Learning the letters and their sounds was very intimidating to me. Learning to read did not come easily to me and I quickly learned which students were more advanced than I was. My most vivid memories of the grade 1 and 2 classroom are of the manner in which they were organized as well as where my desk was placed. The two grades were combined in a split class so even as a child I was able to observe how the same material was taught differently depending on the grade level. More importantly, I began to see a pattern in how certain students were treated by the teacher. I noticed that each class seemed to have the same type of characters such as the “know-it-all” who could answer any question, the “show-off” who had the nicest things, and the “slow student” who seemed to need more time to do anything. The teacher adapted the method in which she taught depending on who she was speaking to. The “know-it-all” always got the benefit of the doubt, the “show-off” was just expected to have the nicest clothes and the “slow student” was often dismissed as being lazy. At this level learning was about understanding and remembering what was in the textbook; the students who did not understand or remember were seen as not fitting into the
norm. When I look back to these classroom dynamics I can see how the concept of power and who holds it takes shape in such an environment. Some students were not given the chance to develop their own understanding and means of learning at school. As Kincheloe (2004) observed, education was presented as truth without any reflection on differing perspectives.

The teacher used guided reading books that slowly got harder as you moved from level to level. The levels were represented by colors. I remember thinking that I would never get to the hardest level (dark green). Like my classmates, I began reading the simplest book feeling as though I would never finish it. At home my mother went over the book with me but I still felt that I was behind the other students. As my reading progressed I began to enjoy books and looked forward to changing levels. Looking at the photograph (see Figure 7) I realize that this is the first time that I can remember actually academically tracking my own progress as well as seeing that of others. Remarkably, it was at home in the presence of my mother and then later on my own that I was able to develop my own sense of self-monitoring. As a teacher I am expected to participate in professional development. Knowing what I need to improve on and being able to track my progress was most likely born out of these experiences with my mother.

My Grade 2 Teacher

Ms. Laurie was my grade 2 teacher. She was soft-spoken and seemed to have a very calm demeanor in comparison with my previous teacher. She always smiled and was ready to help which made me feel welcome and reassured that the progress I had made in grade 1 would continue. Having these two teachers with their different styles accomplishing similar results granted me a respect for the profession that I carry to this day. They were able to team-teach without stepping on each other’s toes. The classroom was the same but then I got to sit on the grade 2 side of it. Seeing the grade 1 students come into the classroom was as eye-opening as seeing the work of the grade 2s had
been the year before. I quickly noticed that the patterns I had seen continued with the new cohort; different students took on roles similar to those I had observed the year before. I wonder if this was common to every classroom or just the unrelated observations of a primary school student? As a teacher I have developed the belief that I must ensure that I am aware of what my students have each been categorized as, whether they themselves are aware of it, and what I can do. These categories often transcend teaching styles and are applied unofficially within each school community. The fact that I began to see patterns as a student in my classmates’ strengths and weaknesses enabled me to understand that learning occurs at different rates for different people. I found that the students who usually did best always came to school with all their homework completed, whereas the students with lower grades did not. I had much assistance from my parents during homework time and wonder what would have become of me had they not been there. During my second year in my teacher education program I was placed in schools where I was expected to work with small groups of student who needed extra help. As I moved to the various schools where I was placed I quickly noticed that one of the common traits among the various students was that their parents did not or could not go over their homework with them.

The picture of the school prompted the memory of a small room near the front of the main entrance to which students who misbehaved were sent. More often than not it was the students who struggled academically who also found themselves in trouble.

**The Schoolyard**

Prompted by the photo in Figure 7 I remember that my experience of both grades was characterized by the search for friends. At school I felt different from the other students who seemed to be able to socialize more easily than I was able to. At the end of grade 1 my best friend, Gerald, changed school and I found this very hard. Gerald was the only friend I remember making and his presence
in the class made me feel as though I had someone on my side in the class. Losing this friend early on in my school life in addition to changing schools so often made me hesitant to make new friends. As a teacher I always make an extra effort to ensure that students have the opportunity to work with various classmates both in and outside their own classroom so that they can identify who they get along with best while still having contact with others. I also have developed an aversion to small groups of students and staff members and I will touch upon this again a bit later.

In the schoolyard I would remain next to the school fence looking out into the neighborhood at the school as well as the various houses that lined its property. I do not remember being interested in moving around the yard, choosing instead to remain close to the entrance doors. I remember one cold and dry winter morning I was thirsty and decided to lick the pole of the fence I was leaning against. My tongue stuck instantly to it causing me to yell loudly for help. The school bell rang and we were supposed to line up with our respective classes but I could not move. Eventually a teacher noticed what had happened and with the help of some warm water I was detached from the fence. At that point I realized that being part of a group served the purpose of protection and this influenced the manner in which I then socialized with my classmates. I began to identify different groups of students with a view to making friends with them to ensure that I would always have people on whom I could count if needed. This pragmatic approach to relationships also ensured that I would not be hurt in the event of a change of school since I would easily be able to replicate what I had accomplished at one school in another.

As Mitchell and Weber (1999) suggest they might, these memories have influenced my work both in the classroom and in my professional life as a teacher. When I began teaching I was not hesitant to change schools since I was used to it as a student. I did my best to put everything I had into every class knowing that I might not get a chance to do it the following year given that I might
move again. I believe that in teaching we do not always get another chance to teach the same course since the students and classroom realities are constantly changing.

Figure 8: 6957 Bloomfield, Montreal.

The Move

When I was in grade 3 my family moved to a neighborhood of Montreal called Parc-Extension (see Figure 8). It was located next to the Town of Mount Royal but was different in many ways. I remember seeing a lot more diversity among the people who lived there. Whereas I had become familiar with seeing Hasidic Jews in Outremont I now encountered people from India, Pakistan, Greece, and the Middle East. As a child this location of Parc-Extension marked an important transition for me. The new apartment was small and there appeared to be no other children to play with outside. I periodically ventured out of the apartment in order to investigate the environment but do not recall ever finding a playmate. A long fence stretched between Montreal and the Town of Mount Royal with a few openings in it for pedestrian traffic. Here a fence separated two sides much
as railway tracks did in other places. The differences between the two communities is as clear in my mind today as it was then. One side had large houses with well groomed gardens while the other was filled with apartment buildings and commercial buildings. This difference was reinforced when my parents took me out on Halloween only to find that the gates in the fence had been locked. My mother told me that the city had done this to ensure the security of children during trick or treating but I understood it to mean that I was not welcome. When I had lived in Outremont I would have been welcome in the other section of the town but now that I was in another part of town I was not. I have always remembered this event and often think of it when I am discussing students with other teachers; am I treating the student differently because of where they call home? As English schools close, the catchment area from which a particular school draws its students is enlarging in Quebec and this means that there is more of a mixture of students from different classes. This necessitates that I be aware of any barriers such as access to funds for projects and fieldtrips or the manner in which a student gets to school; all this needs to be taken into consideration.

We stayed at that house for one year only before we crossed another set of tracks and ended up in the Montreal neighborhood of Rosemont (see Figure 9) where, as a result of the closing of this school, my parents enrolled me into a new school called Luke Challaghan Memorial Elementary School.
The Other Side of the Tracks

There was a convenience store located in front of the house in Rosemont as well as a bar and garage at the corner of the street. The apartment had more space and the parks were kept cleaner than the ones in Parc-Extension. It was located near an overpass that towered over an industrial park. During the evenings and weekends the area around my house became empty of people allowing me to investigate the surroundings. Many of the children with whom I played came from low income families but this did not stop us from finding ways to enjoy ourselves, such as playing road hockey. I developed the view that children not only enjoy playing together but can also learn from each other outside the classroom as much as inside it. I remember one older neighbor telling me about the Second World War as early as grade three. I had several action figures as toys and the fact I was being given information from someone just a bit older than me helped me to incorporate the information...
and remember it. When I am designing a lesson for my students I try to include activities that allow the students to teach others about what their interests are, as I will go on to discuss later.

Figure 10: Luke Challaghan Memorial Elementary School.  
Figure 11: Bars on windows.

Wanting to Study What I Was Not Permitted to Study

There are three things I remember from my time at Luke Callaghan Memorial elementary school (Figure 10); the French Teacher, learning about Prince Edward Island, and the bars on the windows (Figure 11). Having already attended two other schools I was not too worried about adjusting to a new environment. The first thing I remember noticing about the school is that every window was covered with bars. My previous schools most likely also had bars on their windows but this was the first time that I remember noticing them and noting that they had an impact on me. I had equated bars with prisons and was somewhat perplexed as to why they were needed in the first place. At my previous schools I had found the basements to be a place of relaxation, like being under my bed sheets. Now these basement windows were covered in metal bars and fencing. Having been to the zoo during the previous summer as part of a summer day camp I had had an opportunity to observe how the animals in cages were kept. I spent a lot of time looking at the lion pacing back and forth without so much as a small divergence in its path, wondering how bored it must be. When I was
asked to teach in a classroom with no windows I objected and tried to plead with the administration to change the class location. As a teacher I think it is important for students to be able to keep a connection to the outside world while in school and the best way to do that is with natural light. My aversion to bars is related to the fact that despite letting the light in they are a constant reminder that you are captive.

I remember adjusting well to the curriculum and learning early on that there were certain behaviors that school personnel expected of me if I was to be considered an average student. I remember nothing from the classroom except for a project my class had to do on a Canadian province. Although I desperately wanted to do it on Prince Edward Island I was given Quebec because the teacher told me that it was important for me to learn about my culture. I never considered myself to be more of a Quebecker than anyone else I had gone to school with and this made me resent being made to feel different. When it came time to present I did a good job of discussing Quebec. However, I fell in love with Prince Edward Island. The student presenting it had got his hands on some large pictures and the scenery made me want to visit. It was presented as being a unique place, which made me feel I had something in common with it. I remember the flag depicting an island with three small trees and a larger one. The red sandy beaches and connection to England made me want to visit it. Why would this one project out of many be the only one I remember from an entire grade? Perhaps it because I was told to research something other than what I was first attracted to or the fact that its flag was more colorful than the flag of the province I had been given. Eventually I would do my own research into the province as well as spend a summer there working. Reflecting on that moment I can see where I began to be fascinated by topics my teachers would tell me I could not study. In grade 8, for example, I changed schools again and my science teacher told me that I should not do my compulsory science project on water because
it was a boring subject. I decided to do it on water anyway and ended up qualifying to move on to the regional science fair. The project became a way for me to establish my place within what I considered to be the different categories that students were placed into. As a new student I wanted to try to pass for an average student who was completely independent so I spent about a term in the school library preparing and designing the science project. As a teacher I have developed the notion that students should not be told what they cannot do but rather what they can and will do. Although I had surpassed the expectations of the teacher, I had not done it out of wanting to become a better student or a better person but rather to prove the teacher wrong.

**Knowing My Place**

In grade 3 the teacher expected all the students to work on specific tasks that were to be presented to the class as a whole. One such task was learning the months of the year in French. We were given at least a week to study them but I could not remember them. When I was asked to present before the class I made some errors prompting the teacher to yell at me as well as tell me to return to my seat. He then reminded the class that I was French and should not have had a problem with this task. He said that I was an embarrassment to my culture. This was another reminder that I was different from the others. The fact that my family name is Benoit meant that the teacher had certain preconceived ideas as to what I should know as well as to how I should act. After I had gone home in tears my mother got involved and I do not remember seeing the teacher again. This was the first time I remember being singled out as being different from my classmates in terms of culture. I was deeply embarrassed that apparently I did not hold up to the standards that my culture expected. Although my parents assured me that the teacher was out of line I began to see myself and my classmates differently. I remember that I went from being a student in the class to being the French boy. Being labeled when I was not expecting to had me seeing the world differently again. I used
to be able to play into the roles that the teachers had for me but I had never had to answer to the presumptions based on my perceived culture. As a teacher I always try to let my students tell me how they define themselves so as to ensure that I am taking their views into consideration. As a teacher working in English education with a French last name I am aware that students already have an idea of the type of upbringing I had. Student names should not be used to define who a student is.

![Figure 12: Nazareth Elementary School, Montreal.](image)

**New Beginnings (Again)**

Once it was announced that Luke Callaghan was closing permanently I was sent to Nazareth Elementary School (Figure 12) located in the Plateau district of Montreal. I can recall very little about the school except that I was one of the only students in it who had a French family name. The student body was dominated by children from immigrant families from all over the world which reinforced more than ever my difference from the group that I played with. How did this shift affect my youth?
I spent my time in the schoolyard as far away from the school itself as possible. Although the school was constructed of white bricks all my memories of this school are dark. The schoolyard bordered a busy road and I enjoyed listening to the noise that came from it. Entering the school felt like entering a tunnel that had poor ventilation. The contrast between the light exterior and dark interior confused me. I do not remember anybody from the school. All I remember from this school besides the playground are the numerous lists I was given. I remember the school supply list was two pages long, that I had a list of the assignments and when they were due, and I remember that there was a bulletin board located outside the classroom that listed how well students were doing in various classes. Although I spent half the year there I felt as if all that I learned was that listing things was important. There were no bars on the school that I can remember, but the list of names outside the classroom acted in a similar manner since I felt the need to ensure that my name was located in the right places on them. As a teacher I cannot identify with the need to create great amounts of bureaucracy in place of true student learning. Besides the fact that I disagree with the listing of student names based on formal testing results, teaching and learning should not be reduced to a series of checkmarks and short answer questions. When my mother learned that the school was slated for closure she decided to transfer me to a larger school in the middle of the year.
Stability

Not long after I changed to Nesbitt elementary school this time my parents moved to an apartment closer to the new school (see Figures 13, 14, & 15). It was located close to parks and the streets were relatively clean. Once again I had the opportunity to discover the architecture of my new surroundings. I began to make connections between how the homes were decorated and the types of people who lived in them. Houses that had an intricate vegetable garden were often inhabited by older couples of southern European immigrants. Homes that had several bicycles in the yard usually had cars that lined its fences and were families with children. I remember my family members enjoying sitting on the stairs in front of the house as we had done when I lived in Outremont. The windows seemed to be as old as the ones in the schools I had attended. All the apartments had a similar layout but the view from my bedroom windows differed. Since I spent much of my time doing homework in front of the windows I got to see different scenes from small streets and lanes to small gardens. The stability afforded from being able to stay in the same home for more than a few years allowed me develop the ability to make links between how different people choose to
live and what they themselves thought of themselves. For instance the two families that had the big

gardens felt that they were normal since everybody should try to grow their own vegetables. They had defined what normal was for them without realizing that they were the exceptions on that street.

I am constantly faced with how different students and their parents view themselves. The concept of what is normal or not is continually being questioned in my classes. As a result my students often end up questioning their own concept of normality through our classroom discussions without their even realizing it.

Figure 15: Nesbitt Elementary School, Montreal.

Fitting In

I arrived at Nesbitt Elementary School (Figure 15) in the middle of fourth grade. I remember the teacher mentioning to her class that all the desks had to be rearranged to accommodate my arrival. As a teacher I always try to meet with the new students before they enter the classroom. I also contact their previous school in order to talk to the teachers they have worked with in the past.

When I was teaching in high school I would always keep a desk free in case a new student joined my
class. I did not want the student’s first experience being one of worry that the other students would be bothered by their addition to the class. This also provided me with time to observe the student so I could see what their personal strengths and weaknesses were so that I could help them accordingly.

I had mastered the skill of adjusting to a new school. I could read the class and see which students played which role within the classroom community. I had learned not to get used to people since I would only miss them upon my eventual move to another school. Interestingly, I now often find myself at odds with my fellow teachers over the importance of working with the same students every year. Could this be a result of my childhood adaptation to changing schools so often?

I remember the basement of Nesbitt where the cafeteria was as well as play areas. I continued to be intrigued by the bars on the windows as well as by the manner in which the school was divided. The school still had the words “boys” and “girls” inscribed in the mortar from when the school used to be segregated by sex. Although Nesbitt was a large school with a big yard, it was divided by grades so the grade I was in was often confined to the back entrance area. As I had done in my previous schools I spent much of my time in the yard observing the school and its features. The large hallways of the structure as well as the industrial furnishings such as the foot level wall protectors, large doors, and solid lockers gave me comfort. The students I would share classes with changed almost every year, but the buildings always shared similar features that I could count on no matter where I found myself.

**Productive Remembering**

If we look at productive remembering, as Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt and Pithouse-Morgan (2013) term a form of relearning though critical reflection, something taken up by Kelly (2013), then self-study brings about the opportunity to make sense of educational practice with the goal of applying what is learned to professional development. Arts-informed inquiry into photography
used to extract place markers contributes to an analytic toolbox that is part of the greater Critical AutoEthnographic endeavor. Including the I in the journey allows me to become what Carani (2013) refers to as the navigator in my work encouraging the ongoing work that is required by teachers and teacher educators in order to re-invent ourselves as teachers (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse-Morgan, & Allnutt, 2011). Navigating memories as spaces for the creative process enables the researcher to uncover an understanding of the past and its effect on her or his identity. My experiences throughout the five elementary schools that I attended, when revisited through photography, provided for additional data in two ways (Cole, 2011). This data allows for the fusion between arts and qualitative research which leads to a better understanding of the meaning and development of the teacher self as I will demonstrate in the next section.

**Building On Memory:**

**Visual Methods, Critical AutoEthnography and Teacher Education**

Photographing the schools as well as the memories that these photography trips and photographs brought forth allows for the narrative self-study of a period of lived experience. The examination of the self as teacher as well as one’s own self-study in relation to teacher practice in the context of lived, relational educational practice is essential to the development of one’s teacher identity (Pithouse, 2007). Returning to the places where my official education took place and photographing these buildings encouraged me, as it did Allnutt (2009), to explore my own identity.

How can photographing the schools one attended be a conduit or tool for studying the self? Following Pink (2009), how do I look at self-identity as being constituted and at its effects on my development as a teacher? As Pink states (2007) “Visual methods pay particular attention to the visual aspects of culture, the interlinking of the visual with ethnography, culture, and individuals” (p. 21). Therefore, like critical pedagogy, visual methodology is concerned with comprehending
how we know as well as the culture in which this knowledge was formed so as to better engage in self-study. Self-study is a process that expresses personal needs and strengths which, when studied, allows teachers to better understand their identity so that they may be better prepared to guide their students (Allender, 2005).

**Reframing the Past for a Better Understanding of the Future:**

**Where Am I in the Picture?**

Can we revisit the schools we attended? Do we ever leave them behind? In this final section I come to the questions: Where am I (as a teacher) in the picture? What difference can it have made to my teaching to photograph the schools I once attended and the houses or apartments I once inhabited? Each school taught me important lessons about teaching, as well as about myself. I can place my memories into three main groups; memories of feeling inadequate, different, and lonely; memories of wishing I could do better; and memories of teachers and supervisors.

**Memories of feeling inadequate, different, and lonely.** It became apparent to me early on that in order to stay out of the way of teachers and other students I should quickly find out what was considered normal in a school and then strive to achieve that. Every new school made me feel as if I had to forget who I was to become someone that would be accepted. As a teacher this has affected the manner in which I interact with my students. When I think back on the manner in which I interacted with the first real class I taught I can see how my past affected how I acted. For instance, I made sure that I got to learn how to pronounce all their names before they came into my classroom. I also took my homeroom students around the school in order to make them familiar with the different facilities in the hope that the new students would have an opportunity to get used to the layout of the school.

Having difficulty learning to read in comparison to my classmates early on forced me to
look for different coping strategies to ensure that I maintained the norm. As a teacher I have to continually look for various solutions in order to meet the needs of my students. I look upon literacy programs that are advertised as universal with much suspicion because of my experiences. Looking back at my earlier education has brought me closer to who I was and therefore who I want to become. Although I ended up being able to find the right strategies for my own learning to take place I still kept the belief that I was somehow not as strong as my classmates and I still often wonder why this is so.

Part of my teacher identity has to do with feeling connected to the environment in which I find myself. As a teacher I feel that students must be given the opportunity to feel that they are part of the class. I might have found comfort by holding onto the bus seat when I was taking the bus for the first time but it was just one of the coping mechanisms that I employed to ground myself. Even today I sometimes find myself needing to lean on the walls of the classroom in order to feel at home in it. I also try to incorporate the sense of touch in the classes that I teach. For instance, when I taught history in high school I would often bring in props which I allowed the students to manipulate. In a Science class I was assigned to teach when the teacher unexpectedly retired, the first thing I did was introduce actual labs for the students to do.

Because of the many different schools I attended and homes I lived in I became very hesitant to make friends with my colleagues. My constant question was: Why do I need friends that I will just lose at the end of the year? As a teacher I feel that my job is to get to know my students as best I can and in as little time as possible. Taking time to fraternize with colleagues did not make sense unless their friendship could help my teaching or my students through collaborative teaching. Looking at the origins of this behavior helped me see where some of my hesitation came from. Over the last few years as a result of this study I have made an effort to get to know my colleagues.
This has allowed me to learn about different teaching methods and improve my own.

I have a better understanding of my dislike of lists. I feel that they belittle students by not giving them the opportunity to learn for themselves. Students need to be given the tools required to better themselves in language they can understand. Providing them with paperwork and lists which are not explained to them well enough is not the practice of the type of teacher I aim to be.

What is normal? Moving from school to school and discovering that what was considered normal varied from school to school ingrained in me the notion that what we consider to be the norm is relative. As part of my teacher identity I try to acknowledge what each student feels her or his strengths to be so that each one can be proud of who she or he is. Looking back at the origin of some of these feelings has made me put more effort into promoting who I am as a teacher with my students and with fellow staff members.

As a teacher I am terribly sensitive to the need never to make students feel as if their actions will affect the rest of their classmates. When I changed schools I was labeled a new kid by the class teacher, supervisors, and other teachers. This label was one that I could do nothing about. A teacher having to rearrange chairs to incorporate me into the class or some students having to add me to their project group when their project was almost complete was not my fault yet I was made to feel that it was. As a teacher I use labels wisely especially in the presence of students since I do not want them to experience what I had to live through.

Memories of wishing I could do better. Part of my teacher identity stems from seeing my students as part of my extended family. Looking at my childhood memories prompted by the photograph of the front of my first home allows me to understand the roots of this view. It was not the act of playing in the front yard or looking for a place to hide but the memory of it that allows me to inquire into my teacher identity in relation to the manner in which I view my students. Should
all teachers view their students in the same way? Would I have viewed them in that manner had I been raised in a building that did not benefit from a yard or a lane?

My memories surrounding the color coding of the level-based reading programs I encountered in my early grades allowed me to explore my understanding of student self-efficacy and the importance of using multiple approaches when teaching students. The colors of the books left an impression on my mind of my inability to easily keep up with the other students in the class. As a result I had to find my own ways to cope. I cannot leave a classroom knowing that I have not tried at least two different approaches with the student(s) I am working with.

Having had the opportunity to live in various neighborhoods caused me to see a lot of differences in the manner in which people were treated. Seeing the doors in the gates locked between the Town of Mount Royal and the new neighborhood I lived in in order to discourage children to move freely between them made a big impact on my teacher identity. What did the area I lived in have to do with who I was? Why was I suddenly a security issue? As a result I make every effort to learn as much about a student as possible because I want to ensure that they are all treated equitably. Where you come from should not provide others with the right to define you.

The memories associated with my attempt at passing as normal is not unlike what many students experience. The difference is that I had to continually change my persona to conform to the new expectations of the new school that I was attending. As a teacher I am sensitive to the need of institutions such as schools to categorize students for purposes of simplicity. Nevertheless as a teacher I have had to remind my colleagues that their students are still developing and that putting them into categories sometimes affects how we deal with them. It is important to acknowledge the different characteristics that students have but creating overarching stereotypical categories does nothing to serve the students or their learning. In my case, up until the point when my grade three
teacher labeled me a French boy I was not aware of the assumptions that came with it.

**Memories of teachers and supervisors.** Kindergarten is often the time when students’ concepts of right and wrong are formed as they begin to be socialized into the school system. Returning through my memories to the time spent learning about rules and how and when they were applied has affected the manner in which I deal with my students. I do not think that simplistic discipline programs work in most contexts unless they take into consideration the concerns of all students. A teacher needs to get to the root of a problem and address it, and, in order to do that, it is necessary for them to know the students involved.

Seeing the school supervisors during recess treating students differently only served to make me withdraw from the schoolyard play. The buildings, however, remained constant and supported me when I needed to lean on something. As a teacher I feel that students need to be given some space to call their own even if it changes every now and then. It has also solidified the idea that the principal should be present in a school yard as much as possible in order to ensure consistency in the application of the school rules. Working as a team with a leader is the best way to make students feel secure in their surroundings.

Remembering my experiences with school uniforms brought me back to the idea that decisions are sometimes taken by well-intentioned school stakeholders which have very little impact on student success. Uniforms or other decisions that apply an extra layer of bureaucracy onto students in order to solve a problem does not address the underpinning idea behind the problem in the first place. If some students are coming to school with dirty clothes, making them buy a uniform will not help the situation.

My incessant need to maintain the norm was built upon what I perceived to be a teacher’s need to label students for convenience. Although teachers did not always say it openly it was clear to
me that some students were given extra help that other students in the class might have benefitted more from. Once I am aware of a student’s home situation it becomes easier to make decisions related to student performance and development. My teacher identity was shaped by observing students with very little home support being treated as if it was their fault. How can the teacher hold so much power over students and not use it more wisely? Had I not attended to so many students would I have noticed the same patterns? As I mentioned, the categories that teachers place students in often transcend teaching styles and are applied unofficially within each school community.

I have developed the idea that knowledge that is learned by students outside the classroom can be just as valuable as what is learned in it. When I look at the picture of my home on Gaspe Street (Figure 9) I see more than the building. I see my neighbors playing in the lanes, I see myself playing pick up hockey with them. When I returned to the classroom after learning something from a friend I was often discouraged from speaking about it in class. There was a textbook and the teachers would mention that we did not have time to diverge from the set lesson. Now, as a teacher, I ensure that students are given a chance to share their concerns and inquiries if there is time. Once students know that I am interested they are usually willing to wait for the right moment to share what they have to say.

As a result of having to adapt to so many new schools I have developed the understanding that being placed with the same students year after year is not as important as providing them with what they will need in every lesson. As a teacher I need to be present for my students every time I am working with them. Since students may change schools at any given moment during the year, they have to be prepared to identify their own strengths and weaknesses the following year.
Further Reflections

In addition to the effects of these three groups of memories there are other ways in which my practice has been affected. I now plan my lessons to include activities in which students get to discuss what their interpretation is of what we have studied, what I plan on presenting to them and where they think I am going with the lesson. Knowing where they are going allows students to focus on a goal that they can understand, and this includes them in the learning process.

Although there is an increasing number of school board and government rubrics/assessment tables for the assessment of students’ work, I ensure that students are included in the process. Students have to be aware of what is expected of them, what they are learning, and why. Although it might seem clichéd to say this, students are more than the results of what they get on the test. Getting a good grade is not the only indicator of progress. If students realize that they are doing what is right for themselves, they are more willing to make mistakes.

I see the need for strong school educational leaders that are more concerned with the well-being of their students than with getting a promotion. My experiences as a teacher have led me to work with a vast array of administrators who, for the most part, care a great deal about the students. Administrators need to get to know the students and staff in order to put into place the necessary structures to avoid larger problematic issues from developing. As a student, I remember that the principals who were the most respected by the teachers and student were those who were able to tell you when you were not behaving to your own standards, as well as those who showed that they viewed you as a fellow human being.

As a result of this memory work, collaborating with other teachers has become easier. I understand how categorizing students into groups is not done out of overt negativity but is, rather, often a way to make an ever increasing job more manageable. When I am working with others I
suggest ways that will help the teachers realize how their language might be affecting some of their students adversely. For the most part teachers are pleased to be helped in this manner since they have never quite realized the effects of their previous practice on students.

As a result of this revisiting project, I now view knowledge production as a complex process that involves learning about the world and our place in it. The relationship between student and teacher is as important as what is supposed to be learned. There is no ultimate truth and any person or any program that claims to have it should be viewed with suspicion.

Photographing and remembering these different schools has also caused me to remember all those first day experiences. The photographs used in this chapter act as artifacts that helped me to re-discover forgotten moments. It is by extracting these moments, as Knowles (2004) points out, that insight is born and from such insights a more concentrated interpretive and research strategy can be constructed. The schools that I attended played a part in the establishment of my identity.

Qualitative research that draws on different modes of research enhances our ability to understand classroom life and support students in becoming more aware of their position vis-à-vis the world (Mackenzie, 2009). This type of research was a personal exploration into how some of my core educational views were established, altered and reformulated in schools. Before this academic exercise I had remembered the general events of my different school years such as field trips and school ceremonies but had not taken the opportunity to go deeper into understanding just how much of my personal and professional identity was being affected then.
Summary

In this chapter I used photographic images (photographs found and taken) as memory triggers to enable a deeper understanding of my teacher identity as being both important and necessary to ensuring my personal and professional development. Since our understanding of cultural phenomena is controlled by our ability to respond and understand (Collier & Collier, 1986), the use of photographs as part of a reflexive exercise in identity building renders the research personal. Using it as a means of generating data enabled me as the teacher researcher to better understand and reinterpret my own teaching practice. I looked at the importance of personal narratives, place, sensory memory, and self-study in the development of teacher identity.
Introduction

Who Cares About TV?

Stories are part of knowledge construction, and that construction cannot occur in isolation.

(Coia & Taylor, 2006, p. 19)

According to Statistics Canada, Francophone Quebecers, who make up roughly 80% of the population of the province, watch more television than any other Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2015). Given the emphasis on protecting and promoting the French language, television producers have, traditionally, had access to government loans and to the subsidies necessary to develop a national television industry. Most Quebecers, unlike their English counterparts, watch local shows that are created and set in Quebec. Indeed, some Quebecers claim that they owe their social cohesion to television (Grescoe, 2000); since the emergence of popular television in Quebec in the 1950s several téléromans (television novels) have begun to reinforce a particular idea of a typical Quebecois. (Ironically, of course, as Grescoe (2000) has observed, this has also provided an opportunity for people to begin to challenge the social order.)

Children from poorer neighborhoods in Quebec watch proportionately more television than their more affluent neighbors (Cadotte, 2012). This means that popular television shows such as Les Bougon (Larouche, 2004) that personify a certain kind of life may well have an influence on the way they view themselves, and on their learning.
This is compounded by the fact that in Quebec, the educational focus is on improving students’ ability to decode and encode texts without much attention being paid to the other elements that make up functional literacy. The development of critical literacy, or the ability to decipher the power relations that shape our literacy, is largely excluded (Leistyna, 1999, 2002). This serves to isolate the elementary school experience for students into a process of learning simply to read and write without their gaining the tools necessary to contextualize and question what they are learning.

Television not only entertains, it can educate; equally, it can misinform. In looking at the role of television in framing the working class as a particular group, and re-inforcing negative stereotypes about it, Leistyna, Alper, Asner and Media Education Foundation (2005) observed that viewing popular television programs through a critical lens can encourage the development of what he called critical cultural literacy. In line with this, Mitchell and Weber (1999) argue that because stereotypes are so often caricatures, popular images “left unexamined can be dangerous” (p. 172). We need to take into account that what a particular set of images can mean or represent is often tainted by the perspective of the person doing the viewing, and by the context in which the event is occurring (Weber, 2008).

In this chapter I study the highly popular publicly funded Quebec television show Les Bougon (Larouche, 2004). I look at how stereotypical notions of gender, race, and class were employed in order to construct a poor working-class family.

**Memory Triggers: Working With Television Texts**

Culture shock can occur when an individual leaves his or her place of reference in order to set up home in a different culture. It can also occur upon return to one’s familiar setting after a prolonged absence. When I returned to Montreal in 2008 after having lived in Japan for two years, one of my frustrations was my difficulty in understanding the cultural references that were being used. For
instance, I noticed that people in my east end Montreal neighborhood were referencing events, sayings, and mannerisms that occurred in particular television shows and films. One television show, *Les Bougon*, seemed to be a particular source of such sayings and mannerisms for them. I began to hear people in my social group make reference to it. In many ways *Les Bougon* is a modern adaptation of the original Quebecois téléromans such as *La Famille Plouffe* and *Le Survenant* except that it promotes a specific archetypal depiction of poverty without dealing with its social and political causes or consequences.

When I first watched an episode of *Les Bougon* as a naïve viewer to see what so many people were referring to, as opposed to studying it as I did later as a researcher, I was both disgusted and drawn to the show but I did not examine what was behind this highly ambivalent response. After I had thought about some of the plot lines and characters in the series I came to the initial conclusion that the use of humor, however grotesque, was something that made the show attractive to me. I did not pursue this further since I was focused on the series itself as opposed to its effect on me. Then, while I was writing about the series as a researcher, memories began to surface and I came to realize that the scenes and characters in the series had led me to remember scenes from my youth. This, in turn, led to insights into my own schooling and teaching as part of what Knowles and Sweetman (2004) refer to as an interpretive and research strategy.

As I began to think about the sources of the mixed discomfort and familiarity that I had felt on first watching episodes of *Les Bougon* as a naïve viewer, I realized that these initial responses constituted a strong source of data that I did not exploit. Since sharing and discussing one’s past critically with the goal of understanding the present transforms us into better educators, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1995) noted, my project aims to use my initial responses to viewing episodes of *Les Bougon* along with a close study of some episodes with a focus on the memories that
this prompted in order to begin to unravel the assumptions I have as an individual and as a teacher in order to better understand who and what I am.

**Data Collection & Methodology**

The cumulative cultural text of ‘teacher’ is a massive work-in-progress that embraces the sub-texts and counter-texts of generations of paintings, memoirs, novels, songs, toys, movies, softwares, stories, photos, and television.

(Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 167)

Mitchell and Weber (1999) identify the importance of reading one text in the light of another in order to arrive at a closer analysis of one or both. They start from the idea of conducting close readings of two films, *To Sir with Love* (1967) and *Dangerous Minds* (1995) in order to create a viewing guide for the use of popular cinematic texts on teaching in memory work and/or self-study so as to advance the professional development of teachers. My close reading of episodes of *Les Bougon* and my analysis of the memories this viewing of them prompted, provided the different texts needed for such a comparative analysis to occur. Doing memory work through viewing movies and television series is not new. Mathabo Khau (2009) used collective memory work with a group of teachers who watched *Dirty Dancing* (1987) so that as a group they could re-establish connections with their own adolescent sexuality and, in so doing, better understand the adolescents they were teaching.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, David Lewkowich (2013) looked at the series *Glee* (2009-2015) as a textual and aesthetic arrangement and as a memory prompt that allowed for the examination of questions of pedagogy involving teaching, learning, and curricula. Put briefly, he focused on everyday cultural consumption and what their modes of representation say about the process of remembering itself. Both Lewkowich and Khau see films and television shows as rich sites for research.
I began my study by watching the fifty-one episodes of the three seasons over a period of a week. During the first viewing I did not take any notes in order to emulate how I would have watched the show under normal circumstances. I then spent the next three weekends watching each season separately. During this viewing I took notes regarding issues and questions that I had. I also noted where I laughed as well as where I felt uneasy. Once I had watched the entire series a third time I chose one episode from each season that had made me feel uneasy, and watched them again with a friend. The purpose of watching them with him was to note if he reacted in the same way to the episodes that I had. During each of the three episodes my friend laughed at all the jokes. I asked him afterwards what he thought were the funniest parts and for each episode he mentioned the scenes which had troubled me the most during my initial viewing. At first I didn't know what to make of this but decided to ask him why he found them funny. He said, unhelpfully, that the show was just a parody and that there was no specific reason he could think of. I decided to return to those episodes and watch them again to see if I could find the humor in them but without success. Since everyone reacts differently to a particular show I had to take into consideration the role my memories played in shaping how I viewed it.

Figure 16: The Bougon Family.
Les Bougon tells the story of a family that inhabits a working class neighborhood in Montreal. The family consists of Paul (father), Rita (mother), Junior (son), Dolorès (daughter), Mao (adopted daughter), Frédéric (uncle), and Leo (grandfather). Paul is a former dockworker who, after losing his job, decides to fight against the injustices of society by getting back at the system. Rather than work, the family decides to participate in various schemes that enable them to get “back at the man.”

**Looking At the Series Les Bougon**

**Choosing Episodes**

From season one I chose Episode Five entitled Bougon vulérables (Larouche, 2004), in which the family is forced to give their grandfather a bath. The way in which the elderly grandfather (see Figure 17) is depicted and treated demonstrates a lack of empathy and humanity. One of the family members ends up winning a contest in which she is allowed to spend one hour with a famous celebrity, a comedian, whom she then orders to wash her grandfather. The grandfather is treated as if he were merely a nuisance.

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5 Figures 16-19 are screenshots taken from Les Bougon (2004-2006).
Figure 18: Junior, supervisor of a home for people with intellectual disabilities, and a resident.

From the second season I choose Episode One, *Communautaire* (Larouche, 2004), in which Junior is sentenced by a judge to do community work because of a crime he has committed. He is assigned to a home for people with intellectual disabilities. The treatment that the people are exposed to as well as the crude jokes that are employed to denigrate them break down their integrity and deny their humanity (see Figure 18). When one of the residents tells Junior that he is overweight he promptly responds, “I may be overweight, but I can lose weight, but tomorrow you will still be a retard.”

Figure 19: A fourteen-year-old and her mother’s ex-boyfriend.
Episode Nine of the third season, *Le Poussin Ou La Poule* (Larouche, 2004) had two plotlines: the uncle begins to date again and the main character, Paul Bougon, is asked to speak to his son’s class. The uncle’s love interest is a single mother who is shown treating her children very badly throughout the episode. When her fourteen-year-old daughter returns home after having been away for three weeks, the mother tells her to return to her room. The mother’s ex-boyfriend is sitting in the living room and he tells the daughter that he cannot wait to spend time with her; he follows her into her room and lies down on the bed (see Figure 19). When the uncle questions this, her mother responds, “It's not incest because he is an ex and she is not his real daughter...if she wants to dress like a slut she shouldn't be complaining.” The second plot line involves Paul’s going to speak to Mao’s class about his ability to play the system. Although Mao’s teacher is depicted as being inarticulate, unprofessional, and uncaring he is still able to let Paul know about the dire situation teaching and learning is in.

Following the viewing of these three episodes I returned to my notes and began to think about the questions I had asked as well as the reasons why I felt uncomfortable. Why did I laugh at the jokes that were so crude? What was it about the show that made it so uncomfortable to watch? How does the series contribute to unraveling the elements of my past that have shaped my identity? I began to remember situations from my past that I looked into and then I developed these into short narratives. These memories were then categorized and associated with the character from the series who had prompted them. Once the memories were separated I analyzed the narratives that they prompted.

From the beginning of the series in 2003 to its end in 2006 the show attracted a large following (Perrault-Lessard, 2011) and, surprisingly, garnered some criticism only from various social assistance and animal rights activists. Although the show is not based on a specific family I was
curious to understand what drew me to it and what effect (if any) it had on me. Had I done what Mitchell and Weber (1999) cautioned against in unwittingly allowing a dominant image of what my past was to take over my own experiences? Why was a show about a dysfunctional family creating so much tension in me? What memories were surfacing or perhaps being manufactured as a result of my looking deeper into the characters and their roles?

It is not the initial viewing of the one particular scene or episode but the feelings associated with the prompted memories that are produced that create a deeper understanding of the past. As Weber (2008) mentions, “our sense of sight is so entwined with all our senses that even with our own eyes shut, we can see those inner images so often evoked by sounds, smells, words, feelings, or thoughts” (p. 41). In order to better understand some of the major themes that the show presents and its construction and propagation of a stereotypical lifestyle it became necessary for me to look at the characters and their role in the show. Drawing on deliberate and accidental remembering, this chapter seeks to make connections between what I remembered and how I remembered (Mitchell, 2011; Mitchell & Weber, 1999), as well as the landscapes upon which the memory was built and interpreted.
Watching Episodes: Characters and Events

Paul: The Patriarch

Paul Bourgon\(^6\) is the patriarch of the family, and it is his past experiences such as attempting unsuccessfully to denounce illegal activities while working on the docks that led him to a life outside the system. His family religiously follows his every instruction. He is a middle-aged white male who drinks excessively, treats his dog better than his wife and children, and rarely shows any emotion. He dresses in old clothes and does not attempt to be fashionable in any sense. He reminisces about the times when life was “simpler.”

Paul is ready to do anything possible to get what he wants even if it means pretending to re-enter the system he so detests. In one episode he is afflicted with a medical condition that leads him to visit a private clinic for emergency treatment even though this means paying for something he believes should be freely available.

The Bougons are portrayed as having no stable revenue but they seem to have the financial resources to buy themselves out of any problem. The audience is left with the notion that people

\(^6\) Figures 20-27 are taken from http://ici.radio-canada.ca/television/les_bougon_c_est_aussi_ca_la_vie/
receiving social assistance can get themselves out of poverty if they only apply themselves to their problems. This attempt to construct a particular view of a group can have the (un)intended goal of not allowing them to define their own reality.

Throughout the series Paul is painted as being an average Quebecois - a white Francophone. The audience is led to believe that society contains two groups of people - Us and Them. Even though the Bougons are poor they are white which provides them with some relief when they are faced with tough questions as to their place in the social hierarchy. Whiteness thus becomes the “marker for the location of social privilege, as well as individual identity” (Maher & Tetreault, 1997, p. 324). Paul himself is proud to proclaim that at least he is able to pretend to be a member of the middle class. In each episode, we are reminded that the Bougons are aware of their position vis-à-vis society, and that they have chosen the position they are in. Paul, we are told, receives social assistance because he chooses to and the family wears old clothes and lives in an unhealthy environment because that is what they prefer. Stealing is their choice; the Bougons see themselves are just getting their share of the pie. What is alarming is not the fact that Paul is made out to be the stereotypical Quebecois male, but that the audience, which is made up mostly of Quebecers, is ready to accept this negative portrayal. We can see here how “stereotypes permeate even the most minor aspects of public opinion and how they are structured by the education that children receive from adults, and reinforced by the media” (Noël, 1994, p. 116).

Rather than venture out of their apartment Paul and his family remain inside their residence when they are not trying to destroy what exists beyond their home. In many ways they are forced to live within the walls of isolation that they have created for themselves. We are reminded of Freire’s (1997) observation that the pursuit of humanity cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship (p. 19).
After reading what I had originally written about Paul Bougon, I began to make connections with my own experiences. Paul made me think of Diane, the mother of my childhood best friend, Hugo. My parents both worked different shifts in order to ensure that someone was always home to take care of their four children. Hugo’s mother, Diane, however, was a single parent who often left her only son unaccompanied. She was receiving social assistance and seemed to participate in several schemes similar to Paul’s that at the time I found to be harmless. I remember feeling jealous of Hugo because he could go to bed when he wanted to, eat whatever was in the fridge as well as go wherever he wanted whenever he liked. With the money that his mother had supposedly earned he had also been to Disneyland as a toddler. Although I was quite happy to have two parents who worked hard to raise money to support all four of us there was a part of me that yearned for the independence and access to funds that Hugo seemed to have. Diane, like Paul, was a very intelligent person who seemed to do what she wanted. It was only upon reflection that I could see that things were not as rosy as I had remembered, but why?

I met Hugo when he joined a community hockey team that I was on. Hugo’s family, like mine, seemed to move annually and I was quite interested to exchange views on this. Initially, I felt that he had a strange demeanor and was lacking etiquette when dealing with our peers but I quickly came to admire him. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, even at the age of ten I understood the necessity of having friends that I could count on in order to face the challenges that changing school frequently and moving entailed. I could not understand why he felt that my family was special or even preferable to his. How could he be jealous when I had not even left the country let alone visited the Magic Kingdom? Recognizing that “[i]ndividuals cannot separate where they stand in the web of reality from what they perceive” (Kincheloe, 2006, p. 3) I realized, all these years later, that my perception of the power she and Hugo had was nowhere near as solid as I had originally
thought. Diane was both a mother and father to Hugo whom she had to raise the best way she knew how and by any means necessary. I return to this and its effect on my teacher identity later in this chapter when I discuss *Les Bougon*.

**Rita: The Matriarch**

Rita Bougon is the family matriarch. She openly admits that her children suffer mild intellectual disorders because of her excessive consumption of alcohol and tobacco products during her pregnancies. Rita has no issues with her daughter’s use of the family home as the location of her paid employment as a sex worker in order to give the money she earns to her father; she encourages this. Although she claims to be an independently strong woman who will not stay at home and do housework, she spends most of her time at home either supporting her husband’s plans or developing schemes that deal with traditionally female domains (such as cooking, and doing housework). For example, in season one, episode eight she creates fake natural products and sells them to a boutique, and in season one, episode three she opens a home daycare. Although depicted as a rebellious character who is unapologetic about her behavior, Rita acts in accordance with the traditional gender roles associated with female homemakers; she professes an understanding of the world that is in line with her husband’s views. Rita pushes her children to break the law, even going
as far as encouraging her youngest child Mao to skip school regularly. Rita is supposed to represent the average mother on social assistance, and although her behavior is often unorthodox, she is viewed as the family’s conscience. This behavior both towards herself and her children is crude and in many cases abusive but in the show she is presented as thinking of herself as demonstrating the ultimate example of unconditional love. Her neglect of the wellbeing of her own kin which leads directly to their misery runs contrary to the idea of social justice in relation to wellbeing which is actually concerned about the suffering of others (Kincheloe, 2008a).

Rita in *Les Bougon* is not unlike the mothers I saw in the homes of neighbors in the various neighborhoods I called home as a child. It was not uncommon for me to walk through the alleys that run between many Montreal streets and hear the numerous conversations being indiscriminately broadcast, as if no one could hear. Summer was a particularly exciting time since doors and windows would be left open and families discussing serious issues not unlike the ones portrayed in *Les Bougon* could be heard. Diane, my friend Hugo’s mother, seems to have embodied many of Rita Bougon’s characteristics as they are depicted in the series. My reflection on Rita in the kitchen brought the memory of the time Diane told Hugo to go and get fruit and vegetables from the municipal botanical gardens. I found myself climbing a fence with Hugo to enter the gardens without paying the admission fee and although I was breaking the law I did not feel I was doing anything wrong since Diane had sanctioned our trip. The more I thought about Diane the more I began to make connections to my upbringing and to aspects of my own parents that come to mind and that are actually quite unsettling. This re-constructed dialogue serves as a useful example.
Brian, you say that I had you pass unnoticed under the turnstile at the community pool in order to avoid paying the admission fee. Why would you write such a thing?

I remember you asking me and my brother to pass under while you distracted the attendant.

That is untrue; you must be confused.

This conversation took place with my mother after she read a passage I wrote about a particular event that had been etched into my mind. How could an event that I remember so vividly be so contested by the other person who was present? Although I know that the perceptions and interpretations of a toddler or young child cannot be taken as truthful, my memory of this event helped shape and mold how I view the world. Having to sneak my way into a public institution in order to benefit from the communal pool was something that made me feel different from the other children. Whether or not my mother indeed had me enter without paying in order to save the entrance fee becomes less of an issue than why I would remember such an event as having happened. This visit to the pool became a site of research, an embodiment of how I felt and how that feeling affected me into my adulthood right up to my first teaching position. This event permeated my thoughts, taking priority over earlier memories and acting as a sort of interruption to what Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse-Morgan and Allnutt (2011) refer to as the usual “chronological and narratological organizing principles that [are] often...involved in life stories” (p. 3). Dwelling on the past is not useful without an intention to build upon it so that we can learn about ourselves in the present and future (hooks, 2009; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). As teachers we often remember events that have occurred to us in our youth but we fail to take the necessary steps to examine these events themselves from various angles so as to use them in a study of our teaching selves and our practice. Watching Rita interact with her children in Les Bougon brought both humor.
and discomfort to me and I needed to work out why this was the case. How could I compare my mother whom I knew had done everything possible to ensure I was raised as best she knew how with Rita in *Les Bougon* and, following from this, with Diane? I will explore this in relation to the development of my teacher identity in the last section of this chapter.

**Junior, the Older Brother**

![Junior Bougon](image)

*Figure 22: Junior Bougon.*

Junior is the Bougons’ son. At twenty-four he is unable to live alone and still resides with his parents. As the next in line to the family throne, so to speak, he is expected to learn about all his father’s schemes. Like his parents, Junior dresses in a sloppy manner, often exposing his soiled undergarments. Much of his time is spent being concerned about his obesity, but he does little to change his habits. He is the most overtly racist member of the family but he is expressing only what the others are feeling. The audience laughs at his ill-conceived adventures, but view his actions as heartwarming attempts to be accepted by his family. In one episode, he inadvertently kills a cat after having sat on it, and then proceeds to cut it into little pieces so that he can flush it down the toilet. Although some protests by animal rights groups were made as a result of that episode, the number of people tuning in increased. Junior demonstrates remorse at having killed the cat, but nothing is
mentioned regarding the manner in which the cat was disposed of.

Junior also provides the comedic relief that enables the audience to feel as if they are somehow dissociated from the character’s actions. In much the same way that Zemeckis used the Forrest Gump character in the movie (1994) of the same name, Junior’s character reinforces the dominant ideology held in regard to the poor without the audience’s knowing or realizing it. Even Junior himself repeatedly laments the fact that he is poor, but does not examine the deeper reasons behind his poverty.

Junior himself is depicted as trying to be accepted by his family. He has no friends and is ready to do anything his family tells him to do with the naivety of an infant. The first thought that comes to mind when I think about Junior is his willingness to put himself out there in order to be accepted. Having had to be the new student several times during my schooling made me relate to this point. Fitting in sometimes meant taking risks such as being more aggressive or ignoring what I really thought in order to belong. Hugo also had to change schools which also made him act in a similar manner to how Junior is represented. Like Junior, Hugo did not do well in school and seemed to put himself in situations that would show others that he was just as good as them. Even though I was jealous of his independence, I still had the understanding that I was different from Hugo. My parents had instilled in me from an early age that getting an education was the only thing that I should focus on but Hugo had had difficulty passing primary school because of his truancy and undiagnosed learning disabilities. Junior is shown to be absentminded and cruel but it could be argued that his lack of motivation in general is responsible for why he plays the hand he has been dealt instead of striving for self-improvement. As part of this memory work, I have attempted to uncover what elements of my past have shaped my teacher identity. My motivation comes from the need to understand my self better so that I can better teach my students.
Dolorès: The Daughter

Dolorès is the Bougnons’ thirty-year-old daughter. She is an exotic dancer and, as mentioned earlier, does sex work in the family home. Every episode begins with her exiting her room with a client. In every case she is portrayed as the person in control of the situation. She chooses to have sex with people for money. In some ways, ironically enough, she is a strong symbol of various woman’s rights movements since she continually pushes the boundaries of what is considered decent in society. Her family members watch her both recruit and satisfy her clients. In one episode, she is actually seen engaging in intercourse. I found myself wondering if this dehumanizes sex by presenting it as just a means to attaining income? Is the message here that humans are all interchangeable?

Dolorès is also a drug dealer and an addict, and is, on several occasions, forced to clean up her act, to put it colloquially. Although she presents a side of addiction that is decidedly unglamorous, she does seem able to sober up with very little effort. Dolorès fails to provide her family members with any support, choosing instead to focus on her own endeavors. In one episode she joins a religious cult because it provides her with instant gratification. She is the only Bougon to fall victim to the pull of the cult.
Interestingly enough, Rita is also presented as a strong-willed individual who is ready to fight any battle. She is not concerned about speaking her mind in any circumstances, and the audience is led to believe that she has full control of her enterprise.

My response to the depiction of Dolorès’s sex work and drug addiction was that they are dealt with in a simplistic manner, and that this creates, in the show, the idea that both are choices that one can make to improve one’s own agency. When I discussed Dolorès with a colleague she asked why I felt that she was doing anything wrong by engaging in sex work. My colleague pointed out that her conducting her business in her family’s apartment might be a smart move in order to ensure her own safety and security. I replied that it was not the fact that she was generating income from the selling of sexual services but that she had to do it in order to make money for her father who controlled the family funds that I was objecting to. As a child growing up in Montreal my bicycle gave my friends and me access to the city where I often came across sex workers soliciting clients. Hugo’s mother, Diane, had several acquaintances who worked in this industry and I quickly recognized, as much as a teenager could, the reality that many of these workers were experiencing. Whereas a picture may evoke a thousand words (Mitchell & Weber, 1999), the multiple images of what Dolorès had to deal with conjured up several memories of Diane, one of which I highlight here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wake up</th>
<th>mother heating spoon on stove</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>played cards</td>
<td>what's in it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend's house</td>
<td>why is she crying?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midday - dark</td>
<td>dirty kitchen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dolorès’s battle with substance abuse is portrayed in a light-hearted matter-of-fact way. Although her family members attempt to intervene in their daughter’s addictions it is only when they themselves are affected that they seem to tackle the issue itself. As I looked back on my original judgments about Dolorès I began to realize that she is much more familiar to me than the women and men I saw on the streets or saw portrayed in the media in my youth. As a child I saw people just like Dolorès consuming illegal drugs and it became apparent to me that the spoon Diane was heating on top of the stove contained heroin or crack and that the marks on her arms were the result of main-lining. It never seemed to bother Hugo who would mention under his breath that there would always be relapses for his mother.

The people portrayed as drug addicts that I had been exposed to in television shows, movies, news programs as well as the manner in which my parents talked about them did not match what I knew about Diane. She was loving, hard-working and vulnerable despite her tough exterior. I had never seen her physically hurt anyone except herself. The drugs seemed to be something she did just to keep herself on track. Although Les Bougon discusses some of the implications pertaining to drug use and prostitution the way in which they broach the topic is over simplistic and it reinforces the idea that one can simply get out of any situation with just a little extra work whenever one decides to do so. Initially Dolorès’s character seems like a parody that I could not relate to, but as I looked more deeply into it I began to see a loving hurting person who was trapped by her own predicament. As a teacher I sometimes have to deal with students who are in some way affected by substance abuse. How have my views on issues such as sex work changed? How have I been affected by this investigation? How has the issue of Dolorès’s characterization worked in relation to my own teacher identity and practice? I will discuss this further on in this chapter.
Fred, the Uncle

Fred is Paul’s brother. He is a middle-aged man who cannot find employment regardless of the effort he puts into the search. From the first episode he is shown approaching the job market and the world in a manner that exudes naivety. His character appears to demonstrate what the average working person is like. All the jobs he attempts to hold involve some kind of illegal scheme. For him, if one is to work in society one must be ready to resort to dodgy tactics. Fred is kind, well-spoken, and good-natured. He maintains hope that the family’s situation can get better but, as Freire (1997) reminded us, “the compulsive dreamer speaks of change when there is nothing left to change” (p. 43). Despite being the only one in the family who has a positive outlook, he is repeatedly characterized as a dreamer who has little actual footing in the reality of this family. His brother must continually remind him that life is about lying and stealing. When Fred contemplated committing suicide, none of his family members seemed to acknowledge his troubles; Paul told him that he could not kill himself because he, Paul, would then lose a brother. When Fred finally gets a job at a bank, he is hired because his employers feel that he is stupid enough to do anything, including embezzlement. Later in the series he joins the military in order to be part of something greater.
Rather than excel, he soon realizes that the army is also corrupt and he quits. Although the Bougon family claims that they could return to the working world, every attempt to do so by their uncle fails disastrously. Frederic exemplifies the idea that things are the way they are and will never get better.

As I was thinking about this in relation to myself a conversation I had had with my mother many years ago came to mind:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brian:</th>
<th>Why are those people driving flashy cars?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother:</td>
<td>They worked hard for their money and can now afford it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian:</td>
<td>Don’t you work hard?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My earliest memories of class present themselves in scenes, like photographs frozen in my thoughts, each related to a specific place or activity. It quickly became apparent to me as a child that the amount of actual work a person did not necessarily equate to the type of financial success presented by my mother as being inevitable. As I explained in the previous chapter, when I was a toddler my parents rented an apartment in the middle-class neighborhood of Outremont. I was exposed to other children who seemed to live in larger, more elaborate dwellings. They also often benefited from a stay-at-home parent during the daytime. As I have recounted, when this local school closed I was bussed to the nearby upscale Town of Mount Royal to continue my education. This was the first time as a child that I can remember beginning to feel embarrassed about what my family had (or did not have). I knew that my parents loved me but I could not understand why we did not have what others did. Was it because my parents did not work hard enough? My father even worked two jobs; this must be enough to make us qualify for a new car, surely? As a teacher I am faced with learning programs that often make blanket one-size-fits-all statements which exclude certain students. For, instance math questions that ask students to plan elaborate vacations might serve only to make poorer students feel left out. What has the characterization of Fred taught me
Mao, the Adopted Child

Figure 25: Mao Bougon.

Mao (Figure 25) is the younger daughter of the family. Mao was thought to be a boy until a doctor examined her at the end of the first season. Paul Bougon met Mao for the first time while he was working at the docks. He found a shipping container filled with several illegal Chinese immigrants. Mao’s biological mother gave birth to her just before passing away. The Bougon family then adopted Mao because they felt that it would be a good investment. Employing their usual stereotyped beliefs, they figured that since Mao was of Chinese ancestry she could help them learn to integrate computer technology into their schemes when she grew up. Mao herself rarely attends school in order to be free to participate in the different family enterprises. She manages to play a central part in every major scheme the Bougons attempt.

Upon reflection on the characterization of Mao, I recalled a version of this conversation with my mother and siblings when I was a child:
Mother: We have decided to become a foster family.
Children: Aren’t you already helping others?
Mother: We are working with child services now so it has become official.

Although my parents had been helping children on my street in Montreal for several years by providing them with temporary shelter from domestic threats they were facing in their own homes, they decided to apply officially through youth services in order to begin the process of fostering. Since my mother had returned to school to get some medical training she decided to accept foster children who had severe needs which included physical and psychological trauma. It was in my parents’ nature to want to help others. Although many of these children came to stay with us on a long-term basis I did not build any type of strong connection with any of them. Like Mao, if in reverse, I was never able to relate to my foster siblings. Although they were similar to me in age and class, the fact that we were helping them made me feel better about myself. I wonder, now, if that was their function in my eyes? I felt that the foster children we took in were there because of their own negligence. Separating who they were from the situation they were in was something that I could not do successfully. Perhaps I was jealous? I was projecting what I had been taught at home, at school and what I saw in television shows onto the ways in which I myself saw the world. I now realized that as a grade school teacher I had often looked at students through the same lens that I had constructed for myself as a child. Although I recognized the need to provide differentiated treatment to students based on their own realities there was a part of me that linked their situation or fate to their own progress or lack of it. Watching Les Bougon prompted recollections of situations and how I dealt with them as well as reflection onto why I reacted and thought about several issues pertaining to identity, acceptance and class. I will discuss what the characterization of Mao taught me about my teaching presently.
Leo, the Grandfather

Leo is Paul’s father and does not move from his wheelchair, nor does he talk. In each episode he is fed medication and beer. Although Leo dies at the end of the first season, he played a very important role in establishing the mood of the show. When he was still alive, none of his family members took the time to try to communicate with him. Jokes regarding his bodily functions were used at the expense of his dignity. The audience is given permission to laugh at him. On reflection about my initial response to this character, I recalled this conversation with my mother about a senior citizen who came to live with us at my parents’ invitation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brian</th>
<th>Why is she living with us?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>She thinks her children are stealing from her so we took her in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Why are her kids doing that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Because they feel they can.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My parents took in senior citizens who had fallen on hard times usually because of health issues that made them unable to protect themselves from their own family members. When Mrs.
Evans, a family friend, began to complain that her children were taking advantage of her frail condition my mother stepped in and took her in under our roof. Many strokes and a number of stints at rehabilitation made it difficult for her to keep control of her own health and finances. Watching the family’s treatment of Leo at first made me think of the comedy that I had associated with the jokes patients would make when I visited my mother at her place of work in a rehabilitation center. I had learned that one does not necessarily get more timid with age but sometimes bolder. Whereas I had associated the discomfort of seeing the Bougon family treat Leo with my notions of what counts as negligence and as a lack of respect, I did not link it then to the memories of elder-abuse that had led so many people to seek refuge in my family home. But as I reflected more on this show it occurred to me that although I did not immediately link the abuse of Leo with what I had seen as a child in relation to the elderly people my parents took in, awareness of such elder-abuse has had an impact on my teaching practice in the way I discuss the role of the elderly in our society. Rather than accept the general narratives that we need to help them, I look at them as not needing help but rather as just having different challenges and needs.

**Ben Laden, the Dog**

*Figure 27: Ben Laden Bougon.*
Ben Laden is the family dog; it occupies an important role within the family structure. Ben Laden is allowed to eat on tables and out of bowls usually reserved for human beings. He is provided with the same food that the family eats and demonstrates many of the same problems that his human housemates exhibit. In one episode Ben Laden is diagnosed with alcoholism. Rather than shift the blame towards the family that is supplying the alcohol to the dog in the first place, the focus is instead put on the dog to stop drinking. Paul treats his dog better than he does his family, and does not apologize for it. He sees his dog as his best friend and then spends most of his free time with him. The fact that Ben Laden is treated more humanely by his owner than are his own family members made me think of some of the neighbors that I have had. It was not uncommon for me to walk the lanes in Montreal and hear a parent swear at his children while feeding and petting a dog. As a teacher I came to realize how this might be the reality of the students who enter my classes and I have to be ready to provide them with the understanding they might need.

As I studied the characters and what they represent, some memories came to light that I will examine. Using memories prompted by the show as well as my study of *Les Bougon* I will look at what this series represents to me in terms of class. Remembering Mitchell and Weber’s (1999) caution against allowing an image of one’s past to take over one’s present I am interested in how this has had an effect on my professional self as a teacher as well as on my personal identity as it feeds into my teacher self.

**Memory-Work:**

**Excavating Themes on Class in *Les Bougon***

Class is a major issue in the *Les Bougon*. From the pilot episode, it is quickly made apparent that the Bougons belong to a lower class. Their neighborhood is filled with people who, like them, experience the effects of poverty. The word “Bougon” in Quebec is now used to personify someone
who is too lazy to be part of the system - such is the power of television. Poverty in Les Bougon is used as a nationality, rather than as an economic or social status. Education is seen throughout the series to be a waste of time. In one episode, Paul argues that all that compulsory education does is create too many poor people who can read but do little else. Rather than act as a means towards emancipation, education serves only to provide students with a false sense of hope. Junior cannot read but his family reassures him that reading is not necessary. In my reflecting on this the memory of a dialogue with my mother when I was a child surfaced.

Mother: You have to graduate from high school.
Brian: Why?
Mother: It is the key to a good future.

My friend Hugo did not have to go to school. He attended only when forced to by the social workers who were called to deal with his truancy. I remember complaining to my parents that I would rather do something else than attend school. My mother responded that I had to complete high school and get that diploma. She said it was the only way to ensure a good future. When I asked her about college she said that she would support whatever decision I made to continue my studies.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, having attended several elementary schools as a child provided me with the insight that there are many ways to teach and learn something. Going deeper than the traditional narratives that portray good teachers as individuals who can make learning fun by virtue of being interested in what they teach, I quickly noticed the way in which particular categories of students were treated similarly by different teachers in different schools. By grade four I had learned how to behave in school in order to enact the characteristics my teachers expected. Students who were assigned to the special needs classes often came from lower-class families with little home support, let alone financial wealth. Although these so-called special needs classes are no longer
part of most schools in Quebec they had an impact on the way I see class in relation to learning. Watching episodes of *Les Bougon* enabled me to revisit some of the basic concepts I had regarding the role and importance of education as well as the role of expectations and judgments in one’s success as I will go on to explain a bit later on in this chapter.

**Critical AutoEthnography in Teaching: Where Am I in This Story?**

Although implicit in this context, the role of memory in rereading childhood is productive when it is mobilized by a concern with bringing remembered experiences forward so that they might inform the future in transformative, rather than reproductive, ways.

(Iftody & Sumara, 2011, p. 110)

As other researchers have found, film texts can play a very powerful role in examining one’s own teaching. In Mitchell and Weber’s (1999) analysis of *To Sir with Love* (1967) and *Dangerous Minds* (1995), they make the point that “buried in the potentially dangerous and isolating romanticism of many popular texts are some useful messages” (p. 187). Faith Butler’s (2000) so-called Hollywood curriculum as she describes it in relation to screening a series of films *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *SARAFINA!* (1992) provided a platform for pre-service teachers to reflect on what they would do in the same situations as those presented to the teachers in these movies, and how they would handle issues of power, for example, in the classroom. As Butler writes, “The student teachers revealed an awareness of their power as teachers to, in turn, shape their own students’ identities” (p. 33). This idea of moving from reel to real (Mitchell & Weber, 1999) suggests ways of engagement through viewing so as to think differently about one’s own teaching.

My engagement with *Les Bougon* for the purpose of this study was a little different from how these other researchers used film texts in teacher research. For one thing, I did not, for the most part, view the episodes in the company of others, at least not in any way that deliberately set
out with conversations about pedagogy in mind. I was not even sure when I first started working with the series that I was deliberately and consciously engaging with it since the humour masked the messages for me. Once I had the opportunity to examine the pilot episode of *Les Bougon* seriously for the purposes of this study, I was, as I have already mentioned, both disgusted by it as well as drawn to it. However, I did not look into the specifics related to this sense of closeness that I had to the show such that it made the characters seem so familiar to me. After having identified some of the plot lines and characters in the series I had come to the initial conclusion, as I have already indicated, that the use of humour, or a certain type of humour, however grotesque, was something that attracted me to the show. I realized that the series’ scenes, images, and characters led me to remember scenes from my childhood and my youth. For instance, the portrayal of Junior in the series made me reflect not only on my interactions with my childhood friend, Hugo, when we were in the fourth grade but on the manner in which I dealt with certain students in my class who, like both of them, came from unstable homes. Junior is not able to adjust to the school system but is instead encouraged to become a common thief. He is able to adjust to the various challenges that he encounters throughout his adventures but his ability to plan, think outside the box, as well as execute his schemes are qualities that were not recognized by the schools he attended. How often do schools and teachers discourage students because their skills are not those that schools reward?

From my experience of having taught in different schools it quickly became apparent to me that I often differed with my colleagues when it came to discussing certain students who had been deemed troublemakers. What I deplored was that it was not uncommon for teachers to refer to these students by their alleged actions rather than their names. Watching the series closely and noting my reflections on it prompted me to re-evaluate how I deal with certain students, and how I differ, I think, from many of my colleagues.
I thought about which students I had identified as coming from poor families and how I remember treating them. Although I often empathized with them by giving them extra time to complete their assignments, or providing them with the opportunity to redo their tests, I was not really seeing the bigger picture. Students who come to school without having eaten or who are dealing with difficult home situations should not be expected to be able to work through their issues so easily.

Hugo was my best friend and I admired him throughout my youth because of his living in what I considered to be a perfect environment. Although Hugo had been in foster care before I met him, he had now returned to his mother and was allowed to do almost anything he wanted from staying up at night to taking as much junk food out of the fridge as he liked, as I have said above. Now I see Hugo for the vulnerable child he was and I try to identify his counterparts in the students I meet. I see Junior from Les Bougon in a similar way.

Marty was another of these vulnerable boys. This is a letter I received from him (personal communication, September 11, 2013):

Mr. Benoit,

Thank you! The reason I asked if you worked at that school is because you are one of the handful of teachers that inspired me to become a teacher and I just wanted to take a minute to say thank you. It has been quite a long time since 2003-2004 so I’m sure you do not remember my class, but I had you for grade 8 history and you were the first teacher that showed me that I could do well in school (and since then I have). Anyway, like I said, I just wanted to say thank you for that one year because it really did change a lot of things in my life, as weird as that sounds since it was only grade 8.

Marty
After re-reading Marty’s letter I began to remember the class that he was in as well as the context of the learning that was occurring in it. It was my first full time position in an inner city Montreal high school. Through my discussions with students I had learned that Marty was getting involved with the wrong crowd. I knew the type of reality he and some other students in that class were living so I began to adjust my teaching to incorporate concepts into my lesson plans that dealt with self-confidence and self-worth activities. I got to know each student early on so that I could try to understand what was interesting to them. In class I learned that most students identified as having either Jamaican or Sri Lankan ancestry so I incorporated elements of those cultures into my teaching. I learned that some of my students’ parents did not speak English or French well so I incorporated examples in my teaching of situations in which children are left to help parents. I also ensured that I created the opportunity for discussion that was not based on the questions of right or wrong but rather concerned with constructing the appropriate bridges the students would feel free to cross should they feel the need to. Although Marty did not know it at the time I was well aware of his situation and was able to provide him with the tools necessary to turn himself around, as we expressed it then. More specifically, I seated him close to me (front left row) and ensured that I asked him about his day. I listened to him discuss his relationship with his family and friends and was able to provide feedback without judgment. The curriculum is as much about what is not explicitly taught as what is. In agreement with Davies (1982) I believe that teachers who take the opportunity to learn about their students’ realities from their perspectives can more efficiently build the bonds necessary in the process of passing on their adult knowledge to them.

Being given extra time or the ability to do retakes - often the standard response of teachers to students in trouble - would not have helped Marty. He was living a difficult life and did not need extra time, but rather the scaffolding necessary to find his own way. Revisiting my relationship with
Hugo which was prompted by my watching the *Les Bougon* series has helped provide me with a deeper understanding of where this teaching practice comes from. I wanted to be Hugo in a way but I also knew that I had a far better life than he did. My teaching practice now reflects this awareness.

**The Use of Humor**

When I first started to explore my place, as it were, in this television series, I did not actually focus on the effects the series had on me and why this was so uncomfortable. Rather, I found myself focusing on the superficial plot lines of each episode. It was only when I started re-watching certain episodes that I started to focus more on the awful humor and why it now held such discomfort for me. In my study of *Les Bougon*, the act of noting where and why I laughed at certain parts helped me to think about my identity in relation to teaching. In Episode Five of the first season in which Dolorès gets Martin Matte, a well-known comedian in Quebec, to wash her grandfather, I found myself laughing when he began to vomit as he washed Leo. Seeing a well-known star such as Matte doing something so uncharacteristic of someone of his stature removed my attention from the fact that Leo was being treated disrespectfully. Having had family members who worked with the elderly, I saw what it was like for their aging relatives when families neglected them. Why did I so easily forget about what I knew when I saw a simple episode in a television series? I also laughed during the same episode when Junior goes on a date at the Ritz-Carlton with a woman he is trying to seduce. At the end of the dinner he removes a small live mouse from his pocket and puts it on the floor with the intention of causing a diversion so that he will not have to pay his bill. Contrary to what he expected, the guests in the room do not react to his scheme and he is left looking out of place. It was apparent from the beginning of the scene that he stood out from the crowd. The fact that the crowd was not acknowledging him even in an extreme situation only highlighted the class differences between him and the other diners. What had amused me at the beginning of the scene
suddenly had the opposite effect on me as I realized what was going on. The Bougons might claim that they can do what they want but their socioeconomic standing holds them back even when they try. During my reflections on this point I remembered a similarly telling event:

_It is a warm summer day in the East end of Montreal. I remember Hugo with a new haircut meeting up with me for a play date. What looked like a present-day giant hashtag symbol covered his entire head. I thought it was the ugliest thing anyone could have done to his hair. Hugo mentioned that his mother had taken him to an expensive salon and that the haircut had cost around $50 dollars. Suddenly my disgust turned to jealousy and envy. I immediately wanted to be able to go to the hairdresser but no one would want to take me. Later that day we drove our bikes to Outremont. As we were walking around a couple of kids began to bother Hugo about his haircut. I could not understand why they would be so mean; didn’t they realize that he was wearing the latest fashion? While I was studying Les Bougon I contacted Hugo to ask him where the salon was that he had gone to as a child, and whether he had been back. He replied that he had never been; his mother had decided to cut his hair while she was intoxicated. Being closer to Hugo’s class I wasn’t able to see what was plainly visible but the two boys in the affluent neighborhood of Outremont saw it immediately. Like Junior in the restaurant, Hugo was trying to operate outside his class, and ended up where he began._

As a teacher, watching _Les Bougon_ prompted memories that made me examine how quick I am to judge certain situations without taking the time to understand the context in which they occur. In the case of Hugo I thought he had had an expensive haircut so I was less understanding when he was taunted for it. Only after doing this memory work did I began to understand that he had endure certain situations because of his economic situation. He was forced to wear his class, and as a teacher I recognize I must be more sensitive to student realities since they themselves might not even be aware of the larger socioeconomic picture and their place within it. My examination of this television series provided the necessary platform from which the origin of my personal views on
class could be examined within the context of my professional development as a teacher.

I have attempted to use the series and my initial analysis of it as well as the memories these prompted in order to begin to unravel the assumptions I have (and have had) as an individual and as a teacher in order to better understand myself as a teacher. As noted in Chapter One, as a pre-service teacher I was trained at McGill University in the twelve core professional teaching competencies (see Appendix A) that every teacher is expected to master by the time he or she becomes a teacher. The first professional teacher competency refers to acting as a professional inheritor, critic, and interpreter of knowledge or culture when one is teaching students. However, upon reflection I realized that this does not look at the why behind the whole educational endeavor. In other words, the competency focuses on how creating learning situations that take student experiences and put them center stage are important but understanding why it should be done is not explored.

Using *Les Bougon* as a memory trigger allowed me to re-examine how I see the world as well as consider the repercussions of what I have learned in regard to my teaching. For instance, the first Professional Teaching Competency mentioned above requires that teachers adopt a critical approach to a subject which is based on their ability as professionals to interpret the world and make it significant for their students (MELS, 2000) but it does not provide suggestions on how teachers can develop this critical approach.

**Reproducing and Reinforcing Class Structures**

There are three ideas that seem to me to be at the heart of *Les Bougon* and that strike me as being at the heart of informing my own teaching. The first idea is the fatalism of the characters in *Les Bougon*; their lack of concern with the world only reinforces the long established prejudices regarding class that they have inherited. For example, when Junior questions the legitimacy of his uncle’s pursuit
of a more conventional lifestyle by exploring new career paths, he is just reinforcing the idea that there are only two types of people in the world - the sell-outs and those who choose to rebel. This dichotomy oversimplifies class structure and how people can move from one class to another. Essentially, in this series, any path that is chosen will lead to the same fatalistic end. How can I as a teacher effectively work towards providing my students with the tools to succeed when the message they receive through such shows is that success is related only to how hard you work, Are there not other factors as well that determine success? The Bougons fight against the reality they are dealt but are in fact only held hostage to the rules that they claim they are above obeying. For example, although the Bougons claim to be able to make a living without having to play by the rules of the system, they are in fact not self-sufficient in that they often call on other characters in the series for help, such as Rita’s wealthy parents. As a teacher I must go beyond these simplistic portrayals of reality to provide myself and my students with the tools to deconstruct this reality so that we can reformulate our own. In other words, trying to present things in simplistic ways does nothing to prepare my students for the changing realities we all face.

The second idea from *Les Bougon* that informs my teaching is the awareness that popular texts play a critical role in the formation of our identity. The role of technology is evolving and increasing in the classroom, and therefore we must be increasingly critical of the information we receive. Studying *Les Bougon* using Critical AutoEthnography helped create the basis for being able to identify and construct a challenge to my worldview. It essentially provided me with the language I could use to articulate what I was feeling but not expressing. Studying the series made the unfamiliar familiar (Hirsch, 1997). For example, why did watching this series make me reformulate my relationship with Hugo?
I am in my late teens, arriving at Hugo’s mother’s 50th birthday party being held in a popular fast food pizzeria. I am thinking about how great Hugo’s mom was for giving him so much independence when we were smaller. I can picture the house, similar to the house portrayed in the television series. I am thinking about how Hugo was lucky to have had a mother who, despite having to raise a child alone, was able to give him a stable home. It is midway through the meal and having drank couple of beers, his mom stands up in front of the 20 guests and begins a monologue about all the things she hoped to have done by the time she reached this age. At the end of it, she turned to Hugo and in a firm calm voice said “Because of you I was not able to live my dreams, I should have never have bad you”. Seldom do events such as this affect you in such a fundamental way. My view of Hugo’s situation suddenly changed and she fell from grace. Although Hugo would go on to say that he thought it was most likely just the alcohol talking the way in which I saw the situation changed. How could I have been so blind to the pain that my best friend was going through right before my eyes? Why did the character of Junior make me think so much about my childhood friend Hugo?

Being jealous of Hugo for having no set bedtime shaped my initial view of people living on social assistance, but dealing with these issues in various ways helped me to adapt to another worldview. The students who come from families benefiting from social assistance should not be viewed any differently from anyone else. My pre-conceived notions regarding their ability to get out of their situation if they just worked harder were developed in the different environments in which I was raised. Watching Les Bougon helped me remember the times that I had misinterpreted what was occurring, and made me reassess what had happened. The romantic idea that we can all own an expensive house just by trying hard affected the manner in which I treated my students whether I noticed it or not. Even my friendship with Hugo did little to help me identify the underpinning notions of what was in play. It is important to recognize that shows such as Les Bougon, if observed critically in the way I did so, can help to clarify one’s own views by forcing one to return to the
past. The insights gained can then be applied to one’s future teaching. For instance, returning to the series and analyzing the memories associated with the discussion around elder-abuse and class acted as the legend on a map, allowing me to better find where I was in relation to where I want to be. Essentially, this provided the why that is missing from the first professional competency as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Dealing with the memories explored in this chapter caused numerous ripple effects which, individually, might not have affected my learning, but put together helped by providing the emotional and theoretical impetus needed to encourage the development of meaningful knowledge. As Weber (2014) noted, “[W]hat begins as research becomes an extended series of teaching experiences that lead to learning growth...linking personal inquiries to a broader and evolving picture of community...as the ripples expand outward” (p. 17). Studying this television show critically enabled me to deal with some of my underlying views of learning and education which, after being exposed as inadequate, only revealed more questions. For example, dealing with the different characters together in accordance with my memories and in the context of poverty in Quebec I am more attuned to the realities that my students might be facing. During my fourth year of teaching while working at a suburban high school I had the opportunity to observe this. A new teacher was hired and was paired with me for our teacher orientation. He was a middle-aged man who claimed to have been a pilot, an engineer, as well as an historian before deciding to get his teacher’s certificate. I was amazed at how much he seemed to know about his teaching subject and was interested in seeing how the students would benefit from his wisdom. Once the school year started I noticed that the students we shared were apprehensive about being in his classes. They told me they did not understand much of what he was trying to teach them. I remember this teacher telling me that he felt that his students just needed to listen in class and that he did not have time for their problems.
After a couple of months, some students began to allege that he swore at them and as a result the school administration stepped in. His focus on the facts, however numerous, was not enough to prepare him for the complex social dynamics of the classroom. Re-visiting my past experiences prompted by viewing *Les Bougon* enabled me to identify some of the elements regarding how I, as a teacher, must act in the classroom in order to create the appropriate learning environment. Discussing Paul, Junior, and family as well as the main themes such as class, in particular, has had a much deeper effect on me than just making me aware of the need to expose injustices; it has created the understanding that I need to be better equipped for the classroom of tomorrow.

The third idea from *Les Bougon* that informs my teaching demonstrates that positivism (a form of research which values scientific inquiry over all else) is not dead but is, rather, presented in another form that is more subversively distributed. The television series is presented as a lighthearted depiction of a family that remains together no matter what difficulties they live through (Krauss, 2004). Despite the claim to the contrary in the media by the creators of the show (Cauchon, 2004), the Bougon clan can expect to die in the isolation and darkness that Paul’s father experienced; Leo was left alone in a corner until his death. Junior and his sister are not able to make any meaningful connections with anybody. Not long after the pilot episode aired, as I have already mentioned, mainstream media began using the term “Bougon” to identify the type of person who lives off society. A new reality was constructed around a fictional portrayal of one family’s reality. *Les Bougon* was aired on the French counterpart of The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation called Radio Canada (SRC). On the surface, viewers of the series were left with the impression that the Bougons represented the average person’s plight in being ranged against the main injustices of our society. Francois Avard, the writer of the show, even claimed, “We show poor people for the first time winning; we show poor people with power” (Krauss, 2004, para. 9). More accurately, they
serve only to reinforce the traditional structures that have discriminated against those very same average people for centuries. Whose past is being represented? As a teacher it is my role to uncover these refabricated views of society to understand where I stand in relation to them so that I can aid future students to do the same. For example, the class to which I belong and how it has affected me establishes the position from which I can begin to understand the lived experiences of my students. I have always seen my students, especially those coming from a similar class to my own, in a different way than have most of my colleagues. The manner in which I interact with and teach them is reliant as much on their experiences as mine. Critical AutoEthnography helped to provide me with the language to express what I had already started to do. How has this affected my teaching? Thinking about reality and our perception of it (which can be shaped by popular texts) as Russell (2006) has noted, are key to the development of my worldview as an individual and as a teacher.

**Les Bougon and My Teacher Identity**

The Bougon clan is presented as a group of people trying to fight the system, and their adventures lead them to uncover injustices that need to be righted. Whether it is a corrupt politician or police officer, the Bougons have a way to keep them in check. Viewing *Les Bougon* prompted memories which, when I studied them, taught me about my teacher identity and practice. Seeing how Paul Bougon relentlessly fights the system without ever really getting anywhere highlights how the concept of power and who holds it operates. This must feed into my teaching. As a teacher I am responsible for ensuring that my students are not provided with false hope, but rather given the opportunity to identify the barriers that are holding them back. Paul does not fight to change the system; he just allows it to govern how his family will act.

Understanding the events and situations that occurred in my childhood in order to study who I have developed into and how this has happened has been a difficult task. When I think about
the story involving the turnstile at the city pool I am forced to deal with the markers that I did not realize I had.

When I studied the character of Rita, I thought about Diane but I also thought about my own mother. How can three characters that are so different be in the same category? What does this say about my development into the teacher that I have become? Is the fact that I was always trying to be accepted a reason why I take students’ concerns regarding fitting in more seriously? Do I allow students with single parents more sympathy as a result of my encounters with Diane? Do I have a sensitive spot for children who have two full-time working parents because of my own experiences?

How have my conservative views regarding Dolorès shifted in my study of the show and how has this affected my teacher identity? Upon initial contact with the character I was disgusted with the fact that she was selling her body in the family home. Although I could accept that she should be allowed to choose the means that she wanted of producing income I felt that her use of sex for money dehumanized love. Why did I think this? Seeing Dolorès made me think of the mothers in the neighborhoods that I lived in and the fact that some of them had to do the same thing. Perhaps my views had been formulated as a protective device to block out what I saw? As a teacher I undoubtedly shared these beliefs through my lessons without even realizing it. In a sex education class I taught I can remember making small remarks during my teaching regarding sex workers, or as I thought of them then, prostitutes, without really analyzing what I was saying. I am now more cognizant of the need to deal differently with issues such as these.

A central part of teaching involves preparing students for their place in the world. As a child my parents reminded me that hard work leads to success. The school also reinforced this idea which, on the surface, makes sense. The Bougons are continually working but they are not able to get out of the poverty in which they live. It is as if the show’s creators are equating poverty to a type of
personality. In one sense the Bougons are doing everything they can to move up in society but they are never really able to do it. As a teacher I used to equate hard work with results but upon further examination I realize more than ever that other elements come into play. Now I make sure that my students know that there is more to success than hard work and that they have to be aware that elements such as social and economic barriers exist.

Mao brought out memories of being raised with foster siblings whom I saw as being in a way inferior to me. Although I did not verbalize it, I knew that I had my two real parents at home waiting for me when I got home from school. I could not understand why my parents would spend so much time going over and above what was required to make these children feel comfortable. Why could they not spend that extra time on me? As a teacher I have developed the same idea, no doubt inherited from my parents, that helping others is key, but it is the study of Les Bougon that has helped me expose my insecurities related to the foster brothers and sisters I was raised with. Knowledge of my thought processes has aided in ensuring that I do not place my self-worth over that of any other person.

Seeing Paul treat his dog better than his father made me think about some of the experiences I had with the elderly as a child. For instance, since my mother worked with the elderly I often got to visit and speak to them. I always enjoyed talking to and learning from them. My mother seemed to be able to create strong links with them which amazed me. Seeing Leo Bougon treated so badly only reinforced my belief that I have to do a better job of ensuring that my students learn to deal with all people. Our elders are not only people who may need help but are, rather, individuals who need to be acknowledged and treated with the same dignity as everyone else.
Summary

The central implication of the insight that race is socially constructed is the specific need to attack Whiteness as a destructive ideology rather than to attack the concept of race abstractly.

(Maher & Tetreault, 1997, p. 325)

In this chapter I drew on my personal viewing and close reading of a television series, *Les Bougon*. I used my initial analysis of the series as well as the memories that this prompted in order to unravel the assumptions I have as an individual and as a teacher in order to better understand myself and my identity as a teacher. I also discussed which aspects of the series resonated with my experience. I then looked into the specifics related to the closeness I felt with the show. After having examined some of the plot lines and characters in the series as well as three specific episodes, I have come to the conclusion that the use of humor, however grotesque, was something that made the show attractive to me. While I was doing further work on and writing about the series, I realized that the scenes and characters in the series caused me to remember events and scenes from my past. I took away three main points from watching *Les Bougon*: its emphasis on fatalism is not conducive to promoting human wellbeing; popular texts play a critical role in the formation of our own identity; and there is a continued infiltration of positivist values in some popular media which is in line with what I observe to be happening in contemporary classrooms. I then examined these memories within the context of my teacher identity and discovered that popular texts such as *Les Bougon* play a role in disseminating misinformation and views of the world that without future study can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes. Teacher researchers can use these underlying themes in order to uncover their own assumptions so that they may begin to make the necessary corrections required to become more humane teachers.
I will argue that contemporary educational praxis, the theory and practice of what goes on in our beings...that much contemporary pedagogy flies in the face of who and what we are as a species and does a disservice not only to the students in our classrooms but also to the societies on which these students assume their role as citizens.

(Monchinski, 2010, p. 3)

Introduction

The extract above is from a teacher researcher who is speaking about the need to conduct educational research that is concerned with making the world a better place. These lines underscore the purpose of my research and this chapter in particular as I look at the third of my memory sites. Building on my work in Critical AutoEthnography related to the previous two memory sites - engaging in memory-work through revisiting photos and schools I attended as a child, and drawing on a television series as memory prompts, I visit my own classrooms from my past as a teacher and student as a memory site in order to study the relationship between the official educational discourse in Quebec and the reality of classroom experiences and their impact on teachers and their teaching in public schools. Within my Critical AutoEthnographic framework I deal with the development of my own ethnography as it relates to professional self-conscious reflexivity to address the questions: What is the Quebec’s Ministry of Education’s role in the establishment of positivist ideologies and how does this affect my identity as a teacher? How do I position myself within my research as a teacher researcher? What role can Critical AutoEthnography play in the promotion of a more socially just school system and how might this affect my professional practice?
In particular, I look at different ways in which neoliberal discourses are infiltrating the classroom through various avenues such as official government curricula as well as unofficially through private sector initiatives such as the *Go Program* that was introduced to some Quebec schools in 2006 to help, it was believed, increase student performance.

The chapter is divided into three main sections, the first of which will examine my methodology and the relationship I establish between Critical AutoEthnography and teacher education in relation to what Brown (2005) refers to as the construction of a paradigm and theoretical framework for myself as a teacher researcher. It then goes on to identify some of the ways in which positivist programs, both the mandated, and the non-official such as the *Go Program* and their respective doctrines are infiltrating public schools and what that means for teachers. Since much of our teaching is rooted in who we are and how we perceive the world, all of which can be demonstrated through narratives as Zeichner and Liston (2014) point out, I will use personal narrative to discuss how issues of privilege, voice, social inequality, and the need for social action are not being addressed despite policies that make claims to the contrary. I will expand on how different academics have shaped my worldview and their connection to my development of self. It draws on the work of Lise Noël (1994), Joe Kincheloe (2001, 2003), and Henry Giroux (1988, 2011) in order to examine how the educational reforms and, more specifically, the current core professional teaching competencies (see Appendix A) are affecting teachers, teaching, and, therefore, student learning. Researchers, like Kincheloe (2008a), working in critical pedagogy have stressed the need to include ethnography, textual, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning as part of the methodological bricolage. I am particularly interested in the question of core teacher competencies and the relationship between the social, cultural, and political in shaping teacher and student identity within the Quebec educational context. How can
we define this area, and who are some of the key authors working in this area of critical teacher education? How might this work be applied to Quebec?

**Memory Triggers: Working With Teaching Texts**

Truth does not so much do good in the world as the semblance of truth does evil.  
(La Rochefoucauld, 1659, p. 9)

While there are numerous studies of teachers reflecting on their own teaching through reflective journals, I was interested in going back in time to try to remember particular sets of events and teaching experiences. I did not have any teaching journals from the time, but I did have a collection of assessment folders that contained a series of tests provided by the Go Program that were used for assessing my students. I had written many notes on these assessment folders. I followed an idea explored by Mitchell (2005). In an essay called “In My Own Handwriting” Mitchell went back over a series of journals and diary entries from 1971 to 1975 written during her first years of teaching in a small fishing village in Nova Scotia. She comments almost 30 years later that the journal entries, written almost every day, combine teaching and everything else she was doing at the time. As she observed, returning to her teaching texts helped her “focus on various constructions of a truth, and the ways in which reading back becomes a form of reading, and its own form of self-study” (p. 117).

Similarly, Annette Oberg in Reflecting on Reflecting (2004) outlines a process in which she spontaneously went through her own informal journals written over the previous 15 years, noting the passages that stood out for her in order to then reflect upon them. Her process is similar to her teaching in that she continuously pays attention to the process of engagement. As she puts it, “I have come to describe my teaching and the researching of my teaching as a practice of opening, paying attention, and not knowing” (p. 241).
Another researcher, Deborah Trumbull (2006), used her own journals as a pedagogical tool not just for herself but also with her students. This process not only allowed her to share her thoughts and concerns regarding her previous teachings but also incorporated her current students’ reactions to her writings. Sharing her teaching journals during a semester with her students in a systematic way allowed her to engage in the process of analyzing the students’ responses to her journals, and, as a result, this taught her about her own teaching and about herself as a teacher.

For me the process was somewhat different in that, as I said above, I did not review any type of reflective journal. Rather, I reviewed the teaching notes that I had kept during the time in which I was involved in the implementation of the Go Program. The Go Program was created and introduced just over a decade ago with the goal of improving the performance of middle school students before they reached the later stages of their education. Based on a book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, by Sean Covey (1998), the Go Program curriculum takes a strictly behaviorist approach to educating youth. It was introduced by Premier Agenda that was owned by the multinational stationery company, Franklin Covey Inc. According to their website at the time, the company had a “commitment to principles: We are passionate about our content, and strive to be models of the principles and practices we teach” (para. 6). The program consisted of an added supplement to the students’ school agenda that they had to purchase through their student fees. The program assured teachers that all they would be asked to do was press play on the DVD player and watch the short mini lessons provided with the Go Program package. The DVD also outlined the need for all staff to work in sync in order to ensure that all students achieved their potential. The explicit goals of the program as stated in the teachers’ manual was to help students make positive choices under pressure, improve communication with others, and measure the change in their lives. If the program was followed in the appropriate manner, students would enhance their achievement

7 Retrieved from www.franklincovey.com
on standardized tests, improve their attitude and have a higher school attendance rate. Each week students were to follow the progression of four main characters who encounter issues that were, it was claimed, designed to be relevant to all middle school students. Nettie, Jack, Kyra, and Z face the trials and tribulations of everyday middle school life but they are able to solve all their problems by the end of the five to ten minute clip. The Go Program was not part of the official curriculum in Quebec. However, because of budget cuts and the educational reforms that reduced access to teaching materials schools often turned to these types of programs to meet the needs of their students. Supposedly teacher proof pedagogical programs such as these exemplify the false promises of positivism by trying to study human nature scientifically without taking into consideration what Bruner (1996) argues is the world built upon the rules and devices of narrative.

This program overtly presents a Cog/Behaviorist approach to learning and is described as meeting the basic demands of the average student. Essentially, it is based on the belief that a teacher can teach a student using similar techniques that Skinner used on pigeons. How could a program with such honorable objectives be harmful to our students? What did this teacher proof curriculum say about teaching in general? Why were teachers shown as being unskilled? The scenes in the program capture episodes of life like stills in a film; they convey, as I described in an earlier chapter, the skeleton of life without the flesh and consciousness of being (Muncey, 2010). As a teacher educator it is imperative that I sift through the information being provided, look past the required canon in order to make a sound decision as to what is best for my students. In the case of this program, a Critical AutoEthnographic approach would quickly identify that these programs should be putting life into schools rather than schools into life (McLaren, 2014).

The short videos, vignettes, and books (spread over 34 lessons) begin with four student-characters attending their first day at high school. In the first video the narrator Nettie describes
each of her friends using general descriptors. Jack (Caucasian) is outspoken, and wants to become a professional skateboarder. Kyra (Asian) is described as being shy and smart. She wants to become an astronaut. “Z” (Caucasian) is a geek who would rather play video games than do his homework. Lastly, the narrator Nettie (Afro-Canadian) is unsure of her future. Their teacher guides all four students. Mr. Parcel is a serious teacher who attempts to get his students to realize what their goals should be. Other characters who are introduced briefly throughout the year-long curriculum such as Sandy (who is blond and mean) and Nettie’s love interest, Dan (an African Canadian who can dribble a ball better than he can write) are used to establish and support main concepts and points being introduced during a particular lesson.

Figure 28: The Go Program home DVD with instruction packet.

The students’ parents were also to be provided with a DVD copy (Figure 28) of some of the lessons as well as a general overview of the program, and were reminded of the need to reinforce it at home. Students were also provided with a code and username with which they were expected to go online and answer a series of test questions and surveys to help them follow their progress.
throughout the year. When I raised concerns regarding having students enter and use a web-site that was maintained by a private company, and requested the company representative to provide the school with written assurance that the data students provided would not be used for anything other than what it was supposed to be used for, she responded that I had nothing to worry about but that at that time she was not in a position to put this in writing. Since the school’s governing board as well as the teacher-council had already approved the one-year project the year before, my questions were deemed unnecessary. But for me, a critical teacher must necessarily question why such a program is allowed to be implemented when there were no studies demonstrating its effectiveness. Why did teachers not fight harder to stop it from being adopted? If the educational reformers wanted teachers to be professional inheritors of knowledge who are entrusted with creating learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned, how could the staff have supported this? These questions have made me determined to be an educator who speaks out and is not afraid to ask questions especially when it comes to programs such as these.

**Methodology: Revisiting the Go Program**

For this memory site, I returned to my teaching texts from the time period during which the *Go Program* was first introduced. I had stored various notes and materials from this time in my boxes of teaching materials (since a teacher’s course load may change at any time it is useful to keep past lessons and notes for possible future use). I flipped through the materials to find those related to the *Go Program* and was easily able to locate these because of the elegant binder that was provided to each teacher who had to implement it (see Figures 29 and 30). Next to my other rugged, used notes it stood out and I instantly began to think not only about the circumstances surrounding my experiences teaching the program but my general view of education. Once I began to read over the programs’ materials as well as my notes I began to reflect on the *Personal Orientation Program*
course that was being introduced by the government at around the same time. I then began to write down the memories as they were prompted throughout the process. I have selected the three that best framed, for me, what was wrong with the system in which I was schooled and in which I was expected to school my students (see the sections Memory Work: 1, 2 and 3 for these three narratives).

Identifying and incorporating memory as pedagogy through the employment of autoethnographic narratives plays on the symbiotic relationship between the process and product which, in itself, allows for the incorporation of one’s own voice within the research. I selected my experiences with the Go Program, the writings from my professional teaching portfolio (Figure 31, 32, 33, and 34) as well as research questions from my graduate work in order to build upon how I have developed as a teacher and why (I will return to my work relating to the Go Program a little later on this chapter). Part of becoming a teacher is accepting that our views, beliefs and understanding
of the world are continually adjusting to the context that we inhabit. Revisiting past professional writings from a different perspective allows for greater understanding of the teacher self. I am interested in answering these questions: How have my experiences as a teacher affected my choice of an educational paradigm and theoretical framework and what are the effects of the MELS reforms on teaching and teacher education? Since, as I have remarked in an earlier chapter, we do not live in reality but in the stories about reality (Nash, 2004), this chapter identifies the situations and events that have continued to shape my identity. Also, following O’Reilly-Scanlan (2000), I explore, and try to understand what has shaped my teaching.

Whereas Claudia Mitchell (2005) was guided by the social semiotics work of Stephen Riggins (1994) for the translation of personal documents into artifacts for study, I looked towards the work of John Smyth (2007, 2011) in assembling and analyzing the data regarding the Go Program. Smyth’s research highlights three main narratives that are adversely affecting schools in Western Anglophone countries: the politicization, de-humanization, and instrumentalization of teaching. These fall in line with the struggles I experienced during my first decade of teaching. For Smyth, Down, McInerney and Hattam (2014) the steps for doing education research based on one’s own experience are:

1. Conceptualize a problem
2. Get one’s hands dirty
3. Read, reflect, theorize
4. Make sense of the data through the lens of theory
5. Write up and develop portraits
6. Start all over again with a new set of questions. (p. xiv)

Conceptualizing the problem was easy once I had determined what I thought was wrong with the Go Program. I then proceeded to search through the material I had kept in regards to it.
I read, reflected and theorized about what it was I was looking for and made sense of the data through the lens of my Critical AutoEthnography. I wrote up and reflected upon what I had found and then after I had completed them I came up with new questions.

*Figure 30: Uncovering the Go Program from storage.*

If we start from the premise that no education is politically neutral (Monchinski, 2010), it can be argued that teachers need to be armed with an understanding of phenomenology, hermeneutics, epistemological studies, critical theory, and discourse analysis as well as other diverse modes of knowledge production (Kincheloe et al., 2004; Pinar, 1994). Once teachers are provided with the tools to develop their own understanding of the social and political landscapes in which they exist they can use their past experiences as platforms from which to further reformulate understanding of their own development as teachers. The use of journals and diaries as memory texts in self-study has been successful in studying the interplay of past, present and future in relation to teacher and teacher educator development (Mitchell, 2005).
This approach takes into account that documents created in the past and the subsequent review and study of them can enable teachers to understand and develop their teacher identity while ensuring transparency in the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). As method, I have returned to previous teaching notes in order to examine whether the recent educational reform implemented in Quebec over the past decades which has allowed for the introduction of unofficial curriculums such as the Go Program are having the intended effects on teacher education and professional development on me as well as others. These notes and my writings on them were completed between 2003 and 2010 first as I implemented the program in the school I was working in and then as part of a Textual Approaches to Research graduate course at McGill University. As a teacher I had made the notes but it is only as a grad student that I analyzed them. In that course we were required to search through items that we had kept from our past and to look into why we were still holding on to them.

In returning to experiences that occurred within the classroom between 2000 and 2010, I can pay attention to things in new ways, and I can evoke stories that can become more accessible, and can facilitate reflexivity in research design (Weber, 2008). As a form of inquiry, this process allows me to generate a greater understanding of my teacher persona that can, if used responsibly, serve to help diagnose the individual and collective needs of my future students so that I may, in turn, better connect with my pedagogical strategies and goals (Kincheloe et al., 2004). The starting point of this aspect of the Critical AutoEthnographic study was the attempt to understand myself as a teacher through my use of personal narratives related to the situations and events that influenced the development of my teacher identity.
Looking Back

To return to my discussion of the *Go Program*, I start with a memory that goes back to the process of finding my first teaching job in 2003. At the time, finding a tenure track position teaching in primary or secondary schools was becoming increasingly difficult for newly graduated teachers. The two main English school boards at the time each held recruitment campaigns over a period of a few days. It was made clear at the sessions that there were few full-time positions. Following the sessions I was pessimistic about my chances of finding a job that would allow me to teach the way I wanted to.

I received a call on a Friday from a school principal asking me to meet with her in order to discuss my candidacy for a teaching position at her school for the coming year. I asked her if she had received the resume I had sent to what seemed like every school imaginable but I learned that she had heard about me from another of her colleagues who had, in turn, heard of me through a teaching program that was related to social justice education that I had introduced during a teaching practicum. She wanted to meet with me on the following Monday but I had already scheduled a meeting with another interested school. She then responded, “Why don’t you come over Sunday morning and we can talk over coffee?” I accepted her invitation and ended up getting the job. I accepted the job partly because I did not want to turn down a tenure track position but also because of the vision and commitment to social justice that the principal assured me she had.

Going back to the notes made me begin to think about whether the principal was in fact as concerned as she appeared to be. Looking at the notes on the tests in a program she had embraced and strongly pushed in the school I also now question my motivation for taking the job. Did I really think it was possible for one principal to change the established norms? With all of the responsibilities that the principal had to manage it is not surprising to see why the *Go Program* was so attractive. As the educational leader it was her responsibility to ensure that programs would enable
students to develop a better understanding of their learning, but, instead, she looked for the easy way out. Rather than allowing her teachers to develop their own methods by which to reach their students she contracted the work out to a company for a price. As a teacher I have come to realize through this study how easy it is to fall for these types of programs which promise results and little work. Teaching should not be reduced to simple applying a formulaic program which does not encourage true thinking.

Paradoxically, teachers with decreased resources are increasingly being asked to increase learning outcomes. One way to get around this is for schools to turn to non-official programs that provide all the teaching material in a pre-packaged format. Similar to the way in which during the baby boomer era following the Second World War new household appliance such as washers, and vacuum cleaners were initially pitched to homemakers as a means of cutting down on their work so these programs just left teachers more time to do other work. These programs serve only to shift the role of the teacher from professional inheritor of knowledge to technicians can now be given more non teaching-related tasks.

**Memory Work: Writing 1**

On August 26th 2003, during the second day of the school year, I attended a meeting held in the Montreal inner-city school at which I now had a teaching job about the introduction of a new program that was designed to provide all students with the tools they needed to succeed. I remember that a woman presented teachers with the program; it had already been approved by the school’s governing board, and was to be implemented with immediate effect. I had many questions regarding the program, but, I now regret to say, I decided to keep them to myself because of its being my first year as a full-time classroom teacher. The educational reform in Quebec at this time provided for more leeway into the type of educational programs a local school could choose to follow. Educational programs were decentralized and the obligation to maintain a specific core curriculum was replaced with general guidelines framed by subject specific
and cross curricular competencies. This absence of materials, as Cadotte (2012) observes, meant that schools received, generally, less support for educational materials, leaving the door open for private sector partners to enter the schools.

**Memory Work: Writing 2**

Writing 2 in this memory work provides a glimpse into the death of someone whom I regarded as a family member and the reaction I got from my school. Looking back over these notes I thought about one such time when I lived a situation that did not adequately fulfill the requirements to be allowed to postpone an exam.

*During my first year of college, my mother’s sick elderly friend, Ms. Edmonds, moved into our home. Her grown children were not able to take care of her because she had a medical condition; they moved out leaving her alone but she was unable to live on her own. My family helped her to be as comfortable as possible while her health deteriorated. After living under our care for two years, she died suddenly. Since her death occurred during my final week of exams my teacher sent me to the guidance counselor to explain that I would need to postpone writing my exams because, in my grief, I could not concentrate. Although she empathized with my situation, the counselor said that the college mourning policy applied only to the death of a close family member of the student. In other words, since Ms. Edmonds was not related to me by blood, my relationship with her was construed as being less relevant than that of a distant cousin. I ended up having to take all my exams that week. I was able to manage to pass most of my courses but did rather badly in one course. It was the first and last time that I failed a course and it affected me deeply.*

**Memory Work: Writing 3**

In this third memory piece I discuss the introduction of the *Go Program* in another school despite the varied level of success it had had in the school at which I had first taught. A high school teacher once taught me that if we do not reflect upon our mistakes we are doomed to repeat them but this mistake, as it were, was foisted on me. Although I had had the opportunity to pilot this
program before it did not achieve the goals that it promised in terms of student improvement, yet here it was being introduced to another school without my colleagues taking the time to review not only its efficacy but also its relevance to our particular student population.

On August 28th, 2006, during the second day of the school year, a meeting was held in a Montreal Suburban school about the introduction of a new Go Program that was designed to provide all students with the tools they needed to succeed. A well-dressed woman presented teachers with this program that had already been approved by the school’s governing board, and was to be implemented immediately. This time I asked many questions about the program, including difficult ones to which this representative had vague answers already prepared. When I asked her about that inner city school at which the Go Program had failed that they appeared to have forgotten about, she claimed that it was the only school to have had difficulty implementing the program. When I asked her if these difficulties had been related to the socio-economic background of the school, she politely, but inconclusively, answered, “Things are better now.” After the meeting I asked the governing board and the principal to reconsider this endeavor but I was reminded that the workbooks had already been purchased, and the school would be getting ten DVD players free of charge.

My first experience with the program had disappointed me to the point that I was less afraid to question its reintroduction. I knew what was about to be inflicted upon the students for which it was going to be compulsory.

Finding Myself in the Classroom

Schools are at the mercy of government education departments that make educational decisions that are often based on political motives. Often these reforms are meant, at least on the surface, to be a way of preparing our youth for the realities of tomorrow. These reforms can take several forms such as new courses that are deemed to be more progressive in favor of doing away with those that are seen to be antiquated; altering the criteria to allow students to progress to a new level or even
obtain a high school leaving diploma; and providing teachers with new desired orientations that serve only to comply with technocratic competencies (see Appendix A) that, in turn, de-skill them.

**Theory vs. Practice and Institutionalized Positivism:**

**The Personal Orientation Program (POP)**

In a review of the MELS (2004) list of approved programs of learning it is clear that several Quebec textbooks and curricula that claim to be competency-based often rely on a behaviorist approach. For instance, beginning a decade ago, some schools began requiring those students who were deemed not to be academically inclined to take a course called the Personal Orientation Program (POP). This POP course aimed to ready the students to take their place in the world (2004). In some cases, students were handed a suitcase, box, or chest containing information about various career options and professions and were asked to use its contents to develop a project aimed at developing a profession or skill. My principal at the time asked if I would mind being one of the first to teach it at our school. After reviewing its objectives, I politely refused. The goal of the program, in its focus on the outcome rather than the process or the need for the process, seemed to take the students as far away from finding their place in society as they were when they started high school in the first place. I understood that education should not be about teaching a set of narrow skills (McClaren, 2014). Teaching and learning is more than checking off little boxes on decontextualized assessments that only serve to reproduce the idea that there can only be one truth. Essentially they were learning to be de-skilled (Leistyna, 1999). Had I been required to teach the course I would have asked the students to discuss the reason they were in the course and why they thought their boxes had been prepared in such a way. I would certainly have encouraged the students to look beyond the perceived neutrality of the course to investigate the reasoning behind the course itself and would have helped them to question their taking it. I still needed to develop further as a teacher before I could have
done my students justice in regards to the *Go Program*.

Although it was claimed that any student might have opted to take the course it was, in practice, directed at students who were not academically strong in core subjects. In other words, students who did not engage in the traditional school narratives for whatever reason were now being moved towards programs directed at acquiring trades. More than just career exploration, the POP course presented students with a view of the current world without encouraging them to think critically or engage with it in any depth. The introduction of the course coincided with the abolishing of another course on economics.

**Critical AutoEthnography and Teacher Education**

My notion of Critical AutoEthnography can play an important role in teacher development. Rather than taking a linear look at learning, Critical AutoEthnography accepts the role of other factors and their effects on the mind and spirit of an individual. As Freire argued (1970), the mind is not an empty box waiting to be filled but rather something that is intricately connected to the body. The core teacher competencies (see Appendix A) do not see teachers as self-reflective beings who are able to position themselves within the cultural context that they inhabit. Is it any wonder, then, that some teachers continue to practice their profession without taking the time to include other perspectives or ways of thinking? Learners at all levels learn more effectively and efficiently when their lived experiences and realities are acknowledged (Conolly et al., 2009). Teacher development is an ongoing process (Mitchell, 2005) that benefits from discovering new paradigms that help establish new thresholds of understanding for both the teacher and the learner. The point here is not that the school had not recognized the effects of a social/physical event on a person's mind and thought, but that it could go as far as to apply a type of policy that is so linear that it does not even accept logical delineations from the established norms. The guidance counselor I mentioned earlier in this
chapter applied policies that, like the new core teacher competencies and the educational reforms, de-humanize without realizing it, as Freire (1970) put it.

**Importance of Looking Back and Seeing My Notes Years Later**

Teacher researchers can revolutionize professional practice by viewing themselves as potentially the most sophisticated research instruments available. (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 52)

Why study the memories associated with programs such as POP and the *Go Program*? Schooling is inherently political, writes Giroux (1988, 2011). This means that teachers are at the forefront of the battle to ensure that students are given the tools necessary to develop a critical cultural awareness of education. Pepi Leistyna (1999) calls this evolving awareness the presence of mind. Part of attaining this presence of mind is the ability to address how knowledge is related to the social discourses that are expected of students. Looking at teacher practice by looking back can provide some valuable insights into our own development. As various authors such as Radstone (2000), Haug (1987) and Kuhn (1996) note, memory makes us; our memories are at the center of who we are and who we will be. Over the past 10 years, however there has been an increased awareness of studies in education that have a human science or qualitative approach and an increased appreciation for the study of teachers’ lives as a way of understanding teaching processes (Van Manen, 1989, 1990, 2014). A number of researchers (Cole & Knowles, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1994, 1999; Goodson, 1990, 1994) argue that if we really want to understand what is happening in education today, it is important to study teachers’ lives. I approach both the doing and the conceptualization of memory-work in the context of narrative and autobiographical approaches to teachers studying their own lives, an area that is well-grounded, as I have already established, within teacher education (Cole & Knowles, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Goodson, 1990, 1994; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). I will go on, presently, to consider this in relation to myself.
Questioning the Questions

Any teacher can use Critical AutoEthnography, as I have tried to do, to challenge the perceived need for a curriculum and philosophy designed by a corporation and imposed upon students. The Go Program is removed from the realities of the individual students in the classroom in its construction of a disconnected irrelevant understanding of education. It is without doubt far preferable to turn to an organization that has the student’s best interest in mind rather than turn to a company, even if its intentions appear to be good, whose main aim is to benefit its shareholders in its supposed delivery of information to our youth. One of the major issues relating to this program is that it fails to provide the students with any concepts related to them as students.
2) It is a variety of factors
3) Some decisions are not ours to make
4) Why is the only Asian character shown as a nerd?
5) Equating success to character leaves out a lot of context
6) Among others
7) Magily questioned this
8) Who defines your character?
9) Not sure this is what I remember of
10) Why is Jack so lost and Kyra on path? Why so many clichés

Figure 31: Notes scribbed on test sheets.
Returning to the notes I had written over a decade ago regarding the *Go Program* was a difficult task since I could begin to see very early on how the pressure put on me to perform within the parameters of what was expected was beginning to oppress me. As Mitchell (2005) mentions, such work can be depressing and my memories that surround my involvement with the *Go Program* fall into this category. One lesson asks students to define their own character based on what their peers think. They are encouraged to keep a log of what people around them say about their character. My notes (see Figure 31) jotted onto the assessment activity sheet shows how uncomfortable I was with teaching the program. I noted that *equating success to character leave[s] out a lot of context*, but I did not go on to share that with my students. More importantly, I mentioned that one of my students, Magily, was questioning the content of the lessons: *Magily questions this*. She was the only student who showed immediate hesitation. I found it interesting that a student at the junior high school level would be able to articulate her opposition so well. I was glad that she was questioning the program but it became difficult for me to complete the timed lessons while trying to address all her questions. I did not take advantage of the situation to model the type of learning I wanted to have take place even though, along with Oberg (2004), I know “that students learn through their interactions with me [and this experience] depends on their experience of me” (p. 241). Now I would have taken the opportunity to discuss the Magily’s concerns outside of class as well as provided a longer question period during the lessons. Interestingly enough, the program did not encourage the students to look at why the people around them perceived them to need it. Instead, it encouraged the students to adapt to a pre-conceived notion of what they should be. The lesson even goes as far as suggesting that a *Hero or Person of Character* is someone who is punctual and honest (*Go Program*, 1.1). If teachers are asked to encourage students to model themselves according to particular qualities, they should at least ensure that the students know what underlies this request. I could easily see

8 The *Go Program* was numbered using the lesson and page number.
this lesson leading students to think that if they are late, or do not always tell their employers the complete truth they cannot be a person of character. Now I would insist on pointing this sort of thing out given my subsequent development as a teacher.
94) How can they know who is the leader? Why Act?
95) Should I accept "false" 
96) Oversimplification. Are the rules equal for all? Jessy asks about this question. Ahmed was concerned as to what is natural.
98) Why so general?
99) The question itself is cliché. How about (Netti)?
100) Are they really separate * Why is Jack so lost and Kyra on path? Why so many clichés?

**Figure 32:** Notes on first Go Program quiz, questioning stereotypes.
I am not arguing that we should discourage personal self-discovery, and the detection of the different manner in which we construct our own identity, but this program does neither. In another question students are asked to answer what the four areas of personal renewal are. They have to choose between the body, brain, heart and soul or body, brain, heart and mind (see Figure 32). In my notes where I wrote are they really separate? I was asking why body, brain, heart and soul had to be in different categories let alone be categorized in such an apparently clear way. After having studied effective ways to encourage students to learn I could see that I was beginning to be frustrated by the reality I was facing. When I wrote why so general? I was not just making a comment but exposing a reality. Like my students, my role was being relegated to a simple part of an equation. Although I wrote should I accept “false” for question 95 which discussed personality quadrants I did not ultimately accept it as an answer. In Figure 32 I also see more than just notes; I see, rather, a level of disengagement on the part of both my students and myself. I was a new teacher trying to use the material I was assigned to teach in order to reach my students. I tried to give them the tools to counter the narratives I was putting before them but did I succeed? Similar to Mitchell (2005) who states, “I am interested in the spaces and the tensions to teaching and systematic self-study of one’s own teaching practices” (p. 128), these memories prompted me to look at some of the tensions I was facing early on in my teaching career. Why was I not able to go beyond the questions that I had in order to evaluate what exactly it was I was doing? How could I have asserted myself as a member of the teaching team without alienating myself from my more senior coworkers?

These tests were developed to create material to keep students busy, rather than to teach them to think critically. A teacher who, by her or his very job description, is forced to apply the curriculum as approved of by the governing board of this school, could ask students to look at why the program outlines punctuality and honesty as the traits needed to be a Hero. Essentially, teachers
must realize that the students in their classes arrive with different types of knowledge that are socio-culturally located, and broad and vague statements regarding character do not promote critical understanding or respect the process of learning as a process of mutual humanization (Souto-Manning, 2010). In another lesson students are asked several questions which take the meaning of the word “natural” for granted. I noted (see Figure 33) that even the students questioned its meaning. During the same lesson Magily asked very pointed questions including: Who decided on what the principles should be that we follow? At the time I had been affected enough by her comments which encouraged me to articulate my concerns however I did not follow through on what Magily had questioned.

In Lesson 18 entitled “Win or Lose” Nettie has two extra tickets to a concert, but her three friends all want to attend with her. Every solution is examined until Nettie decides to stay home and give all three tickets to her friends. Her friends decide that this is “lose-lose” thinking so they decide that all four of them will contribute to buying a fourth ticket so they can all go. Besides its oversimplification (Figure 33), why should Nettie contribute more to this arrangement? Surely her three friends could afford another ticket amongst themselves? Interestingly enough, while trying to accommodate her friends, Nettie ends up paying more than the others. Why should she be more submissive? Is it because she is a girl and/or African Canadian? Since media can negatively affect how children see themselves (hooks, 2003) why are these sorts of oversimplified pedagogical materials being allowed in schools? I wanted to discuss these issues with my grade seven students, but, instead, I asked them what they thought about the “win-win” concept. Many agreed that the deal was not fair, but unfortunately nobody went any further. Instead, they started filling out the attitude and behavior tests that follow the lesson. As teachers we must remember that “profound insight in any field of study may involve the apprehension of structures not attainable
at the explicate order of reality” (Kincheloe et al., 1999, p. 67). Had I done enough as a teacher to ensure that my students understood any hidden messages in the lesson? Although I provided a forum for them to discuss their concerns I did not go far enough to counter the general messages that were being provided. I had a workload and as a new teacher was unable to spend more time deconstructing the Go Program further. If the program was obligatory today I would ensure that the students create their own questions and answers to the quizzes.
1) This use of "natural" confused the students.  
   What is natural?  
2) Integrity is a principle.  
   True.  
3) Integrity is:  
   a. making things right for others.  
   b. initiating fast movement.  
   c. being true to feelings, values, and commitments.  
   d. being understood and telling the truth no matter what the outcome.  
4) Nettie was afraid to tell the dance committee she was a freshman because it would change the way they saw her. But when she snubbed Jack she felt worse. This story tells you that:  
   a. showing loyalty towards your friends is more important than trying to impress others.  
   b. Honesty is a principle that is valued highly in friendship.  
   c. Sticking by your friends will earn respect and admiration.  
   d. all of the above.  
5) When you abide by ________, you can play by life's rules and win.  
   a. principles  
   b. principals  
   c. homework  
   d. the rules of the game  
6) Nettie was disappointed in herself for the way she had treated Jack because ...  
   a. friendship and dishonesty  
   b. principles and disloyalty  
   c. honesty and loyalty  
   d. Planet Pizza and Dance Committee  
7) Living by principles enables you to open your eyes and see them at work around you.  
   a. True.  
   b. False.  
8) For every problem in life there is a principle that will solve it.  
   a. True.  
   b. False.  
9) Putting principles first is a key to becoming a person of character.  
   a. True.  
   b. False.  
   c. Nine out of ten times.  
10) Hard work is a principle.  
   a. True.  
   b. False.  
   c. Nine out of ten times.

**Figure 33:** Quiz 3 of Go Program (encouraging static thinking).
False Paradigms

The *Go Program* presents student learning as being monolithic and static. Students do not confront knowledge but are fed it by their school and society. The students are essentially left with no perspective as to where they are in relation to their thinking or acting. Not unlike Snow White who was provided with the poisonous apple by the witch, students are fed the world. To carry this analogy further, whether the students consume what they are given or refuse to, too many of them never actually examine the apple and what it represents. The *Go Program* uses secondary characters such as a basketball player named Dave and the school’s popular girl, Sandy. It is interesting that almost every student in this program represents a certain stereotype, yet the lessons do not discuss it. Dave’s character is used as an example of a person who excels only at sports. He has athletic ability but no brains or self-motivation. Sandy is used to describe the dangers of being a social butterfly. She is white, cute, blonde, and friendly with everyone. Besides the obvious racial overtones a critical teacher might go further to examine why the characters need to be shown in such a two-dimensional manner. In my notes (see Figure 33) I ask myself *why is this a “black or white issue?”* The answer to this question relates to the tendency of some people to put others into simplistically defined categories. Schools play a large role in reproducing class structures and part of this is ensuring that people’s identities are defined for them. The students were being fed a formulaic version of reality which they were then expected to accept and internalize, at least if they wanted to pass the next test. I then asked myself: isn’t it important to ask why the work is being done?*” (see Figure 33). As Kincheloe et al. (2004) notes “Perhaps by incorporating factors into the equation other than general stereotypes students might be enabled to explore theories and power relations thus enabling them to be poised on the very borders where our thought, action, and voice take form” (p. 257). For instance, although the *Go Program* claimed to present a neutral interpretation of past events, they were essentially only
presenting a traditional view of power relations which might have robbed students of the tools required to construct their own worldview since “such domination is often couched in the language of detachment and universality, wherein class, race, and gender position of the “knower” is ignored or presumed irrelevant” (Maher & Tetreault, 1997, p. 325).

The Go Program also asked students to change their paradigms (Go Program, 4.13). It mentions the need to adjust one’s point of view based on the situation one is in. In lesson four Kyra sits next to Z in a café. Z starts eating chips and Kyra is offended because she thinks they are hers. Only after returning home does she realize that the chips were really Z’s and that she had overreacted. The objective of this lesson is to teach the students to “find what they are missing and then do something about it” (Go Program, 4.1). Although the point of the lesson seems harmless at first, a culturally sensitive teacher might inquire as to why the students are not encouraged to look past the basic maxims and quotes they are provided with. For example, the situation with Kyra and Z is so simplistic that there might have been a number of lessons a student might have taken away from it however the Go program only provides one (which the students are forced to choose if they want to get the questions right). Pushing the students to examine their own paradigms but not those of the institutions around them is detrimental to their development. Identifying issues and considering questions like who is in control of dominant discourse is important for the young but not taken seriously by many educators (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). A teacher familiar with Critical AutoEthnography would be in a position, as I try always to be, to provide the students with the scaffolding needed to begin to find their own understanding of how they see the world.

Approximately four months after the start of the Go Program at my first school which implemented this program the company representative could not be reached. The vice principal told me that our school had basically been forgotten. It seems that despite the company having provided
the school with three DVD players, the school did not have the same number of televisions on which to watch the program. It also became apparent that the large majority of the students did not have access to a computer with the necessary internet connection at home. Could the lower economic status of our students have influenced the treatment that was given to the school once the initial workbooks were purchased? The vice principal had a reputation for having had the ability as a teacher and then as an administrator to create programs of learning in the schools that would keep the students at most risk in school. When I asked him if he thought class had a part to play in the equation he just looked at me and blinked. What he did not say was as powerful as anything he could have answered. Decreased spending on schools in addition to the de-skilling of teachers is opening the doors to the possibility of what McLaren refers to as a corporate assault on education. Unfortunately I have seen these so-called teacher proof educational programs increase in number over the last decade, but what sets the Go Program apart from the others is its attempts to define not just what but how a student thinks. This has taught me that teachers must be vigilant towards any new programs that are implemented without much discussion. It is important to stand up for what I think is best for the students even when the administration makes it obligatory. This does not mean ignoring what is assigned but rather ensuring that I do all that is possible to analyze what a program is claiming to done, whether it has been done elsewhere and with what level of success. In the case of the Go Program there was no follow up at the teacher level.
Back to the Future

It is not surprising that a company such as Covey would have used the Go Program to sell more agendas and school supplies. What is remarkable is the ease with which they were able to enter schools. Administrators are strapped for cash and teachers are tired of fighting back. Students are caught in the struggle. Parents were impressed when informed by the promises made by the Go Program claiming that children will become little self-managing successful machines (as long as everyone followed the program correctly). The Go Program moved away from producing situated knowledge that is aware of knowledge production and reception. Students were encouraged to view their classmates in terms of two-dimensional stereotypes. Whether implicit or explicit, students were prepared for a life where thinking and doing are different, and old meta-narratives are just replayed continuously.
Who decided?
1) Why are they asked such basic questions?
2) Could be the lens you see the world through
3) She felt guilty
4) Good!
5) The “lens”
6) Should you compromise your values?

Figure 34: Go Program Quiz 4 on Point of View
On quiz 4 that discusses point of view I wrote Good! (see Figure 34) next to question 4 which asks students to say whether the statement, “Our POV [point of view] will not limit how we see ourselves” is true or false. Although I agree that our POV is how we look at our world and ourselves it does not take into consideration what helps to constitute our point of view. The questions are developed in such a way that the students are given a few choices and asked to select one. Unfortunately, there is no recourse if none of the choices make sense to them. A teacher concerned with the students’ personal development should not just ignore the Go Program. Instead they should ensure that they give students the proper tools necessary to identify its limitations. I would later learn in reading the work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) that this type of so-called teacher proof curriculum does not serve students since it does not take the students themselves into consideration. My experience with this program solidified the notion within me that I needed to do more to ensure that my future students would not be exposed to these types of curriculum without being able to identify what to look out for. If it were not for the Go Program I might not have decided to resign from my job, move to Japan for two years and continue my graduate studies upon my return. Essentially I was looking for the academic language to be able to fight such oppressive curricula. The Go Program exemplifies the way in which positivist programs, both mandated and non-official, and their respective doctrines are infiltrating public schools.

**False Claims**

Positivist programs have shifted the focus away from the establishment of norms that are biased in favor of the governing classes; the reduction of learning to simple competencies (see Appendix A) without situating them in context favor students who have the means to gain that knowledge. For instance, public schools in Quebec have seen their funding diminish while private schools have continued to receive subsidies of up to 65% per student of what a public school receives (Cadotte,
In addition the reduction of learning to simple competencies (see Appendix A) without situating them in context favor students who have the means to gain that knowledge. This increased participation of the private sector in public education has led many schools to move away from providing education that develops the students’ critical consciousness, towards one that is merely a reproducer of the societal injustices. Understanding the association between knowledge and education is valuable to any educator. As a result of this experience I have been able to learn from what I had done in the past so that I can ensure that I am better prepared for similar situations.

I accept that factors such as social-economics and race do play a part in the development of learning. Traditional meta-narratives that unload much of their thought into a linear method of thinking, and as such identify (or marry themselves to) the importance of ultimate truths eventually, in my experience, let students down. It is essential to ensure that absolutes are seen to be what they are. For example, racial minorities are disproportionately represented at the lower levels of achievement on traditional standardized tests that are increasingly being given to grade school students in Quebec. Proponents of these exams, are the multinational companies that create them and certain government agencies that use these evaluations as a yardstick against which to measure all students equally, and without apparent discrimination. Once established and accepted, even the most proactive and caring teacher can fall victim to the attractiveness of simple explanations to complex issues. Programs such as *No Child Left Behind* in the United States shift the focus away from learning towards the establishment of norms that in turn are biased in favor of the governing white middle classes. These programs are slowly being introduced into Canada. In Quebec the education department recently introduced educational partnership agreements that focus on result-oriented procedures. Teaching canons, as I have repeatedly said, is an integral part of any education system, but this must be done critically (Magill, 1999). Unfortunately as Kincheloe et al. (2004) argued,
educators must walk though minefields of educational contradictions in contemporary pedagogical landscapes.

**Identifying the Power Dynamics**

Because they do not put enough emphasis on the teacher-self, the 12 core professional teaching competencies do not achieve what they ostensibly set out to do. The set criteria for teacher training does not take into consideration that difference “always exceeds singular categories since identities are already multiple and intersected” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 200). This chapter has dealt with the different forms that positivism has taken and the reasons why the educational reform has failed teachers and thus their students. The 12 core professional teaching competencies in the MELS program in Quebec do not come close to ensuring that teachers are both ready and conscious of the educational praxis needed to effect real change. This change must take into consideration that education is not neutral and that the banking method of knowledge and learning does not serve our schools or society. In the classroom when students ask what the point of school is, the answer I often gave was that they needed to be ready for society. I would respond to their inquiries that if they wanted to live a good life, they would need to have the tools necessary to get and keep a good job. The established educational pedagogy did not provide me with the tools required to ensure that the students understood that working hard does not necessarily lead to a good life. As a teacher early on in my career, I failed to recognize the social barriers that contributed to my own parents being held back in a particular socio-economic class. Instead, I promoted the general positivist view that everyone has an equal opportunity to become whatever he or she aspires to be. Teaching is already an emotionally demanding profession and, as primary agents in the educational domain, we must be armed with the tools necessary to identify the inequalities in society through self-reflection, mutual understanding, and the courage to engage in critical approaches to understanding the world we
Summary

Memory is key to this type of research since it enables us to look into how we can re-imagine ourselves, so that our change can have a positive effect on other people (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014). If the “fundamental purpose of memory work is to facilitate a heightened consciousness of how social forces and practices affect us” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012, p. 1) then using teaching texts as memory triggers becomes a valuable component to such heightened consciousness. The introduction of overtly behaviorist materials in the classroom is not a new concept but rather a repackaging of neoliberal concepts that have only increased their grasp on the public school system. In summary, this chapter functioned as a third research site, drawing on personal narrative and memory to examine the intersection between the official educational discourse in Quebec with the reality of classroom experiences and the impact this has on teachers and their teaching in public schools as well as its impact on me as a teacher and on my professional development. It looked at different ways in which neoliberal discourses are infiltrating the classroom through various avenues such as official government curricula as well as unofficially through private sector initiatives such as the Go Program. These experiences act as texts, which as McCloskey (2014) observes, can help to develop a critical awareness of social relations and power structures within society.
Discussion

This thesis undertook to demonstrate how recollections that develop through productive remembering can act as a gateway towards more depth into understanding one’s own personal and professional development, and thus improving one’s teaching. As I began this journey I quickly came to realize that it was not the result of my undertaking but the journey itself that would allow me a better understanding of my professional self. Personal narratives, through memory-work, set the stage for the situations that shaped my development and identity as a teacher and teacher researcher. The knowledge gained from venturing into the past can be useful to both pre-service and inservice educators.

As I frame it here, Critical AutoEthnography is concerned with the challenging of dominant practices in the educational domain that lead to the reinforcement and renewal of visible and hidden power relations. Many of the current education programs produce teachers who are not ready for the classroom realities since, as Kincheloe et al. (2004) explain, they have not yet developed a teacher persona that enables them to understand the various specific and general needs of their students and connect them to pedagogical strategies and goals. Teachers must be able to situate themselves within their own cultural power dynamics and be able to see themselves critically within the larger context of issues such as class. The educational reforms put forward in Quebec claim to prepare students and teachers for the future by being inclusive, culturally and socially relevant, and just (MELS, 2000). Those working in Critical Pedagogy warn that systems that claim to be neutral should be looked upon with suspicion (Kincheloe et al., 2004; McLaren 2015).
There are several ways in which the cultural political agenda which is not conducive to social justice education has begun to find its way into Quebec public schools. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, teachers as primary agents of such education are being neglected in the educational domain, and are being left out of the current educational formalist climate because they are being forced to comply with the current educational competencies that do not provide the opportunity for them, as teachers, to develop the skills that will better prepare them to deal with the realities of contemporary schools.

**Research Questions and How I Addressed Them**

When I began this journey I was guided by three main research questions. The first question asks how my memories shaped my identity, and how Narrative Inquiry could contribute to my personal and professional practice. As I began to look at these questions through personal narrative I formed new questions that focused on how the relationship between knowledge and education, power and society as well as the social policies relating to education and diversity in Quebec have influenced the development of my concept of self as a teacher and how has this has affected my teaching. Essentially, the overarching focus came to be on how I could, as a teacher researcher, construct a method that incorporated self-conscious reflexivity into the research I was about to undertake. Found at the junction of autoethnography and critical pedagogy, my notion of Critical AutoEthnography as a humane transformative force created a rich environment from which the excavation and processing of my personal and professional development (and that of other teachers) in relation to others as well as to their lived experiences could occur. It allows for the use of data to analyze and interpret one's cultural assumptions and their effect on one's development as a researcher teacher. My notion of Critical AutoEthnography in teaching incorporates memory work, self-study and the analysis of an example of popular culture (*Les Bougon*, in this case) and the
relationship between and among the social, cultural and political in the process of shaping teacher identity.

I then began to look at the second question: What is the relationship between knowledge and education, power and society, and how has it, along with the social policies related to education and diversity in Quebec, influenced my development as a teacher and influenced my teaching practice? I located my analysis within a Critical AutoEthnographic framework as a pedagogical theory and practice.

I undertook this study with the ideal of seeing how memories shaped my identity and how Narrative Inquiry could contribute to my personal development and to my teacher practice. Essentially, the overarching focus came to be on how I could, as a teacher researcher, construct a method that incorporated self-conscious reflexivity into the research I was about to undertake. Located at the junction of autoethnography and critical pedagogy, Critical AutoEthnography, as that humane transformative force to which I referred earlier in this chapter, creates the right environment in which the excavation and processing of one’s personal and professional development in relation to others as well as to their lived experiences can occur. It allows for the use of data to analyze and interpret one’s cultural assumptions and the effect of the development of these assumptions on one’s identity as a researcher teacher.

Lastly, as I dug even deeper, I asked the question: How could I draw upon autobiography, autoethnography, and memory-work in order to develop and examine my identity as a teacher? Understanding the experiences that have shaped us and how as teacher researchers we can construct a method that incorporates self-conscious reflexivity into the research begins by acknowledging as I did in Chapter One that we cannot ignore the world of our senses from who we become; who we are (Mitchell et al., 2011). As I have discussed in this thesis, identifying and incorporating memory
as pedagogy through the employment of autoethnographic narratives plays on the symbiotic relationship between the process and the product which in itself allows for the incorporation of one’s own voice within the research. It is this combination of personal narrative with the hermeneutic focus of critical pedagogy within the parameters of memory-work which, for me, established the need for a new subcategory within qualitative research that puts an equal emphasis on the self, other and culture, and which I call Critical AutoEthnography. This study holds at its core the idea that how we remember is an important as what we remember (Boym, 2001; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). My use of Narrative Inquiry through memory triggers in relation to photographs of my various homes and schools as artifacts, to the analysis of selected episodes of *Les Bougnon*, and to my revisiting classrooms in which I had to implement the *Go Program* so as to allow for a qualitative construction of understanding and knowledge (while avoiding the pitfalls of nostalgia) enabled me to begin to acknowledge that I could not ignore the embodied center from which I have constructed my idea of my past since it is part of who I have become. As I pointed out in Chapter Six, in almost the same words, identifying and incorporating memory as pedagogy through the employment of autoethnographic narratives allowed for the incorporation of my own voice within my research.

**Assessing My Critical AutoEthnography**

It is obvious that for any qualitative research there needs to be some way of assessing its truth value. As I note in Chapter Three, it was essential for me to look at how others have talked about assessing self-study and autoethnography. Scaffolded by Mokhele’s (2014) criteria for examining self-study action research projects which is set in a South African context and draws on the work of Samaras (2011) and Mitchell’s (in press) five criteria for assessing autoethnography which builds on the work of Adams et al. (2013), my study drew on various narratives that served to establish a full account of my own values and beliefs. In order to ensure that I provided my own insight into this thesis
I included several personal narratives that serve to establish a full account of my own values and beliefs. I used three memory sites as memory triggers (photographs, media, and teaching texts) in the process of engaging in what I have developed and called Critical AutoEthnography. These memory sites directed me to answer the question: What was the process that led to my knowing of self?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Addressing each criterion in my work</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The opinion and insights of the candidate should take priority over other people's knowledge.</td>
<td>In order to ensure that I have provided my own insight into the thesis I have included several narratives that serve to establish a full account of my own values and beliefs. These narratives are scaffolded by, but not exclusively reliant on, others for validity; this demonstrates that I was able to investigate my own behaviors with the goal of not only learning from this investigation but using it to shape and alter my current behaviors. For instance, in Chapter Four I discuss how my development of the concept of truth was altered given my experiences of having attended several schools as a young student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an obligation to demonstrate insight about self-study methodology</td>
<td>The use of three memory sites as memory triggers contributed to my building a clear and logical sequence (photographs, media, and teaching texts) of the processes that led to the development of my notion of Critical AutoEthnography. In doing this I drew on a variety of sources, in particular self-study and memory work, and on researchers such as Claudia Mitchell, Carolyn Ellis, and Anastasia Samaras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and social influence should form the primary goal of self-study projects.</td>
<td>My memory sites deal with educational and/or social influences, which led to the creation of a theory (in this case Critical AutoEthnography). For example, the reasons behind my attending different schools were mainly political on the part of the education authorities while the social economic class to which I belonged also shaped my personal and professional identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The self-study candidate should demonstrate knowledge creation and originality.</td>
<td>Self-study and Critical AutoEthnography allow for the use of data to analyze and interpret one’s cultural assumptions and their effect on one’s development as a researcher/teacher. Returning to teacher notes as well as a re-analysis of past teaching experiences and charting their impact on my teaching and learning demonstrates how Critical AutoEthnography is transformative, how it promotes humanization and how it acts as an appropriate tool for the excavation and processing of one’s professional and personal development in relation to others as well as to their lived experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role played by self in the problematic situation should be criteria candidates are held to.</td>
<td>The use of self as the starting point for inquiry into practice is explicit in my thesis. Issues and situations have been discussed from the standpoint of the I in my identity. Personal narratives and reflections upon these issues in relation to my development as a teacher have been used to bring out the personal bias I brought to the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Addressing each criterion in my work</td>
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| The self-study candidate should use a variety of sources and demonstrate that educational knowledge is not stagnant.  
(Mokhele, 2014, p. 10)                                                 | In drawing on autobiography, Narrative Inquiry, self-study, autoethnography, and critical pedagogy in order to inform my Critical AutoEthnography there is a balance of old and newer sources which has demonstrated that knowledge in this field has advanced tremendously over the last two decades. Critical AutoEthnography, by its very nature, cannot become stagnant since it is not a set way of doing things but rather an approach which takes into account a large number of methodologies underpinned by the conviction that research that is conducted, especially in teacher education, should lead to personal and professional development and to making the world a more humane place. My memory sites deal with educational and/or social events and influences that led to the creation of a theory (in this case Critical AutoEthnography). |
| Is the study doing something different?  
(Stewart, 2013, p. 659)                                                     | I used photographs of schools, an analysis of episodes of a television show, and teaching texts as memory triggers to help construct a Critical AutoEthnography of my teaching practice. I used Critical AutoEthnography to bring together all three memory sites as a way into a greater understanding of my professional development as a teacher and researcher. |
| Does it contribute to the ways that we address/build in/and critically engage with positionality in our research (including researching our teaching)?  
(Mitchell, in press)                                                      | I have moved back and forth from having been a student to currently being a teacher depending on the role I took at the time of each recollection. I identify and expand on three Narrative Inquiry approaches by looking at memory and story as pedagogical tools, focusing on place as identity marker, and on self-study as a form of professional development for teachers. |
| Does it contribute to the care with which we research and teach?  
(Mitchell, in press)                                                       | In one sense of contributing to such care I explicitly make it clear that my memories associated with the events discussed are themselves interpretations of events and should not be seen as perfectly accurate since all knowledge is situated. In another sense of ensuring such care, this has allowed me to gain greater self-awareness in relation to my teaching and to my practice with students. |
| Does the work promote and take concern for social justice?  
(Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2013, p. 669)                                  | I discussed the various ways in which teachers must question the why behind the how. Through my narratives I uncover the different techniques that are employed in discouraging true learning that is transformative and that promotes the development of a more just world. Since an equitable and just community is not necessarily an ethical and caring community (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004), incorporating the self into the research and identifying the power relations that are present in and outside of the classroom leads to education that is not only concerned with social justice but one that promotes it. |
| How does the study set up its own ‘call for action’ in relation to sustainability?  
(Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2013, p. 676)                                | I have highlighted the significance of self-study to Critical AutoEthnography and the importance of carrying this work out with pre-service and in-service teachers. For example in Chapter Two I discuss how Critical AutoEthnography can provide a way for teachers to come to accept that their own stories and the manner in which they undertook their journey of personal and professional identity does, and can be made, to count. |

*Figure 35: Criteria for assessing my work.*
Toward Better Teaching

Teacher researchers can revolutionize professional practice by viewing themselves as potentially the most sophisticated research instruments available. (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 52)

The above extract perfectly expresses the importance of well educated teachers looking towards themselves for the strength needed to improve their teaching and their students learning. Taken as a whole, then, my thesis responds to the criteria set down for work in self-study and in critical autoethnography. I have attempted to provide a forum in which dialogue that can make my teaching better can take place. I have tried to expose some of the ways in which power operates in our classrooms through both the official and non-official curricula. I have also highlighted the fact that fairness does not always promote true learning and, in some cases, acts to stifle it. This study is as much about the process as the product. The act of going back allowed me to understand my contemporary self so as to improve my future teaching.

Contributions to New Knowledge

Although Narrative Inquiry has become increasingly accepted as an appropriate and even necessary approach to teacher education some questions still persist: Is it research? Does it contribute to the knowledge base? Does this methodology represent good research? (Hamilton et al., 2008). As mentioned earlier in this thesis (see Chapter Two) Mitchell and Weber (1999) build on the work of Crawford et al. (1992), Haug (1987), Kuhn (1995), and Zandy (1995) to show that memory-work, like education itself, can be political. Teachers need to engage in memory-work in order to begin to identify and explore patterns that develop out of their own lived experiences. By returning to my past in order to better understand the present and future I have learned to become a better, more engaged, teacher. As Kirk (2009) wrote:
Reflexivity necessarily engages the self in critical exploration of experience, perceptions, and positions; the insight gained into these can then be used as a starting point for others, and for starting to develop shared understandings of educational issues and strategies to address them. (p. 124)

Self-study has allowed for a greater understanding of the nature of teaching and learning about teaching as well as aided in the development of a greater sense of professional pride (Kosnik et al., 2006). Returning to the three memory sites has enabled me to re-engage with the feelings that I had then and to see how these shaped my teacher self. I better understand now why I interact with students the way I do. I also better understand some of the biases that I have pertaining to my students that were brought to light as a result of this study. For instance, my initial belief that students need only to put in the time in an effort to do better in schools did not take into account that there might well be greater contextual issues going on behind the scenes that are causing these students to underperform. The three memory sites and their respective methodologies complemented the twelve core professional competencies for teachers as outlined by the Quebec Ministry of Education. I think that this all contributes to new knowledge and that other teacher researchers can use this approach to add to this store of new knowledge about teaching.

As O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000) observes:

One of the paradoxes of memory-work and self-study is that through the process of self-exploration we may move beyond ourselves becoming more aware of other people’s experiences and understanding how our stories are irretrievably connected to the stories of others. (p.200)

As Strong-Wilson (2013) observed, there is one approach:

...that focuses on phenomena with which productive remembering can usefully engage and another...which elaborates on various tools and methods for productive remembering. (p. 2)

For my personal narrative I was personally engaged in discovering which events and elements of my past have shaped me into the person and teacher I am today. Developing an
awareness of ourselves as learners can enable us to see what we can be (Loughran & Russell, 2002). In practical terms, personal narratives provide the opportunity for pre-service and in-service teachers to learn about themselves through their interaction with the lived stories of others. In addition, as a social and theoretical perspective my personal narrative contributes to the increasing body of literature in teacher education that is concerned with the teacher self as well as the elements from the past that, once better understood, can help shape the future teacher self. Having examined the landscape that has shaped the educational experiences in Quebec I have provided the context in which my experiences have contributed to the construction of my paradigm and theoretical framework as a teacher researcher.

Finally, the thesis makes an original contribution to the study of the impact of school closures on children. While the phenomenon of school closures is a critical one in rural areas, for example, in North America, along with closures in many urban settings as a result of shifting economic and social forces it is an area that remains understudied. In drawing on my own childhood experiences, and positioning this work in the context of teacher education, I offer an analysis that suggests that school closures may have lasting effects on children’s learning.

**Implications For Further Research**

Although my focus has been on class it could have equally been on gender, sexuality, race or age. All of these areas could provide for further study in this area using Critical AutoEthnography. Understanding the methodological I comes about after we have questioned, discovered, framed, reframed and revisited our past (Ellis, 2004; Samaras & Freese, 2006). Some researchers use the “I” to demonstrate a struggle to “rescue...[and clarify the] historic multiplicity of the autobiographical act” (Zandy, 1995, p. 4). Since “memory-work is underpinned by the premise that memories play a fundamental role in current individual and collective patterns of thought and action” (Pithouse,
it is essential that we look at both the product and the process of teaching. If pedagogy is defined as more than just teaching (Van Manen, 1989) and, rather, as the art and science of educating children then learning cannot occur without well thought out and purposeful teaching (Loughran, 2006). My research looked into the use of photographs, a television series, and teaching texts, but its methodology could be applied to other areas of qualitative research. For instance, case studies of new teachers’ expectations as opposed to the reality they encounter can be used to encourage teacher self-actualization. Narrative Inquiry drawing on teacher or student material can be used to aid in a better understanding of the learning relationship between teacher and student and/or teacher and self. Returning to the memories pertaining to my schooling has led to the uncovering of new memories, and I have tried to investigate what these memories say about my teaching identity. In addition, looking through my past notes has uncovered new materials that can be used as memory triggers which themselves can be used to extrude valuable information regarding my teaching, and my students’ learning. Employing self-study methodologies to rediscover the critical events that have shaped and transformed my teaching helped me uncover other areas of interest.

**Limitations**

The limitations of a Critical AutoEthnography pertain mostly to its hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research which can be rightly seen as an attack on Western concepts of truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Although Critical AutoEthnography could be seen as being too artful and not scientific (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010) it should be seen as a method that is connected to the concept that educational research should have as its focus the goal of improving our society.

There are, of course, limitations in relation to the actual ‘doing’ of Critical AutoEthnography, especially in relation to ‘how long’ and ‘how deep’. During my study of *Les Bougon*, for example I focus on a limited number of episodes which acted as memory triggers in
order to provide me with the data necessary for my study. I drew from only two years’ work with
the *Go Program* (see Chapter Six) which could perhaps be seen as a limitation. However, teaching
the program about 6 years apart and in different contexts allowed me to study the manner in which
these one-size-fits-all programs do not in fact reach all but provide, rather, formulaic expectations of
how the students should think.

Finally, I acknowledge that self-study typically involves working with other people in
collaborative ways. Samaras (2002) refers to these people as critical friends. As previously mentioned
in Chapter Three, my supervisor offered the critical engagement for this Critical AutoEthnography.

**Towards a Framework for Critical AutoEthnography and Teacher Education**

In this last section of the thesis I look first at the usefulness of development education which looks
at the structural causes of poverty and reflective teaching in relation to Critical AutoEthnography
within the context of teacher education. One of the major themes underpinning this thesis relates
to how my socio-economic class has affected my personal and professional identity. Framing my
journey was the overarching concern for finding connections between the self, other and culture.
I contrasted what I learned in this study with the method in which the core professional teacher
competencies were implemented and their effect on teacher and student learning, and propose an
alternative. I end by establishing the importance of not losing one’s identity in the research journey
but instead using it to strengthen oneself. I offer here six propositions for thinking about Critical
AutoEthnography and teaching.
Proposition One: Development Education and Reflective Teaching

Development education focuses on the praxis, which through reflection and action can be directed (Freire, 1970; McCloskey 2014). I am interested in development education since it is committed to the transformative power of education that can counter the unchecked neoliberalism that is currently doing an injustice to our world. Borrowing on the tenets of Marxist theorists as well as on Freire, development education focuses on preparing us for the realities of an increasingly globalized world. One of the main themes of my thesis is related to how I place myself within my pedagogical theory and practice and how can this be researched using Critical AutoEthnography. Certain forms of learning such as development education argue that in order to address the structural causes of poverty it is essential for teachers to gain a critical awareness of the social relations and power structures within the specific society in which they find themselves (Andreotti, 2006; McCloskey, 2014). Looking at education from the perspective of class struggle enables teachers to address issues of social economics so that a real examination of the effects of media and government policies can be analyzed. In the context of this study, through Critical AutoEthnography, I have examined some of the power structures that occurred in and out of the classroom, which, after analysis, lead me to better understand my students’ realities and thus teach for social justice. As I have already had cause to mention more than once, in Quebec, the Ministry of Education has attempted to produce a list of core professional teaching competencies (see Appendix A) that are intended to improve teacher learning but I question whether these really promote reflective teaching or just contribute to the reproduction of the current reality.

Reflective teaching puts the emphasis on the self in order to come to understand one’s role in a modern, democratic society (Calderhead, 1989; Game & Metcalf, 2011; Zeichner & Liston; 2014). Reflective teaching builds on previous educational traditions ranging from the conservative
to the radical with a focus on examining the thoughts that are brought to our teaching as well as the processes that are selected while we are teaching (Zeichner & Liston; 2014). A combination of this approach with that of development learning (as defined above) enables teacher researchers to study the self with the goal of understanding where they stand in relation to the context in which they teach. Critical AutoEthnography can play a role in ensuring that integrity and wholeness, through a firm understanding of the role of teacher identity, remain part of the educational experience.

**Proposition Two: Critical AutoEthnography is a Viable Alternative to a Teacher Competencies Model**

How can Critical AutoEthnography help to address the concerns discussed in this thesis in order to have an impact on teaching, learning, and personal development? I was particularly interested in the question of teacher competencies and the relationship between the social, cultural and political in shaping teacher identity. There is a need for teachers to deal with the context in which education takes place, the forces that have shaped schooling and its purposes, the power dynamics that are at play as well as the importance of constructing a transformative classroom that promotes social justice (Kincheloe et al., 2004). As an alternative to mainstream research, Critical AutoEthnography encourages and highlights the teacher researcher’s subjectivity rather than ignoring it. Questions such as whose voices are privileged in the classroom are not ignored but accepted as part of the ideal of reflexivity. Whereas more traditional forms of data collection such as surveys, computer simulations, and discourse analysis are often used as a foundation in traditional research and writing, increasingly there is research that argues that these orthodox methods have constrained the range of questions researchers ask about emotions and, consequently, the answers likely to be found (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). As a student teacher I purposely ignored many facets of my personal experience in completing my course assignments because they were treated as irrelevant in the professional
training that I had received. With the exception of some classes that dealt with specific policies I learned to adapt my academic journaling to reflect the reality that I thought the professor expected of me. Critical AutoEthnography, which accepts the significance of the social self as text and the self in relation to others as a site for social inquiry, as well as in relation to social policy (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Molestane, 2009) is opposed to this practice of meeting evaluation standards based on the expectations of one’s examiners. Critical AutoEthnography is, by its very nature, concerned with social justice; “the potential for linking self-study and social policy is rich and, we might add, radical in relation to linking the personal and the social” (Pithouse et. al., 2009, p. 18).

Some of the questions pertinent to replacing teacher competencies with a Critical AutoEthnographic approach to teaching would include the following:

• Which elements of my cultural and socio-economic background played a role in the development of my general classroom knowledge and morality?

• Should the curriculum always be presented in the same way regardless of the teacher’s background?

• Have my classroom practices contributed to reinforcing the language of objectivity? Have my classroom (cultural/ethnic) assumptions contributed to oppressing students and fellow teachers from other cultures?

• How have my experiences in formal and informal education tainted the manner in which I see the world?

• How have my experiences of other cultures affected my teacher identity and practice?

• How have the relationships between knowledge and education, and between power and society, as well as the social policies relating to education and diversity in Quebec influenced the development of my concept of self and how has this affected my
teaching?

• How have different academics and researchers shaped my worldview and how are they connected to the development of my teacher self?

What role did the teacher competencies play in the formation of my teacher self?

All these questions relate to the central one: How do I place myself within my pedagogical theory and practice and how can this be researched and uncovered using Critical AutoEthnography?

**Proposition Three: A Critical AutoEthnographic Model (as Opposed to a Teacher Competencies) Addresses the Context of Learning**

A lack of understanding about the larger context in which we teach leads teachers to maintain and reinforce current power relations because, as Freire (1970, 1974, 1997) insists, once the oppressor has taken hold of a particular population, it is not uncommon for the oppressed to underestimate the force of this power, and, even, to ignore the oppressor in the oppressed. In other words, the permeation of the dominant discourse is total and takes on several forms that are, in this case, transmitted through the education system. Teachers must learn to identify their own place within a particular reality, as well as understand that the oppressor is continually influencing their reality. Critical AutoEthnography is not a specific method of teaching or being but is, rather, an acceptance that social change via social justice is needed and possible, and that informed intellect is encouraged. These core professional teaching competencies do not take individual context into account as does Critical AutoEthnography.
Proposition Four: Quebec’s Insistence On Seeing Education as a Science Fails to Acknowledge the Role of Subjectivity

Situating my project within the context of Quebec allowed me to reference, specifically, my autobiography as a student and teacher in order to incorporate memory as pedagogy. Positivist thinking encourages the idea that parameters such as class, race, gender, sexual preference, age, mental and physical health and so on should be studied as separate manifestations of self-identified conditions. In Chapter One I asked the question: Who are the people who have influenced my journey? I have discussed the various people I encountered throughout my journey who have had an important influence over me. In the late 1980s, Montreal historian Lise Noël stressed that in order for Quebecers to ensure a more humane society, it was imperative that researchers and teachers work towards bringing together several approaches to learning and thinking in order to find a common ground. In her book *Intolerance: A General Study*, Noël (1994) argued that those same parameters should be looked at in a comparative interdisciplinary manner that encourages solidarity of action. The educational reform has attempted to look at education as a science and has thus hidden itself behind the veil of objectivity.

Noël’s study of the critical consciousness of Quebec is both thorough and unique. Since her work was published more local researchers such as Baillargeon (2009) and Cadotte (2012) have demonstrated that the current educational reform is not only ineffective but also harmful to our students. Their examination of the relationship of the dominator and dominated at different levels as well as the concept of emancipation has been overlooked in English Quebec and the rest of North America mostly because of the language barrier. Noël examines how issues of power and socio-economic inequalities are maintained and reinforced. Baillargeon (2009) argues that there is a need for an increased foundation in philosophy and reading for teachers, and Cadotte (2012)
points out the effects of ignoring the cultural and historical context of education on our Quebec schools. All these researchers are reacting to the manner in which positivist forces that assume that knowledge included on standardized tests is neutral and objective (Kincheloe, 2008a), are being reintroduced into Quebec at a time when the province is experiencing a rebirth in educational policy. Increasingly, public educational policies are coming under pressure to better prepare students for the new social, cultural and technological pressures that are seen as essential to ensure student success in society.

Teacher competencies should aim to encourage teachers to identify how the so-called historic truths, laws of nature, will of God, the imperatives of knowledge, criteria for art, and force of language are employed in order to dominate the oppressed (Noël, 1994). For instance, none of the current competencies requires teachers to discuss how the language of objectivity is used to ensure that religion and sin, law and crime, science and anomaly and the implicit rules of discourse are employed to keep the oppressed in their place. Teachers are instead provided with projects that expect them to deal with issues in compartmentalized ways such as organizing and holding multicultural or anti-bullying days, which oversimplify complex social, racial, and cultural issues. These are activities that fail to describe the subversive tactics that are used to alter the self-identity of the oppressed through the objectifying of the body, treating the oppressed as an abstraction, as well as encouraging a pedagogy of guilt. Contrary to contemporary critical pedagogues, Noël draws her influence almost exclusively from European academics in fields ranging from psychology to child studies and applies their work to a Quebecois context. Her ability to demystify the concept of universal discourse by breaking down the various aspects of social and cultural repression make her work conducive to the concept of conscientization as espoused by Freire. The dominated need to learn about their repression and speak out so that they may begin to gain the power necessary
to emancipate themselves. Whereas both Noël and Freire argue that once emancipation is obtained it is important to ensure that we continue to work to alleviate suffering in the world, Noël does not clearly state that a particular group must ensure they do not fall victim to the same oppressive behavior that had originally served to keep them in their place. Freire also states that critical pedagogues need to be optimistic and thus weary of fatalist attitudes (1970). Noël, however, does not share the same optimism and laments that because we can never really be aware of “the scope of...suffering...the struggle for tolerance can never really end” (Noël, 1994, p. 239).

Proposition Five: Critical AutoEthnography in Relation to Integrity as Wholeness

Other scholars such as bell hooks (2009) point to the connection between class, race, and gender in the creation and maintaining of oppression. “Critical thinking involves first discovering the who, what, when, where, and how of things, using knowledge in a matter that allows you to determine what matters most” (p. 9). Common sense that is based on a strong foundation is a necessary component to understanding the complexities of the world. Her earlier work on how class privilege mediates and shapes perceptions about race, especially in relation to Black children, can be applied to a study of how any oppressed groups are kept in place. In order for students to learn best, teachers need to try their hardest to ensure that there is a relationship with each student (hooks, 2003). The ability of hooks to study her own experiences in order to construct her reality is relevant to Critical AutoEthnography. Issues such as normalized violence and the omission of balanced teaching lead the oppressed into a corner from which their only exit is adhering to the “profound cynicism [which] is at the core of dominant culture(s)” (hooks, 2003, p. 11). One’s story should not be ignored but rather embraced and shared. Sharing one’s perspective through narrating one’s story and contributing to real conversation is something that both hooks and Freire saw as being
central to any learning environment. Unlike Bloom (1987) who feels that teachers should be able to make claims of superiority, hooks accepts the importance of a teacher’s incorporating the student’s journey into his or her worldview. In fact, hooks mentions that students stop learning when they feel that the content is no longer relevant to their lives and if the ways in which they are taught do not take them into consideration (hooks, 2003).

Proposition Six: Knowing Who We Are as Teachers Can Lead to Better Teaching

When teachers are asked to withhold their own identity from the classroom, there is the risk that there is, in a sense, a single common identity. In her autoethnography in which Tilly-Labbs (2011) looks at her positioning and repositioning of the self in relation to moving between two different classes, in her work she notes through narrative that there is “[m]ore social inequality just disguised a little better” (p. 712). Knowing where we come from and how it has affected us is a good way to becoming a better teacher who can better relate to his or her students. When students are presented with teachers who identify themselves as members of a single homogeneous group, they may be unduly influenced by what is presented to them. Students might not be able to understand and relate to the teacher as being a complex multifaceted individual. Ira Shor (1992) mentions the importance of using personal narratives in our teaching. Teachers who use these often encounter less resistance from students who then can connect the topical themes to their own experiences. Having teachers share their background has a significant effect on students in providing them with a concrete example of the varying and diverging backgrounds of individuals. Besides religion, race, nationality, and (cultural) appearances, there are other elements teachers may want to share if they deem this beneficial to the students. Teachers are increasingly asked to deal with more diverse classrooms without necessarily getting more training or help in the classroom. In Quebec
public schools, the number of teachers on long-term disability because of burnout has increased dramatically among both new and veteran teachers (CBC News, 2006). If teachers were given the tools to better understand the different power relations that are operating in schools they could more efficiently deal with the elements of the system that are not conducive to social justice. Critical AutoEthnography as a form of teacher orientation can act as a bridge between the challenges of everyday classroom realities and a more just world by providing teachers with the tools needed to change the system.

**Significance of This Framework**

Taken together these six propositions aim to ensure that teachers’ personal and professional development is conducted in a manner that acknowledges the role that their identity plays in the learning process. Critical AutoEthnography can work towards producing research that keeps integrity, wholeness, and identity central to the educational experience. Teachers’ acknowledgement of the context in which teaching and learning occurs while highlighting their own subjectivity can make learning more effective. Social change is needed, and teachers can lead the way towards a more just world. Although my study is situated in my experiences in Quebec, it deals with overarching themes that could be applied everywhere. Inspired by the concern to make students feel part of the educational process through incorporating their stories into their teaching, teachers can establish integrity and wholeness into the process of educating students. Providing teachers with the tools necessary to identify the oppressive power relations in which they operate so as to enable them to counter the traditional narratives and find the value in their own stories, so that they can teach towards social justice and a more equitable world can be done through Critical AutoEthnography.
Final Reflections

I did not choose to engage in Critical AutoEthnography, Critical AutoEthnography chose me. I contend that both academic and teacher knowledge should be founded on the understanding that the stories that we tell are as important as the events and facts that make them personal and real to us. I employed Narrative Inquiry using a Critical AutoEthnographic approach with the intention of finding answers pertaining to my development as a teacher; instead I uncovered more questions about how memory shaped my identity and made me into the teacher I am today. Going back can bring both positive and negative episodes from our past to light. One must proceed with caution when undertaking a Critical AutoEthnographic study since it often puts one, as the researcher, face-to-face with the elements of one’s past that have shaped one’s current identity and this can be disturbing. Teachers who take the time to look back can not only improve their teaching, they can also equip themselves with the contextual tools they need to shape their own realities. I chose three memory sites, but there could be, and are, many more.

Teachers’ professional autonomy is being chipped away at an alarming rate in North America. Teachers can use Critical AutoEthnography to prepare themselves so as to ensure that their students are provided with the necessary skills to become autonomous, thinking, and humane individuals. Teachers, after all, are former students who offer the potential for hope for educational and societal renewal.
References


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Appendix A: Core Professional Competencies for the Teaching Profession

1. To act as a professional inheritor, critic and interpreter of knowledge or culture when teaching students.

2. To communicate clearly in the language of instruction, both orally and in writing, using correct grammar, in various contexts related to teaching.

3. To develop teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study.

4. To pilot teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and to the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study.

5. To evaluate student progress in learning the subject content and mastering the related competencies.

6. To plan, organize and supervise a class in such a way as to promote students’ learning and social development.

7. To adapt his or her teaching to the needs and characteristics of students with learning disabilities, social maladjustments or handicaps.

8. To integrate information and communications technologies (ICT) in the preparation and delivery of teaching/learning activities and for instructional management and professional development purposes.
9. To cooperate with school staff, parents, partners in the community and students in pursuing the educational objectives of the school.

10. To cooperate with members of the teaching team in carrying out tasks involving the development and evaluation of the competencies targeted in the programs of study, taking into account the students concerned.

11. To engage in professional development individually and with others.

12. To demonstrate ethical and responsible professional behaviour in the performance of his or her duties.