

**MARK ME:
STUDENT IDENTITIES IN AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

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Submitted in June 2008 in fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD in Education

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TABLES OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used for titles of policy documents:

<i>PSP</i>	<i>Public School Program</i> (published 1999 by Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture)
<i>Foundation</i>	<i>Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum</i> (published 1996 by Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation)
<i>ELA</i>	<i>English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 7-9</i> (published 1997 by Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation)

Abbreviations used for organizations:

APEF	Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation
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Other abbreviations:

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
IDU	Interdisciplinary Unit
PMI	Plus, Minus, Interesting

SUMMARY

This is a study of the constitution of adolescents' identity through authentic assessment experiences in my Grade 8 homeroom English class in a rural school in Nova Scotia, Canada. It combines poststructuralist theory with practitioner research and examines how young people, through authentic assessment, constituted identities in my classroom to be assessed.

As someone who was an enthusiastic user of authentic assessment, I became suspicious of its effects on students and began to wonder if it differed from traditional assessment practices. I also questioned if the students, through the authentic assessment events in my classroom, constituted identities to suit me. Therefore, my research question asked *how are young people's identities constituted in my classroom through authentic assessment practices?* I explored ideal subject positions in assessment policies and in my classroom program, and how they played out in what the students did to constitute identities.

To help create distance from my everyday classroom perspective as a teacher, I designed a methodology with three lenses: practitioner research, qualitative methods, and critical discourse analysis. This process involved analysing four types of data: assessment policies, data from the classroom program, reflective data from students, and my research journal. The analysis led to three key findings concerning the constitution of students' identities in my classroom.

The first finding was that authentic assessment in my classroom shaped school work as identity work. This was an important finding because the authentic assessment literature and the policies in this study do not take into account the constitution of students' identities and do not address the hidden effects of power in authentic assessment practices. Authentic assessment in my classroom raised the stakes of assessment because I was marking the student's whole self and not simply their specific knowledge and skills in English.

The second finding was that one way that identities were constituted was by students lining up the self with teacher and curricular expectations. The authentic assessment practices in the classroom were explicit about these expectations with students as well as how their marks were generated. This process meant that authentic assessment in my classroom was powerful in persuading young people

about the kind of person that they needed to be and in general, young people aligned themselves with these expectations.

The third finding was that authentic assessment made schooling engaging for most of the students in my classroom because it connected school work with their interests. In a time when young people are resisting schooling, my study has shown how students in a relatively poor and rural education were engaged and successful at school. That being said, while authentic assessment has great potential for working with young people, not all students in my classroom were engaged. In addition, there are dangers that authentic assessment may unknowingly promote the formation of uncritical and flexible subjects ideally suited to neo-liberal discourses.

I conclude by suggesting that the field of authentic assessment needs to acknowledge its connections with the formation of student identity and address itself to the social and political challenges of that work.

DECLARATION

I declare that:

1. this thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university;
2. to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

Signed _____

Date _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Associate Professor Phil Cormack, Director of the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures, for supervising my work. Phil has offered encouragement and advice and has been an exemplary mentor. He has modelled what it means to be a specific intellectual with ethical concerns in today's world and has been an inspiring teacher about the constitution of identity.

I thank my colleague and friend Meredith Greene for her intellectual criticism and generous support of my academic work.

I thank the students and parents who were involved in this research for being such enthusiastic learners and for allowing me to be a learner with them.

Finally, I thank my family and friends for their continued support. Their love, patience, and understanding provided me time to complete this thesis.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the profession of teaching and to those who have involved me in their assessment practices. The list below includes the names of public school teachers and university professors that I can recall from my formal education. It does not include piano teachers, swim instructors, Boy Scout leaders, saxophone instructors, choir and band directors, ski coaches, art instructors, professional mentors, cooking advisors, correspondence and short course instructors, and numerous others who have contributed to my education outside of classrooms. Thank you, teachers everywhere.

Public school teachers:

Elsie Baxter, Shannon Dickie, Wayde Hitchcock, Carolyn McLellan, Lorianne Legere, Debra Frenette, Cynthia Cameron, Dennis Arbuckle, Leslie Smith, Karen Angel, Jeanne Milner, Murtle Miller, G. Murphy, Mary Tobin, David Van Zoost, Carol Finbow, Bob Howell, Gary Chapman, Doug Nevin, Dave Pos, Jack Stevens, Stan Davis, Joan Cameron, Eileen Mantz, Carolyn Ames, Mike Roach, Brenda Porter, Elizabeth Thompson, Rick d'Entremont, Marilyn LeBlanc, Mary Jane Beatty, Christine Webber, Brian Jones, Harry Wilkes, Dave Slade, Dave Oram, Dave Fullerton, Dave Bradley, and Brian Bauld.

University professors:

Dan Patridge, Peter Sianchuk, Ian Hutchinson, Roger Wehrell, Paul Berry, Frank Strain, Roland Crooks, Neville Ralph, Gordon Fullerton, Robert Sealy, Stephanie Ségard, Paul Patterson, Thorir Ibsen, George Cowley, Eric Domville, James Alsop, Wes Cragg, Andrée Lotey, Michael Corbitt, Boris Dekster, Marvin Krank, Wendy Burnett, Arthur Millar, Terrance Craig, Michael Thorpe, Mark Blagrove, Roger Calkins, Donald Cross, Arthur Motyer, Heather Jones, Eldon Hay, Brian McMillan, Lex Wilson, Pat Lafford, Gerry Hopkirk, Ivan Cassidy, Margaret Brown, Michael Phillips, J.R. Harris, Jim Fasano, Heather Hemming, Susan Church, John Sumarah, and Phil Cormack.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRACTITIONER'S PROBLEM

Oh, oobee doo
I wanna be like you
I wanna walk like you
Talk like you, too
You'll see it's true
An ape like me
Can learn to be human too
(Sherman & Sherman, 1967)

So there I was, standing in a middle school's computer room at the end of the 1997-98 school year watching twenty-seven adolescent students type into the keyboards answers to questions they had raised about the concept of relationships. This was the final good copy of their weeklong Grade 8 English Language Arts Process Exam. The students had discussed and requested to type their insights and to have music playing in the background, and so I found myself assuming the role of a DJ to the students' music as I surveyed the class. This disengaged position felt uncomfortable to me. It seemed as if the students no longer needed me as their teacher and my role was relinquished to observation. The school year that led to such a position was marked with a process of adolescents assuming increasing amounts of "control" of the curriculum in our classroom as we experimented with authentic assessment.

Archibald and Newmann (1988, p. 1, original emphasis) see "authenticity" as the key to what they call "valid" assessment: "A valid assessment system provides information about the particular tasks on which students succeed or fail, but more important, it also presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful - in short, *authentic*." What was characteristically "authentic" about the assessment tools used in my classroom was the *involvement* of students before, during, and after the assessment event. Student involvement created opportunities for understanding what tasks were considered "worthwhile, significant, and meaningful" for students. I was interested in assessment experiences that were conducted *with* and *for* students, not those that were done *to* them. From

September to December, we explored multiple assessment tools and practiced developing rubrics as a whole class and in small groups (these assessment tools are presented in detail in Chapter 5). From January to March the students contracted for grades, suggesting the nature, percentage weight, and the assessment criteria of their assignments. In March, during a class meeting initiated and conducted by the students, they requested to have “complete control” over their assessment. From late March to June, the students prepared and then negotiated with me their own assessment tools in advance of beginning their assignments. The Process Exam asked students to respond to their own question(s) about relationships, using the numerous print and non-print texts that we had chosen to explore throughout the term. However, like Dudley-Marling (1997, p. 77), I found that “offering students some measure of control over their learning...wasn’t always as straightforward as I imagined.”

Something occurred as I watched these adolescents type methodically on the keyboards: I noticed how some of the students’ vocabularies reflected my own choice of words. Concepts such as “context,” “complexities,” “visual literacy,” and the proliferation of questions (emphasized in my thinking) appeared in the students’ writing. I wondered how much of the students’ writing was their own? I had experienced what Hill and Ruptic (1994, p. 25) report: “Involving students in setting criteria and evaluating progress is challenging, but highly rewarding.” My teaching, as well as my research intentions, aimed to “develop learners who are active participants in their learning” (van Kraayenoord & Moni, 1997, p. 38). At the end of my fourth year of teaching, in a moment when a form of celebration of the year’s work should have been at the forefront of my mind, I found myself questioning the paradoxical position of students in authentic assessment. I questioned how much I understood the complexities of students’ identities during the process of authentic assessment. What kinds of selves were students creating through authentic assessment as they made curricular decisions? Making the irony more blatant, Disney World’s music, “I Wanna Be Like You” was playing in the room, and the students sang along as they typed.

This moment was the impetus for this research. My interest in assessment moved from technical questions to those of a broader philosophical nature. Up until this point in my teaching career, I had focused my professional attention on how to conduct a specific assessment event. After the Process Exam of June 1998, I became interested in how students were making decisions within the assessment events in my classroom. Rather than thinking about what students were *able* to do, I became curious about what they were *enabled* to do. I came to see authentic assessment practices –

those that embrace the involvement of students – as events that did work on students to constitute their selves in particular ways. My research problem was to examine how students' identities were constituted by authentic assessment practices and the work of this research was to demonstrate how questions from the classroom become theorized, re-conceptualized, and contribute to our knowledge of educational practices.

This thesis “seeks to bring the theoretical story to life” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997, pp. 21-22) by richly portraying the authentic assessment practices in my classroom. My initial interest in this research was formed in these contexts and I describe them as a practitioner. I use literature and data throughout the thesis to assist in this process, rather than restricting their references to select chapters. I aimed to “develop an intellectual style of writing that engages the broad public” (Tierney, 2000, p. 190) so that this writing can be used by other teaching practitioners. Because this thesis is intended to be a practical text, thick descriptions of my assessment approaches and my professional background that fostered interest in these approaches are required. I am conscious of writing engaging descriptions of students in the classroom so that other practitioners may use this research to reflect on their classroom practices. I seek to bring the “theoretical story to life” because this reflects what I believe is an important part of being a professional – to reflect on practice in efforts to find alternative ways of teaching and working with young people. I do this in the intentional structure of the work; I entwine practice and theory. Throughout the writing, I was conscious of demonstrating how theory was useful for understanding young people and classroom assessment events and wanted to make this connection accessible for a wide readership of practitioners. As hooks (1994, p. 64) writes, “Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public.” It was through this colliding of wor(l)ds, theory and practices, that this research was produced.

To understand the contexts of this research better, I begin this chapter by presenting the claims embedded in the literature of authentic assessment. This is where I began my thinking about authentic assessment. It is important for me to clarify what is meant by the term “authentic assessment” because the terms “authentic assessment,” “alternative assessment,” and “performance assessment” are often used interchangeably and Worthen (1993) considers this to be one of the challenges in the field. The literature offers diverse definitions of authentic assessment (Burke, 1999; Worthen, 1993), but all of these assessment practices imply that students will experience something

“authentic.” Wiggins (1998, pp. 22, 24, original emphasis) proposes six standards that determine an assessment task, problem, or project to be authentic if it:

1. is realistic,
2. requires [student] judgement and innovation,
3. asks the student to “do” the subject,
4. replicates or simulates the *context* in which adults are “tested” in the workplace, in civic life, and in personal life,
5. assesses the student’s ability to efficiently and effectively use a repertoire of knowledge and skill to negotiate a complex task,
6. allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback on and refine performances and products.

What these standards emphasize is that student involvement is required to ensure that assessment events will be “worthwhile, significant, and meaningful” (Archbald & Newmann, 1988, p. 1) to their learning, and therefore, “authentic.” The following quotation from Schmidt and Plue (2000, p. 14) illustrates the way that authentic assessment approaches emphasise engagement, activity and process above products and grades:

Alternative assessments are often designed to motivate students to take more responsibility for their own learning, to make assessment an integral part of the learning experience itself and to embed the process in authentic learning activities based on higher order thinking skills (e.g., investigation, problem-solving, persuasive writing, etc.).

The goal to involve students in classroom assessment practices is consistent with other recent trends in education such as the use of assessment during instruction, student self-assessment, and the assessment of knowledge and skills together (McMillan, 2004). By involving students in all aspects of assessment, they understand how they are being assessed thereby increase their commitment and achievement (McMillan, 2004). As Anne Davies (2008, p. 23) explains, “Deep student involvement in the classroom assessment process is needed if students are to learn and achieve at high levels.”

I define the term “authentic assessment” as the family of practices that embraces students as significant designers and participants in assessment events. Students’ involvement in authentic assessment includes the assessment of their own skills, the incorporation of student interests into assessment events, and the student use of the assessment results. This definition of authentic assessment is congruent with the work of Stiggins (2008), who is concerned about involving students in assessment practices. I believe that this is a productive way of characterizing authentic assessment because it signals that students’ lives beyond the classroom are emphasized in the

assessment practices and encourages students' participation in determining what is relevant for their lives.

Most of the authentic assessment literature is based on an assumption that it is possible to get at the “real” identities of students – that students' identities are unproblematic and “authentic.” Furthermore, the authentic assessment literature often refers to a “real-world” unproblematically. The intention of this phrase in the literature is to reference the world beyond school experiences. When I use this phrase I place it in quotation marks to signal that the phrase denotes an assumption that the world beyond school is “real,” and conversely that the world of school is perhaps artificial, or in some way “not real.” As will be shown in later chapters, I also began my work in authentic assessment with this unproblematic view of the “real-world.” This research challenged my understanding of the “real-world” and authentic assessment in my classroom. An important rationale for my research problem is that it troubles the assumptions of an “authentic” identity that is assessed in the classroom. To date, the authentic assessment literature has ignored the complexities of asking students to bring their lives from outside of school into school.

The authentic assessment literature appealed to me as a practitioner because it offered ways of working with young people that were engaging and, as I thought at the time, could help students who may not have typically been successful in school. As we will see over the course of this research, my position about authentic assessment changed. To help readers understand how a practitioner's stance on classroom practice changes, I include a section in this chapter about what it means to research my own classroom practices.

The data for this research were generated during my seventh year of teaching, 2000-2001, in a Grade 8 English Language Arts classroom in Nova Scotia, Canada. My classroom practices at the time were contextualized by the assessment environment surrounding this research, the location of the research in rural Atlantic Canada, and my placement as a teacher in a classroom at Nova Middle School¹. These contextual factors shaped what was made possible in my classroom, as well as the way in which I viewed authentic assessment practices. My interest in researching what sort of student selves were made possible in my version of authentic assessment practices emerged from these contexts and I present them later in this chapter.

¹ Nova Middle School is a pseudo name for the school involved in this research. I also use pseudonyms for all of the students, parents, and colleagues involved in this research.

1.1 Challenging the claims of authentic assessment

Possibilities occur through the use of authentic assessment practices - possibilities for both the learner and for the learning process. I use these two broad headings to review the claims made in the literature about the possibilities that are made available to the learner and for the learning process through authentic assessment practices. In my experience, much of the policy and other writing about authentic assessment has been written from a procedural perspective about what teachers *should* be doing in their classrooms. Little research has been done from a practitioner stance to explore if these authentic assessment practices are possible, if authentic assessment works the way it is claimed to play out in the policies, or how different it is from traditional assessment practices. My focus on researching how authentic assessment works to constitute student identities is intended to address this significant gap in the literature.

It should also be noted that the “Authentic Assessment Movement” (Wiggins, 1989) can be understood to be a move away from the exclusive use of “traditional” assessment practices, or put another way, a move towards the use of more diverse assessment practices in the classroom. The term “authentic assessment” assumes that “new” concepts of assessment are a direct movement away from subject-centred traditional assessment (Wiggins, 1998), negating opportunities to explore combinations of traditional and non-traditional assessment strategies. I am reminded of Madaus, Raczek, and Clarke’s (1997) research into the history of assessment practices as they questioned how “new” authentic assessment truly was – performance assessments have been around since ancient times. Popham (1993) goes as far as to reference prehistoric Sabre-toothed Tiger hunting as an early authentic assessment task. A possible danger arises when implementing authentic assessment strategies if educators are led to believe that their teaching history and implementation of “traditional” assessment practices has not been valuable. Valencia, Hiebert, and Afflerbach (1994, p. 288) wrote that the “. . . authentic assessment movement has highlighted changes in three fundamental aspects of assessment: (1) the nature of the assessment task and contexts, (2) the active engagement of teachers and students in the assessment process, and (3) the needs of various assessment audiences.” These changes due to authentic assessment claim to create possibilities for the learner and for the learning process.

1.1.1 Possibilities for the learner

Students are called into active roles in authentic assessment practices. They are asked to be involved in making decisions about their learning goals through self-assessments and make choices about how

they can best demonstrate their understandings (Burke, 1999; Earl, 2003; Stiggins, 2005b; Terry & Pantle, 1994). The literature makes two broad claims about what is made possible for students when authentic assessment practices are used: student motivation increases and students' interests are addressed. Both of these claims use terms related to the field of psychology: "motivation" and "interests." Rose (1998, p. 60) suggests that in recent times, a "psychologization" has occurred where a whole range of human practices, including assessment practices, are infused by a psychological understanding of people: "The conduct of persons becomes remarkable and intelligible when, as it were, displayed upon a psychological screen, reality becomes ordered according to a psychological taxonomy, and abilities, personalities, attitudes, and the like become central to the deliberations and calculations of social authorities and psychological theorists alike." The literature about authentic assessment typically depicts young people in psychological terms.

In educational contexts, motivation can be defined as "the extent to which students are involved in trying to learn" (McMillan, 2004, p. 269). While standardized testing has been shown to decrease student motivation to learn (Amrein & Berliner, 2003), a significant claim in authentic assessment literature is that it motivates students (Burke, 1999; Clark & Clark, 1998; Earl, 2003). The type of motivation that authentic assessment uses is not an external motivator (such as a mark or a grade) but an internal motivator (such as a student's interest or desire). Internal motivation and assessment practices are often described in psychological terms such as "internal locus of control" (Rotter, 1966). Students "...with an internal locus of control attribute their behaviour to forces inside them. They see themselves as responsible for their own successes and failures" (Banks, 2005, p. 267). The literature claims that authentic assessment increases such internalized forms of motivation. Stiggins (2002b, p. 34) refers to this role of assessment as "tapping the wellspring of motivation within." Earl (2003, p. 68) writes that, "Assessment can be a motivator, not through rewards or punishment, but by stimulating the intrinsic interest of students and providing them with the direction and confidence they need." Stiggins (2002b, p. 35) proposes that developing student motivation is best done through assessment practices that involve the learner:

We have alternatives to our tradition of using assessment to trigger rewards and punishments. We can turn to a constellation of three tools that, taken together, can permit us to tap an unlimited wellspring of motivation that resides within each learner. These tools are: student-involved classroom assessment, student-involved record keeping, and student-involved communication. Together, they redefine how we use assessment to turn students on to the power and joy of learning.

For the learner, authentic assessment claims to tap into students' sense of an internalized motivation to learn. Stiggins suggests they will experience feelings of "power and joy" through authentic assessment experiences.

Authentic assessment also claims to respond to the interests of the learners, something which more commonly used assessment tools such as tests do not typically allow (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; S. Katz & Earl, 2000). Research by Darling-Hammond and her colleagues has demonstrated the benefits of tailoring assessment practices to specific learning situations and learners. This research shows how authentic assessment practices have helped to validate the more "real-world" interests of students as they prepare for adulthood: "...tests do not tap many of the skills and abilities that students need to develop in order to be successful in later life and schooling" (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995, p. 5). Further possibilities arise for students when they become involved in the assessment practices. Their participation provides them with opportunities to involve their interests, make choices, reflect on their learning, and bring their social worlds into the classroom. In regards to this last opportunity, Dyson's (1993) work helped me to understand how students operate within multiple social spheres that are not exclusive of one another. These spheres include students' "home" sphere, "official" sphere (e.g., school), and "peer" sphere and "there are no neat boundaries between "home" and "school," nor between official (teacher-controlled) sphere and that of peers" (Dyson, 1993, p. 6). Dyson demonstrates that when children are able to meld these social worlds in the classroom they are more likely to succeed at school tasks. Dyson refers to this process as a "permeable curriculum" where different spheres can overlap and feed into each other, in ways controlled by the students and fostered by the teacher. This was an important concept for me because it helped me to understand that while I was offering young people what I considered to be relevant and engaging activities through authentic assessment, they brought multiple and competing social meanings to these classroom activities. Authentic assessment allows teachers to create a permeable curriculum where students' social worlds become involved in the classroom practices. Together, the involvement of students' interests, choices, reflections, and social spheres allow students and teachers to create assessment events that are "tailor-made" for specific learning interests and the variety of experiences made available through authentic assessment practices allows students and teachers greater flexibility in designing student assessment events.

This greater flexibility and diversity of assessment experiences is consistent with other trends in education. For example, Shepard (2000) demonstrates how recent assessment theory shares

common principles of curriculum and learning theories in the constructivist paradigm. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that students construct their own meaning from their experiences (Brookhart, 2004, p. 445). In this paradigm, the learner is understood to be the expert at making meaning. Because the learner is central to choosing and using the assessment tools, students are expected to know themselves as a learner and make appropriate choices to develop their learning. In a constructivist paradigm, intelligent thought involves metacognition or self-monitoring of learning and thinking (Brookhart, 2004; Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Understanding the learner as the constructor of knowledge has allowed concepts such as multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) to become an approach to teaching and assessing (Armstrong, 1994). Multiple intelligence theory suggests that the learner is the expert on determining his/her own abilities, not an external assessment tool such as those developed by Binet in the early 1900s to measure intelligence (the intelligence quotient, or I.Q.) in hopes to identify students requiring additional educational assistance. In multiple intelligence theory, the learner determines his or her levels of intelligence in several areas (e.g., verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, logical/mathematical, visual/special, bodily/kinaesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist intelligence). In multiple intelligence theory, the learner is understood to be diverse and self-aware. In terms of classroom assessment practices, this demands a variety of assessment opportunities to accommodate the diverse intelligences within and among students (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997). As such, students may suggest that they learn in a variety of ways, encouraging educators to accommodate diverse learning interests by using a variety of instructional and assessment practices. Authentic assessment claims to provide the necessary diversity of assessment experiences.

1.1.2 Possibilities for the learning process

The authentic assessment literature makes three claims about learning: authentic assessment is connected to learning, promotes higher-order thinking, and develops positive interaction between the teacher and students. I describe these three claims in turn below.

Authentic assessment is often described in terms of how the assessment practice connects to student learning. For example, authentic assessment claims to make the assessment practice explicit to students, allowing student input or self-assessment in efforts to guide further learning opportunities: “Assessment does not stand apart; it is interwoven with teaching and learning to make connections for students, reinforcing what they know and challenging their thinking” (Earl, 2003, p. 68). This cyclical nature of learning and assessment has been credited with improving student learning (P.

Black & Wiliam, 1998; Lissitz & Schafer, 2002; Popham, 2008). Some writers have explained this relationship of assessment and learning as “assessment *for* learning” (P. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Buhagiar, 2007; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Stiggins, 2002a, 2005b, 2008; Sutton, 1999) or as “assessment *as* learning” (Earl, 2003; Winter, 2003) and these terms can be differentiated from a third increasingly common phrase in the assessment literature, assessment *of* learning.

Lorna Earl (2003, p. 22) describes “assessment *of* learning” as the predominant form of assessment in schools – a summative assessment experience “intended to certify learning and report to parents and students about students’ progress in school, usually by signalling students’ relative position compared to other students. Assessment *of* learning in classrooms is typically done at the end of something (e.g., a unit, a course, a grade, a Key Stage, a program) and takes the form of tests or exams that include questions drawn from the material studied during that time.” Authentic assessment practices can be used for summative assessment experiences, such as a performance assessment of a student’s dramatic skills at the end of a unit of study. However, authentic assessment practices can also be used in other ways. Earl (2003, p. 24) reports that “assessment *for* learning” focuses on formative, rather than summative assessment, “...making the shift from judgments to creating descriptions that can be used in the service of the next stage of learning.” In “assessment *for* learning,” authentic assessment practices can be used to involve students in the assessment experiences. Stiggins (2005a, pp. 327-328) explains,

Students partner with their teacher to continuously monitor their current level of attainment in relation to agreed-upon expectations so they can set goals for what to learn next and thus play a role in managing their own progress.... In short, during the learning, students are inside the assessment process, watching themselves grow, feeling in control of their success, and believing that continued success is within reach if they keep trying.

In such a way, authentic assessment can help teachers involve students in their learning such as by having students reflect on their achievements and set goals for further learning. Authentic assessment can also be used to implement a vision of “assessment *as* learning.” In “assessment *as* learning,” the student’s role is emphasized,

...not only as contributor to the assessment and learning process, but also as the critical connector between them. The student is the link. Students, as active, engaged, and critical assessors, can make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and master the skills involved. This is the regulatory process in metacognition. It occurs when students personally monitor what they are learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand. Assessment *as* Learning is the ultimate goal, where students are their own best assessors (Earl, 2003, p. 25).

Teachers can use authentic assessment practices in all three of these approaches to assessment: “assessment *of* learning,” “assessment *for* learning,” or “assessment *as* learning” and many proponents of authentic assessment claim that a balanced classroom assessment program among assessment *of*, *for*, and *as* learning is essential for student success (Buhagiar, 2007; Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter, & Chappuis, 2004; Stiggins, 2003; Winter, 2003). Regardless of expression, authentic assessment practices aim to inform and improve student learning.

A second claim in the authentic assessment literature is that it promotes higher-order thinking where knowledge is constructed rather than memorised by the learner (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008).

Authentic assessment attempts to create ways in which the knowledge that is constructed by the learner can be validated. Instead of the teacher determining what knowledge is deemed important (such as a multiple choice question on a test), the student is encouraged through authentic assessment practices to determine what knowledge is meaningful for him/her and present this knowledge to the teacher, peers, or wider school community. Many educators have challenged the sole use of paper and pencil methods of testing (Simmons & Resnick, 1993; Sizer, 1992; Supovitz & Brennan, 1997) suggesting that they do not allow learners to demonstrate what knowledge has been meaningful for the learner. The design of the authentic assessment allows educators “to make learning for students more coherent, understandable and closely related to life beyond school—something that a curriculum divided into eight key learning areas or even more subjects may not be able to deliver” (Cormack, Johnson, Peters, & Williams, 1998, p. 253). By using authentic assessment, students are encouraged to make relevant and meaningful connections between their learning experiences and practical daily life. This process requires students to engage in higher-order thinking such as application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation (Board of Education for the City Of Etobicoke, 1987) rather than exclusive knowledge recall or comprehension commonly associated with pencil and paper forms of assessment (Bloom, 1956).

A third claim in the authentic assessment literature is that it develops positive interaction between the teacher and the students (Burke, 1999; Wiggins, 1990). Students are understood to be partners in learning where the teacher and students share expectations (Short & Burke, 1991). Authentic assessment practices aim to make the assessment criteria explicit between the teacher and the student so that the student will develop confidence in his or her own abilities while simultaneously earning trust in the teacher’s communication of assessment expectations (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 1999). It should be noted that the importance of positive teacher-student relationships is also expressed in

much of the middle school literature about assessment (George, Stevenson, Thompson, & Beane, 1992; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997).

Table 1.1.2 summarizes the claimed benefits of authentic assessment. About the learner, the authentic assessment literature claims to increase student motivation and respond to the interests of learners. About the learning process, authentic assessment claims to connect assessment with learning, promote higher-order thinking, and develop positive

Table 1.1.2	
Benefits of authentic assessment	
<i>The learner</i>	<i>The learning process</i>
Authentic assessment increases student motivation	Authentic assessment is connected to learning
Authentic assessment responds to the interests of learners	Authentic assessment promotes higher-order thinking
	Authentic assessment develops positive interaction between teacher and student

relations between the teacher and the student. These claims are often presented in the literature as straightforward and uncomplicated, and are not problematized. The literature about authentic assessment presents the learner as willing to learn, self-motivated, and as having particular interests. As a practitioner, I know that not all students are interested in school. Not all students are self-motivated. Not all students understand themselves as a learner with specific interests. While the literature about authentic assessment offers possibilities for working with adolescents in ways that claim to improve student learning, this literature is often technical in nature and naïve about the student and the learning process.

The authentic assessment literature offered me, as a practitioner, many technical ideas such as how to organize and conduct a specific assessment event. However, the claims in the authentic assessment literature did not provide me with direction about what kind of students’ selves these practices might produce. Instead, authentic assessment literature claims to represent an authentic identity by bringing “real-life” into the classroom and producing what might be termed an “authentic child.” My research problem troubles the assumption of an authentic identity in authentic assessment and points out the need for practitioners to be aware of the naivety of this assumption; this theoretical gap in the authentic assessment literature does not help practitioners envision the effects of these practices on students’ identities. Furthermore, *how* authentic assessment operates on and for young people is not sufficiently addressed in the literature. I was interested in the student identities that were made possible through the authentic assessment practices in my classroom, as I understood the

classroom to be a space where particular ways of being were encouraged and rewarded, while other ways of being were discouraged, punished, or ignored. This practitioner perspective was not addressed in the literature. My professional interest in authentic assessment was no longer reflected in the literature; by 1998, I became interested in theorizing my authentic assessment practices while most of the literature publicized the techniques for conducting authentic assessment.

1.2 Researching my own assessment practices

In order for readers to understand the context of this research better, I include relevant descriptions of how my professional and personal life contributed to my approach to authentic assessment in the classroom as well as the literature described above. My interest in authentic assessment practices began in 1994, my first year of teaching, when I was teaching French to Grade 7 and Grade 8 students in a community without French-speaking residents². Parents were resistant to their children learning French, as they could not foresee a need for this skill in the immediate and local job market. Secondly, many of these parents grew-up in this local community and had discovered that despite their studying of French in school, it was of little or no use to them as adults. In the years leading up to my hiring, there had been multiple teachers in this teaching assignment, each remaining for only a few months. I taught roughly 300 students (10 classes) in 35-minute blocks of time. I found authentic assessment to be a means through which I could engage students in these French classes. At the end of each unit of study, there was a “Tâche Finale” (a final task) that mimicked an event that would typically occur outside of school experiences: yard sales, medical emergencies, celebrity interviews, for example. These final tasks were authentic assessment events where students were required to speak French in contrived situations that imitated the “real-world.” Students enjoyed these assessment events and were successful in French – much to the surprise of the parental community. I was encouraged to keep using authentic assessment practices in my teaching because of the students’ excitement to participate in class and be successful at school.

Since my first year of teaching, I have continued to explore authentic assessment possibilities in the subjects that I have taught: Grade 8 English Language Arts, Grade 8 Social Studies, Grade 8 Related Studies, Grade 8 Personal Development and Relationships, Grade 11 Communication English Language Arts, Grade 11 Academic English Language Arts, Grade 11 Advanced English Language

² Statistics Canada reported that in the year 2000, of the 13,760 residents in the county surrounding Nova Middle School, 95 people spoke French. Ten people (all male) spoke French at their work place of the 7,210 people working in the county (Statistics Canada, 2006a). It is conceivable that these ten people were the French teachers in our school system.

Arts, Grade 11 Vocal Music, Grade 12 Advanced English Language Arts, Grade 12 Film and Video, the International Baccalaureate program's Theory of Knowledge course and seminar class, and Grade 11/12 Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies for Talented and Gifted Students³. I have also taught university courses that were specialized for educators about classroom assessment practices, assessment issues, and assessment literacies. I have taught undergraduate courses in Nova Scotia, Jamaica, and Barbados and graduate level university courses in the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Regardless of grade level or subject matter, authentic assessment practices have remained a component of my teaching. I write this to signal that this research was not a one-time event in my experience as a practitioner. I have a history of working with authentic assessment in a variety of subjects, geographic locations, and with a wide range of students' ages.

This research, while it could be considered an organic extension of my day-to-day teaching experiences, is situated within a particular time and place: in 2000-2001, in a Grade 8 English Language Arts curriculum, and in a rural Atlantic Canadian middle school. However, while the research data were generated in one particular class and school year, I am able to bring a broader practitioner perspective about authentic assessment practices to the research. My practitioner perspective has been shaped by thirteen years of classroom practice, teacher leadership in assessment, and curriculum writing. Beyond teaching university courses, I have also, for example: conducted assessment workshops for schools, school boards, and departments of education in Atlantic Canada; delivered keynote addresses and academic papers at conferences; written articles for professional magazines; participated in assessment leadership teams within my school board; and written curriculum for the province of Nova Scotia and the country of Mongolia. My perspective as a practitioner has remained optimistic about the possibilities of authentic assessment in working with young people, while at the same time cautious about the effects of authentic assessment and the ways in which these practices constitute students into particular ways of being.

Because this research was conducted in my own classroom and organic to my classroom practices, it is aligned with the field of practitioner research. For this reason, it is useful to describe my research in the literature about practitioner research which can be understood as “a study of a social situation

³ Four of these courses were “Locally Developed Courses” where I wrote the curriculum and had it approved by my school board and the Nova Scotia Department of Education for implementation in my school: Grade 8 Related Studies, Grade 11 Advanced English Language Arts, Grade 12 Advanced English Language Arts, and Grade 11/12 Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies for Talented and Gifted Students.

with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (Elliot, 1991, p. 69). Educators have frequently used the methodology of practitioner research to explore questions that have arisen from their classroom practices (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Fecho & Allen, 2003; Thomas, 2005). Jacobson (1998, p. 125) explains a rationale for teachers conducting practitioner research: “Practitioner research is based on the assumption that a social practice such as teaching is best understood and researched by the practitioners directly involved in it: the teachers. Because of its focus on particular actions of individuals in relation to contexts for action, practitioner research is uniquely appropriate for exploring the outcomes of organizing acts of teaching and contexts for learning in particular ways.” I was interested in practitioner research because it was a way for me to relate my classroom practices with educational theories.

Fecho (2003, p. 283) describes practitioner researchers as “those of us in education and elsewhere who are reflective upon our own practice and who seek to call our praxis – that dialogue between theory and practice – to the surface, the better to be able to understand that transaction.” My classroom observations about theory and practice in authentic assessment raised questions that led to this research and provided the motivation for the study. Grundy and Kemmis (1981) report that most often in action research (one of a number of approaches to practitioner research), the research begins because of a theoretical challenge for the teacher. In my case, I was struggling with how students’ identities were informed by my authentic assessment practices and this prompted my interest in practitioner research. A more detailed description of practitioner research as a methodological stance is presented in Chapter 4, but here I wish to include brief comments about two issues related to practitioner research that shaped the writing of this research: (1) writing this research in a way that shows my changing perspectives about authentic assessment over the course of the research and, (2) making my everyday assumptions and practices “unfamiliar” so that I could achieve distance in my perspective of my work. I address these common issues for the practitioner researcher below, and hope that my work contributes to the field of practitioner research through the ways these have been addressed. I address these two issues here, at the onset, so that readers may more fully understand my decisions about the writing style of this thesis.

1.2.1 Writing with changing perspectives

It is important to note that this research took place over several years. While the critical incident that promoted this research (as described at the beginning of this chapter) occurred in 1998, the data were generated in 2000-2001. Furthermore, analysis of that data occurred during and since its

production, allowing me time to revisit my analysis and consider alternative perspectives as my understandings of authentic assessment changed while I continued to teach and learn. For example, I used the detailed notes from my teaching journal of 2000-2001 to describe my classroom program in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Specific assessment practices are illustrated in Chapter 5 as to how they helped me to achieve my aims as a teacher. I then proceed to analyse my classroom program in Chapter 7, putting its assumptions under pressure so that I might understand my practices in new ways. This analysis allowed me to discuss what ways of being were made available to students in my classroom. As Fecho (2000, p. 389) points out, "...discussions and pedagogy that are intended to move students to re-evaluate their positions should move the teacher as well." The findings in this research moved me to re-evaluate my understandings about authentic assessment and shaped my current practices in my classroom. It was a challenge for me as a writer to describe my own practices without resorting to time-dependent descriptions such as "I used to," or "Now, looking back...." I solved this problem in my thesis by continuously writing about myself not in terms of "then" and "now" (before/after) but rather by showing multiple interpretations of the events that are described in terms of my continuous learning from the research and as a practitioner. What I emphasize in my writing are practitioner reflections throughout the thesis.

1.2.2 Making the familiar strange

Erickson (1973) used the phrase "to make the familiar strange" and the literature about practitioner research has continued to use this phrase to suggest that practitioners are able to separate from their well-known everyday practices and see these practices in alternative and new ways (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994, p. 115). For example, practitioner researchers might use a combination of different research methods so that a variety of data are produced, allowing for multiple perspectives. In my research, I included data that were generated from the assessment practices in my classroom, but I also used qualitative methods to generate data that supplemented the classroom's assessment practices. Furthermore, I used assessment policies as data, which allowed me to compare the policies with my everyday assessment practices. I used techniques commonly associated with critical discourse analysis to trouble the data and disrupt my reading of the data. This hybrid approach to data production and analysis allowed me to make the assessment practices that were familiar to me in my classroom, strange. The methodology for this research is presented in Chapter 4.

My writing in this thesis illustrates my changing understandings of authentic assessment and works to represent my everyday teaching practices with "new eyes" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). One

of the ways that helped me to achieve this in my writing was by having multiple perspectives in my professional life that explored authentic assessment. Besides my classroom practices, I also spent a great deal of time reading about authentic assessment and working with other teachers in workshops, courses, and other forms of professional development. I liken the development of my practitioner's perspective to a concept known as "crop rotations." Farmers rotate their crops so that the nutrients that are needed in one particular crop have time to replenish the soil. This is how Canadian writer Ann-Marie MacDonald described for television audiences (2003) her ability to manage simultaneous careers - acting, writing, producing, and hosting the Canadian produced television show *Life and Times*. She said it was all about "crop rotations"⁴. So too, has been the writing of this research. I have enjoyed "crop rotations" in my academic work. That is, my professional experiences about assessment have been planted in three fields: (1) teaching in the classroom, (2) reading theory and conducting research, and (3) offering professional development experiences to teachers about assessment practices.

These "crops" rotated in my life as I wrote this thesis. For example, from 2000-2007, I taught in the Nova Scotia public school system with intermittent gaps to teach at the university level. I "replenished the soil" by moving into other spaces to think about my research question and classroom practices. I taught university courses in Canada and abroad and worked with teachers in a range of ways: conducting roughly twenty inservices about authentic assessment (with a staff of four in a rural Nova Scotia school and at conferences with hundreds of educators); offering ten "keynotes" presentations including one concerning diversity in Maritime classrooms with two thousand educators present; more than 200 teachers observed my classroom practices; and I wrote curriculum with teachers in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and in the Canadian cities of Halifax and Toronto. I list these experiences because, as a practitioner, they helped shape my understanding of my classroom by providing me with opportunities to rehearse, adapt, and re-think my practitioner's perspective of authentic assessment.

In many ways these opportunities allowed me to exchange reflections and ideas about authentic assessment practices with educators who shared comparable rural settings (such as rural Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Jamaica), who worked in diverse urban settings (Halifax, Nova Scotia; Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island⁵; Kingston, Jamaica;

⁴ In a personal conversation with A.M. MacDonald in the fall of 2005, she explained that Canadian author Timothy Findley had offered her this analogy in a private conversation at his home.

⁵ I use the term "urban" here loosely – Charlottetown, the capital "city" of Prince Edward Island, has a population of about 32,000 people (<http://www.city.charlottetown.pe.ca/>).

Bridgetown, Barbados; St. John's, Newfoundland), or who worked in places that had experienced recent changes in political regimes (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia). These experiences helped me to see authentic assessment experiences not as something unique to my classroom and local students, but as operating within a wider field of assessment. I witnessed how authentic assessment practices often involved specific resources in the classroom, making these practices easier in some situations, but not in others. For example, authentic assessment often requires ample classroom space to display the variety of artefacts constructed by students. Some schools that I visited did not have sufficient space for students *and* their assessment pieces to be in the classroom at the same time. Other classrooms used recycled garbage as their classroom supplies so that students might create something other than traditional paper and pencil assessments. These conversations and experiences with other teachers in diverse educational systems allowed me to position my own classroom within the field of assessment in very practical terms: my classroom and practitioner research was situated within a particular context.

1.3 Contextualizing the research

This research occurred at Nova Middle School, a school located in rural Atlantic Canada, and within an assessment environment that was shaped by local school practices, provincial policy, and national/international reforms in assessment. As a practitioner researcher, I wanted to provide a framework for contextualizing my research. This allowed me to discuss the multiple influences that shaped my work with students. I begin by describing the research context in broad terms – the assessment environment – and then present demographic information and informal observations about teaching in rural Nova Scotia. Finally, this section presents my day-to-day working environment and the site of this research, Nova Middle School.

1.3.1 Assessment environment

The assessment environment surrounding my teaching was concerned with assessment reforms in a broad sense, which were signalled by changing provincial policies, and made realized at the local level in Nova Middle School's assessment regulations. Broadly speaking, assessing students is about negotiating two competing assessment reform movements: one is a push for student-involvement in their assessment practice (for example, authentic assessment practices), and the other a push for standardized testing to assess students' skills and abilities. As a practitioner, I am ambiguously placed between these apparently competing visions of assessment. I discuss the positions of authentic

assessment and standardized testing within the field of assessment in Chapter 2, but wish to make early gestures towards the changing assessment environment in which I worked. At the onset of my teaching career (1994) and into the time of the data generation for this research (2000-2001), the student assessment literature, assessment policies, and teachers' professional development experiences about assessment promoted the use of authentic assessment practices. I make this claim based on the emphasis found in the assessment literature at this time (reviewed in Chapter 2), the significant shift in provincial policies about assessment that endorsed authentic assessment practices (reviewed in Chapter 6), and the amount of professional opportunities outside of my classroom that were available to me because of my interest in using and researching authentic assessment practices (as noted above). However, since this research began, a change in the assessment environment has occurred: assessment literature, Nova Scotia Department of Education initiatives, and teachers' professional development experiences have become preoccupied with the use of standardized testing to assess student achievement.

This shift of emphasis in the field of assessment can be broadly understood as a shift in the political agenda that dominated much of the Western economy during the 1990s – a shift towards neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is “a political project for facilitating the re-structuring and re-scaling of social relations in accordance with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism” (Bourdieu, as cited in Fairclough, 2003, p. 4). Throughout the 1990s, education systems were “transformed by neo-liberal policies that promoted marketization, school self-management, local governance and strong centralized forms of control and accountability” (Codd, 2005, p. 193). Neo-liberal government policies virtually eliminated resources committed to education especially in public schools and instead encouraged “processes of individualization to ever-expanding areas of social, work, and personal life” (Gonick, 2006, p. 15). The spread of neo-liberalism meant that parents were to have “choice” in the education of their child, and this resulted in privatizations of schools (L. Davies, 2000). In Canada, similar trends for the privatization of schools (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2004) and a call for accountability (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2005b; Cirtwill, Clifton, & D'Orsay, 2002) were apparent. Compounding the effects of the neo-liberal marketization of schools was another, connected, reform movement: neo-conservatism.

As Michael Apple points out about the relationship of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, “[t]he seemingly contradictory discourse of competition, markets and choice on the one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing and national curriculum on the

other.... oddly reinforce each other and help cement conservative educational positions into our daily lives” (Apple, 2001, pp. 104-105). Neo-conservative educational policies impose national curricula, standards, and testing. While there is currently no national curriculum in Canada (educational systems are controlled by each province and territory), the call for accountability and standardized testing has become more common and emphasized in recent years. This may have been due to a large number of neo-conservative educational reforms movements internationally (Apple, 2001; Elliott & Maclennan, 1994; Gandin & Apple, 2002; Loxley & Thomas, 2001; Motani, 2005). In the United States, George Bush led neo-conservative education reformation through standardized testing by establishing a government Act called *No Child Left Behind* (United States Department of Education, 2002) in which, among other initiatives, elementary school students were required to be successful at standardized tests in order to be promoted to the next grade level. Since this United States Act was passed, Canada has seen a rise in the number of standardized tests used in schools to determine student achievement and all provinces except Prince Edward Island⁶ now have some form of standardized test that students must complete (Airasian, 2006). In Nova Scotia, some of these tests count as thirty percent of students’ final mark in a course, but none is used exclusively to determine whether (or not) a student passes a course or grade level.

Advocating for authentic assessment in neo-liberal/neo-conservative times is difficult work, especially for educators who are working in educational systems that may not endorse the significant work involved in conducting authentic assessment in the classroom. For example, the teachers I have taught who are working in Jamaica, Barbados, and Newfoundland reported that they found it worthwhile, but difficult, to implement authentic assessment practices in their classrooms because of the emphasis in their school systems to evaluate students using standardized tests. These teachers acknowledged that their school communities were interested in preparing students for these tests and that this consumed a great deal of class time. In contrast, teachers in Prince Edward Island worked in a province whose educational and political leader of the time refuted standardized testing and these teachers reported that trying new assessment practices was “do-able.”

⁶ There is great public debate in this province as the Department of Education proposed the introduction of standardized testing. A Task Force on Student Assessment was created to investigate the issue. I presented a keynote address called “Classroom assessment: What parents need to know” in Prince Edward Island (2006) and members of this task-force were present. I also taught masters university courses in this province about assessment literacy (2004-2006), and I have been aware of educator’s concerns about the changing assessment climate. See Stewart (2006) for an example of a retired teacher’s submission to a newspaper in that province.

With more Canadian provinces endorsing standardized testing (Airasian, 2006), authentic assessment is arguably becoming de-valued/disenfranchised. In 2000-2001, authentic assessment was a “buzz word” in the classrooms of Atlantic Canada; the “buzz” has now been replaced with standardized testing. Standardized tests are those that are constructed outside of the classroom and are administered to a large number of students. They are standardized in four ways: format, questions, instructions, and time allotment (Bracey, 1989). A local educator in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island summarized the language used in standardized testing as follows:

...a ‘standardized test’ is one that is given and scored in the same way, no matter where or when it is given, so that the scores of all students can be compared. Of these, ‘norm-referenced tests’ are used to evaluate the performance of one student in relation to the performance of others, or to compare individuals to a ‘norm.’ They are designed so that results fit a ‘bell curve,’ with most in the middle and a few at the high and low ends. ‘Criterion-referenced tests’ (CRTs) and ‘standards-referenced tests,’ on the other hand, are designed to measure how well a student has learned what is taught in a particular course or grade, or how well an individual has mastered a specific set of skills. A standardized CRT is administered to students in many schools, and there may or may not be a curriculum match. Standardized tests are described as ‘high stakes’ when the results are used to make decisions about placement, retention, graduation, etc. (Stewart, 2006)

Table 1.3.1 illustrates the numerous standardized tests that Nova Scotia students are required to write. With research and political agendas interested in wide-scale (and in some cases high-stakes) testing, educators, schools, and communities experience public scrutiny. This vision of professional accountability is based on the achievement results of students, not the merits of the teacher’s ability as a professional to respond to the diverse learning abilities and interests within a classroom. Furthermore, the results of standardized testing tools intended to promote accountability in our educational systems - as claimed by politicians (see Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2005b) - do not offer teachers direction in addressing the individual learning needs of students in our classrooms.

Table 1.3.1 Standardized testing in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 2007)	
Provincial Level	Grade 3: <i>Literacy, Mathematics</i> Grade 6: <i>Literacy, Mathematics*</i> Grade 9: <i>Literacy, Mathematics*</i> Grade 12 (Nova Scotia Exams): <i>Advanced Mathematics, Biology, Biologie, Chemistry, Chimie, English, English/Communications, History*, Mathematics, Mathématique, Mathématique Avancées, Physics</i> * in development
National Level	<i>Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)</i> [written by 13 and 15-year-old students]: Mathematics, Reading, Science
International Level	<i>Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)</i> [written by 15-year-old students]: Mathematics, Reading, Science <i>Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS)</i> [written by Grade 4 students]: Reading

I am placed in a precarious position as a practitioner: I must consider students' eventual preparation for standardized tests, while simultaneously preparing them for the world beyond school where learning is much more complex. The work of Black and Wiliam (1998) provided me with encouragement to continue emphasizing authentic assessment practices in my classroom program despite a growing professional, public, and government interest in standardized testing. These researchers reported that to raise the scores of summative assessment experiences such as standardized tests, teachers need to be assessment literate about the formative assessment tools that they use in their classrooms (P. Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2005; Wiliam, 2005). The purpose of formative assessment is to improve student learning. Stiggins (2002a) refers to formative assessment experiences as “assessment *for* learning” and he calls for educators to involve students in these classroom assessment practices. When students are involved in their own assessment, they set goals related to improving their learning, understand what exemplary work looks like, self-assess, and communicate their learning to others (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002). One way to combine these facets of student learning in authentic assessment events is to involve students in the process of designing assessment tools. Such a vision involves students as partners in creating classroom assessment experiences. Rather than creating assessment tools outside of the class without student input, teachers may create assessment tools *with* students.

This leads me to a final comment on the assessment environment of this research: the local level of student assessment. Students in this research were not required to write a standardized test in Grade 8 English Language Arts. They were, however, required to be assigned a final mark for their work in the course. This point may seem obvious, but assigning grades to students is not commonly discussed in the literature of authentic assessment and is ignored in the provincial assessment policies. Instead, regulations at the school level serve as the “gate-keeping” function of the school system and guide practitioners as to how to determine students' placement in the school system. For example, in order for students to be promoted to Grade 9, they had to have earned a 50% in their Grade 8 subject. Teachers were not allowed to assign final grades of 46%-49% and were encouraged to make a decision about the grade that would more clearly determine the student's promotion or failure of the subject. These school-based guidelines were written informally. What I am signalling is that despite the debates about assessment reform through authentic assessment practices and standardized testing, and despite the introduction of new assessment policies in the province, teachers were left to their own devices to create an assessment plan for their students. Teachers were expected to have a school administrator approve this plan at the beginning of the school year,

and it was expected that this plan would be shared with students and their parents. Typically, such a plan would indicate the percentage weight of tests, assignments, and exams in the student's final grade. Because student assessment in my research context was dependent on my classroom program and not standardized testing or other required components from my employer, it is important that readers have a detailed understanding of the assessment practices in my classroom. This is the focus of Chapter 5.

Despite neo-liberal/neo-conservative times and a growing interest in standardized testing, the assessment environment surrounding my teaching, in general, encouraged me to use authentic assessment practices in my classroom. Because students were not expected to write a standardized test in Grade 8, teachers had a great deal of flexibility in creating a classroom program that addressed the outcomes of English Language Arts, and as can be seen in the next section, I was not the only educator in the school who was interested in authentic assessment.

1.3.2 Nova Middle School

In the school year of 2000-2001, I was teaching at Nova Middle School, a school within the larger Nova High School located in a town in rural Nova Scotia. Nova Middle School had created its own mission statement and it remained unchanged during my teaching at the school:

Nova Middle School Mission Statement (1989)

At Nova Middle School, we believe that our school should be student-centred, enthusiastic, compassionate, approachable, involved, and committed to middle level education. We believe that the programs should be relevant and flexible, stressing high individual academic excellence. We believe that the programs should encompass exploratory, inter-disciplinary and life skills activities in order to facilitate physical, social, and emotional growth of the middle level students. At Nova Middle School, we believe that middle level education extends beyond the boundaries of the school, into the community and beyond to enhance learning in a meaningful manner (as written in Nova Middle School's *Student Discipline and Policy Booklet*, revised 1995).

Thirteen classroom teachers assisted by a vice-principal, a resource teacher, and a part-time guidance counsellor worked together to enact the vision of Nova Middle School. It is significant to note that of those sixteen positions, eleven staff members had moved to Nova Middle School within the previous four years, and that seven staff members had five years of teaching experience or fewer. Nova Middle School operated in the same building as Nova High School. It was a corridor with a distinct staff, gymnasium, music room, technology education labs, resource room, staff room, and photocopier. Many aspects of the middle school were shared with the high school: guidance

responsibilities, administrative responsibilities, the canteen, student council, outdoor athletic facilities, and a computer lab.

Approximately three hundred students from ages eleven to sixteen comprised the five Grade 7 and five Grade 8 classes. The

students travelled as a class to each subject area: English, Social Studies, Math, Science, French, Related Studies, Technology Education, Music, Family Studies, Sustained Silent Reading, Personal Development and Relationships, Physical Education, Homeroom, and Exploratory Time. Students had nine 30-35 minute classes in a

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Block 1 8:55-10:10	—	—	—	—	—	—
Block 2 10:10-11:20	—	—	—	—	—	—
11:20-11:35	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
Block 3 11:35-12:45	—	—	—	—	—	—
12:45-1:30	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon
A Period 1:30-2:00						
Block 4 2:00-3:10	—	—	—	—	—	—

day. Recess was held at a different time than that of the high school's, as was the start and end times of lunch. A schedule posted in the homeroom classrooms demonstrated how the six-day cycle rotated in a flexible block timetable (see Table 1.3.2).

The flexible block schedule was described by the Vice Principal of Nova Middle School in a letter sent home to parents at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year:

Your child's timetable is a rotating flexible block. The four-block (8 period) day provides flexibility for teachers to modify the time of day when the curriculum is delivered. The addition of the "A" period [one-half hour each day after lunch] comprising Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and/or Personal Development and Relationships (PDR) has proven to enhance reading skills and address personal needs of your child. Rotating the schedule every 9-10 weeks provides an opportunity for your child to have certain teachers/subjects at different times in the day.

In the morning, the students met in their homerooms to listen to the announcements, check-in with their homeroom teacher, and get organized for the day. This routine was often appreciated as the students arrived at Nova Middle School from six different elementary feeder schools.

Predominately a rural populace, eighty percent of the students commuted to school each day by bus from the surrounding county lines. Students' commute times could extend from twenty minutes up to an hour and a half (each way) on the school bus. This meant that most students remained at

school during the lunch hour. Since there was no cafeteria in the building, this created a large student community during non-instructional time congregating in the classrooms, the hallway, and the gymnasium.

The Grade 8 homerooms were divided into two “Teaching Teams.” The Vice Principal described these teams as “Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams: Core teachers of your son or daughter have an opportunity to meet and discuss such concepts as scheduling, discipline, curriculum, and students requiring individualized instruction or attention. This allows for a more comprehensive awareness of your child’s needs and development.” As there were five homerooms, I crossed over to both teams. Team Teaching allowed staff to work together on particular student concerns as time was allotted within our teaching schedule to meet with each other. We often spent the time discussing student concerns that we observed in our classrooms or sharing knowledge of each other’s students. For example, if a parent had contacted me about one of the students in my homeroom about a recent medical concern, I would share this information with other teachers who taught this student if the parent wished.

As a Team, we also managed our own discipline, sometimes calling a particular student into our meeting to discuss a concern. Furthermore, there were students in our middle school working on individual program plans that needed the support of full-time Teacher-Assistants. Other students had significant special needs including medical concerns, hearing impairments, athletic achievements, musical interests, enrichment needs, and learning disabilities. Our Team Teaching meetings allowed us to plan curriculum for these students with special needs. Another level of student support was offered by resource teachers and this assistance occurred for identified students while other students attended French class. For example, in the two classes involved in this research, four students received resource support in lieu of French in both of these classes. Teaching assignments often included several subjects. For example, my course load included Grade

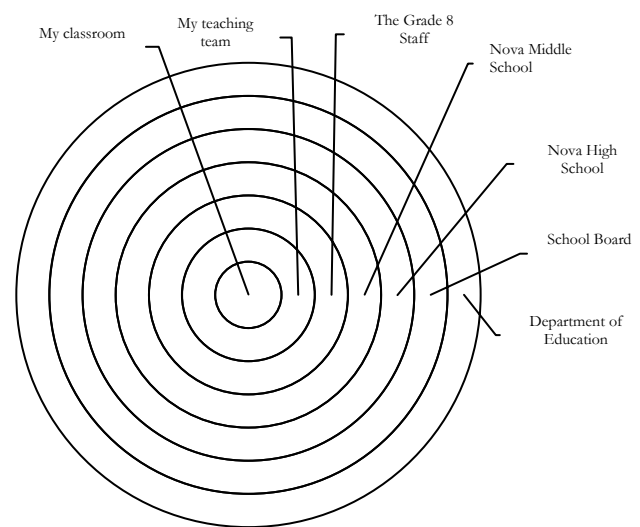


Figure 1.3.2
Positioning my classroom

8 English Language Arts, Social Studies, Personal Development and Relationships, and Related Studies. I taught all four of these courses to my homeroom students and to other classes. My homeroom class had 27 students. Their other courses were taught primarily by my Team Teacher across the hall.

I thought of my classroom as a “world within worlds.” My classroom practices were located within larger organizational spheres of influence informing my curricular choices. Figure 1.3.2 illustrates how my classroom was positioned within concentric circles - the worlds of team teaching, the Grade 8 staff, working within a middle school wing inside of a larger high school, in a rural part of a geographically large school board, under the jurisdiction of a provincial Department of Education. My work was found within these layers of educational agendas. Often, these worlds interacted and fostered my professional development and leadership. For example, I was able to participate in my school board’s Middle Level Education Leadership Team (1996-1998), English Language Arts Leadership Team (1996-2000), School-wide Enrichment Leadership Team (2000-2001), Fine Arts Leadership Team (2003-2004), and Assessment Leadership Team (2003-2004). I was able to use these professional experiences to provide leadership at my school. In the years preceding 2000-2001, I assisted staff in establishing a common professional development plan concerning classroom assessment.

Staff became interested in assessment practices as a means of finding some consistency in how students were assessed in the same course when it was offered by different teachers. Preliminary dialogues led to a provincial grant application to explore authentic assessment practices by the staff. This initiative was part of a larger program of the Department of Education - a *Junior High School Network Project* where “best practices” for middle schools were supported financially by applying for a \$40,000 grant to support a school-based curriculum initiative. The monies made available by the Department of Education allowed Nova Middle School to purchase professional “how-to” books about authentic assessment and provided some release time for teachers to develop curriculum units and assessment tools collaboratively. The heightened attention to assessment practices provided our staff a common vision, or at least vocabulary and we began to discuss our common assessment language with students.

My classroom operated in a professionally supportive environment for authentic assessment practices. I was excited to work with my Team Teacher, encouraged by the leadership experiences

made available to me through the school board, and I had assessment texts and release time for meeting with other teachers through monies supplied by the Department of Education. I spent considerable time in the evenings and weekends planning innovative curriculum for my classroom and I was excited about teaching.

1.3.3 Rural Nova Scotia

Nova Middle School was located in a small town in rural Nova Scotia with a population of 3,778 in the year 2000⁷. In Nova Scotia terms, this was an average size for a small town in the province of 908,007 people. This town serviced the local county population of 13,780 with a post office, a hospital, a fire station, a police station, hardware stores, three groceries stores, five gas stations, a mini-mall, numerous restaurants, two theatre companies, and community services. Like the rest of Canada, rural Nova Scotia has experienced a steady trend of urbanization. One hundred and fifty years ago, 13% of Canadians lived in urban environments and 87% lived in rural settings. In 2001, these figures had changed to 80% of Canadians living in urban environments and 20% in rural. However, in Nova Scotia, a greater proportion of the populace lived in rural settings in comparison to the national percentage: 44% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2005). Like the rest of Canada, this percentage has diminished. In 1851, 93% of Nova Scotians lived in rural communities (Statistics Canada, 2005). The industries of Nova Scotia have changed in recent generations, with impacts on life in rural Nova Scotia. Local economies have traditionally been based on agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining. The principle industries of the county surrounding Nova Middle School in 2001 can be found in Table 1.3.3a.

Industry	County			Nova Scotia		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total - Experienced labour force	6,530	3,725	2,810	442,425	234,445	207,985
Agriculture and resource-based	730	490	235	29,000	23,600	5,405
Manufacturing and construction	1,535	1,260	270	70,955	55,845	15,105
Wholesale and retail trade	940	530	410	71,085	36,020	35,070
Finance and real estate	220	70	150	20,620	8,140	12,480
Health and education	1,100	210	885	80,700	19,660	61,040
Business services	935	630	305	70,270	42,210	28,065
Other services	1,075	525	545	99,790	48,970	50,820

*Table adapted from Statistics Canada's Community Profile.
Retrieved February 17, 2007 from www.statcan.ca (Statistics Canada, 2006a)*

⁷ These statistics, and most others in this section, were derived from a federal government census in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

As natural resources diminish and global economies undermine small local industries, new employment opportunities have been created for Nova Scotians. This trend can be understood as “globalization,” defined by Fairclough (2003, p. 217) as: “The contemporary tendency for economic, political and social processes and relations to operate on an increasingly global scale.” The term has been criticized for the following reasons:

- its claim to be a contemporary concept (Fairclough, 2003; Yon, 2000),
- its ignorance of parts of the world that are marginalized by globalization (Angus, 2004; Fairclough, 2003) ,
- its implication towards economic determinism (Angus, 2004),
- its emphasis on economic terms of globalization and minimizing cultural terms of globalization (D. Johnson & Kress, 2003).

I use the term “economic globalization” to reference the changing economies in Nova Scotia, but acknowledge that other forms of globalization occur, such as “cultural globalization.” In Nova Scotia, recent employment opportunities include tourism, technology, film, music, and other cultural industries. These industries are typically found in urban centres and, as noted in Table 1.3.3a, were not found in the county surrounding Nova Middle School. These “new” ways of working often demand a relocation of the worker, shifting rural populations into urban centres such as the city of Halifax, or to other locations where employment is more abundant. Atlantic Canada experiences Canada’s highest unemployment rates, with Nova Scotia 2.2% higher than the national average (see Table 1.3.3b).

Canada	6.7
Nova Scotia	8.9
New Brunswick	8.8
Prince Edward Island	13.9
Newfoundland	18.1

Nova Scotians unable to find work locally, are able to become employed by moving to the western provinces of Canada (Taplin & Higgins, 2006) which have significantly lower unemployment rates (e.g., British Columbia’s unemployment rate in 2007 was 4.3%, the lowest in 30 years). The government of Nova Scotia, in efforts to avert this worker migration and to build local economies, offers financial assistance to encourage Nova Scotians to find employment within the province. For example, the government of Nova Scotia offers loans to university students interested in starting their own business in an initiative called the *Students in Business Program* (Government of Nova Scotia, 2006c). Secondly, the government of Nova Scotia promotes the development of local economies by offering financial incentive programs to businesses such as *Going Global, Staying Local* (Government

of Nova Scotia, 2006a) to export local goods and services to markets outside of the province. Both of these examples, the *Students in Business Program* and *Going Global, Staying Local*, signal to me as an educator that my students, to increase their opportunities for employment in Nova Scotia, will need to adopt an entrepreneurial spirit towards their work. Furthermore, they will need to be interested in the economies beyond the local region to export goods and services, or be willing to relocate and find employment.

This line of thinking is consistent with a specific neo-liberal vision of individual citizens as explained by Nikolas Rose (1999, p. 230): “Individuals are to become, as it were, entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make among the forms of life available to them.” As an educator, I felt responsible to assist students in being an “entrepreneur of themselves,” specifically to assist students in school-to-work transitions and so, in my classroom, I was interested in students learning about their local world as well as the world beyond the county and province. This is not to suggest that the future economic status of my students was a specific goal of my classroom program. I did, however, consider students to be future citizens and my role as an educator to prepare students for participating in society. I was not promoting this form of entrepreneurialism uncritically – I was also concerned that such a direction for teaching asked students to produce versions of their self that would be approved by me, as their teacher who had specific educational aims and ideal versions of citizenship. (The aims of my classroom program are presented in detail in Chapter 5). I was cognizant that rural students in Nova Scotia may or may not have had many personal experiences exploring other locations. For example, in my Grade 8 class of 27 (students of 13-14 years old), only five had travelled to the sole large city in Nova Scotia, Halifax, 70 kilometres away. Learning about the local world as well as the world beyond the county and province was important for students’ future participation in society. Students who chose to remain and work in Nova Scotia after their schooling could expect to earn less than if they had moved to other parts of the country where earnings were, on the average, higher. The same could be said about those who chose to remain and work in rural Nova Scotia: these employees earned less than those working in urban Nova Scotia.

In the county surrounding Nova Middle School, the average earning for a full-time full-year employee was \$33,344, compared to the provincial average of \$37,872 (Statistics Canada, 2006a) and the unemployment rate in the town was 6.0, and in the county, 9.5. These statistics reflect what I perceived as a practitioner – some students who travelled great lengths on the school bus to arrive to

Nova Middle School from rural settings came from some of the poorest families in the province. To get a sense of the geographic impact on the rural experience of schooling in Nova Scotia, my daily trip to the elementary school as a schoolchild in this area took an hour and half on the school bus each way. Having grown up on a farm in another county of Nova Scotia, I appreciated what these rural students often brought to school – a familiarity with work, an appreciation of the opportunity to be around their peers (especially those who lived in isolated parts of the county), and a close connection with their family members.

Of the 4,295 families in the county, 3,225 were married-couple families, 540 were common-law-couple families, and 525 were lone-parent families (400 female-lone parents). Lone-families had a median family income of \$21,110, while couple-families had a median family income of \$46,095 (Statistics Canada, 2006a). I emphasize the low income in Nova Middle School's rural community because as a practitioner it was important for me to understand what sorts of resources students might access outside of the school. For example, it was unreasonable for me to expect students to be able to access the internet from their homes or complete an assignment by using a video camera (or other technologies) when families could not afford these technological tools. If I expected to integrate technology into the curriculum, it would have to be done with school resources. Similarly, I was conscious of students' access to more basic school supplies at home such as Bristol Board (a large paper product often used for making posters), modelling clay, or Post-it notes. It should be noted that I was conscious of these equity issues for students not only in terms of families' financial resources, but also in terms of families' geographic location and capacity for mobility. I have my students fill out a brief and informal questionnaire at the beginning of each school year so that I can ensure that I am not asking students to do an assignment at home that cannot be completed. One of the questions addresses access to the internet at home. In 2007, roughly one third of the high school students in my classroom had no way of connecting a computer to "high-speed" internet services even if their families could afford to do so; there is no internet service in remote parts of the county. Furthermore, for some families, it might take more than an hour and a half to drive to a store to purchase a piece of Bristol Board and at the time of this research there was no public transit system in the town or county surrounding Nova Middle School. Given the rural nature of the school setting and low family incomes in the county, I had to plan the authentic assessment events in my classroom carefully so that specific resources would be available to students at school.

Resourcing my classroom was often financially difficult. The school had no specific budget for an individual teacher's vision of authentic assessment practices. There were school budgets for bussing sports teams, an annual purchase of textbooks, a bulk purchase of classroom supplies, but few opportunities for me to request financial assistance to have students create a photographic essay, stage a performance, or use a computer. This financial situation was not unique to Nova Middle School – it was common across the province. Statistics Canada reported that the Nova Scotia education system spent 15% less per child than the national average: “The province spent \$7,200 per student compared with a national average of \$8,504 in 2003-04, Statistics Canada determined after compiling data from 1997-98 to 2003-04” (Simpson, 2006). What frequently happened was that I spent my own money on resources that I believed would support students' learning. The only computer in my classroom was one that I bought. I purchased costumes for students' performances from a second-hand clothing store in the town. I paid for the development of photos (my camera), the ink for the printer (also mine), and the paint for the mural. “Teachers in Atlantic Canada spend more than \$400.00 per year for school-related things, nearly 90% of which goes towards school supplies” (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2005a), while Nova Scotia teachers' salaries remain the second lowest in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006b).

What I am getting at, is that using authentic assessment practices in my Nova Scotia context demanded a financial commitment from me, the teacher. Other teachers or schools may have found that using authentic assessment practices that required additional resources was not financially possible in their situation. My visits to schools in other countries suggested to me that authentic assessment, with its demand for student resources to create artefacts or performances, may not be viable in these classrooms. The same argument can be made for any school system that is unable (or unwilling) to support authentic assessment financially. Teachers working in rural Nova Scotia and interested in authentic assessment may not have easy access to sufficient classroom resources.

Despite the limited financial resources available to me at Nova Middle School, in general, I experienced what researchers (Davalos & Griffin, 1999) cite as the strengths of rural schools: (1) supportive family-like atmospheres, (2) generally favourable teacher to student ratios, (3) potential abilities of administrators to mobilize smaller, more manageable teaching staffs to make instructional improvements, and (4) possibilities for implementing innovative teaching practices (O'Connell & Hagans, 1985; Peltier, Foldesey, Holman, & Matranga, 1989). I was able to work with colleagues and students in “family-like atmospheres” in regard to implementing innovations in authentic assessment

practices. I had positive relationships with students and staff and a strong sense of collegiality was one of the reasons I enjoyed working in this rural school.

Understanding the context of my research involves looking at the assessment environment surrounding this research, the site of Nova Middle School, and the surrounding conditions of rural Nova Scotia. My practitioner work in this context was continuously negotiated. I was in a paradoxical position as a supporter of authentic assessment practices working in a system where students would also experience standardized testing in their later years of schooling. I worked in a school where resources such as collegiality were abundant, and school supplies were, at best, basic by Canadian standards. As a member of the local community surrounding Nova Middle School, I valued rural life in Nova Scotia yet simultaneously realized that students, in their adult lives, would most likely need to work with (or in) worlds beyond the local county. Teaching in this context encouraged me to be reflective about my practices as I negotiated my placement as a teacher working within this framework. In this way, the context was a catalyst of this research.

1.4 Directing my research

The authentic assessment literature claims to help students present their own identities, but in my classroom practices of authentic assessment I started to see reflections of the local community and myself. As I questioned the claims in the authentic assessment literature, I realized that my assessment practices occurred within a specific context that would shape my research. The assessment environment surrounding this research generally supported my assessment practices, especially, as we will see in Chapter 6, by the Department of Education's assessment policies. Nova Middle School was a supportive environment for me to implement authentic assessment in my classroom and the rural nature of school community was receptive to my attempts to involve the world beyond the school in students' school experiences. Despite this generally supportive environment for authentic assessment practices in my classroom, complications arose - complications that shaped my research direction.

My practices from 2000-2001 raised what Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997, p. 22) consider a "complication" – a problem encountered: assumptions were made in my practices that the students could assume positions of authority by participating in the decision-making process involved in the

authentic assessment events. As described by Boomer, Lester, Onore, and Cook (1992, p. 6) possible naivety can occur with claims that offer students opportunities to negotiate:

Indeed we are beginning to wonder whether the outright autocrat is not less dangerous than some self-deluding humanist. At least the former may make the rules of the power game explicit. We looked closely at so-called “child-centred” progressive teaching techniques, where teachers purport to take a largely facilitative role. Here, teachers who still retain the significant, ultimate powers often pretend to divest themselves of power by giving limited decision-making opportunities to the children. For example, children may be free to choose one of several options without having the option to reject the options.

I began to wonder if I was teaching in a manner in which Boomer might call a “self-deluding humanist.” Were the assessment practices creating unexpected effects with the students? Garth Boomer asked: “Are schools dedicated to the promotion of the child’s power to learn, and ultimately to learn independently of instruction and guidance? I am sure that administrators and teachers throughout Australia would answer with an unequivocal ‘yes.’ Why is it then that we find dependent learning rather than inquiry and experiment? Why is it that we find so few questions from children?” (as cited in Johnston & Dowdy, 1988, p. 4) Were my assessment practices promoting dependent learning, but misleading students to believe that they were acting independently? Perhaps my authentic assessment practices were unintentionally creating learners who felt “in control” but who were instead dependent on the teacher. Lensmire (1998, p. 274) warns that issues of power do not disappear when encouraging students to use alternative forms of assessment:

...encouragement is sometimes not far from coercion in the classroom, given unequal power relations among teachers and students The institutional authority of the teacher in school does not just go away when that teacher chooses to engage in alternative teaching practices; it remains for the student to negotiate with the teacher, or work through, or work around. It’s a complicated business.

Likewise, Boomer is cautious when educators “purport to hand over powers [as] the harmful effects of their power may be increased, because the subjects of this power are likely to be mystified about the actual sources of control” (Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992, p. 8). Conscious of Boomer’s warning, I attempted to understand and honour students’ interest in their assignments with as little interference as possible, offering guidance when asked (which happened frequently) or when I thought that students’ proposals were not aligned closely enough to the curriculum outcomes of the course. I wondered if I also offered guidance when the students’ interests were not aligned with my own.

I reflexively carried a set of beliefs about the ideal student in my classroom: one who was reflective, independent, had a passion for learning, a critical thinker, and was creative. This set of ideals was

dangerous because, without examination, it could have privileged students who displayed many of these behaviours, or conversely, alienated those who did not (see De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002). Understanding that every educator carries beliefs about the adolescent student, I began to challenge how students may or may not have been supported in my classroom because of my notions of an ideal adolescent student. This led me to a series of questions: Was the goal of my teaching to turn out students who were like me? What versions of young people were envisioned by the system? What role do young people have in determining this? Were these versions of young people adequate for their future lives, especially in a world that is changing? I later learned that these were issues of subjectivity and identity, and as we will see in Chapter 2, these ideas underpin how we conceptualize young people, develop their schooling, and conduct assessment practices. By focusing my research on issues of subjectivity and identity, I signal concerns about how students were being constituted through specific assessment events in my classroom.

This practitioner problem engages academic conversations about identity, adolescents, and the role of authentic assessment in today's world. I locate this research problem in the next four chapters. First, I use the literature about identity, adolescents, and assessment to illustrate how my research emerges from these fields. Then, in Chapter 3, I offer the theoretical tools that helped me to understand how student identities were constituted within my classroom. Chapter 4 describes my approach as a practitioner conducting research about my own version of authentic assessment practices and summarizes the data corpus for this research. In Chapter 5, I write about my educational aims as a teacher and provide a rich description of my classroom program and the authentic assessment practices that I used in the 2000-2001 school year. The next four chapters help to position my research problem so that readers might envision my work in the classroom, understand its context in the literature, and appreciate the relationship of theory and practice in practitioner research.

This research is situated in neo-liberal/neo-conservative times - when young people, as well as educational practices are being redefined. In classrooms, students use assessment results to make sense of who they are and how well they are doing in today's world. These assessment experiences describe young people as an individual self in relation to their peers: some students are successful and rewarded, others are not and are punished. Traditionally, students' marks reflect the success and failure of young people at school and as a practitioner researcher, I was interested in the possibilities of authentic assessment to work with young people in new ways. This is not to suggest that marks

are avoidable in authentic assessment practices, but that they are derived in new ways. *What* is assessed and *how* assessment occurs enables students to constitute their self differently.

However, identity constitution in authentic assessment practices has not been sufficiently researched. This knowledge is valuable so that practitioners can understand the complexities of students' identity constitution in authentic assessment practices. Instead of assuming that young people have an "authentic" identity that is produced in authentic assessment, teachers need to be aware of their own role in constituting students' identities in their classroom and to be able to help students understand how identities are constituted.

Furthermore, we do not yet know what versions of young people authentic assessment supports and rewards or what versions of young people authentic assessment marginalizes or punishes. The claims of authentic assessment (to create possibilities for the learner and the learning process) have not been studied in terms of how students are supported or excluded in classrooms due to those practices. My research problem contributes not only to the theorization of students' identities in assessment practices, but makes practical contributions to the field by bringing to light how authentic assessment might be used to keep young people engaged in school, and, conversely, how authentic assessment may not work to engage all young people. This knowledge may help teachers to shape their practices to address a wider range of student identities and find new ways of using authentic assessment to keep young people engaged in school. I was interested in how authentic assessment, while working within the parameters of schooling, offers students new ways of being in my classroom and how students take up or resist identities that are on offer. In this way, I considered that my research interest in identity, adolescence, and authentic assessment was a new way of thinking about how young people work at school to constitute a self that calls out, "Mark me."

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUALIZING, SCHOOLING, AND ASSESSING ADOLESCENTS

In Chapter 1, I pointed out that identity is a concept that underpins how we conceptualize young people, develop their schooling, and conduct assessment practices. This chapter describes this terrain through the use of academic studies, official policies, and media descriptions of young people, their schooling, and assessment. I approached the literature with a series of questions: How is adolescence thought about and what kind of people do adolescents need to learn to become? What kind of schooling will best achieve this? What is the role of assessment in achieving this? These questions are addressed in three sections: conceptualizing adolescence, schooling adolescents, and assessing adolescents.

Essential to this chapter is the issue of identity in today's world, specifically for young people in adolescence. While the notion of identity is closely linked to the literature about adolescence, I theorize identity in a particular way and this is described in Chapter 3. As we'll see, my theoretical approach to identity takes into account the social and political contexts of students' lives in and outside of school and utilizes concepts of subjectivity to show how students constitute identities. My approach emphasizes that students' identities are not fixed or on a predetermined trajectory of development. Instead, student identities are understood to be constituted differently in various discourses and contexts. This is a specific understanding of identity that involves postmodern theories of discourse, power, subjectivity, governmentality, and technologies that are discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter I focus on how the authentic assessment literature concerning adolescence conceptualizes identity which is somewhat different from the approach I use, as will be seen.

I use the term "adolescence" not as it is commonly used but as a particular theoretical construction of young people through dominant discourses of psychology and medicine that specify adolescence as a particular and determinable time-period in life. In contrast, I use the term "adolescent(s)" to

signal the particular construction of young people as lived persons with different relations. Discussing what kind of people adolescents need to learn to become is not a new conversation – adolescence has always been a site of societal anxiety, not only of who adolescents *are*, but more significantly what they might *become* (Epstein, 1998; Giroux, 1998, 2004; Lesko, 2001; Yon, 2000). In many ways, discussing identity issues enters into debates about what identities are sufficient for young people in these times and therefore, much of the current literature concerning identity involves descriptions of today’s world as a context for identity formation.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concepts of neo-liberalism/neo-conservatism to describe these times, but other related labels can also be used to describe today’s world, such as “Late Capitalism” (1997), “New Capitalism” (Fairclough, 2003), “New Times” (Cormack, 1998; Lesko, 2001; Nixon, 1998a; S. Taylor, 2004), and “Global Times” (Yon, 2000). It can be noted that such labels do not only happen in scholarly texts. They are also found in popular and fictional texts such as Greer’s (2003) label for these times, “the Consumeristic Period” and in teacher training texts such as Fisch’s (2007) video *Did you know...shift happens* which describes that we are living in “Exponential Times.” What these descriptions of today’s world emphasize is rapid change:

We are living at a time of rapid global socio-economic and cultural changes....such as de-industrialisation, feminisation of local labour markets and the diversification of family forms, [which] are contesting and fragmenting traditional lifestyles. Alongside this, education as a post-war representation of the modernist project, involving comprehensive re-organisation, child centred pedagogy, anti-racism and anti-sexism underpinned by a belief in universalism, collectivism, humanism, rational progression and social justice, is being destabilised by this emerging socio-economic uncertainty. For example, fundamental changes in the relationship between the reward structures of the school and the labour market seem to be leading to great confusion among large sectors of male and female students concerning the purpose of school in preparing them for occupational and social destinies (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 1997, p. 261).

One of the problems driving this conversation about today’s world is determining what kind of work force will be needed in the future (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Lesko, 2001). It can be said that the world is experiencing rapid change that shapes both the work force imagined and schooling practices valued to shape up this imagined worker. This is particularly relevant in Nova Scotia where, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, traditional industries such as fishing and agriculture are being replaced with manufacturing, tourism, and cultural industries. The literature about adolescence has been a site of anxiety where new ideas about the future citizen are worked out (Lesko, 2001). Layered onto these conversations about adolescence is the role of assessment in shaping and sorting young people. For example, if adolescents are viewed as a “work-force-in-training,” then school can be understood

as the place for this training, and it follows that student assessment events can be viewed as how well young people are prepared to participate in society as workers in what I henceforth refer to as these “New Times.”

Schooling for young people is not only about creating a future workforce. For example, the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development (1989) recommends that school for adolescents should be focused on citizenship. In my province, the Nova Scotia Department of Education (1997, p. 3) emphasizes students’ role in curriculum: “In a context of social, economic, and technological change, it is important that our schools provide students in the middle years with learning experiences that will enable them to understand themselves and their world.” Walker and Soltis (1992, p. 37) report that general education involves more than concerns about society: “[it] is importantly about students, society, and knowledge, and if any one of these components is severely neglected, education is worsened and all components suffer.” However, in neo-liberal discourses the worker and the education for workers is becoming a dominant concern and other interests in education have become less important. As a teacher, I must think through curriculum choices as Walker and Soltis (1992, p. 37) suggest, “...from several appropriate perspectives, including student-centered, society-centered, and knowledge-centered ones.” With this in mind, young people need a broader education than just for work. As a teacher, I am tapping into discourses other than those used for work, while recognizing that these are the discourses that are dominant in neo-liberal educational movements in New Times.

In relation to identity, conceptions of New Times emphasize expanded skills that young people will need, especially new literacies and technological skills (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Giroux, 2004; Nixon, 1998a). This is important to acknowledge because these skills inform what students should learn, how teachers should teach, and how students and teachers relate. Furthermore, if young people are expected to acquire and use these new literacies, teachers need to acquire these same skills or they run the risk of being disconnected from the identities of young people. Green and Bigum (1993) refer to this phenomenon by describing teachers as “aliens in the classroom,” inferring that they are teaching young people very different from themselves. In a similar vein, Epstein (1998, p. 1) notes that adolescents “...sometimes seem like a completely different species from adults, and their habits, idiosyncrasies, and argot have long mystified grown-ups.” Prensky (2001), in describing the disconnect between young people and their teachers, uses the term “digital natives” to describe students’ familiarity with technology and “digital immigrants”

to describe teachers' general lack of familiarity with communication and information technologies. This emphasis on new literacies and technologies in *New Times* informs the identities that young people are expected to constitute in today's world and directs educational practices in classrooms. As we will see in Chapter 6, educational policies in Nova Scotia address this concern by re-envisioning young people for *New Times*. I point out this emphasis here to provide insight into why issues of identity are important for young people, for schools, and for assessment practices.

Beyond creating a future work force that is capable of using new literacies and technologies, the literature about identity in *New Times* also discusses the nature of ideal citizens. For example, Giddens (1991, p. 75) describes the self as someone who is responsible for their own trajectory: "we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves." Instead of understanding identity to be fixed, predetermined, or inevitable, the literature concerning identity in *New Times* frequently describes identity in terms of the relations of the self to surrounding organizations such as teachers, schools, and communities (A. Luke, 1993; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996). The self is understood to be an issue of continuous self-formation and re-formation (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). With this in mind, I approached the literature discussed in this chapter with an interest in focusing on the issues of identity in *New Times*.

I begin with discussing how the mainstream literature presents adolescence via psychological understandings as a time of development and socialization. I critically review the mainstream literature about adolescence and suggest that the predominantly psychological understandings of adolescence, while creating some possibilities for teaching and learning, also limit some of the possible ways in which we might work with youth. I then explore how middle schooling can be understood as a strategy (Rose, 1998) for constituting a psychologically defined adolescent. I present the common rationales for using authentic assessment with adolescents in middle schools and I use the literature review to ask what possibilities are suggested for working with adolescent learners and address gaps that are evident in the literature. Finally, I use the literature to inform the direction of my research as I consider the authentic assessment practices that were used in my Grade 8 classroom.

2.1 Conceptualizing adolescence

Adolescence is most often defined as the transition from childhood to adulthood, initiated by puberty (A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Lesko, 2001). Understanding adolescence in this way denies young people any claims to adulthood or childhood. Adolescents do not have the rights and privileges of adulthood nor are they allowed to behave like children. Instead, adolescence is considered to be a unique developmental stage in the growth of humans. They are something other than adults or children (Cormack, 2005; Lesko, 2001; Wyn & White, 1997). As Wyn & White (1997, p. 147, original emphasis) suggest, “Youth is a *relational* concept; youth is constructed in relation to adulthood.” Lesko (2001, pp. 11-12) argues that there is a dominant set of assumptions (what she calls the “discourse of adolescence”) that “affects and influence *all* adolescents’ lives.... [as they] are subject to its ideas and assumptions.” Educators similarly work within discourses of adolescence. Science, specifically psychology, predominantly shapes the discourse of adolescence, constructing it as a time of development and socialization (A. Hargreaves & Earl, 1990; A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Lesko, 2001). Science (and specifically psychology) claims to be an objective means of conceptualising adolescence, and has become a predominant way in which people conceive of themselves, and others, in the modern world. Rose (1998, p. 59) refers to this as “psychologization”; the ways in which people form “truths” about persons in psychological terms. These psychological constructions of young people are found in much of the literature that describes adolescence and that recommend educational practices for working with youth.

An influential piece of literature that informed educational systems about teaching and learning with adolescents was the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development’s (1989) *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century: The Report of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents*. This report is considered to be the impetus for rethinking adolescence and schooling in the last two decades according to scholars in Australia (Cormack, 2005), Canada (A. Hargreaves & Earl, 1990; A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996), and the United States (Lesko, 2001; Manning & Bucher, 2005; National Middle School Association, 1995b). The Carnegie Report reflects a common tendency in the literature of adolescence – a stark binarization of the representation of adolescence. The first chapter of the Carnegie Report had this to say about adolescence:

Adolescence is one of the most fascinating and complex transitions in the life span: a time of accelerated growth and change, second only to infancy; a time of expanding horizons, self-discovery, and emerging independence; a time of metamorphosis from childhood to adulthood. Its beginning is associated with profound biological, physical, behavioral, and social transformations that roughly correspond with the move to middle school or junior high school. The events of this crucially formative phase can shape an individual's entire life

course and thus the future of our society (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1989).

The Carnegie Report positioned adolescence as a time of transition, as a developmental stage of growth, and critical in determining not only the individual's life, but also the fate of society. I wish to highlight two claims that emerged from the Carnegie Report: that society is dependent on the successful development of adolescents, and that adolescence is a space for societies to make changes and improvements. Lesko (2001, p. 21) has argued that "adolescent development became a space for reformers to talk about their worries and fears and a space for public policy to enact new ideas for creating citizens and a nation that could lead and dominate the particular problems and opportunities of the modern world." Underpinning these assumptions about adolescence is a fear that youth may *not* be successful in their developmental growth phase between childhood and adulthood and that society, for the sake of its own health, should be concerned about the unsuccessful adolescent:

For many others, however, the obstacles in their path can impair their physical and emotional health, destroy their motivation and ability to succeed in school and jobs, and damage their personal relationships. Many reach adulthood ill-equipped to participate responsibly in our democratic society (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1989, executive summary).

Adolescents, then, are defined as a two-folded problem. Firstly, unsuccessful development of adolescents is a threat to democratic society. By defining adolescence as a concern for society, educational systems are called into responding to this threat. Educational spaces are therefore involved in upholding or protecting society from adolescents. Secondly, adolescents need adult assistance during this time of transition. In fact, adolescents are seen to be dependent on the ability of adults to help them "develop and mature" (A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996). Wyn and White (1997, p. 21) summarize this popular perspective of adolescence: "Youth are a problem to society and to themselves." In the majority of cases, the literature concerning adolescence presents this stark view of young people.

2.1.1 Popular conceptions of adolescence

Popular conceptions of adolescence often portray youth as "a threat" and "as both symbols and victims of modern society" (Wyn & White, 1997, p.19). Such constructions of the adolescent are frequently the topics of widely distributed magazines intended for an adult audience. For example, in the period leading up to my study, two popular magazines distributed in Canada, *Newsweek* and *Maclean's* have published articles with titles such as "The Secret Life of Teens" (Leland, 1999), "How

Well Do You Know Your Kid?” (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1999), “The Truth about High School” (Adler, 1999), and “Rave Fever” (Oh, 2000), all implying that adolescents are deceptive or non-trust-worthy; a threat:⁸

Since they first emerged as a demographic entity earlier this century, adolescents of every era have carved out their own secret worlds, inventing private codes of style and behavior designed to communicate only within a group and to exclude or offend adults....now the Net, videogames and no-holds-barred music are creating new worlds that many adults can't enter (Leland, 1999, p. 45).

In survey after survey, many kids - even those on the honor roll - say they feel increasingly alone and alienated, unable to connect with their parents, teachers and sometimes even classmates. They're desperate for guidance, and when they don't get what they need at home or in school, they cling to cliques or immerse themselves in a universe out of their parents' reach, a world defined by computer games, TV and movies, where brutality is so common it has become mundane (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1999, p. 36).

The lines drawn by teenagers are frequently unfair, often hurtful and generally enforced by physical and psychological intimidation (Adler, 1999, p. 58).

'It's my second party,' Max replies, adding, 'I had to sneak out of my window. My mom thinks I'm still home.' ... It all seems sweetly mischievous. But then Amanda asks, 'Are you dosing?' - rave⁹-speak for 'Have you taken drugs?' - which draws a nod from Max (Oh, 2000, p. 39).

Lesko claims that the discourse of adolescence that constructs adolescents in such ways can be understood as a set of popular assumptions. She calls these assumptions confident characterizations of adolescence: adolescents come of age into adulthood, they are controlled by raging hormones, they are peer-oriented, and adolescence is signified by age (Lesko, 2001). These popular notions of the adolescent have created a body of mainstream literature that defines youth as at-risk and in need of adult assistance through times of transition and development. For example, Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) report that adolescence is primarily concerned with young people's identity and values. They are involved in a psychosocial crisis characterized by the struggles of peer-group membership and their relationship to society. The physical, emotional, social, and intellectual changes that young people experience during adolescence and the educational implications of these changes have been described by many writers (Arnett, 2002; Baltzer, 1996; Braddock & McPartland, 1993; Dorman & Lipsitz, 1984; Garvin, 1994; George & Alexander, 1993; Hillman, 1991; Manning & Allen, 1987;

⁸ The cover images of these magazines and the images of young people that were included in these articles were used in my classroom program as I asked students to respond critically to the representation of adolescents in media. I mention this here to signal the ways in which this research was connected with my practice. In this case, the literature that I was reading about adolescents prompted a classroom activity – both relating to how young people are represented.

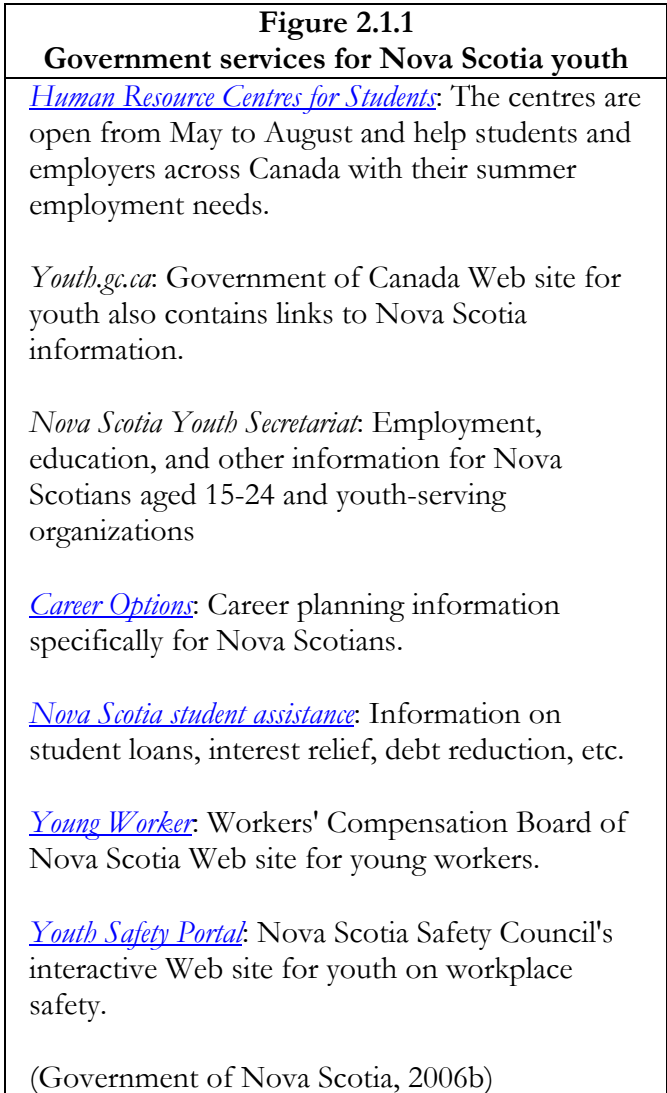
⁹ Raves are all-night parties associated with youth culture and criticized for the prevalence of drug-use. See, for example Oh (2000) and Tomlinson (1998).

Manning & Bucher, 2005; Milner, 2000; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Suzuki, 1988). These writers rely on a psychological understanding of adolescence and use this as a basis for their educational suggestions.

Lesko (1996a, p. 155) claims that, “When groups such as... the young are constructed as other and problematic, social regulation of these others is supported and specified by the social science experts who represent them.” Thus, education is affected by these social science experts including those in the fields of social work and law. For example, in 1989, the government of Nova Scotia passed the *Youth Secretariat Act* which resulted in the formation of the Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat, responsible for “developing effective responses by Government to the needs of the Province’s youth” (Government of Nova Scotia, 1989). In addition to other government youth services noted in Figure 2.1.1, the Nova Scotia government established *Youth Health Centres* around the province, including one in the town where Nova Middle School was located. These sites were intended to be accessible to youth so that they could ask health-related questions and did not require parental accompaniment.

The local school board also worked with *Nova Scotia Public Health* to ensure that nurses were available in schools to attend to students’ medical needs and questions. Nova Middle School worked closely with local law enforcement who visited the school if there

was a legal issue or a security incident, but who also maintained office hours at the school site to be accessible for (and visible to) the students. What I am signalling is that the students in this research experienced social regulation, much of which was created through government laws and services. For example, the province had legislation that regulated the ages when young people may purchase, possess, and use tobacco products and liquor, attend movies without an adult, ice-skate without a



helmet, and discontinue their schooling. In addition, the province used age to determine when young people were eligible for various licenses to drive a tractor, a vehicle on the road, or a motorized boat, and fish, hunt, or trap. Municipalities further regulated young people during their leisure time, determining where youth were allowed to skateboard, play road-hockey (street-hockey), bike, and congregate (or not). These social regulations tend to uphold the trouble-to-society-and-themselves versions of young people.

In Nova Scotia, the Department of Education and Culture produced a document that espouses the popular conceptions of adolescence as described above. This document was called *Current and emerging research on successful junior high schools: The middle years*, researched and written in 1997 by Ann Kilcher of Paideia Consulting Group. Its purpose, as outlined in the document, is to “help teachers, parents, and others in the school community to identify priorities for improvement and consider approaches, strategies, and structures for improving the learning experiences and conditions for young adolescents. Our students deserve nothing less” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p.3). Adolescence is described as follows:

... [The] years between the ages of 10 and 14 are among the most turbulent in the human life span. Within a relatively short period, young adolescents experience profound physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes. These young people are living through some of the most important and drastic changes in the entire life cycle – changes in attachment, autonomy, sexuality, intimacy, achievement, and identity (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 5).

Here, mimicking the language found in the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development’s (1989) *Turning points*, the adolescent is described primarily in psychological concepts: attachment, autonomy intimacy, achievement, and identity (Gleitman, 1986; Liebert, Wicks-Nelson, & Kail, 1986; Woolfolk, 1993). The document explains in detail the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual

<i>Emotional Characteristics</i>	<i>Educational Implications</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be emotional and unpredictable • May be extremely sensitive and easily offended • May be overly self-critical and hard on themselves • Have a growing sense of fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need opportunities for releasing emotional stress and to discuss their issues and concerns • Need sensitive adults who are interested in their well-being and development • Need opportunities for self-exploration and self-definition • Need various opportunities to experience success • Need to be treated fairly and consistently

changes of the adolescent learner and makes claims that there are specific educational implications because of these “developmental needs” (see Table 2.1.1 for an example of the document’s claims about the adolescent’s emotional needs and the consequent educational implications of these needs). These developmental needs (physical, social, emotional, and intellectual) tend towards psychological conceptions to assert “truths” about young people.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture’s document is, like many other educational policies about adolescence, consistent with popular representations of the psychologically defined, developing and maturing, adolescent: “Young people going through rapid growth and extensive development of early adolescence need an educational program that is distinct from either the elementary or the secondary school” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 13).¹⁰ The local school board’s policy similarly recommends that educational experiences for adolescents should be developmentally responsive. These popular conceptions of young people present a universal picture of adolescents who are in a transition that is defined by change, crisis, and the need for adult intervention to “save” adolescents from themselves and from society at large. These representations, while commonly used, may be misleading. For example, Head (1997, p. 6) claims that, “Although adolescents have long attracted adverse comment there is little historical evidence for there being an inevitable and universal period of crisis at this phase of life.” A “period of crisis” however, is what is most commonly used to inform educational policies about schooling for adolescents.

The mainstream literature about adolescence limits the ways in which educators think about and thus work with young people in classrooms. Central to this are specific investments in the concept of a developmental stage (Lesko, 2001; Liebert, Wicks-Nelson, & Kail, 1986) or what Kenway and Bullen (2001, p. 3) refer to as developmentalism: “Developmentalism implies that the movement from childhood to adulthood involves a linear progression from the simple to the complex and from the irrational to the rational.” Such understandings have created professional definitions of adolescence that direct what educators believe about the young people in classrooms. For example, looking back at some of my understandings of adolescence during my first year of teaching, I recognize that my beliefs about the learner were vested in psychological developmentalism; the teenager was in a developmental phase between childhood and adulthood. In a teaching journal that I kept during my

¹⁰ It is interesting to note the similarities of such statements with other policies written about adolescence and schooling in other contexts – demonstrating the global nature of the discourse of adolescence. For example, the Department for Education and Children’s Services of South Australia published the *Action Plan for the Middle Schooling Years* (1994, p. 5) which states that “The education of young adolescents in government schools should be based on an understanding of the developmental characteristics of these young people and their consequential educational and personal needs.”

first year of teaching, I described the young people in my classroom as in the process of metamorphosis (similarly, see Suzuki, 1988). I compared some of the young people in my classroom to being in a “cocoon stage.” As useful as cocoon imagery was for describing the student who appeared in my classroom door with eyes hidden under hair, ball cap, hood, and earphones, I wondered what positive ways of thinking about these young people that were discouraged by my conceptual framework of the developing adolescent.

2.1.2 Reconceptualizing adolescence

Recent literature about adolescence has challenged the notion of developmentalism and offered me new ways of conceptualizing the way I viewed the young people in my classroom. Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997, p. 53) helped me to re-think the basic categories of childhood and adulthood, suggesting that perhaps there are not “clearly identifiable processes which are universal” or that “all normal young people must go through these set stages, completing their developmental tasks, in order to have any chance of being ‘normal’ adults.” These writers criticize the concept of adolescence, arguing that it assumes a self that exists separately from society or social relationships and, once this self is found during the stage of adolescence, this self is established for life and one’s identity is determinable and fixed. The task of adolescence, therefore, is to discover and develop one’s self to the extent that it might be considered “normal” in society. Young people who do not achieve this in adolescence are defined as a problem in society.

This line of thought was useful for me as it provided with me with a way of thinking about my students’ identities: perhaps they were not, as I was taught in my undergraduate psychology and educational psychology courses, in a developmental phase that clearly sorted students into adults and adolescents (or non-adults). I knew from my experiences working with young people in the classroom that adult/mature behaviour was less about age and more about the context surrounding the behaviour. Wyn and White’s work also provided me with a critical lens for viewing the young people in my classroom making me attentive to the labels that I used to think and describe young people. Like Wyn and White, I came to understand that the label “adolescent,” for example, was, in the majority of cases, a means of objectifying, categorizing, and judging young people. I began to watch for how my colleagues, the students, and media used this term to determine if someone was successful (adult-like) or not.

Another writer who influenced my thinking about adolescence was Nancy Lesko. Her work aimed to denaturalize adolescence:

People between the ages of 12 and 17 years are believed to naturally and inevitably possess certain characteristics and behaviors that correspond with essentially different natures than those of adults. The set of binary oppositions cements adults in positions of superiority, regardless of the topic. Adolescents have been constructed and problematized in a way similar to the modern conception of the elderly with the effect of making youthfulness the problem of adolescents and denying a basic human solidarity in growing up. When groups such as the elderly or the young are constructed as other and problematic, social regulation of these others is supported and specified by the social science experts who represent them (Lesko, 1996a, pp. 155-156).

Layering Lesko's work onto that of Wyn and White, I became cognizant of the *ways* in which young people are constituted through adolescence: adults are placed in positions of superiority and can therefore construct social regulations that aim to control young people. This perspective helped me to re-think not only the effects of the discourse of adolescence on young people as a way constituting themselves, but also made me question my role as an adult - as a teacher in a classroom - working with young people. I re-evaluated my use of the term adolescent in my professional life, and how I, as a professional, participated in shaping-up young people into particular forms. Lesko (1996b, p. 453), in reviewing the literature summarized four professional definitions of youth:

1. Conventional medical and social science based views are one set of definitions that involve abstracted, universalized concepts of hormone-raging, identity-seeking, and peer-conforming youth.
2. A second category, youth as major social problem, is composed of youth who fail to follow proper norms for development and are prone to violence, pregnancy, motherhood, school dropout, unemployment, and other deviances.
3. In therapeutic arenas, such as social work and mental health, youth are viewed as victims/patients: of sexual assault, of dysfunctional families, or of addictive patterns, such as alcoholism.
4. A fourth discursive construction of youth is written in rights language, and opposes the child as-property-of-parents view that contains youth within families.

As an educator, I identified closely with Lesko's first two professional definitions of youth. I could make parallels to how local education policies that described young people often conveyed many of the ideas found in Lesko's first definition of youth to present a medical and science based adolescent who was biologically determined with specific intellectual, physical, social, and emotional stages of development. Furthermore, I could see how schooling frequently takes up many of the aspects of the second definition of youth through its preoccupation with deterring young people from becoming a social problem, as made apparent by the inclusion of topics such as peace education/peer mediation, babysitting and parenting skills, sex and sexuality education, career

education, and employment skills in courses such as “Personal Development and Relationships” in Grades 7, 8, and 9. As a practitioner, I became aware of how I was expected, due to the descriptions in curriculum and policies, to participate in the construction of adolescents by using these professional definitions.

One of the difficulties of mainstream and professional definitions of adolescence is to view adolescents categorically as in-between children and adults and therefore they are understood to be incapable of speaking for themselves because they are not fully developed, nor ready for society. Adolescence is a paradoxical state because young people’s moment of entry into society is encouraged and simultaneously repressed by adults (Roman, 1996). Students remain without the capacity to represent themselves and are continuously represented by adult views of adolescence (Epstein, 1998; Giroux, 1996, 1998; Head, 1997; Lesko, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Males, 1999; Pollack, 2000; Wyn & White, 1997). I raise this concern to emphasize one of the problems of conducting research with adolescents: it becomes difficult for students to speak, or make reference to their self without referencing these common societal understandings about what it means to be an adolescent. For a teacher working with authentic assessment practices, this concern must be considered so that students perceive themselves beyond the common conceptions of a developing adolescent who is partial, ill-equipped, or not-ready, but rather as someone who is capable of making decisions and can contribute to the learning and assessing processes in the classroom. What I am suggesting is that authentic assessment practices could potentially be used to provide students (and myself) a space for discussing, resisting, or contesting dominant conceptions of adolescence and provide other ways to explore identity in our classroom.

This form of identity work with young people has been initiated by other educators and researchers (Cormack, 2005; Roman, 1996; Wyn & White, 1997) and follows what Lesko (2001, p. 199) has suggested - that contemporary work with young people should “undermine the monolithic view of adolescents as supposedly all the same and as fundamentally different from adults.” Wyn and White (1997, p. 25) suggest why there may be few researchers following this line of thought: “Perhaps overwhelmed by the dominance of the developmental psychological approach to youth (‘youth development’), few have explored the implications of challenging the categorical approach to youth research, youth studies and to youth policy.” Undermining universal versions of adolescence allowed me to create ways of thinking about young people as being constituted in other and fluid forms. For example, one of the ways which Lesko (2001) and Wyn (2000) have challenged developmentalism and the categorical approach to conceptualizing young people in terms of

biological determinism (e.g., adolescence as a phase or stage in life), is to rethink how adolescence is viewed within unilateral and panoptical time:

Somehow a remade adolescence must take up the contradictions of being simultaneously mature and immature, old and young, traditional and innovative. These contradictions are explored in various texts, fictional and sociological. For example, Johanna Wyn, following the tracks of Buchmann, argues that youth are simultaneously young and old, learning and learned, working and in school. This idea of time (that is, past, present, and future) as holding seemingly opposing identities *simultaneously* is, I believe, a necessary dimension of a retheorizing of adolescence (Lesko, 2001, pp. 196-197, original emphasis).

This “untimely” (Lesko, 2001, p. 199) way of viewing young people is particularly challenging in the field of educational assessment where students might be expected to “do better” or show “improvement” in their school work and grades. Student assessment, by nature, reports how students are doing within a particular moment in time, such as at the end of an assignment, unit of study, school term, or school year. In fact, student assessment documents students’ achievement in relation to time and therefore conceptualizing young people in school as “untimely” is problematic in practice. Assessment practices that value the process of learning, while emphasized in the authentic assessment literature (e.g., assessment *for* learning), are not typically reported in the summative assessments that are included in students’ final marks. It appears then, that authentic assessment practices can be used as part of a process of reconceptualizing adolescence: students’ identities in authentic assessment practices are sites of investigation where time-bound forms of adolescence may be contested.

Reconceptualizing adolescence operates not only in the sphere of time, but also of place. By this, I mean that adolescence is a social construct and in today’s world of globalization, the place of reconceptualizing young people occurs both locally, such as in my classroom practices, but is also informed by increasingly wider contexts. Lesko (2001, p. 198) explains: “...there are now challenges to modern economic, intellectual, global, and familial arrangements. Citizenship and nation-states are likewise under revision. Adolescence and childhood are being redefined in the process, as the global economy expands and discards unproductive processes and people.” Therefore, as a practitioner, I am interested in ensuring that the young people in my classroom are not “discarded” by the global economy as the local economy changes. Reconceptualizing adolescence in my classroom involves redefining citizenship as I prepare young people for current and future participation in societies that are experiencing continual changes in economies. While Lesko’s point was about a global economy, the same point can be made for other aspects of globalization; I saw

my role as an educator to prepare students not only for economic globalization, but also for changing political and cultural globalizations.

The literature about reconceptualizing adolescence has implications for my studies, specifically for the ways in which I theorize students' identities in my classroom. These theoretical frameworks are presented in Chapter 3. Here, I wish to note that the theoretical framework for this research evolved from the literature about adolescence. Firstly, reconceptualizing adolescence requires a way of thinking about students' identities that are not fixed. This was evident in the literature that challenged adolescence as a construct typically described as being psychologically and biologically determined, and bound in concepts of unilateral time. In taking up the work of reconceptualizing adolescence, I was interested in theoretical positions that allowed me to think about identity in ways other than as predetermined and static. Secondly, the literature contesting the popular conceptions of adolescence allowed me to think about how students' identities are socially constructed. This was apparent in the examples of how social regulation and globalization work to shape-up young people in particular ways. I realized that this research would require theoretical frameworks that understand identity as constituted within social contexts. Yon (2000, p. 15) puts it this way: "Processes of globalization have significantly changed perceptions of time and space and rendered problematic notions of identity as fixed in time and space."

I interpreted the problem of adolescence in a way that is different from the mainstream literature about adolescence. In the majority of cases, popular conceptions of adolescence define young people primarily in psychological terms and societal problems. Table 2.1.2 summarizes the common conceptions used to describe young people in these ways as reviewed above. Schools are expected to develop educational programs based on these popular conceptions of young people. This, as we will see in the next section, is largely taken up by middle schools, as they work to solve the "problem of adolescence." However, I interpret the problem of adolescence not to be that young people *are* a problem, but that they are *defined* as a problem; the popular conceptions of adolescence are themselves, a problem. That is, defining young people as a problem is problematic for me because this assumes a role of superiority where,

Table 2.1.2
Popular conceptions of adolescence
<p>According to popular conceptions of adolescence, young people are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a problem to society • a problem to themselves • at-risk • a threat • in a period of transition • in a developmental phase • both symbols and victims of modern society

as the teacher, I am expected to provide guidance and control to young people who are not only a problem to others, but also to themselves. This perspective objectifies my students and does not encourage me to work with students in ways where they are active participants in their learning. Interested in students' meaningful involvement in the authentic assessment practices of my classroom, I wanted to conceptualize young people as capable participants in their learning, rather than as objects to be guided and controlled. Thus, for me, the problem of adolescence was finding ways to contest the dominant and popular conceptualizations of adolescence so that young people in my classroom may have opportunities to create other versions of adolescence. This is particularly important in New Times where young people will experience great flux in their social lives, including uncertain job stability. It is conceivable that young people will need to re-invent themselves at intervals throughout their life to remain active participants in society. Head (1997, p. 112) writes, "Those who foreclose on their identity will be at risk as circumstances may later force change on them. Increasingly, young people will have to enter adulthood with the necessary flexibility to deal positively with social change." Reconceptualizing adolescence is not only a project for teachers and other adults, but significant for young people themselves.

2.2 Schooling adolescents

Sharget and Smink (2004) claim that one of the most urgent problems facing societies and schools in today's world is that adolescents are dropping out of school. For example, in Canada in 1993, "...an estimated 30% of 15- to 20-year-olds do not complete high school, as compared with an estimated dropout rate of less than 10% in Germany, and less than 2% in Japan" (Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996, p. 313). Statistics Canada has reported that the dropout rates for students in rural and small town schools remain higher compared to students in urban areas (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 2005). What is happening according to Bottrell (2007), Fernández (2002), McFadden (1995), and Smyth (2006) is that young people are resisting schooling and deciding that school is disconnected from their wider lives and this is especially true for rural students and for students who are marginalized in schools. In efforts to keep young people engaged in their education, schooling for adolescents has undergone reform. The middle school reform movement connects the "problem" of young people and the problem of schooling.

If the problem of adolescence is that young people are at-risk and "a problem to society and themselves" (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 21), then middle school can be understood as a strategy for

addressing “the problem of adolescence.” Rose (1998, p. 28) considers a strategy to be the “...procedures for regulating the capacities of persons linked into wider moral, social, or political objectives concerning the undesirable and desirable features of populations, work force, family, society.” It can be argued, that middle schools are a strategy for regulating and managing adolescents. I make this claim because, as we will see, much of the middle school literature takes up the concept of developmentalism and the notion of a psychologically-defined adolescent who is at-risk, requires adult intervention, and is in a phase of development. Therefore, middle schooling can be understood as an educational reform movement that takes-up the popular conceptualizations of adolescence. I focus my attention on the literature of middle schools because this was the context of my research. In my discussion of the literature, I involve local examples where appropriate.

Schools are places where young people are expected to constitute a self - to “become somebody” (Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996). The literature about schooling for young people makes assumptions about the nature of young people and the ways in which schools should be organized to respond to what young people “need” to “become somebody.” The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture (1997, p. 19) recognized that “creating schools that are welcoming, inclusive, and caring communities for all students is essential particularly for middle years students who are experiencing so much change in all aspects of their lives.” According to the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture (1997, p. 22) these communities are fostered through individualizing and personalizing students’ experiences, recognizing students’ needs¹¹ during the transitions between grades and schools, developing a comprehensive guidance program, integrating peer support programs, providing health services and offering extra-curricular activities. “What matters most is the care in the classroom and in the routine relationships among teachers and students” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 22). Such a vision of education suggests an alignment of middle schools with curriculum theories that focus on the “individual.” For example, Pratt (1994, p. 14) suggests that a curriculum perspective which emphasizes “the development of all aspects of the individual” be termed “individual fulfilment.” Posner (1995) used “experiential” to describe a curriculum framework which is derived from students’ experiences. Dewey (1938) used the label “progressive” to describe curriculum which is based on the notion of “individual experience.” Progressive and individualistic curriculum approaches are foundational to the philosophy of middle schools - to be centred on the

¹¹ In this document, the word “needs” is normalized and is used to represent “developmental needs” which, as we will see, are based largely on psychological understandings of the young person.

“development” of students and address their “developmental needs” that are perceived as “individual.”

Progressive educational reforms that gave rise to the creation of middle schools emphasized “child-centred” curriculum where the student’s developmental needs could be addressed. These developmental needs were compatible with psychological conceptions of young people. The following three citations illustrate what is typical in middle level literature – the unproblematic use of the psychologically-based words “development” and “needs” and their combination:

- “Program and services in the transition years should primarily be based on the characteristics and needs of early adolescents” (A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996, p. 5).
- “[Middle level education is the] . . . segment of schooling that encompasses early adolescence, the stage of life between the ages of 10 and 15. In order to be developmentally responsive, middle level schools must be grounded in the diverse characteristics and needs of these young people. It is this concept that lies at the heart of middle level education. While grade configuration may be a consideration, the nature of the program provided for young adolescents, wherever they are housed, is the crucial factor” (National Middle School Association, 1995b, p. 5).
- [A Nova Scotia educator explained that a middle school is] “centred around the developmental needs of early adolescents; emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually” (Baltzer, 1995, p. 13).

Placing the young person at the centre of the definition gave middle schools an identity. This version of schooling was not only “student-centred,” but also greatly influenced by psychology, specifically in the beliefs of developmentalism.

How the middle school was organized was researched by Alexander and McEwin (1989) and the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development (1989). These studies reported that many of the programmatic visions of middle level education remained to be fully implemented. The Carnegie Report presented recommendations for improving the education of adolescents:

- (1) create small communities for learning, (2) teach a core academic program, (3) ensure success for all students, (4) empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students, (5) staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, (6) improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents, (7) reengage families in the education of young adolescents, and (8) connect schools with communities (as cited in Lounsbury, 1996, pp. 2-3).

The Carnegie Report was influential in that it initiated professional interest in creating middle schools. In my professional context, this report was interpreted locally to create policies, and then

this policy was used to assist in the implementation of middle schools in my school board. There were two significant periods of implementing middle schools in my school board – one in the late 1980s (the beginning of Nova Middle School) and the other in the late 1990s. This second “wave” of middle school implementations occurred during the beginning of my teaching career and Nova Middle School experienced a professional rejuvenation during this period as staff shared their relative expertise with other schools in the school board. In 1997, in support of middle school versions of schooling, the Middle Level Leadership Team¹² of Nova School Board stated that it was committed to the development and implementation of middle level education and supports:

- a philosophy that addresses the varied intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of early adolescents,
- teams of educators who are knowledgeable about, and committed to teaching early adolescents,
- a developmentally responsive curriculum and program which is balanced between the cognitive and affective needs of early adolescents,
- an environment conducive to learning that is positive, safe, supporting, and challenging.

Because this vision of middle school education was articulated by my school board’s policies, educators who were interested in developing a middle school program at their school could request additional support from the Middle Level Leadership Team. Typically, this involved professional development about how to structure a middle school.

To assist middle school structuring, the school board’s Middle Level Leadership Team relied on the frequent use of the National Middle School Association’s documents.¹³ *This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle level schools* has “been the most widely cited statement about the education of young adolescents” (National Middle School Association, 1995b, p. 1). The content of this book was modified into a school-based staff survey to assess the implementation of a middle school program. Another document from the National Middle School Association, *Research Summary #4: Exemplary*

¹² The Middle School Leadership Team was formed in 1996-1998 by the Coordinator of Programs of the school board to conduct professional development experiences. The Leadership team had two sub-committees: one to organize a two-day conference for all middle school and junior high school teachers in the school board and a second committee to write a *Middle Level Handbook*. This second committee consisted of two teachers from each of the seven middle school/junior high schools within the board. I was the co-coordinator of the two-day conference, and I participated in the writing of the *Middle Level Handbook* as well as the *Middle Level Policy* (1997). For purposes of anonymity, the name of the school board is not referenced.

¹³ The National Middle School Association was an American organization that offered professional development opportunities and resources for schools and staff. In the 1980s, the majority of the staff at Nova Middle School attended their annual conference in the United States. In the late 1990s, there were few locally produced documents about middle schools and so the Middle Level Leadership Team referred to documents from the National Middle School Association. In 1997, the Nova Scotia Department of Education published a guide to assist in the implementation of middle schools throughout the province, *Current and Emerging Research on Successful Junior High Schools: The Middle Years*.

Middle Schools (National Middle School Association, 1995a) suggested five characteristics of successful middle schools: interdisciplinary teams, advisory programs, varied instruction, exploratory programs and transition programs. These characteristics help to demonstrate the organizational structures and explore the nature of middle schools, and they were used locally in a two-day conference for all middle school and junior high school teachers in my school board to organize the conference into keynotes and workshops. These five characteristics were rationalized in terms of psychological perspectives of adolescence, as they were intended to address students' physical, social, emotional, and intellectual developmental needs. For example, young people are assumed to need mentoring and have to have consistent contact with adults, therefore structures such as advisory programs and interdisciplinary teams are recommended in the literature.

I used to think that middle school was a series of structures, but now I can see how it was underpinned by a series of assumptions about young people. That is, the middle school literature frequently gestures to psychologically defined conceptions of the adolescent and encourages the adoption of school structures that can assist educators in regulating young people into ways of being based on these conceptions. The five characteristics of exemplary middle schools suggested that the developmental needs of adolescent students provided the rationale for middle school programming. Middle schooling was a reform movement that asked educators to reconceptualize schools around the psychological construct of developmentalism via progressivist approaches to teaching:

Young adolescents have their own legitimate developmental period, with their own unique physical, psychosocial, and cognitive developmental characteristics. The needs of young adolescents will be met only when middle school educators *change* educational practices to reflect middle schoolers' growth and development and when these educators *understand* how communities and their contemporary issues affect development.... Only when this is done can middle schools reach their potential and meet the developmental needs of young adolescents (Manning & Bucher, 2005, p. 59, original emphasis).

One of the concerns that I had about these observations about the regulatory nature of middle schools is that it encourages educators to consider the young people in their classrooms homogenously as "in-need" of adult interventions and thereby giving the teacher a right to surveillance, supervision, and correction. This position felt awkward for me as a practitioner, as I was interested in conceiving and working *with* students as active participants in the classroom activities, not as passive recipients of adult-determined "aid."

A number of researchers have pointed out how homogenous views of young people serve to exclude some students from success in school. Thomson (2002, p. 1) refers all students as having a "virtual

school bag full of things they have already learned at home, with their friends, and in and from the world in which they live” but notes that students who are not from mainstream cultures often do not get to open that bag in school.¹⁴ Institutional processes in schools do not account for students’ lives outside of school and therefore students’ “funds of knowledge” from outside of school – “these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133) - are not valued or utilised as a bridge into valued knowledge and skills. That is, social aspects of students’ lives such as race, gender, poverty, rurality, and sexuality are used to frame the path of the adolescent’s development (Lesko, 2001) and privilege students with particular backgrounds and disadvantage others (Cormack, 2005; McIntosh, 1990). Lesko (2001), for example, argues that schools are unhealthy environments for young people because they are largely masculine institutions that encourage competition. Through processes that privilege the values and knowledge of only some populations, school moves young people of difference into the margins of schools and makes education a place of sorting students by social status (Giroux, 1996; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996; Yon, 2000).

From a wider point of view, middle schools have failed to change the schooling of adolescents. Larry Cuban, (Cuban, 2000; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) in discussing the history of middle schooling notes that as a reform strategy it has failed. While significant changes can be noted within specific school structures, the students’ experiences have, for the most part, remained consistent with the vision of high school programming (Fleming & Toutant, 1995; A. Hargreaves, 1986; Lounsbury, 1991). Middle schools continue to conduct the work of sorting students into those who are successful and those who are not largely emulating the role of the traditional high school in this regard.

2.3 Assessing adolescents

Student assessment acts as a “gate-keeper” in schooling, determining who is successful and who is not, and so the approaches that are used in student assessment privilege certain young people while disadvantaging others. Thinking about how young people constitute identities in my classroom allows me to enter into broad debates about the role of educational assessment in these times. There are many positions in this debate as researchers and practitioners ask, “What are the best assessment

¹⁴ Peggy McIntosh (1990) offers a similar concept which she calls the “invisible knapsack.”

approaches to helping young people in today's world?" Authentic assessment is one approach to assessing students, and requires teachers to take up particular practices to support students' success. Alternatively, as noted in the previous chapter, a neo-liberal/neo-conservative position in this debate might suggest that students should be assessed with standardized tests that measure students' performances in a comparative and competitive manner. Apple (2001) points out that neo-liberal ideas of markets and choice combined with neo-conservative ideas of standards and accountability have reinforced conservative educational positions such as the emphasis on standards. Such a position would require teachers to prepare students for the format and content of these standardized tests and therefore direct teachers' classroom practices differently. Another approach to this debate is to understand educational assessment through the perspective of progressivism.

Educational progressivism has two key components: "Proponents believe that the values of democracy, self-reliance, and responsibility can best be advanced by encouraging students and their teachers to demonstrate them in the classroom. And they believe that education should be child-centred, that strategies to enhance learning should be developed, implemented, and evaluated for each child in a class, as opposed to the entire class overall" (D. L. Black, 2000, p. 36). Followers of Dewey's writing believe that "learning is continuous, individuals learn best in small groups, and that learners best acquire knowledge and understanding when they are actively, rather than passively, engaged" (D. L. Black, 2000, p. 36). In terms of assessment, progressives might argue that students should be involved in the assessment practice, and furthermore, that assessment practices should be tailored to individual students. A progressivist argument is that young people should not be overly compared to one another and be allowed to learn in a manner that suits them. Progressive discourse is therefore somewhat oppositional to neo-liberal/neo-conservative reform movements that recommend standardized testing of large populations against the same norm.

Neo-liberal/neo-conservative, and progressivist versions of student assessment are different in terms of what should be expected of young people in schools and how teachers should work with young people in classrooms (see Gandin & Apple, 2002). In the previous chapter I pointed out that neo-liberalism has been a political project concerning local governance, strong central control, and accountability and that the goal of neo-liberalism is to restructure societies to be advantageous of global capitalism. In terms of assessment, proponents of neo-liberalism might endorse change and choices in classrooms, competition among students, and connection with the "real-world" beyond school. Conversely, the goal of neo-conservatism can be seen as a movement not so much towards

choice and free markets but more towards conformity and regulation. In terms of assessment, neo-conservative educational policies might support an interest in national curricula, standards, and testing where school is concerned with “back to the basics” (Bergman, 2004) of reading, writing, and arithmetic. While the goals of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism are different, they can also be understood as allies in the ways in which these political positions create an environment that is conducive to competition, regulation, and accountability; an environment conducive to standardized testing. Teachers who are working within such an environment might feel pressure in their school communities to spend significant time preparing students for standardized tests rather than using teacher-created or student-involved assessment practices. In this way, neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism can be seen to have similar effects in the classroom – to emphasize student and teacher accountability through external controls such as standardized testing and assessment systems.

By contrast, progressivism can be understood to be after something quite different than neo-liberal/neo-conservatism. As Fujita (2000, p. 7) pointed out in his work comparing education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan,¹⁵ progressivism and neo-liberalism/neo-conservatism produce competing versions of educational reform:

Many educational critics committed to progressive ideas have emphasized individuality, self-realization, self-cultivation and freedom in learning, and argued that the ‘cramming’ education, standardized curriculum, uniform teaching, and strict school management obstruct authentic learning, a stress-free life, and the development of individuality and creativity.

A progressivist stance towards assessment would value students’ involvement in the creation of the classroom assessment events, especially as this involvement might assist students’ individuality and freedom in learning. Progressivist followers of Dewey explain “the role of teachers is to bring their greater maturity and experience to the classroom in order to help students to interrogate those beliefs” (Fecho, 2001, p. 32). The role of the teacher in a progressive classroom is not to prepare students for standardized testing and external accountability, but to help students understand their own interests and development as a basis for their wider social involvement. The debate between neo-liberal/neo-conservatism and progressivism is about what teachers and students should be doing in classrooms: preparing for a form of external review or preparing for self-cultivation. What is at stake is how teachers and students relate, what activities are valued in the classroom, and what it means to be a teacher or a student. I am placed in the “front-lines” of this public debate as a practitioner. It is common to read about the problems of the education system in popular parenting

¹⁵ For readers interested in a similar comparison of neo-liberal and neo-conservative educational reform initiatives in Canada, Britain, and the United States, see Elliott and MacLennan (1994).

magazines in Canada. Most often, these critiques signal the debate between neo-liberal/neo-conservative and progressive education visions of education: “There is a reason why a lot of parents, myself included, welcome the ‘back to the basics’ initiatives underway in many provinces. We remember what progressive education did for us. We expect better for our own children” (Bergman, 2004).¹⁶ Teachers must work out how to teach in a climate of such competing political agendas.

While the positions of neo-liberalism/neo-conservatism and progressive education are in some representations as noted above, opposite ends of the spectrum, they can also be seen to have a number of important continuities. That is, both can be understood as based in liberalism – a belief in the individual as the defining element of society, as someone who has capacities to be developed, or as Peters (1996, p. 41) describes, “understandings of ourselves as rationally autonomous individuals.” Educational reform in *New Times* can be seen as a debate about how to prepare autonomous young people for today’s world – through external surveillance and accountability via standardized testing or by involving teachers and students in the development of assessment practices that take into account more local and individual knowledges. This debate on educational reform divides practitioners, researchers, and parents, and shapes what students experience in classroom assessment practices. What is at stake is not only the role of authentic assessment in today’s world, but also, and I argue more importantly, the role of young people in society in *New Times*. This perspective allows me to think about the importance of assessment in shaping students into particular ways of being in the world and how teachers, through their assessment practices, prepare students to participate in society. A wide variety of student assessment practices is available to teachers working with young people. To understand this variety better, I begin by providing an overview of the field of student assessment and then position authentic assessment within this field. I then discuss gaps in the authentic assessment literature and my practitioner concerns about these gaps.

2.3.1 The field of student assessment

Assessment-led-reform has been a part of education since the earliest days of schooling (Clarke, Madaus, Horn, & Ramos, 2000; Kornhaber, 2004; Madaus & O’Dwyer, 1999; Madaus, Raczek, & Clarke, 1997). Wiggins (as cited in Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1991)

¹⁶ Resistance to progressive education is not a phenomenon exclusive to Canada, nor to countries without a history of progressive education. In Japan, where progressive educational reform is relatively new, it receives criticism: “Japan is the only country amongst the industrialized nations shifting towards a more progressive, problem-solving approach in education and that this is a mistake because it will surely contribute to the deterioration of academic standards” (Motani, 2005, p. 312).

has reported that “assessment is the Trojan horse of school reform because of its power to reshape what and how schools teach.” Forms of assessment that students experience are determined by wider political, cultural, and economic factors. Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris (2001) report that, “policies surrounding educational testing have become political spectacles and struggles for both publicity and control” (as cited in Wyatt-Smith & Campbell, 2002, p. 10). These tensions and struggles in assessment can be understood as work that is conducted within a field, as described by Bourdieu (1993; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1994; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For Bourdieu, human activity is conducted within social fields, a place where agents take up different competing positions, each with its own set of rationale and rules. Using Bourdieu’s notions of a field to think about assessment, lead me to consider that assessment is socially constructed with specific political alignments. Assessment, regardless of form, is not neutral. Investigating assessment literature as a field, there are identifiable, oppositional, and multiple positions for educators to negotiate. These positions reflect a wide variety of purposes, aims, users, and assessment techniques. Rudner and Schafer (2002) refer to these positions as a “series of tensions” and consider professional judgment the guiding principle that educators should use as they struggle within these tensions. I identify some of the binaries created within the field of assessment in Table 2.3.1.

Teachers navigate the field of assessment, taking up multiple positions within these polarized understandings of assessment. For example, sometimes teachers are called upon to develop their own classroom assessment tools, and other times they are asked to administer standardized tests written by their employers; teachers

Table 2.3.1	
Binaries in the field of student assessment	
Judgement is external (the examiner)	Judgement is internal (the examinee)
Assessment created outside the school	Assessment created within the school
Standardized assessment	Classroom assessment
High-stakes assessment	Self-assessment
Test assessment	Performance assessment
Product assessment	Process assessment
Formal assessment	Informal assessment
Summative Evaluation	Formative Evaluation
Numerical	Anecdotal

working in the field of assessment operate within a binary of standardized testing and classroom assessment. This binary is not a local occurrence. In Australia, Wyatt-Smith and Campbell (2002) raised questions about what kinds of assessments, standardized testing or classroom-based assessment, provided quality feedback to middle school students. Similarly, this assessment binary was explored in the United States by Heck and Crislip (2001). In Canada, Katz and Earl (2000) called the current assessment trends a paradox; teachers are caught between these juxtaposed directions in assessment (standardized large-scale testing versus classroom-based assessment tools).

While this binary informs all parties interested in education, it is at the classroom level where I focus my interest. The tension that I felt from working in this field informed the assessment practices that were used in my classroom. As I designed assessment plans for the curriculum, I was simultaneously aware of the expectations that the educational community had on my students' performances in future standardized tests, and excited about the classroom assessment tools that my class had developed to reflect their learning.

Stiggins' (1998) reported in his audit of the quality of classroom assessment training in teacher education programs, that most teachers receive little or no training in assessment practices. Much of the literature about assessment often polarizes the field, creating language that defines these positions, and attempts to persuade the agents within the field to take-up these positions. To illustrate the tensions binaries can create for practitioners (and students) I discuss the polarization of standardized testing and classroom assessment. The assessment practices in this research, authentic assessment practices, are a component of the latter part of this binary, and therefore contrast with the practices of standardized testing. While I have chosen to use this dichotomy to structure my writing, this is not to suggest that standardized testing and classroom assessment do not share similarities. For example, both forms of student assessment establish criteria for the purpose of comparing students, determine which students are deemed successful, and are used to report students' successes and failures to the school community. Regardless of the form of student assessment that is used in classrooms, students, teachers, and other adults use assessment results to make decisions about future academic plans and employment possibilities.

2.3.1.1 Standardized testing

Both standardized assessment and classroom assessment are common in Nova Scotia, as standardized testing has recently been re-instated in the form of standardized criterion-referenced testing¹⁷ at grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, as presented in Chapter 1. Much of the public attention tends to be concerned with these standardized tests more than classroom assessment (Schmidt & Plue, 2000). For example, the results of standardized testing in Nova Scotia were published (Cirtwill, Clifton, & D'Orsay, 2002; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 2003) and debated (Forbes, 2002). These reports rank individual schools and school boards. This public pressure directs teachers to ensure that students will be successful in the provincial exams and teachers typically align their teaching and assessment methods with those of required standardized tests: "Teachers pay

¹⁷ In Chapter 1, I provided a definition of standardized criterion-referenced testing along with a reference (Stewart, 2006) and noted that criterion-referenced testing can be standardized and that doing this is common in Nova Scotia.

attention to the form of the questions of high-stakes tests¹⁸ (short-answer, essay, multiple choice, and so on) and adjust their instruction accordingly” (Abrams & Madaus, 2003, p. 33).

In places such as Nova Scotia where Grade 12 provincial exams are required and count for thirty percent of the student’s final grade (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 2001b), teachers may feel pressured to prepare students for these provincial exams by using more select-response questions in tests and other pencil-and-paper forms of assessment in their classroom. “In every setting where a high-stakes test operates, the exam content eventually defines the curriculum” (Abrams & Madaus, 2003, p. 33). Standardized testing can therefore, be understood as a means of educational reform. Kornhaber (2004, p. 52) summarized the “Theory of Test-Based Reform”:

Higher standards must be clearly and publicly spelled out. To find out whether students and educators are focusing on reaching these standards, students will be tested. To make sure the new standards and tests motivate teacher and student effort, test results will carry consequences or stakes. The consequences can be rewards (e.g., good publicity in the newspaper, bonuses for educators and schools) and/or punishments (e.g., bad publicity, dismissal of school staff, student retention or diploma denial). To avoid punishments and get rewards, students and teachers will work harder and as a result, students will learn more and be better prepared for the workforce.

In Chapter 1, I introduced how neo-liberalism has taken on standardized testing as a significant technology. It should be noted that there is a growing body of literature that opposes the use of standardized testing, particularly as researchers claim that it decreases student motivation (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Wasburn-Moses, 2003) and limits student learning (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Froese-Germain, 1999; Hoffman, Paris, Salas, Patterson, & Assaf, 2003; Kornhaber, 2004). Furthermore, Fecho, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005, p. 197) argue that “the centripetal forces that demand adherence to high-stakes large-scale educational reform policies like *No Child Left Behind* are killing teachers’ professional judgement....[and] there is no room for teacher agency required for adults to feel successful, validated, or even grownup.” Academic researchers point out the problems of standardized testing (e.g., Madaus, West, Harmon, Linn, 2001; Lomax & Viator, 1992; Supovitz & Brennan, 1997), and critics of standardized tests have been vocal for more than one hundred years (White, 1888). David Pratt (1994, p. 103), at Queen’s University in Ontario summarizes the difficulties created by standardized testing:

- Subject matter that is not tested, is not taught (such as music, art, non-verbal skills, non-mathematical skills, higher-order thinking skills, or non-mainline topics in which specific teachers are experts),

¹⁸ High-stakes assessment is when the result of the assessment (usually a standardized assessment) has consequences for the student such as grade promotion or school selection. The term is often used interchangeably with “standardized test” in the literature.

- Teachers lose the freedom to make curricular choices,
- Standardized tests encourage lecturing and drill teaching methodologies,
- Commercial test-boosting packages are often used in classrooms,
- Low-achieving students are often dismissed from school on testing days,
- Standardized tests increase the number of students retained in a grade.

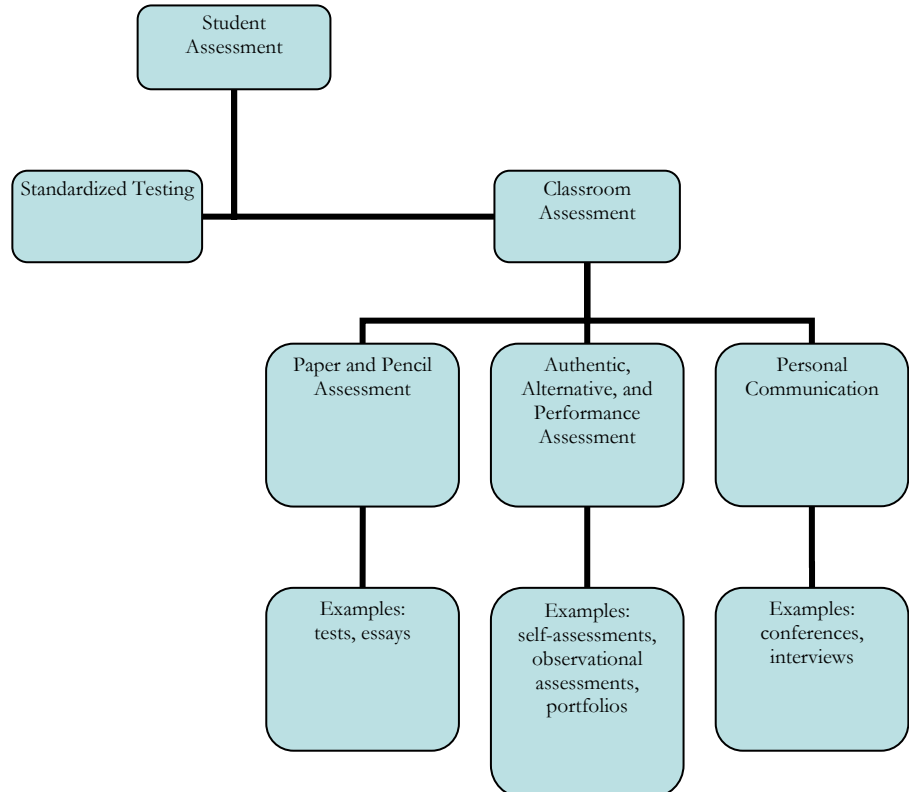
Despite these criticisms of standardized testing, provincial governments across Canada are increasing, not decreasing, their use (Airasian, 2006). Their use contributed to the assessment environment surrounding this research, although the students involved in this research were not required by the Nova Scotia Department of Education to write a standardized test. They experienced another form of assessment, classroom assessment.

2.3.1.2 Classroom assessment

Classroom assessment refers to all assessment tools that are developed within the classroom by the teacher and/or student and is not a homogeneous body of practices. In Figure 2.3.1.2, I present a

concept map for discussing student assessment, and I have divided classroom assessment into three categories: paper and pencil assessments, authentic /alternative /performance assessments, and direct personal communication with the student. I have used this framework to group classroom assessment practices into “families of practices.” I have organized these assessment concepts to

Figure 2.3.1.2
Classroom assessment concept map



provide a framework for understanding the assessment practices in this research, but wish to point out that the terms can be re-conceptualized to present themselves in different understandings. For example, it is conceivable to create a standardized test that incorporates alternative assessment practices where students are required to create a portfolio that would be compared with those of other students (Supovitz & Brennan, 1997). I have deliberately chosen to present the terms in a manner that represents my teaching and research framework, recognizing that classifying assessment practices into totally consistent categories is impossible. My intention for dividing classroom assessment into these three families of practices is to illustrate how authentic assessment is a group of related practices that involve alternative and performance assessments.

The examples provided for each of these families of practice are not exclusive, but were intended to provide a sense of the spirit of each family. For example, the family of practice called “paper and pencil assessment” has two examples (tests and essays) where students are expected to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in written forms. That is not to say that the other families of practice do not have written components, but that these elements are not vital to the assessment of the student’s knowledge or skill. A student could, for example, come prepared to a student conference (an example from the family of practices called “personal communication”) with questions generated by the student and written on paper that would be asked by the teacher. The assessment event, however, is much less about what is written on paper, and more about what/how the student responds to these questions during the conference. In this way, I use the terms “paper and pencil assessments” broadly, to signal when they are the primary way of assessing a student.

Two additional notes should be made about these families of practice:

1. Much of the classroom assessment literature positions the family of practice “paper and pencil assessment” as “traditional” and describes these practices to be the most common form as assessment used in classrooms (Lissitz & Schafer, 2002; Popham, 2002; Stiggins, 2001). This is important to note because the other families of practice define themselves in relation to these “traditional” forms of assessment. The family of practices called “authentic, alternative, and performance assessment,” for example, is an alternative to “paper and pencil assessment.” History is often overlooked in the use of the word “traditional” to describe “paper and pencil assessments” as ancient assessment practices relied on oral examination and performance assessments (Madaus, Raczek, & Clarke, 1997; Popham, 1993). My use of the term “traditional

assessment” refers to the more modern use of the terminology, “paper and pencil assessments” such as tests and essays.

2. “Personal communication” is a family of practice that is closely associated with “authentic, alternative, and performance assessment.” While “personal communication” can be understood to have a distinct characteristic of student-teacher verbal communication, this is not to suggest that these practices necessarily occur distinctly from other families of practice. Students and teachers might, for example, conference before the writing of a test, or conduct an interview before a self-assessment.

Teachers use a variety of assessment practices in their classrooms – pencil and paper assessment, authentic assessments, and personal communication to assess students. In the field of assessment, teachers negotiate how they will construct their classroom assessments and recent trends in teacher education programs promote the use of a variety of assessment practices (Banks, 2005; Buhagiar, 2007; McMillan, 2004; C. S. Taylor & Nolan, 2005). Wiggins (1989) calls this trend the “Authentic Assessment Movement” where emphasis is placed on “performance measures, including portfolios, exhibitions, and simulations as alternatives to the more traditional assessment of classroom tests and research papers” (Banks, 2005, p. 32). As we saw in Chapter 1, what interested me about authentic assessment were the multiple claims in the literature of how assessment could be understood as a means to improving student learning (Andrade, 2000; Arter & McTighe, 2001; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Earl, 2003; Guskey, 2003; E. Hargreaves, 2005; Lissitz & Schafer, 2002; Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2005b; Wiggins, 1998).

2.3.2 Gaps in the authentic assessment literature

Having situated authentic assessment within the field of assessment and having challenged the claims of authentic assessment in Chapter 1, here I point out gaps in the authentic assessment literature. As a practitioner, I have experienced some of the problems that are not sufficiently addressed in the authentic assessment literature: a significant problem is that of students who are not internally motivated and do not want to bring their “real-world” interests into the classroom for public scrutiny. In addition, I must work within an educational system that reinforces external motivators through assessment such as marks, grades, promotion, and academic and financial rewards in the form of scholarships and prizes and this is not discussed in the authentic assessment literature. The literature about authentic assessment often omits discussion about the nature of the student/learner and the negotiation of such complexities. Furthermore, the literature avoids theorizations of the

learner as well as how student decisions are constructed in classrooms. Instead, the learner is understood to be “free” to choose among the opportunities provided by the teacher, or suggested by the student. These gaps point out that the literature has not sufficiently addressed the constitution of students’ identities in authentic assessment practices.

By avoiding discussions of students’ identities in authentic assessment practices, assumptions are made in the literature about students’ identities. For example, the underlying notion of the student who is capable of participating in authentic assessment practices presumes that adolescents are able and willing to assume responsibility for their schoolwork. The learner is expected to make decisions about his or her own learning. Sutton (1997, p. 132-133), in her book, *Assessment for learning*, reports the following pre-conditions for successful independent learning:

- The learner believes that he/she is capable of learning,
- She knows enough about herself to set learning targets within her extended grasp,
- He is willing to make the effort and commitment,
- She is aware of different ways of tackling the learning task, and able to make good decisions depending on the circumstances,
- He has access to useful resources and knows how to use them,
- She is not afraid of failure and knows how to learn from it.

As a practitioner, I have yet to meet this “ideal” student, although it is assumed possible in the above description of the independent learner. Independent learning, as noted above, is not described in terms of its value for students or teachers. That is, it is assumed to be a “good thing” and is not problematized in the literature. Furthermore, the literature about authentic assessment practices suggests that students should be actively involved in the decisions surrounding their education - students may be asked to be involved in their assessments, their record keeping, and in communicating with the teacher about their assessment aspirations and concerns (Stiggins, 2005b; Sutton, 1999). This notion is not challenged in the literature and is not questioned in terms of its value. In experiences where the students are involved in the assessment practices, the adolescent is presumed to be a capable, independent thinker, and not a disciplinary problem in the classroom. In general, in the authentic assessment literature, students are uniformly depicted as engaged in their education, cooperative in the classroom, and interested in being responsible for their own learning. Such a vision of students could be considered a “romantic promise of progressivism in education” where romantic notions of young people prevail (Walkerdine, 1992, p. 15).

This raises the question of where that leaves students and teachers in schools where, for a variety of reasons, students are not willing to assume this “responsibility” for their learning. They may not be

capable of making decisions, of being independent, or being actively involved in the assessment practices. In fact, the authentic assessment literature frequently leaves out references to the notion of young people's identities. Instead, adolescent identities are assumed to be readily available for assessment and constant over time - an assumption of liberal discourses. For example, one of the common practices in authentic assessment is to ask students to conduct a "self-assessment" such as the following:

- asking students to reflect on what they know and are able to do and make statements of how they will direct their attention in the future (these statements may be in the form of learning goals) (adapted from Rolheiser & Ross, 2000),
- asking student to describe what they know and are able to do before a lesson/unit and compare this to what they know and are able to do after the lesson/unit, thereby demonstrating that learning has occurred (adapted from Wilson & Jan, 1998),
- after a small group discussion, asking students to reflect on what went well, what did not go well, and what might have been done differently in the group's discussion (adapted from Evans, 2001).

In these examples, the identities or "selves" that young people are asked to assess are assumed to be readily available to the student (and teacher), and comparable over time and multiple contexts (e.g., small groups or independent learning situations). The literature, because of its assumptions about the nature and capabilities of the learner in authentic assessment practices, signalled to me the need to inquire about how the ideal student was conceived in my classroom and what that might mean.

Authentic assessment practices encourage the active participation of the students in classrooms, creating additional opportunities for young people to constitute a self to be assessed. While traditional assessment practices typically promote teacher-determined knowledges and skills (Lissitz & Schafer, 2002; Popham, 2002; Stiggins, 2001), authentic assessment practices, as introduced in Chapter 1, have the potential to promote student-determined knowledges and skills (P. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Earl, 2003; Montgomery, 2002; Popham, 2008; Stiggins, 2001, 2002a; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006; Sutton, 1999; Winter, 2003). In authentic assessment, students make decisions about the form and content of the assessment events. This creates a rich environment for the study of adolescent identities. For example, authentic assessment is one way to have students practice activities that might emulate "real-world" experiences (Kushman, 1995). Students, through the authentic assessment practices, are invited to bring the "real-world" into the classroom for public consumption and these events constitute students in different ways in the classroom. These "real-world" components of authentic assessment allow students and teachers to

incorporate changes in the local and global worlds into classroom experiences, especially as these changes might apply to the economic, political, and cultural lives of young people. Furthermore, because authentic assessment practices place less emphasis on print texts and allow students to show their knowledge in other ways (e.g., performances, visual media, etc.), these practices may create future citizens who are able to express themselves in a wide range of forms and use diverse technologies. In this way, young people may constitute identities that are unimagined by adults.

In summary, the gap in the literature is of two kinds. First, there is a practical gap. There is a lack of connection between authentic assessment and practical elements of teaching. For example, very little has been written by practitioners about how authentic assessment works as well as very little has been written about how it connects with teaching, and is assumed to be something that is done *after* teaching. Second, there is a theoretical gap in the literature. Overall, authentic assessment literature focuses mostly on the operational dimension of practice, but ignores contextual matters of culture, history, and power. A significant gap in the literature is the lack of critical theorization of authentic assessment practices, specifically the cultural and critical dimensions of learning and practice. The social aspects of the learner including race, poverty, rurality, gender, and sexuality are not addressed in the authentic assessment literature nor does the literature explore how authentic assessment relates to specific teaching pedagogies such as critical literacy (McLaren, 1991; McLaren & Lankshear, 1993). Instead, assessment literature in general is typically separated from pedagogical stances leaving teachers to make connections between teaching practices and assessment practices. When assessment is described within the literature of pedagogy it is often a thin, distinct, and final chapter that does not make explicit connections to teaching strategies but provides a more panoramic view of the role of assessment in general and the technical aspects of implementing assessment (see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Copeland, 2005; Gallagher, 2006). Little has been explored about how authentic assessment operates on and for the participants; even less critical work has been conducted about authentic assessment from a practitioner perspective. As a practitioner, I was concerned about this lack of assessment theorizations in three ways:

- assessment practices may fall victim to unexamined political motivations,
- educators may develop naive understandings about the consequences of assessing their students, and
- this naivety and unexplored assumptions about assessment de-professionalizes the work of teachers by creating assessment practices that do not promote reflection and professional review.

I was interested in taking up the challenge set forth by Delandshere (2001) to explore the philosophical and social-political assumptions made in assessment practices as a basis for rethinking and re-imagining my own classroom practices. By problematizing my own practices, I aimed to demonstrate how authentic assessment could involve practitioners in work beyond the technical implementation of assessment tools and into critical and theoretical work. What I am troubling in this research is not only the literature about authentic assessment, but also my *version* of authentic assessment practices in my classroom, as described later in Chapter 5.

2.4 Directing my research

The literatures of adolescence, middle schooling, and authentic assessment practices related in particular ways that informed my research about how students constitute a sense of self in the classroom through authentic assessment practices. These fields helped me to shape the direction of my research question: *how are young people's identities constituted in my classroom through authentic assessment practices?* These literatures provided me with ways to enter into the conversation about how educators conceptualize and regulate adolescents. In doing so, the literatures also signalled specific directions for the theories that would be needed to pursue my research question.

From the literature about adolescence, I proposed that educational writings and policies took up a predominantly psychological view of adolescents. The literature was pre-occupied with explaining what adolescents “are” – typically in terms of their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual “developmental needs.” Often, as we have seen, these developmental needs are used in the literature to recommend “educational implications” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997). Teachers were encouraged to use these developmental needs to make decisions about their classroom practices and thereby privileging certain ways of being in the classroom and not others. Interested in exploring how individual students constituted themselves in my classroom, I needed to be aware of this dominant way of conceiving young people so that I could seek possibilities other than “not a child, nor adult.” My research interest was in exploring how individual students used or resisted this psychological way of understanding themselves in schools and this was identified as a gap in the literature about adolescence. The literature also provided me with ways of reconceptualizing adolescents as holding “seemingly opposing identities simultaneously” (Lesko, 2001). This suggested to me the need for a theoretical framework for understanding identity as a fluid concept. Secondly, some reconceptualizations of adolescence allowed me to think about how economic, political, and cultural globalization influences students’ notions of their self. I learned

from the literature about adolescence that I required theories that examined the constitution of identities in social contexts, and that these identities would not be understood to be fixed. That is, I was interested in reconceptualizing young people in ways that might resist the notion of a self that was psychologically determinist and stable once “reaching the goal of adulthood.” I wanted to challenge the idea that young people, as described by developmentalism, are heading towards a predetermined, rational adulthood that can be known and instead reconceptualize young people as valuable in our (and their) current lives.

As I have discussed, education has not come to terms with the fluidity of the self. Even the most recent trends in education such as middle schooling rely on nineteenth and twentieth century notions of fixed identity and psychological needs. From the literature about middle schooling, I was sensitive to how middle school reform could be understood as a strategy that seeks to regulate adolescents and educators into particular ways of responding to the psychologically defined adolescent. From this historical perspective, I was interested in how middle school could be understood as a space for “adolescent reform” – a space where students and educators may re-conceive teaching and learning with young people. The middle school literature helped me to envision how my school was a place of encouragement for young people, how my classroom was a place for young people to construct positive conceptions of themselves, and where knowledges that were useful for students’ lives could be validated. In this way,

...middle schooling should be constructed as a ‘site of advocacy for young adolescents’ where negative and narrow constructions of this group can be confronted and their lives spoken, written and visualized in new ways. This is middle schooling that assumes difference and diversity in young people and, underpinned by a commitment to equitable outcomes, uses that difference and diversity as a pedagogical resource to engage with the varying local and global experiences of young people today (Cormack, 2005, p. 276).

The literature about middle school helped me to think about how young people experience social regulation, how middle schooling works to regulate young people into particular ways of being, and how my role as a teacher participated in this process. Because social regulation was emphasized in the literature about adolescence and middle schools, I realized that my research would need theories that helped to explain the processes of identity constitution. My research would need theories to explore not only *what* identities were made possible through my authentic assessment practices, but also *how* these identities were constituted. I noted that this process involved social regulation and techniques for shaping up students through school structures (such as advisory programs), guidelines (such as the calculation of honours), and practices (such as authentic assessment). I was also aware that students were further regulated by the broader educational system (such as educational policy)

and in the world beyond school (such as government laws and licences). The review of literature helped me to understand that I was less interested in theories that illustrated identities to be the determinable result of a set of social regulations, and more interested in theories that explained how young people had a role to play in the constitution of their identities within these social contexts. Put another way, I was interested in theories that avoided the objectification of young people and helped me explain not only how they *were constituted*, but also how they *constituted themselves*; students were not passive, they were active in the constitution of their self. The middle school literature helped me to understand that “adolescent reform” involved challenging the dominant ways of representing young people (such as deterministic developmentalism), and finding new ways in my research to conceive young people as vital to themselves and others in their current identities. Middle schools were a site where such enquiries were possible.

From the authentic assessment literature, I was interested in the theoretical gaps related to the contextualization of assessment practices; how assessment experiences need to be understood in contexts of histories and power. While the literature provided me with ample technical descriptions of how to implement authentic assessment practices and improve my assessment skills, it did not discuss what ways of being – what identities - were made possible because of these assessment practices. There is a lack of critical understanding about how authentic assessment practices connect with the different social and cultural resources held by students. We have little critical analysis of how authentic assessment plays out in young people’s lives in the classroom and how it might have differential effects on students. For example, the generic advice given in the authentic assessment literature does not help me think about how to address the particular resources that my rural students bring to school. While the authentic assessment literature has a strongly technical orientation, it has not taken up theoretical challenges offered by new (poststructural) understandings of student identity and subjectivity. This remains important work to do because authentic assessment often refers to and utilises as a resource for learning students’ lives beyond school and treats their identities as unproblematically set. This research aimed to help fill this gap in the assessment research by investigating the identity work involved in authentic assessment.

As we will see in Chapter 3, theorizations of identity were needed in order to do this. These theories would need to be able to address how I, as a teacher, was in a position of power in the classroom yet expected young people to participate in the assessment practices. In essence, my review of the authentic assessment literature signalled that I would need to theorize the concept of power and how

it operated in my classroom. Secondly, authentic assessment literature frequently avoided the contextualization of these practices and I realized that my research would need rich descriptions of my classroom context, program, and practices. This research moves the discussion of assessment beyond the realm of “scientifically-based research” into the realm of the ethical and illustrates how school assessments are implicated in the construction of young people’s identities. The kinds of selves that assessment practices – in this case, authentic assessment practices – make our students into is important because it “fills a significant gap in the literature and [contributes] to a theoretical [and] practical knowledge base that is educationally significant” (Kilbourn, 2006, p. 544). This research, as practitioner research, could prove valuable to the body of authentic assessment literature as one way of illustrating the contextualization – the histories and stories – of authentic assessment.

CHAPTER 3

THEORIZING IDENTITY

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter helped me to understand that I was interested in theories that could: address how students construct knowledge about themselves and the world through authentic assessment events, address how young people present a self in my classroom to be assessed, and offer ways of thinking about how young people were both regulated and regulated themselves into particular ways of being in my classroom. Because identity underpins my research, I needed theories that could help me describe how students constitute a self in my classroom that took account of the role of the teacher, the school, and the community in that process. As Thiessen (2006, p. 348) notes, research on identity has two main purposes: "...to critically inquire into how the identities of an increasingly diverse group of students are influenced by what happens in classrooms and schools and to probe how students in different locations adapt to the structures, expectations, and work of classrooms and schools." I aligned my research with the first of these expectations, as my research problem was to examine how students' identities were constituted by authentic assessment practices.

According to Yon (2000, p. 1), consideration of identity is a "particular passion" of these Global Times because it is something that is so prevalent in today's world - in the media, in thinking about our families, communities, and cultures. Similarly, Mansfield (2000, p. 1, original emphasis) claims that identity could be considered "*the* defining issue of modern and postmodern cultures." We know that the conditions of postmodernity are affecting how identities are changing. That is, for young people living in today's world, identity is not only important - it is being redefined: "The young people we encounter are at the intersection between the end of social model of youth produced by industrial society and a new social experience of youth in a society more shaped by the imperatives of mobilisation than by roles, by the imperatives of communication rather than function" (McDonald, 1999, p. 3). Young people are living in times where their identities are not based on particular and relatively fixed roles in society and instead young people are asked to see their identities as flexible. Therefore, schools need to adjust their practices – including assessment practices - to reflect this

evolving understanding of identity. This adjustment in our classrooms is important for two reasons: first, so that schools can help young people prepare for what is expected of them in today's world especially in terms of their identities, and second, so that schools can respond to a social experience of youth that is shaped by globalization. In sum, I am aware that authentic assessment is not exempt from today's emphasis of thinking about and constituting identities, yet little has been researched about the relationship between authentic assessment and students' identities.

Researching identities is also important in schools so that we can understand which classroom practices allow students to engage in meaningful identity work that keeps them interested in schooling. Or, put another way, which identities are supported (and which are excluded) from school because of our classroom practices? The question and the theorization of identity is "a matter of considerable political significance" (Hall, 2000, p. 29). For example, my research problem about how students' identities are constituted in authentic assessment is important because it demonstrates which identities are encouraged/rewarded and which are marginalized/punished because of these practices. One of the important aspects of my research problem is that it raises the issue of *how* students' identities were constituted, and not simply *what* identities were constituted. This was done by theorizing identity (such as discussing subjectivity, governmentality, technologies) as we will see in this chapter. By emphasizing *how* students' identities were constituted, my research problem moves authentic assessment research into a new theoretical field.

In this chapter, I begin by describing my rationale for using poststructuralist theories as a basis for thinking about assessment and then I describe how these theories helped me to think about identities. I also introduce two concepts that are commonly associated with poststructuralism - discourse and power/knowledge - that were useful for my understanding of how identities may be constituted. Later in the chapter, I describe my understanding of the related concepts of subjectivities, governmentality, technologies, and ethics. Together, these concepts offered me a way of conceptualizing identity in New Times and this helped to direct my research.

3.1 Poststructuralist understandings of knowledge

In its broadest form, my employer defined educational assessment as the "systematic process of gathering information on student learning" (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. 377). This definition was used by my school board to develop policy documents about

assessment and in turn, inform teachers about ideologies of assessment. Implied in the language used to define assessment in such a way is the belief that data about student learning is measurable, fixed, and can be simply “collected” or “gathered.”¹⁹ Delandshere (2001, p. 7) reported that such premises for thinking about assessment are common: “current views and practices of assessment seem to rest for the most part on the unexamined and problematic assumption that knowledge is static, universal and monolithic.” These depictions of assessment reflect positivist perspectives of the world where knowledge is waiting to be gathered into determinate laws (Lather, 1992; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Such beliefs suggest that knowledge can be acquired through reason, is universally attainable, and contains “Truths” (Kelly, 1997). Positivism articulates a fixed body of knowledge that shapes the way in which we understand the world. This body of knowledge privileges certain viewpoints at the expense of others, creating inequities in our educational system.

If knowledge is understood as something that the learner “finds,” then education practices concentrate on the transmission of knowledge (Miller & Seller, 1990) from the teacher to the student, and assessment practices attempt to measure the knowledge that has been attained by the learner. The types of knowledge that are valued and worthwhile assessing are predetermined and measurable; knowledge can be divided into measurable units for assessment purposes and the results of such assessment can be used to verify that the predetermined knowledge has been transmitted to the student. Understanding knowledge as static and measurable is, and has been in the last century, a predominant conception of assessment (Clarke, Madaus, Horn, & Ramos, 2000; Serafini, 2001). With such a conception, “assessment is equated with measurement” (E. Hargreaves, 2005, p. 216). “Measurement-driven-assessment” encourages positivist understandings of knowledge and validates assessment experiences that do not involve students and teachers in deciding what versions of knowledge would be reasonable or valuable for students. In such a way, positivist perspectives limit our understanding of what is considered worthwhile knowledge for young people by excluding

¹⁹ I use this example to illustrate the unchallenged concept of “knowledge,” common in assessment policies and authentic assessment literature. This is not to suggest that my employer consistently expressed beliefs in “static” or “fixed” knowledge in policy documents. For example, in a section of policies *not* concerning assessment, the Department of Education (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, pp. B3-B4) expressed the “Principle of learning” as follows:

- Learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge,
- Students construct knowledge and make it meaningful in terms of their prior knowledge and experiences,
- Learning is enhanced when it takes place in a social and collaborative environment,
- Students need to continue to view learning as an integrated whole,
- Learners must see themselves as capable and successful,
- Learners have different ways of knowing and representing knowledge,
- Reflection is an integral part of learning.

divergent viewpoints, including their own. By contrast, I was interested in an epistemological position that could align with pluralistic aims of education: to think about assessment practices by embracing “long-repressed” viewpoints (Greene, 1996; Madaus, Raczek, & Clarke, 1997) - in particular, those of students.

Many scholars have challenged assumptions about knowledge by using a wide variety of theories that contest the assumptions of positivism. St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) call this academic interest, “working the ruins of humanism” where postpositivist theories are used to take issue with humanism²⁰ (or any other theoretical framework) in attempts to provide alternate versions of knowledge. Howe and Eisenhart (1990, p.8) define postpositivism (or nonpositivism) as “any view that embraces the heart of the new philosophy of science: that all observation is theory-laden.” Readings in postpositivist literature prompted me to challenge implicit claims about knowledge such as those commonly assumed in assessment policy and literature (see Clarke, Madaus, Horn, & Ramos, 2000; Serafini, 2001). I was interested in theories that could help me conceptualize knowledge when students were involved in determining what occurred (and what was valued) in the classroom, such as when they participated in authentic assessment practices. Using a postpositivist paradigm to explore assessment helped me to understand what types of knowledge were generated through authentic assessment practices. For example, postpositivist philosophies focus on *constructed* not *found* worlds (Lather, 1992, p.89). Authentic assessment activities, therefore, can be considered through postpositivist perspectives as acts of knowledge construction. This is significantly different from a positivist perspective on assessment, where it is assumed that knowledge is to be found and is a measure of a pre-formed reality.

Lather (1992) offers three postpositivist paradigms for generating and legitimising knowledge in educational inquiries: those that seek to understand, to emancipate, and to deconstruct. While not intending to force exclusive alignment with one particular strand of postpositivist inquiry, questions about how knowledge is constructed are answered differently in each of Lather’s strands. I positioned myself within two of these strands: seek to understand and seek to deconstruct. Seeking to understand is a purpose for educators interested in writing research – to explain their practices in descriptive terms. This writing, for example, seeks to describe and understand my own assessment practices. I used the “seeking to deconstruct” paradigm to disrupt the assumptions of knowledge, and to “continuously demystify the realities we create” (Lather, 1992, p. 96). It is in this spirit that I

²⁰ Humanism: “The collective term for ideas or philosophies that are human-centred. These usually assume a consistent and universal model of what is and is not human” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 182).

began to ask questions about the assumptions of educational assessment activities such as the premise that knowledge is fixed and measurable. I began to question the assumptions made in policy documents that reflected positivist beliefs about knowledge and that demanded assessment to measure this knowledge. From this perspective, assessment is much more complex than simply “gathering information” about student learning.

Poststructuralism was among Lather’s (1992) groupings of deconstructive theories.

Poststructuralism offered me ways to problematize the types of knowledge that were created through the authentic assessment practices in my classroom because it attempts to place knowledge as a *contested event* (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993, p.385). Poststructuralism challenges “hierarchical principles of meaning, truth, essence and identity and [are] thus seen as unfixed, incomplete and contradictory” (Mansfield, 2000, p.184). Using poststructuralism, I considered that assessment practices were events that produced specific versions of knowledge about the student that were constructed in specific ways. I understood that the assessment practices were political and social processes that were about the construction of what counts as valued knowledge, about identity, and about the development of particular practices and beliefs. Alison Lee (1992, p. 1) explained what poststructuralism allowed for me in my research:

Poststructuralist theory allows, among other things, an investigation into relations between the individual and the social in specific sites. It does this through a focus on the centrality of language in the organisation of human experience. That is, there is no access to ‘reality’ which is not necessarily mediated through semiotic systems, the most powerful of which is language. Research questions concern the complex ways in which individual human subjects come to understand themselves and the world in specific locations. In terms of educational research, what poststructuralist theories and methodologies allow is an understanding of the necessary complexity of the school as an institution and a set of social practices.

I used aspects of poststructuralism as a tool to deconstruct assumptions raised in the literature about assessment and this allowed me to explore alternative ways of thinking about assessment theory and practice. I illustrate this with three examples:

1. First, if knowledge construction is understood to be part of political and social processes, then this in turn demands that teaching and assessment practices understand that knowledge construction also involves the student as a social subject. Therefore, poststructuralism allowed me to think of students as important players in the construction of knowledge. To support knowledge construction is to elicit current understandings made by students and provide opportunities for students to challenge this knowledge and create alternate understandings. Assessment in this context attempts to reflect what students have constructed.

2. Second, common understandings of assessment involve events that typically occur at the end of instruction, a lesson, a unit, or a course. However, if the premise of learning is that knowledge is constructed, then the process of this construction demands inquiry, validation, and assessment. In this vein, assessment need not be conducted at the end of the knowledge construction, but may be used to assess the *process* of knowledge construction.
3. Third, if knowledge is understood as a process of construction, then assessment practices need to acknowledge what versions of knowledge are constructed and what informed this construction process. This point signals the relations between knowledge, power, and the subject (see discussion below).

The implications of such understandings about assessment are significant and have created much debate about the purposes, the users of the assessment results,²¹ and designs of educational assessment. Cormack, Johnson, Peters, and Williams (1998, p. 19) suggested that assessment is a logical place for such educational debates to occur because assessment valorises particular versions of knowledge and debate arises as to what form of knowledge “count.” As Schultz (2002, p. 2) put it, “...whoever is empowered to establish the criteria, develop the assessment tools, and delineate the comparative data will also control the outcome and consequently have their viewpoint validated.” As a practitioner, I was interested in exploring *students’* constructions of knowledge. This made sense to me because I understood that the young people in my classroom would need skills to participate in a world that was experiencing rapid change so that they could work and make decisions relevant to their current and future lives. Authentic assessment, I believed, provided me with opportunities to involve students in the construction of knowledge.

Poststructuralist theories also helped me to understand how young people made meaning of the authentic assessment practices in my classroom and how, as subjects, they constituted identities that could be assessed. Identities, as we will see, can be understood to be constituted in discourse and involve power/knowledge. I introduce these two concepts to foreground my discussion of identity because they help explain the nature of the terrain in which the subject is located.

²¹ “Users” of student assessment results include, for example, students, teachers, parents, and policy writers. In the field of authentic assessment, researchers claim that *students* are the primary users of assessment (P. Black & Wiliam, 1998; Stiggins, 2001), and therefore student involvement in assessment discussions is critical for thinking about assessment practices. By rethinking the assumptions of knowledge and assessment, students learn that knowledge is debatable and that they play a role in its formation. Such views of education are similar to Dewey’s (1916) ideals of explaining learning in terms of experience and making claims of “warranted assertability” rather than “Truth” (Phillips & Burbules, 2000, p. 3).

3.1.1 Discourse

The way in which a subject makes meaning of social and historical contexts is explained in Foucault's (1972) discourse theory. Discourse theory helps to explain how subjects are constituted as thinkers and knowledge producers. Discourse is:

... a collection of statements and ideas that produces networks of meanings. These networks structure the possibilities for thinking and talking and become the conceptual framework and the classificatory models for mapping the world around us. Discourse shapes how we come to think and produce new knowledge, and facilitates shared understandings and engagements. [Although] discourse facilitates thought and actions it may also work to constrain, as it sets up the parameters, limits, and blind spots of thinking and acting (Yon, 2000, p. 3).

According to discourse theory, knowledge is constructed within discourse that shapes what is possible to conceive. For example, the discourse of "measurement" is evident in the broad field of assessment (Reynolds, Livingston, & Willson, 2006; Serafini, 2001; Thorndike, 2005). This discourse shapes the production of knowledge of those who think about assessment. That is, subjects conceptualize ideas about assessment within the ideas available about measurement. For example, thinking about authentic assessment (as discussed in previous chapters), it could be said that broadly speaking, these practices involve the discourse of developmentalism. This discourse (among others) informed the ways in which I conceived of the authentic assessment practices in my classroom. However, discourse theory assumes that just as much as we construct knowledge, knowledge also construct us. As McLaren and Lankshear (1993, p. 389) explain, "Discourse provides individuals with identifications which convert them into subjects." In this way, students, as subjects, were constituted with the discourses made available through authentic assessment practices in my classroom. It is important then, to consider *how* these discourses constituted particular versions of knowledge, as well as how they worked to shape the students into specific subject positions.

3.1.2 Power/Knowledge

Power and knowledge are closely related in Foucault's (1980) discourse theory. Foucault redefined the work of power as "modern disciplinary power" where subjects are understood to be the *site* of power, not the *object* of power. For Foucault, power exists at the moment of subjectification. This is a power that is productive, circulatory, exists in action, functions at the level of the body, and often operates through technologies of the self (Gore, 1998). Fendler (1998, p. 52) summarizes Foucault's conception of power:

One significant aspect of the changes in the constitution of the subject from modern times is the conflation of the site of power and the subject of power. In previous eras, power had

been conceived as sovereign and outside the self; and the subject of power had been the natural/social self. That is, subjectivity previously had stood in an agonistic relation to sovereign power. However, the effects of formal modernization were to shift power from external or sovereign structures onto self-disciplinary practices. The educated subject, then, became endowed with a new sort of power, namely, the power to govern itself.

Assessment, according to Foucauldian thinking, does not *hold* power *over* a student. Rather, the student is the *site* of power, as the student constitutes him/herself through the possibilities made available through discourses. This was useful in my thinking about adolescence. In Chapter 2, I identified one of my concerns about the conceptualization of adolescence – young people were defined as subjects who were socially regulated and positioned as inferior to adults or adulthood. Thinking about assessment practices in Foucauldian terms allowed me to think of young people as the site of power where “government mechanisms construe them as active participants in their lives” (Rose, 1999, p. 10)²². I was able to conceptualize young people not as objects of social regulation but as subjects that shaped identities within the discourses available to them. In this way, the student “...is recognized as ‘educated’ and ‘civilized’ precisely because of its ‘self-discipline.’ Conversely, the subject, insofar as it is constituted as not self-disciplined, is regarded as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘uneducated’” (Fendler, 1998, p. 53).

Aware of potential influences of the educator’s discursive power of surveillance, Cormack, Johnson, Peters, and Williams (1998, p. 254) apply Foucault’s notion of power to authentic assessment, and warn educators not to overlook the dynamics of power in the classroom:

. . . many of the alternative approaches to curriculum and assessment promoted in middle school literature . . . help to “discipline” students in new ways that hide the effects of power. Thus rather than being disciplined by the teacher out in front of the class, students learn to discipline themselves in groups and to self-assess their own progress towards being docile and compliant students against “negotiated” criteria. In this view, alternative assessment practices could lead to the same old educational outcomes (with significant numbers of disadvantaged students continuing not to do well at school) while helping students to feel happier and more engaged!

The authentic assessment practices in my classroom, then, can be viewed as a discursive practice of power that offered students opportunities to practice self-governing.

Foucault (1980, p. 131) linked the concept of power closely with that of knowledge and used the term “power/knowledge” to emphasize this relationship:

...truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power....Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of

²² More on “government mechanism”/governmentality below.

power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

This relationship between power and knowledge helped me to think about the "general politics" of truth in my classroom: what discourses were accepted and made function as true in my classroom through the authentic assessment events? This line of questioning helped direct my research because it increased my interest in identifying the discourses that were made available to young people in my classroom and made me question what alternative discourses young people might have brought into the classroom through the authentic assessment events. Furthermore, I realized that I would need a methodology that could address the complex nature of examining discourses in my classroom.

Poststructuralism as a theoretical stance, allowed me to think about the discourses made possible through authentic assessment and the ways in which young people, as subjects, took up positions within these discourses and constituted a self. Bronwyn Davies (1992, p. 51) explains:

A particular strength of the poststructuralism paradigm is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discursive practices and at the same time recognises the subject as capable of having agency in relation to those practices. The constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. Once having taken up a particular position as ones' own, a subject inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.

I understood my classroom to be a discursive terrain where young people could take up subject positions to present versions of truth that were, ideally, rewarded (e.g., by marks) during authentic assessment events.

3.2 Constituting identities

Poststructural theory and the related concepts of discourse and power/knowledge provided me with a means of thinking about students' identities in my classroom that were fluid. This perspective on identity is consistent with the work of poststructural researchers such as Britzman (1994), Luke and Gore (1992), Hall and du Gay (1996), McLaren and Lankshear (1993), Peters (1996), and Rose (1998). Furthermore, the notion of a fluid identity is consistent with descriptions of New Times that

are “marked by notions of fragmentation, dislocation and hybridity” (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 1997). Gonick (2006, p. 17) describes this fluidity in relation to neo-liberalism: “Whereas once youth was identified as the period in one’s life of ‘becoming,’ under neoliberal social, political, and economic conditions, those who are to succeed... must be flexible, adaptive, and prepared to be in a state of continual ‘becoming.’” I used a definition of identity provided by Hall (2000, p. 19) that saw it as fluid as well as connected to the discursive context: “. . . identities are points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.” This definition allowed me to address three particular issues that I identified in the review of literature:

1. *Multiplicity*: I understood the identities of young people not to be fixed or deterministic. Instead, Hall’s definition encouraged me to reconceptualize young people not as adolescents involved in a developmental phase but as young people who constituted multiple identities within class, unit of study, and/or assessment events.
2. *Time*: Hall’s definition of identities allowed me to reconceptualize young people in “untimely” ways (Lesko, 2001), as described in the previous chapter. The identities of young people - these “temporary attachments” - are not predetermined by their age, but constituted by competing discourses (that may make age significant) made available to them through the authentic assessment practices. In this way, young people can be understood to be learned and learning, young and old.
3. *Place*: As presented in previous chapters, globalization is influencing how young people are constituted in terms of citizenship. As Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1997) explain, there is a “. . . need to re-connect the theorising of identities and education to the wider changing socio-economic and cultural landscape.” Hall’s definition allowed me to address the discourses – local discourses and wider discourses - that were made available to the young people in my classroom. This approach would require an acknowledgement of the changing economic conditions of Nova Scotia and the effects of changing economies (local and global) would have on becoming a citizen and employee in these times.

Understanding young people to have multiple and fluid identities encouraged me not to become attached to any one “version” of a student in my classroom. In fact, taking this way of thinking about young people into consideration, it might be misleading for a teacher to claim that they “know” a particular student. Furthermore, this signalled to me the importance of teachers understanding that students’ identities may be temporary and multiple during assessment events. Students, for example, might do “well” in one particular assessment practice, but not in another. By “doing well,” I am suggesting that the identity that was constituted during the assessment event was

rewarded through marks and by other means such as praise. It would be important, therefore, that I generated data across multiple classroom contexts, such as data constructed by a range of students through a range of authentic assessment practices to allow me to describe students' multiple and temporary identities in my classroom. This wide scope of the data corpus (discussed in the next chapter) would allow me to illustrate how young people take up or resist multiple discourses to constitute multiple and temporary identities.

The work of Jones (2006, p. 116, original emphasis) helped me to understand how students may constitute an identity using a variety of discourses through “hybridity” and “hybrid language practices,” which she defines as:

...the use, or performance, of more than one Discourse to communicate and make meaning in different settings. Sometimes two or more Discourses are used within a single setting, and other times decisions are made to use one particular way of speaking over another based upon perceptions about the place and the people where the conversation is occurring. This, hybridity and the creative and powerful use of multiple language practices also creates a new way of *being, thinking about, and responding to* the world.

Thinking about the authentic assessment practices in my classroom, I could understand how students, when asked to participate in designing the assessment event, experience opportunities and struggles to constitute a self within competing discourses. Jones (2004, p. 464) illustrates this tension by describing how students “are placed in a position of choosing whether or not to judge their own family and community members from the perspective of their teachers and the school.” Four related concepts were useful for describing such tensions when young people’s identities were constituted and are described below: subjectivity, governmentality, technologies, and ethics.

3.2.1 Subjectivity

While identity describes a subject at any one time and is understood not to be fixed, subjectivity is a theoretical construct that facilitates examination of the *ways* that people can have multiple identities and how they change. Notions of subjectivity are central to poststructuralist inquiries and they are entwined in other theoretical concepts such as discourse and power/knowledge. According to Rose (1998), our understanding about ourselves, about being human, exists within particular social and historical ways of understanding the world. Subjectivity refers “...to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is

always linked to something outside of it - an idea or principle or the society of other subjects”

(Mansfield, 2000, p. 3). This definition of subjectivity demands:

- a) acknowledgement that the human subject does not exist outside of social and historical ways of making meaning,
- b) examination of the social and historical ways of making meaning, of knowing our self.

This understanding of the human subject was particularly useful for my interests in exploring how students constructed knowledge about themselves in the classroom and how authentic assessment practices might have offered and deterred certain ways of being in my classroom. I acknowledged that assessment practices were social and historical ways of making meaning and thereby students were made subject to these particular ways of knowing and understanding. In this manner, the subject was a form not a substance (Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen 1998).

Understanding subjectivities in this way suggested that students were constituted into a self as a result of their assessment experience. This was particularly useful for my research as it helped me to understand that the self that students constituted during the assessment events was informed by social context such as the classroom, the local community, and their family lives as well as historical contexts such as the ways of understanding schooling and adolescence. Furthermore, it helped me to acknowledge that students would have constituted multiple selves in my classroom, as the social and historical context changed. This theoretical idea was consistent with what I had determined to be crucial to my study from the review of literature - a more fluid notion of how students presented a self in the classroom to be assessed. Subjectivity, as a theoretical concept, allowed me to contest the deterministic ways of representing young people. I could think about the students in my classroom not in terms of a developmental phase that was universal and clearly identifiable (Wyn & White, 1997), but as constituted within specific social and historical positions. My research was as much about the social and historical ways of making meaning in my classroom, as it was about the selves that students produced. Practitioner research was conducive to this sort of inquiry where the social and historical contexts are richly described.

While the concept of an identity as a temporary attachment to a subject position (Hall, 2000) articulated what forms subjects constituted, the idea of subjectivity allowed me to describe *how* these attachments were made. Literature about subjectivity presents several ways of thinking about how subjects make attachments to subject positions (A. Luke, 1996; Mansfield, 2000; Weedon, Tolson, & Mort, 1980). For example, Heath (1981, p. 106) describes this process as “an account of suturing

effects,” Althusser (as cited in Hall, 1985) refers to this as the “hailing” of the subject by discourse, and Hall (2000, p. 27, original emphasis) suggests that we think of “this relation of subject to discursive formations *as an articulation*.” I took my lead from Hall (2000), as I was interested in acknowledging that while subjects may be “hailed” into positions, they also invest in the positions; I understood subjects to be simultaneously made subject to things (e.g., discourses, people, institutions) as well as be engaged in acts of subjection (e.g., making the self an object of work). This understanding allowed me to consider the students in my classroom not to be socially regulated into particular forms, but instead to describe them as being engaged in an articulation of the self where the subject was understood to be both constituted through and in discourse; young people were both subjected to and made their self subjected to the possibilities made available in my classroom through authentic assessment events.

While I understood that identities were temporary attachments to subject positions, I also acknowledge that some subjects may have strong attachments to specific subject positions, creating the sense of a more established identity. Gee (2001a, p. 111) suggests that subjects constitute a “core identity” which is like a centre of gravity for the individual:

Discourses can give us one way to define what I called earlier a person’s “core identity.” Each person has had a unique trajectory through “discursive space.” That is, he or she has, through time, in a certain order, had specific experiences within specific discourses (i.e., been recognized, at a time and place, one way and not another), some recurring and others not. This trajectory and the person’s own narrativization (Mishler, 2000) of it are what constitute his or her (never fully formed or always potentially changing) “core identity.”

Gee’s concept of a core identity was useful for me because it allowed me to consider the way some of the subjectivities and their related discourses which were available to students from beyond school might have particular significance for them. As Jones (2006, p. 123) points out, “educators need to know a great deal about the contexts in which students acquire their primary Discourses²³ and what to do with those dispositions as they enter classrooms.” I considered that my local knowledge of living in rural Nova Scotia was a great asset in this regard as was the nature of teaching English, which provided me with opportunities to learn about students’ lives through their writing and conversations in the classroom.

²³ Primary discourses are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialisation as members of particular families within their socio-cultural setting (Gee, 1996, p. 137). Secondary discourses are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisation within various local, state and national groups and institutions outside early and peer group socialisation, for example, churches, schools, etc. (Gee, 1996, p. 133).

3.2.2 Governmentality

If discourse is the terrain in which subjectivities are constituted, then governmentality refers to the ways in which the subject is permitted, encouraged, or discouraged to assume certain ways of being. Foucault's (1983, p. 221) definition of governmentality is central to my examination of assessment practices:

“Governmentality” does not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather is designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.

Foucault's description of governmentality resonates with my understandings of education, and specifically, of assessment. As a teacher, through the assessment practices I establish, I “structure the possible field of action” of my students. I want to clarify that I am not referring to the direct action on an individual student such as the use of corporal punishment. Instead, governmentality is about the processes of conduct, the “programmes, strategies, techniques for acting on the actions of others towards certain ends” (Rose, 1999, p. xxi). In no way am I claiming that I could have presupposed the range of possibilities for student subjectivities in the classroom nor have controlled their experiences, but I recognize that my teaching practices shaped the possibilities available to students in constituting subjectivities. For example, the assessment events in my classroom, as an element of discourse, created possibilities for certain subject positions, while denying others. Assessment practices, then, can be seen as having its own set of possible fields of action for students; they governed how students made sense of their classroom experiences.

Assessment practices are elements of governmentality that act to help students assume particular ways of being and adopt particular understandings of the world. The concept of governmentality helped focus my research direction. For example, while modernist forms of disciplining young people were evident in my classroom (e.g., school rules and consequences about dress codes, violence, etc.), these were not the areas of interest in this research. Instead, I paid particular attention to the ways in which students constituted a self. This way of thinking about young people caused me to think differently in relation to what students told me about their selves. I wondered, for example, what students' preferences and expressions of identity might tell me about their contexts. Rose (1999, p. 261) explains:

These technologies for the government of the soul operate not through the crushing of subjectivity in the interest of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social, and

institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of the self. Their power lies in their capacity to offer means by which the regulation of selves - by others and by ourselves - can be made consonant with contemporary political principles, moral ideals, and constitutional exigencies.

I came to understand that authentic assessment practices could be considered a technology that allowed students to align their personal interests with those of the English Language Arts curriculum and wider political agendas for schooling; to align their “individual pleasures and desires” with “institutional goals.”

3.2.3 Technologies

Foucault (2003, p. 146) described a way of thinking about technologies as “the specific techniques that humans use to understand themselves.” These are the ways in which the subject, through discourse, participates in governing (and is governed) into a self. Rose (1999, p. 11), after Foucault, calls these the “techniques of the self”: “Technologies of subjectivity thus exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship with what one might term ‘techniques of the self’ [-] the ways in which we are enabled, by means of the languages, criteria, and techniques offered to us, to act upon our bodies, souls, thoughts, and conduct in order to achieve happiness, wisdom, health, and fulfillment.” These techniques, according to Rose (1999), include self-inspection, self-problematization, self-monitoring, confession, self-reformation, therapy, techniques of body alteration, and the calculated reshaping of speech and emotion. Technologies are important to discuss in *New Times* because they describe the ways in which identities are constituted in current political and social contexts. For example, Rose (1999, p. 118) observes that technologies are used in today’s work place to constitute subjects to be aligned with the agendas of their employers: “The new vocabulary of team-work, quality consciousness, flexibility, and quality circles thus reconciles the autonomous aspirations of the employee with the collective entrepreneurialism of the corporate culture.” I wondered how students might have used human technologies to align themselves with the culture of my classroom and of the local community.

Foucault’s work was useful to me in understanding different types of technologies. He describes four inter-related technologies: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power (or domination), and technologies of the self. Due to the particular focus of authentic assessment on the “self,” I focussed my research interest on Foucault’s technology of the self, the various “operations on their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being that people make either by themselves or with the help of others in order to transform themselves to

reach a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (as cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 78). I was interested in how practices in my classroom may have made technologies of the self available to students during the process of identity constitution. Foucault illustrated three technologies with particular relevance to my study - the confessional, the panopticon, and the examination. In what follows, I relate Foucault’s ideas about the technology of the self to their use in my thinking about young people and authentic assessment in this research.

3.2.3.1 The confessional

Western man, Michel Foucault argued, has become a confessing animal. The truthful rendering into speech of who one is, to one’s parents, one’s teachers, one’s doctor, one’s lover, and oneself, is installed at the heart of contemporary procedures of individualization....In confessing, one is subjectified by another, for one confesses in the actual or imagined presence of a figure who prescribes the form of the confession, the words and rituals through which it should be made, who appreciates, judges, consoles, or understands....In compelling, persuading and inciting subjects to disclose themselves, finer and more intimate regions of personal and interpersonal life come under surveillance and are opened up for expert judgment, and normative evaluation, for classification and correction (Rose, 1999, p. 244).

The confessional was interesting to me as a practitioner because there are many times when students are asked to share who they “really” are in class. This occurs, for example, in assessment practices that ask students to reflect on their “past” self (such as what did you know or not know before this unit of study) and compare this to their “present self” (such as what do you know now, after this unit of study). In such cases, the young person is asked to constitute a self that is informed by the discourses made available in the classroom. I was interested in how students were subjectified by the context of the classroom which included me, their teacher “in charge” of the assessment activity. Orner’s (1992) Foucauldian analysis of the hidden curriculum of the “talking circle” demonstrates how students may be sculpted by power in the classroom that requires students to “confess”:

In a Foucauldian framework, the talking circle represents an expression of disciplinary power -- the regulation of the self through the internalization of the regulation by others. Similarly, Foucault’s analysis of the all-knowing confessor and the regulatory and punitive meanings and uses of the confessional bring to mind curricular and pedagogical practices which call for students to publicly reveal, even confess, information about their lives and cultures in the presence of authority figures such as teachers (Orner, 1992, p. 83).

In my research I understood that as students “confessed” themselves to teachers (and parents, peer, etc.), classroom practices (including authentic assessment practices) constituted students and made particular ways of being available to the young person. I was interested in how authentic assessment

events might, through the practice of confession, make technologies of the self available to the students in my classroom.

3.2.3.2 The panopticon

Foucault's (1977, p. 170) use of the analogy of a panopticon described how an institutional practice of architecture made a technology of the self possible. The technology of the self is self-surveillance where the individual assumes responsibility for his or her self-disciplining because disciplinary power has been internalized. The panopticon is:

...the method of surveillance in the modern prison - this is the method that the modern state uses to execute and regulate its control of society. Unlike the monarchical state, which uses brute force to control its subjects, the "democratic" state requires internalized and sophisticated coercion to perform this function. The term "panopticon" was a name suggested by Jeremy Bentham (1995). In a prison built with modern architecture that allows guards to see continuously inside each cell, the "panopticon" is the central observing tower even though the prisoners cannot see that they are being observed. This constant gaze controls the prisoners affecting not only what they do but how they see themselves and replaced the use of a dungeon and dark cell to control the prisoner. This image serves as a metaphor for the power in of governmentality in the modern state (Shawver, 2006).

Relating Foucault's panopticon to my classroom perspective, I understood how assessment policies worked to regulate my decisions as a teacher (Shore & Roberts, 1993), and consequently I created versions of what students were expected to internalize during the assessment event. Through the metaphor of the panopticon, I understood how students constituted a self in accordance with these expectations; the versions of their self were constituted under constant surveillance both external and internal that sought to align the self with what the assessment practice rewarded. For example, in the authentic assessment practices in my classroom, students were asked to make decisions about what parts of their lives beyond school they might bring into the classroom. In such instances, I understood that young people were engaged in a technology of subjectivity that could be related to Foucault's interpretation of the panopticon: students at home, while not under my direct supervision as their teacher, used the internalized expectations from the classroom to assist in these decisions.

3.2.3.3 The examination

In the analogy of the examination, Foucault's (1977) notions of power/knowledge work in the government of subjects. Foucault uses the invention of the modern examination to exemplify this connection and demonstrate how power and technologies work to discipline subjects:

Whereas, in earlier times, the masses of people remained invisible, now each of us becomes visible as an individual, but only along dimensions that apply to all. Thanks to the exam,

each of us can be *put in his or her place* on a finely graded hierarchy - one that is organized around the concept of the norm. The examination, therefore, illustrates a prominent way in which power and truth, according to Foucault, are connected in modern society. Without power over students, examinations could not yield ‘truths’ about them and these ‘truths’ could not be used for purposes of ‘placing’ them in social hierarchies and shaping their expectations of themselves and others (Schrag, 1999, p. 377, original emphasis).

In the examination, the production of knowledge and the exercise of power are linked (Simola, Heikkinen, & Silvonen, 1998, p.68) to create what Foucault termed, the “calculable person.” Hoskin (1993) extends Foucault’s idea of the examination to suggest that the “calculable person” is the *result* of the invention of marking (as cited in Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998, p. 22). In line with this thinking, I followed what Rose (1998, pp. 120-121) called the “calculable subject” that can be determined through psychological tests: “The psychological test rendered visible the invisible qualities of the human soul, distilling the multifarious attributes of the person in a single figure. These inscriptions could be compared one with another, norms could be established, [and] evaluations could be carried out in relation to those norms and judgments made in the light of these.” In this way, young people engage in acts of governmentality during the examination. Researchers interested in taking up Foucault’s idea of the examination have illustrated how a similar argument could be made for how standardized testing operates to govern subjects:

...we propose that the movement to standardized testing be viewed as part of a larger societal movement toward techniques of government that operate indirectly and at a distance. These techniques of government seek to “manage” populations through the use of measurement tools and numerical calculations (Graham & Neu, 2004, p. 295).

Consider again the SAT, one of the bases on which many [American] colleges select students.... In the case of the students, especially, one can grasp what Foucault means when he says that disciplinary power *produces* subjects: the score a student obtains becomes part of who the student *is*: an average student, in the bottom decile, a perfect scorer, smarter than her brother, too dumb for Princeton, etc. (Schrag, 1999, pp. 377-378, original emphasis).

The discourse of the quantification of quality, and of high-stakes testing, is disciplinary in the sense that it is part of an active project to bring teachers and students under a more totalizing and individualizing gaze, and thus to discipline, regulate and police them (Carlson, 2005, p. 36).

I use concepts from Michel Foucault to analyze the ways in which the high-stakes accountability movement has appropriated the technology of the examination to redefine the educated subject as a normalized case.... I argue that critiques of current educational policy and practice need to devote attention to the radical implications of testing on what we mean by the educated subject (the individual) in education. Challenging this notion of the self may enable educators to challenge the power exercised through high-stakes testing and open up more promising possibilities for public education (Gunzenhauser, 2006).

In this way, the examination works as a disciplinary practice that governs young people into a calculable self that, ideally, will be a version of the “successful student” or a “good student.” While the calculable subject is described in relation to the examination, I had to be alert to the possibility that authentic assessment might have similar effects.

I understood how authentic assessment events in my classroom could be compared to Foucault’s notion of the examination: young people were expected to create a self that was a version of “the good student” through the authentic assessment practice. A student could be understood to be a calculable person in the way in which she or he is disciplined (and disciplines his or her self) into a version of the ideal student in the assessment practice. Rose (1998, p. 121, original emphasis) refers to such practices as related to social psychology, as they are

...devices for inscribing the social existence of persons in ways that enable them to enter into calculations. The attitude scale, the morale survey, the sociometric diagram, the graphical representation of field theory – all these will inscribe human sociality in a form in which it could become calculable. The inscriptions of social life in a stable, mobile, comparable, and combinable form could be accumulated in government departments, personnel offices, and other *centers of calculation*.

I understood that my classroom was a centre of calculation and that the authentic assessment practices could be thought of as a device for inscribing young people as calculable subjects. A concrete example of this can be imagined when a student is expected to contribute to a small group discussion in class and the teacher records how well the student was able to participate in this discussion by noting, for example, the student’s body language and paraphrasing skills. These teacher records can be used to judge the student’s performance, assign a numerical basis for these observations, and compare the student to others in the class. In this way, the young person becomes a calculable subject. It is worth noting that the authentic assessment literature ignores these effects as if authentic assessment were somehow exempt from this disciplinary process.

Foucault’s work also inspired me to think about the type of examination that students completed in my classroom experience. As we will see in Chapter 5, these were Process Exams where students were expected to choose or develop questions, construct arguments, use appropriate evidence to support these arguments, and present their ideas in a format of their design. Recognizing that a Process Exam is different in nature from a traditional exam as discussed by Foucault, I envisioned how disciplining technologies were still involved. However, unlike the traditional exam, the Process Exam may have provided more readily available access to technologies of the self. While traditional examinations emphasize discipline, Process Exams require self-discipline. The Process Exam in my

classroom required extensive student involvement in the design of the assessment and therefore students had to constitute a self that would be rewarded by the teacher, but without the teacher's input. In this scenario, the student must work independently and use self-surveillance and compare their ideas to what they anticipate is expected from the teacher (and others) in order to be successful. Self-surveillance, a technology of the self, is therefore made possible in the scenario of a Process Exam.

These three Foucauldian ideas – the confessional, the panopticon, and the examination - helped me to understand that the authentic assessment practices offered human technologies that shaped students, and helped them shape themselves, into particular ways of being in my classroom. In my research, this led me to ask, “What technologies of the self were made available to young people through authentic assessment practices?” Foucault's examples of technologies provide me with conceptual frameworks and vocabulary to discuss the complex activity of governmentality. Understanding governmentality and technologies was important to my study because it allowed me to think about students' subjectivities and together, these theoretical tools helped me to articulate how subjects constitute identities.

3.2.4 Ethics

As we will see in later chapters, my English classroom program involved supervising a particular kind of ethical setting – one that Hunter (1994, p. 14) notes historically as the “professional task and the civic duty of English teachers.” For this reason, I include a discussion of ethics here as it relates to the constitution of students' identities in my classroom. It should be noted that in terms of conducting research with human subjects, ethical considerations are a significant concern for the researcher and I discuss the issue of “research ethics” in the next chapter as I present the methodology. Here however, I use the term “ethics” as it is sometimes used in Foucauldian literature on education and specifically in the discussion of pedagogy in English classrooms (Golden, 1996; Hunter, 1994, 1996).

Foucault (1997, p. 263) refers to ethics as “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself...and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions.” While the more common way of using the word “ethics” refers to the moral constitution of a person, I use the term to emphasize Foucault's interest in understanding a subject's “freedom” to constitute a particular self. This was critical to my study as English classes in

schools can be understood to provide “supervised freedom” (Hunter, 1994, p. 4) for such processes of identity formation:

... [English] pedagogy is organized around a complex pastoral relation between teacher and student. This is a relation in which discipline is achieved not through the imposition of external sanctions but through the manner in which students learn to govern themselves. The basic mechanism is one in which the teacher incites the student into spontaneous activity, not for its own sake, but as a means of opening the student’s inner life to supervision and as a means of allowing the student to see their conduct through the normative gaze of the teacher.

Foucault helped me to understand that the freedom that subjects had to shape their identities was not an abstract freedom but was “dependent on the resources they had at their disposal, both in terms of their own capacities and the structures of society” (Moss, 1998, p. 5). For Foucault (1985, p. 28), the constitution of the self involves ethical considerations that are not about being “right” or “moral,” but engaged in a “process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.” Therefore ethics, in Foucauldian terms, is less about defining a self in relation to established or fixed moral codes and more about how subjects in a world of increasing “freedom” and “choice” takes up projects of the self. Rose (1998, p. 17) describes this freedom:

Freedom, that is to say, is enacted only at the price of relying upon experts of the soul. We have been freed from the arbitrary prescriptions of religious and political authorities, thus allowing a range of different answers to the question of how we should live. But we have been bound into relationships with new authorities, which are more profoundly subjectifying because they appear to emanate from our individual desires to fulfill ourselves in our everyday lives, to craft our personalities, to discover who we really are. Through these transformations we have ‘invented ourselves’ with all the ambiguous costs and benefits that this invention has entailed.

Ethics can be described as being attentive to the ways in which one constitutes a self and this has always been an issue in education and has changed over time. For example, the genealogical work by Foucault (1997, pp. 255-256) concerning ethics illustrates how religion and laws have shaped ethical subjects in the past and how modern times emphasize scientific knowledge of the self:

...most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life. Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.

Picking up on Foucault's lead, others have illustrated how scientific knowledge, particularly psychology, has been used to constitute ethical subjects in modern times (Rose, 1998, 1999). What Foucault (1997, p. 261) emphasizes is that our ideas of ethics need not be tied to science and that there are other possibilities:

My idea is that it's not at all necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge. Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what's going on now – and to change it.... I think we need to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures.

This detachment from science may be particularly important in New Times, as it could be said that we are in a period of “scientific crisis” where science produces massive risks (Beck, 1992, 1998, 1999; Elmore & Roth, 2005; Giddens, 1998) to the sustainability of our environment and societies (e.g., global warming or weapons of mass destruction). For Foucault, our understandings about ethics could be otherwise and he works to disrupt our certainty about how things are today. This disruption can be seen as Foucault's ethical project and he claims that “everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism” (Foucault, 1997, p. 256). In other words, one must be “on one's guard” at all times and be paying attention to how one constitutes a self. Subjects who are interested in conducting ethical work – “the work one performs to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior” (Rabinow, 1994, p. xxxiii), or as Blacker (1998, p. 362) puts it, “what one does to oneself in order to behave ethically” – requires them to “act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself” (Foucault, 1985, p. 28). My research about students' identities explores what it means to be ethical in today's world and illustrates the daily struggles of this process.

Thinking about ethics helped me to see how important it was that my research explored issues of identity and subjectivity. By examining how students' identities are constituted in authentic assessment practices, teachers (and young people) can learn how students' freedom in our classrooms can be understood to be a basis of students' self-management – a concept that Foucault showed is an important issue in postmodern times. My research problem raises the issue of students' freedom (and their subsequent self-management) and connects this freedom in practical terms of students' experiences in authentic assessment events.

Foucault (1997) offers four questions about the study of ethics (or four aspects about the relationship to oneself), each providing me with direction for thinking about young people and how ethical struggles may be made evident in my classroom:

1. “Which is the aspect or the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct?”
2. “How are people invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations?”
3. “What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?”
4. “What is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?”

This last question concerns teleologies (Rose, 1998, 2000), the ideal ways of being that young people aspire to become. Together, these four related aspects about the relationship to oneself were useful to my study because they helped me to think about how some young people in my classroom may have constituted a specific ethical self. Because Foucault’s work has strong relevance for schools and moral education (Belsey, 2005; Golden, 1996), I was interested in how his work could be used to direct my thinking about young people and their schooling. Belsey (2005, p. 86), using Foucault’s study of ethics, describes three ways in which the education of young people can help them to ethically constitute themselves: “by ethical work that a person performs on their self with the aim of becoming an ethical subject; the way in which individuals relate to moral obligations and rules; and the type of person one aims to become in behaving ethically.” I questioned how my classroom program may have adopted or adapted these ways of supporting students in the constitution of an ethical self in my classroom. To be ethical is thus to govern one’s self within the possibilities made available by one’s own capacities as well as those offered through structures such as schooling or authentic assessment in efforts to achieve “ethical self-constitution” or to constitute an “ethical subject” (Rabinow, 1994).

Together, the ideas of subjectivity, governmentality, technologies, and ethics are useful for thinking about and describing the work that is done on reproducing the self for our increasingly changing world. I understand the process of constituting an identity to be a perpetual process that cannot be separated from discourses in New Times. As Bragg (2007, p. 352) claims, “‘Ideal’ students in these times have global relevant knowledge and skills; they no longer make demands, but take the initiative.” Given that the task of neo-liberalism to become somebody cannot be ignored in New Times, my understanding of identity constitution directed me to ask, “What were the ideal subject positions for young people in my classroom?” This question was useful because it helped me to identify which identities were valued and rewarded in my classroom, and which were not; which were

deemed successful in my classroom, and which were in danger of being discarded. As a practitioner, I was interested in putting my own practices under scrutiny to learn how these practices may have offered possibilities for some students but not for others. I wondered what students made of the ideal identities on offer and asked, “What identities were resisted, adapted, or adopted by students in my classroom?” My understandings of subjectivities, governmentality, technologies, and ethics provided me with the means to address questions of how young people constituted identities in my classroom.

3.3 Directing my research question

What had begun as a moment of crisis in my classroom during the students’ typing of an exam had turned into a broader discursive perspective of the young people in my classroom. I did not consider them to be simply imitating the syntax and diction of their teacher in their writing, but taking up discourses in the classroom that constituted them into particular ways of being. My research question asked *how are young people’s identities constituted in my classroom through authentic assessment practices?* However, poststructuralist theories of identity helped me to move my general research question that concerned questions about *how* young people constitute identities, to include questions that asked *what*: what identities, what discourses, and what technologies were used by young people in my classroom?

I understood these to be guiding questions for my research as they directed what sort of data would need to be generated and what sort of methodology would be required to address these questions. Put another way, the theoretical tools from this chapter helped to direct my research by signalling the scope of data that would need to be constructed as well as informed the analytical approach to the data. For example, because students’ identities were understood to be multiple and temporary, a wide range of data would be required to discuss these constitutions. Because students both were governed by and governed themselves within discourses, I decided that it would be important to watch for: (1) how students’ identities were constituted in discourse, and (2) how young people resisted, adapted, or adopted the discourses made available to them inside the classroom as well as those that they brought from their lives beyond the classroom. This simultaneous and “double-minded” approach guided the way in which I designed the methodologies for this research, which is described in the next chapter. Like the theoretical positions about identity in this research, I wanted to design a methodology that was flexible and hybrid in nature. Furthermore, I understood these

identities to be multiple and temporary, requiring an analysis that illustrated how they were constituted within changing social contexts. As such, these identities were understood to be associated with broad societal ideals about the role of educating young people in New Times.

As we have seen in previous chapters, adolescence is a site of anxiety where the fate of society is presumed to be bound up in the future lives of young people. Defining young people's identities in New Times seems to be taking on a new urgency (Epstein, 1998) and is a passion and preoccupation of today's world (Yon, 2000). I understood my classroom to be a valuable site for research into how young people's identities are constituted. Wexler, Crichlow, Kern and Martusewicz (1996, p. 155, original emphasis) argue that schools are "one of the few *public* spaces in which people are engaged with each other in the interactional work of making *meaning*. These are places for making the CORE meaning, of self or identity among young people." As a practitioner, I was familiar with popular conceptions of understanding young people as adolescents who are in need of guidance from adults in the process of constructing meaning. However, poststructuralist theories helped me to think about students' identities in different ways. The theories presented in this chapter made me question what ideal versions of young people my employer envisioned, what ideal identities I envisioned in my classroom program, and what identities young people in my classroom constituted. As such, this research contributes to conversations about theorizing young people's identities in today's world, draws attention to the broader discourses that constitute these identities, and focuses on what these understandings mean for classroom practices in New Times.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

I signalled my orientation to practitioner research in Chapter 1, and here I identify its relation to my particular focus on authentic assessment. What was apparent in the review of authentic assessment literature was that it is technical in nature, emphasizing the “how-to” of practitioner knowledge, but ignoring contextual matters of culture, history, and power. My research problem was to examine how students’ identities were constituted by authentic assessment practices. As noted in previous chapters, the gaps in the literature about authentic assessment were both practical and theoretical. Practically speaking, the authentic assessment literature is not connected to teaching practices (it is largely assumed to be something that is done *after* teaching) and the theoretical gap is that authentic assessment is detached from notions of identity (and other associated concepts such as power, governmentality, technologies) and instead assumes that students’ identities are unproblematically “authentic.” My research addresses both of these gaps. Researching classroom identities is important work for teaching in today’s world so that teachers are aware of how their practices (in this case, authentic assessment practices) encourage and reward some identities, while they exclude and punish others. This research could prove valuable to the body of authentic assessment literature as one way of illustrating the contextualization – the histories and stories – of authentic assessment.

Following Foucault’s political project to disrupt our common assumptions about the world, my political project is about disrupting common assumptions about authentic assessment and adolescents. This political project can be broadly understood to deepening knowledge in a specific area. That is, to conduct a level of analysis that is a “worm’s-eye view” that considers power from the “bottom up” (Blacker, 1998, p. 357). As Gore (1998, p. 249) explains, “The microlevel focus of Foucault’s analytics of power... has clear potential in addressing change possibilities. That is, the Foucaultian approach enables us to document what causes us to be what we are in schools, and hence, potentially, to change what we are.” Authentic assessment practices allowed me a terrain for such an inquiry as I considered how young people constituted their selves in my classroom. This way of understanding myself as a researcher was inspired by Foucault’s (1980, p. 80) notion of a

“specific intellectual” - an expert in a specific field who has strategic possibilities of influencing other fields. As well as this thesis allowing me to become a “specific intellectual” about authentic assessment, my thesis is also a beginning of me getting to know more about the wider fields of educational assessment, identity, and poststructuralist theory. As an intellectual project, my research works towards a “new politics of truth” as described by Foucault (1980, p. 133):

The essential problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people’s consciousness – or what’s in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regimes of the production of truth.

To begin such a task, I developed a methodology that allowed me to create distance from my everyday classroom perspective as a teacher. In this chapter, I focus my discussion on the methodological stances of practitioner research and its possibilities for my research. While practitioner research is usually considered a form of qualitative research, I found it useful to make distinctions between the two. While I acknowledge that practitioner research and qualitative research are not mutually exclusive, I chose to discuss practitioner research in more detail under its own heading. This allowed me to address its specific research traditions in a more focussed discussion as well as to demonstrate how qualitative approaches were used to generate data extraneous to my day-to-day activities as a practitioner.

The challenge for practitioner researchers is that they “must work to see the taken-for-granted aspects of their practice from an outsider’s perspective” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994, p. 28). I was able to overcome this problem through the design of my research, in which I deployed two additional approaches to supplement my practitioner research focus. These were qualitative approaches, and critical discourse analysis. Combined, these three lenses provided me with multiple ways of examining my taken-for-granted aspects of my authentic assessment practices and I describe them in turn in this chapter: practitioner research (section 4.1), qualitative approaches (section 4.2), and critical discourse analysis (section 4.3). I follow this discussion by addressing ethical considerations of using practitioner research that involved the students in my classroom (section 4.4).

After I present the design of my research and ethical considerations, I outline the data corpus. As I described in previous chapters, authentic assessment literature frequently avoids the contextualization of these practices and I realized that my research would need rich descriptions of my classroom context, program, and practices. This would include the assessment policies that

shaped what was expected of me, as a teacher, in a Nova Scotia English Language Arts classroom. In this way, I was interested in what my employer envisioned as versions of young people; what representations of young people were made in the assessment policies that guided what should occur in their education. These policies informed my classroom program. I realized from the literature review, that the scope of my research data would need to be broader than my classroom practices alone. To address my research question, I used data that demonstrated what was expected of students in assessment practices; policy documents provided such a framework for understanding what was supposed to occur in classrooms. Because my research interest concerned governmentality and students' subjectivities through the assessment experiences in my classroom, I used data that were produced by the students themselves and their parents. The data corpus focuses on the informants and participants in the assessment practices used in classroom for Grade 8 English Language Arts in 2000-2001. The major sources of data for this research are presented in turn below: policy documents (section 4.5), classroom program data (section 4.6), additional qualitative data (section 4.7), and my teaching journal (section 4.8). This chapter also identifies the various methods used to generate the data corpus, discusses the limitations of my research, and concludes by showing how subsets of data helped me address my research question, *how do young people take up or resist identities that are on offer through the authentic assessment practices in my classroom?*

4.1 Practitioner research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) suggest that practitioner research is a means of re-professionalizing teaching. I conducted my research in this spirit, as professionalism is a rising concern in my local context of Nova Scotia where government seeks to standardize and deskill teachers' work. For example, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and some school boards in the province are increasingly using standardized testing to create teacher "accountability" (Nova Scotia Teachers Union, 2005; Nova Scotia Teachers Union Curriculum Committee, 2001). This has also been identified by the Canadian Teachers Federation (2004) as a national trend and this organization offers that instead of using standardized testing to ensure professional accountability, "[a] successful accountability model would seek to engender a renewal of trust and confidence in the system and in the people who work in the system. It would also strive to foster active public support for and engagement in public education." I see part of my professional responsibility as building trust in our public education system. By conducting practitioner research, I hoped that my research would contribute to practitioner knowledge and be a way of promoting teaching as a profession. Grundy

and Kemmins (1981, p. 333) recognize the significant ways in which practitioner research promotes the teaching profession as it “creates self-reflective and self-critical communities of professionals who are interested in the development of their own professional skills and also in the development of the profession.” This research is evidence of the ability for teachers to contribute to the profession of teaching and to self-regulate the profession. Furthermore, this research is evidence of the validity of teachers’ experiences. The questions for my research evolved from my reflections about my teaching practices and the merits of this research remain in its ability to contribute to teachers’ professional knowledge of how we might serve students’ learning through assessment practices. Burton (1986, p. 719) writes that “problems are best solved by those who own them.”

Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) trace the historical roots of practitioner research. Entwined in its history are strands of action research, teacher-as-researcher movements, participatory research, and practitioner research. These authors present various definitions for these inquiry-based research movements. I use the term “practitioner research” in this study as follows: a “systemic, intentional enquiry by teachers, [which] makes accessible some of the expertise of teachers and provides both university and school communities with unique perspectives on teaching and learning” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 5). The data used in this study involved artefacts that were part of my classroom practices, such as assessment artefacts created by me and/or by students. Specific qualitative methods including focus groups, interviews, and policy analysis were adapted to investigate the assessment events, further producing data. As such, the practitioner research used in this study was informed by qualitative methods that assisted the inquiry into my classroom practices. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994, p. 108) report that practitioner researchers adapt “traditional” qualitative methods to “enhance the research process and the data gathered.” This was a useful way for me to think about my research, as I was hoping to enhance practitioner knowledge about authentic assessment practices, especially in the theorization of those practices.

My classroom observations about theory and practice in authentic assessment raised questions that would not have occurred without reflection on my teaching practices. Put another way, reflections about my teaching led to this research and provided the motivation for this study. Lawrence Stenhouse (1985, p. 8) defines all teacher research, in its most basic terms, as “systematic self-critical inquiry.” Not only does this reflexivity allow for professional development, it also provides a context for academic research, spanning the divide between theory and practice, between research and the classroom teacher. This research was intended to be much more than “self-improvement”; I

aspired to conduct research that would add knowledge about education. For example, reflection in this study offered not only practical knowledge for my classroom, but also guided my inquiry into how assessment events inform students' identities through these practices. For these reasons, reflexivity, a critical aspect of practitioner research, was built into the study. While I describe specific data methods later in this chapter, it is my intention here to explain how reflexivity determined their role in this study. Reflexivity was built into this research in three ways:

1. *Documentation and rich description* – To facilitate reflexivity in this research, the authentic assessment practices that were used in my classroom were clearly documented and described. Examples of such documentation included students' assessment artefacts, records from my classroom program that described student instructions during assessment events, and my teaching journal. These texts, organic to my classroom program, were included as data in this research to allow reflexivity. I am not alone in the experience of using journal writing as a means of classroom investigation. Wendy Peters (1996, p. 2) goes so far as to say that “writing is the research.” The data collected from note taking allows a larger framework for the recorder, and begins to “direct itself.” Garmston and Wellman (1994, p. 107) reported the same phenomenon and claimed, “our event journal has become as important as our calendar. It goes where we go, and we write in it frequently.” I discuss my teaching journal in section 4.8.
2. *Cyclical nature of data generation* – Reflection also guided action in this research, as research methods were used to investigate initial reflections. For example, specific qualitative methods were used in response to a reflection about my classroom observations. Notes in my teaching journal guided the questions that were used in student focus groups and interviews.
3. *Student reflection* – Reflexivity was also included in the research design by allowing students opportunities to reflect on their assessment artefacts and on the data produced through the qualitative methods. For example, students participated in authentic assessment events and then discussed their artefacts in a focus group. Students then reviewed the transcripts of the focus groups and held what I introduce later as “Research Literature Circles” about these transcripts. Then, the transcripts of the “Research Literature Circles” were made available for individual students to record additional comments in the margin. I used these comments to guide the questions that I asked in individual student interviews. Finally, my reflections about these processes directed changes that I made in the implementation of future authentic assessment practices with these students. Figure 4.1 illustrates how student reflection worked with the cyclical nature of this research.

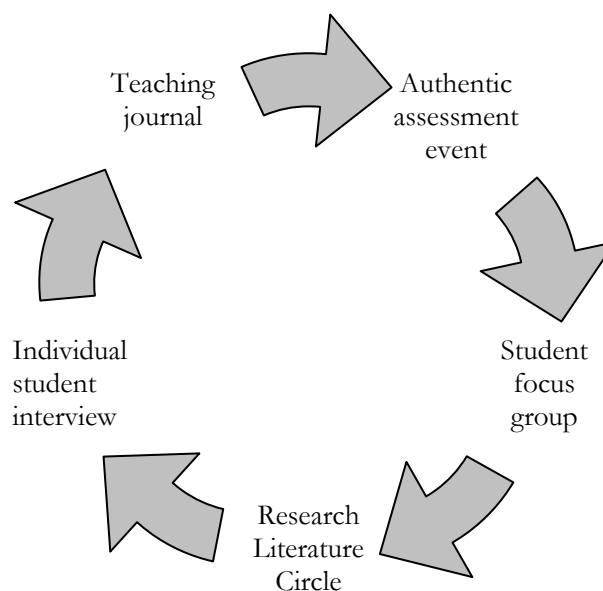
This last means of incorporating reflexivity in the research – involving students’ reflections – occurred both as a process of the authentic assessment practices in my classroom, and through specific qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews. Schultz (2001, p. 23) suggests that “we find ways to include participants in our [research] projects, and that we decide that the goal of equal participation should not be a standard by which we measure our success. In short, we need to accept multiple kinds of investment.”

Following her ideas, I became interested in conceptualizing ways in which students could be more active

in the determining the direction of the data generation and analysis. I wanted to create spaces where students could raise their concerns about the issues of assessment as well as the ideologies that were created in discussions through the research. For example, students raised questions about the emerging data they had generated and they had choices about how they would respond to these questions (as well as those that I had created) during further data production methods. It was exciting to be part of a process where I felt simultaneously a teacher, a researcher, and a co-participant in the research design. Inviting students to reflect on the research process and to have input into its design felt comfortable to me; it mirrored my classroom practices.

There is little denial in the literature about practitioner research that teachers are experts, however, this expertise is considered by some to be more practical knowledge than formal knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994; Huberman, 1996). Critics of practitioner research suggest that it is not an appropriate research method for producing trustworthy knowledge because the researcher is too close to the situation being studied, making it easier to “confirm one’s hypothesis and make one’s own inferences far more plausible” (Huberman, 1996, p. 132). To overcome this critique of

Figure 4.1
Student reflection and the
cyclical nature of the research



practitioner research, my research design uses other lenses to examine my classroom program: qualitative approaches and critical discourse analysis. The qualitative approaches provided more depth and understanding than would otherwise be possible in the busy work of a teacher and critical discourse analysis helped me to distance myself from data, provide alternative ways of reading data, and therefore I was not an ideal reader of data. These lenses helped me to look at the data produced for this research in new ways – to make the everyday practices of my classroom “strange” (Erickson, 1973) and see my practices with “new eyes” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994, p. 115). Furthermore, my own understandings about my classroom program were checked for validity in three additional and deliberate ways:

- I involved students in the discussion of emerging data as a process to check for validity,
- I used a wide range of data (e.g., policies, assessment artefacts, interviews with students and parents) instead of relying solely on my own notes in the research journal, and
- as introduced in Chapter 1, I had multiple perspectives about authentic assessment and adolescence in my professional life and opportunities to discuss my thinking with colleagues in various local and far-away settings.

This is not to suggest that through these techniques of “making the familiar strange” only one “truth” could be produced in my research. Instead, I aimed to produce a representation of my practice that could be substantiated as trustworthy knowledge so that my research contributed to both practical and formal knowledge.

4.2 Qualitative approaches

While practitioner research provided me with a means of generating data that was common to my everyday classroom practices and reflecting on these practices, the qualitative approaches used in my research provided me with much more depth and understanding about both the assessment practices and the students in my classroom than is normally available to a busy practitioner. Using qualitative methods was appropriate for my study because qualitative research involves the immersion of the researcher in a social group and prolonged observation of the day-to-day lives of the participants through participant observation or through interviews (Creswell, 1998; Herrmann, 1987; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Seidman, 1998; Watts, 1993). As a teacher, I was able to conduct participant observation for the school year, and conduct interviews (and other methods) at specific times in the school year. A second reason for using qualitative methods was that they allowed me to see the classroom through the students’ eyes in some depth. I aligned my interest with those of Fielding

(2001), who followed the work of Rudduck, Chaplain, and Wallace (1996, p. 1) who claimed that “what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to, but provides an important—perhaps the most important—foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools.” Thirdly, the qualitative methods worked as a way for me to triangulate data – to use different sources to provide insights into particular events and practices (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980). The specific qualitative approaches I used are described in section 4.7 and included traditional qualitative methods such as interviews (Patton, 1980; Seidman, 1998) and focus groups (Greenbaum, 1998) with students and parents, plus some new ways of generating data that were made possible by my classroom program and conducted in the spirit in of integrating research and practice to produce new methods (Schatz & Walker, 1995).

The work of Schratz and Walker (1995) was particularly useful for me because it helped me to envision ways of producing data with students were reflective of my classroom practices. For example, Schratz and Walker describe how Lindsay Fitzclarence used “conceptual maps” that were drawn by students as the basis of interviewing students. Strategies such as this encouraged me to reconceive what Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) term “traditional” qualitative research methods into forms that would best suit the research participants. I began to think about what students already knew about methods (instructional *and* research methods). What evolved was the use of insider-knowledge about the participants’ experiences in classrooms to design a methodology that mimicked many of the instructional structures that I often used in class. These structures were familiar to the students, and allowed for a variety of choice and input from the students.

These adapted and “participatory research methods” that were informed by my classroom practice included: carousel brainstorm, speaker’s corner, other ways of representing, and Research Literature Circle meetings. These hybrid methods were qualitative in spirit as they were used to provide additional data that would help “...take the reader into an actual world to reveal the cultural knowledge working in a particular place and time as it is lived through the subjectivities of its inhabitants” (Britzman, 1995, p. 27). This was a means of valuing what students’ had to say about their school experiences and using their voice to reflect on practice (Fielding, 2001, 2007; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996). While traditionally, qualitative research has emphasized the use of participant observation and interviews (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2001), the hybrid methods allowed me to produce data in ways that were more familiar to students in my classroom.

For example, students were invited to provide additional written reflections about their authentic assessment experiences through a carousel brainstorm, and a speaker’s corner. These reflections were not requirements of the classroom program but were familiar ways of working in the classroom. These approaches were on-going and optional for student participation, as they were made available to students in the classroom from May 21st to June 15th. I describe these reflections below. Another hybrid method was what I labelled “other ways of representing.” As noted in previous chapters, this was one of the curricular strands of the English Language Arts curriculum, and because this was familiar to students, I used variations of other ways of representing (that is, representing through ways other than prose writing) to engage students in producing data. This consisted of visual representations and poetry that students created to express their ideas about assessment. These ways of producing data are consistent with recent qualitative methods that use visual data to express meaning (Silverman, 2001), or as Schratz and Walker (1995, p. 65) call it, “using pictures to see the invisible.” The visual productions were explained orally by the students and their comments were recorded and transcribed. Another kind of a hybrid method that I used was an adapted method called “Research Literature Circles” where students conducted what was essentially a “traditional” focus group but without my leadership as the primary researcher. Instead, the Research Literature Circle (as a modified way of thinking about focus groups) was administered entirely by students. They assigned preparatory and leadership roles to themselves bringing discussion questions, connections, illustrations, and quotations from the emerging data that *they* considered important to discuss. This is connected to what is called in the practitioner research literature “collaborative research,” where the role of students is understood to be one of “co-researchers” who help determine the problem to be studied (K. Schultz, 2001; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998).

In sum, the qualitative methods were useful for me as they allowed me to engage in practitioner research, but also employ ways of generating data that were beyond business as usual; my practitioner research was informed by qualitative methods that generated and supplemented the data that were provided through my classroom practices (see Table 4.2 for a summary of the additional qualitative methods).

Table 4.2
Qualitative methods used
Carousel brainstorm
Speaker’s corner
Other ways of representing
Focus groups
Research Literature Circles
Student interviews
Parent interviews

4.3 Critical discourse analysis

The review of the literatures about adolescence, middle schooling, and authentic assessment practices directed my research question by signalling particular theorization of knowledge, technologies, and identities. This theorization, in turn, provided me with direction as to how to approach the data that were generated in this research. For example, the concept of governmentality suggested to me that I would require an approach to analysing data that would allow me to determine the ways in which young people were governed and governed themselves, or, put another way, how authentic assessment practices operated as a human technology in my classroom. Furthermore, if students' identities were understood to be multiple and temporary, then I would need to approach data with flexibility and avoid methods that lead to fixed understandings of young people.

Critical discourse analysis is compatible with research about the negotiation of student subjectivities, the constitution of identity, the negotiation of knowledge, social relations, and issues of power. Luke (2002a, p. 105) argues that a key task currently facing CDA is to “analytically deconstruct, in poststructuralist terms, positive and productive configurations of power/knowledge in discourse.” I was interested in taking up this challenge to explore positive and productive configurations of young people through and by discourse in authentic assessment practices. Such an analytical approach embodies a set of assumptions about not only about discourse, subjectivity, and governmentality (as previously introduced), but also about language and its relations to social practices. CDA views language as both socially shaped and socially shaping, or constitutive (Fairclough, 1993).

Critical discourse analysis, as an approach, allowed me to consider all of the data generated in the research as “texts.” Luke (1995, p. 11) uses the word “text” to refer to “any instance of written and spoken language that has coherence and coded meaning.” For example, the words “assessment events,” as a “text,” are coded in meanings that can only be understood by the context (the social actions and relations) of the users of the language. Fairclough (1993, p. 134) suggests that “Language use, moreover, is constitutive in both conventional, socially reproductive ways, and creative, socially transformative ways, with the emphasis upon one or the other in particular cases depending upon the social circumstance.” Educators, for example, may use the phrase “assessment event” to convey a range of possible understandings including conventional ways (e.g., the term is used “appropriately” in common everyday understandings to refer to a student assessment activity such as a test) or transformative ways (e.g., the term is used in unconventional ways to resist or offer other understanding of the phrase such as the observation of a paper airplane’s trajectory); the meaning of

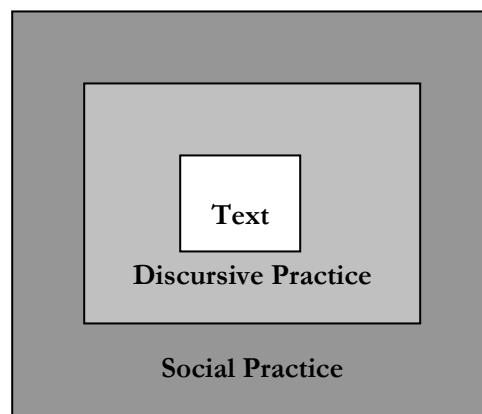
the phrase is constituted in relation to its use in social practices. The processes of producing, distributing, and consuming the text is what Fairclough terms “discursive practices” (Fairclough, 1992, 1993, 2003); texts are produced in specific social contexts.

Fairclough’s (1992) model of a three-dimensional conception of CDA allows a framework for positioning texts within larger discourses. The text is placed at the centre of this model, which is surrounded by discursive practices, and further framed by social practices (see Figure 4.3). Social practices refer to the social structures and struggles (e.g., official policy, public pedagogy, popular culture, definitions of adolescence or the learner) in which a text is created and used. Fairclough (1992, p. 71) suggests that discursive practice is a *form* of social practice that focuses on the production, consumption, and distribution of the text (e.g., teacher or curriculum influences) and claims that social practice may be wholly or partially constituted by discursive practice. This model was useful to me as it provided two complementary directions for approaching the data: “...analysts can begin from text analysis, or indeed analysis of social practice. The choice will depend upon the purpose and emphasis of the analysis” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 231). Regardless of the direction through Fairclough’s model (from “outside-in,” or from “inside-out”), the aim of CDA is to:

...systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135).

CDA provided me with ways of considering the data produced in this research. I was able to conceptualize how the various texts that were produced in this research related to one another, especially in terms of the representation of young people and the discourses that were made available to them. In this way, it was possible for me to relate assessment policies, my classroom program (including, for example, students’ assessment artefacts), and data produced through qualitative methods. Table 4.3 illustrates examples of the ways in which CDA helped me to think about these broad categories of data.

Figure 4.3
Fairclough’s model of CDA



Fairclough suggests specific tools for addressing data within his three-dimensional model of discourse. I present sketches of the tools that were useful for my research, and explain their use in more specific terms later (within data chapters) to provide context for their application. For now, it is suitable to position these tools within Fairclough's model of analysing the text, discursive practices, and social practices.

Analysis of Text: Fairclough (1992) offers four categories for text analysis: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. Of these, the first two were particularly useful for me in discerning the representations of young people in the texts. Using CDA to analyse text was a way for me to make the everyday “strange.” What follows is an adaptation of Fairclough's (1992) descriptions of the more specific tools of vocabulary and grammar that assisted my research in making common texts such as assessment policies or students' assessment artefacts “unfamiliar”:

- *Word Meaning:* a focus on “key words” that are general or local cultural significance, of changing uses of words, and on the meaning potential of a word
- *Transitivity:* to identify what processes (e.g., action, mental) and participants are favoured in the text (Halliday, 2004). To conduct a *transitivity analysis* is to “separate the text into functional linguistic units apart from the overall meaning of the text” (Janks, 1996a, p. 15).

These tools for analysing text allowed me to describe how the young person was being described in terms of labels and processes.

Analysis of Discursive Practices: Central to my study was the notion of *intertextuality*: “repeated and reiterated wordings, statements, and themes that appear in different texts” (A. Luke, 1995, p. 11). This technique allowed me to consider connections among the various texts that were produced through practitioner research. Because data were generated within different social practices (e.g., different student combinations) intertextuality allowed me to link these texts by tracking ideas that were referenced in multiple texts. Intertextual links allowed me to focus on student production of text, specifically how they constituted additions to prior texts (Fairclough, 1992).

Table 4.3
Approaching the data in this research through CDA

<i>Form of data</i>	<i>Considerations for CDA</i>
Assessment Policies	As texts, these policies represented young people in particular ways. CDA allowed me to determine in what ways the young person is represented and what the young person is asked to do during authentic assessment events (e.g., what processes are used to describe the young person’s activity during an authentic assessment event – to write, create, draw, think, etc.). Secondly, the policies could be understood in terms of how they were distributed to school board, teachers, and into classrooms in Nova Scotia. Thirdly, the assessment policies could be understood as social practices that informed educators about the role of schooling in the shaping of young people into particular forms (e.g., citizens, workers, family members, etc.).
Assessment artefacts from the classroom	CDA allowed me to think of students’ assessment artefacts as representations of self that take up particular ideal ways of being in the classroom and as being shaped by the discourses made available to students in the classroom. CDA provided me with ways of comparing the representations of young people in the assessment artefacts with those of the assessment policies. The comparisons made possible by CDA helped me to shape my research direction such that I would be able to determine if similar discourses were made available to young people and if comparable versions of young people were constituted between the authentic assessment policies and the authentic assessment practices in my classroom. Of particular interest to me were local discourses made available to the young people in my classroom.
Data produced through qualitative methods	Transcripts of student focus groups and interviews (etc.) were used to supplement data from authentic assessment practices that were common in my classroom. CDA helped me to understand that these texts produced through qualitative methods were also constructed in social contexts and represented particular versions of young people in rich descriptions that may or may not have been readily available through specific authentic assessment practices. As students explained the “self” that they presented in the assessment practice, they used particular discourses that were made available to them in and outside of school. Thinking about the possibilities of CDA with my research, I understood that students’ descriptions of their classroom “self” could be related to those versions represented in assessment policies. Furthermore, young people may have used the assessment policies and/or their assessment artefacts to constitute a “self” during their participation in qualitative methods of this research. For example, during a focus group, a student may have referred to the assessment policies or their own assessment artefact (or one of their peer’s) to assist them in articulating their “self” understanding. CDA provided me with tools to understand such processes of identity constitution.

Analysis of Social Practices: Fairclough (1992) offers several “guidelines” for approaching discourse as social practice. One such guideline was of particular use to me: *ideological and political effects of discourse*. Here, the focus is on “systems of knowledge and belief; social relations; and social identities (“selves”)” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 238). The purpose of analysing social practices is to denaturalize the text, to illustrate how it makes its authority obscure through linguistic techniques, and to show how alternative readings are made possible. Therefore, CDA helped me to understand “naturalized” productions of young people such as “adolescent” as a struggle to shape the ways in which we understand, talk about, and create opportunities for young people. Understanding assessment as a site of social practice provided me with useful insights into the ways in which young people govern and are governed; assessment events provide young people with opportunities for constituting versions of their “self” for social ideological investments. Such struggles in my research were aimed at illustrating, as Luke (2002a) puts it, “productive uses of power.” Luke (2002a, p. 11) suggests that CDA needs to develop positive theses about the productive uses of power and this should include “*idiosyncratic local uptakes*...where human subjects take centrally broadcast or dominant texts and discourses and reinterpret, recycle, revoice them in particular ways that serve their local political purposes.” I understood that my own assessment practices, as well as the versions of young people produced in this research, were reinterpreted and recycled, broad social practices. In such a way, I was able to think about what discourses proved to be most constitutive within the assessment practices for the identities that students took up in my classroom. I understood that such connections to wider social practices signalled “educational reform” within and beyond the province. Similarly, I considered my research to be aligned with “adolescent reform.”

My intention in using critical discourse analysis in my research was to provide “new eyes” to the authentic assessment practices that had become familiar to me in my classroom. I wanted to find ways of making my everyday practices unfamiliar, and by doing so, be able to rethink what was happening in my classroom in regards to students’ identities. I used CDA with a variety of data in this research: policy documents, data from my classroom program, data produced through qualitative methods, and my teaching journal. In the next four sections I provide an overview of the data generated in this research.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Because this research involved young people as participants, ethical considerations were important to discuss with the students, their parents, the school administration, and the school board. “In general, discussions about research ethics are centred about two key preoccupations, firstly informed consent, and secondly, protection of research respondents” (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 94). These principles are commonly used to explore research ethics or expanded into other categorizations such as those by Flinders (1992): informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality. Maor (1997) further extends the ethical framework provided by Flinders (1992) to include Sockett’s (1993) professional virtues in the discussion of educational research ethics: honesty, courage, care, fairness, and practical wisdom. As a practitioner, I wanted to use a framework that would be readily accessible to the young people in the research because I wanted to make my ethical considerations explicit in the classroom. While I considered that young people may have understood the terminology used by Sockett, I decided to use a framework with fewer categories and less familiar vocabulary to emphasize the ethical considerations of the research in my discussions with the students. I chose to discuss ethical considerations in this research using Morrow and Richards’s (1996, p. 94) two broad “preoccupations” and I present them in turn below.

4.4.1 Informed consent

At the conception of my research interest, the principal of the school was informed about, and agreed to the nature of this study. Upon approval from the university to support my research proposal, the superintendent of the school board was contacted, and granted permission to conduct this research (see Appendix 4.4.1a). Potential participants received detailed information about the study (see Appendix 4.4.1b). Students were informed of this research by means of verbal explanation and a letter (see Appendix 4.4.1c). Parents were similarly informed of this research by means of an information letter (see Appendix 4.4.1d).

Because this research involved human subjects in school settings, informed consent from students and their parents was needed prior to conducting the research. There is a shift in legal trends that envision children as legal subjects with their own rights, rather than passive objects of parental rights (Mohan, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Weithorn & Scherer, 1994). For this reason, much emphasis was spent in assuring student consent to participate in the research. Each participant received a personal letter outlining the aims of the research, voluntary participation, anonymity, freedom to withdraw at any time, confidentiality, and the security of the data collected (see Appendix

4.4.1b). Participants were requested to sign a consent form (see Appendix 4.4.1c). Because debate could occur as to who “owns” the adolescent students’ rights to participate in the research (the student or the parent), the consent of a parent or legal guardian of the student participant was also required (see Appendix 4.4.1d).

Before I introduced the research proposal to the students, I reviewed Johnson’s (2000) principles for conducting research with children. I found her “checklist” useful in organizing my presentation. In Johnson’s writing are a series of questions asked from the vantage point of the prospective child research participant that address ethical concerns about consent: (1) how the student will be treated, (2) the nature of the research, (3) how students were chosen to participate (4) what participants would be doing, (5) how the students’ stories would be used, and (6) how the research would be communicated back to the participants. I used these ideas to frame my presentation to the students, making my own “checklist” of items to share with my students.

While inviting the students in my English class to be involved in this research, I realized that not all would participate. On April 25th, as I was introducing the research (accompanied by the information letter and consent forms), one student asked, “Can as many people as want to be involved in the research?” [Of course.] As a teacher, I knew that beginning something unfamiliar with students could result in challenges. Another student asked, “What would you do if *no*-one signed the consent form?” I replied, “I’d probably start a new research project.” I recorded in my research journal that afternoon, “The tone in the class is unsure about the research. I did not ‘sell it’ and perhaps over-emphasized the volunteer and withdrawal aspects.”

Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that an “informed dissent” also be allowed for participants. In such a case, participants are assured that “dissent” to participate in the research is respected by the researcher as much as their “consent.” Recognized that ethical dilemmas (or a change in students’ interests) could arise throughout the research, and not only at the initial stage of acquiring informed consent, I reassured the participants that they could “dissent” at any stage of the research. For example, in establishing the membership of the first focus group, I verbally offered for students to “back out” at several key times: on the day they received the information letter, two days before the focus group, the morning of the focus group session, and during the focus group meeting itself. I also ensured informed consent through classroom discussions, emphasizing what the research involved, what the students’ role was in the research, and what would happen with the research data. Building these discussions about informed

consent and the right to withdraw into the data production activities was another way of obtaining consent from the volunteer participants.

Laura came to talk with me about her “informed dissent” from the focus group interview scheduled for May 31st: She explained that she would have to withdraw from the Research Literature Circle, not from lack of interest in the research, but from a scheduling conflict:

Laura sought me out before school to tell me that she has a doctor’s appointment tomorrow during our data generation time (a Research Literature Circle meeting). She is a “Discussion Director” for her Research Literature Circle group. She eagerly offered to change her doctor’s appointment: “It’s just a check-up, it’s not like I’m dying or anything.” She appears *very* excited to participate in the research. It’s not too easy to *get* a doctor’s appointment around here! I wonder what Laura’s parents think about this choice of priorities... (as described in my teaching journal, May 30th, 2001).

Here, Laura’s enthusiasm demonstrates her willingness to participate in the research, offering her consent. As it turned out, Laura changed her doctor’s appointment and participated in the Research Literature Circle.

This research was designed as complementary to everyday classroom practices. The structure of this research allowed students to drop in or out of the research process. As such, students’ level of involvement was negotiated throughout the research. For example, in class meetings prior to this research, students became familiar with the protocol of “passing” (not participating) in classroom discussions when called upon by myself, or a peer. This classroom dynamic had been well established. It was important that such understandings of the research process were clear to the students because they were in an unequal power relationship with me, as their teacher. I wanted to ensure that students did not feel any obligation to assist me with my research.

4.4.2 Protection of research respondents/participants

It is important to note that the participants worked with the researcher for ten months during the research. This is one of the benefits of practitioner research. Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that this time for a relationship to develop between researcher and researched is a critical ethical element of researching children. This relationship is perhaps the most important aspect of students feeling comfortable to dissent from the research at any time. The relationships and the social status between the interviewer and interviewee have implications for data generation (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hood, Kelley, & Mayall, 1996). Building relations with students over a period of time allows

the participants to better understand the motives of the research and the interpersonal skills of the teacher researcher. Allard (1996) notes that allowing students to help in the design of the methods (especially in how they believe they might best be able to express themselves) reduces the danger of the students being exploited or embarrassed by a pre-determined adult researcher agenda. These opportunities for students to participate in the methodology were part of my previous discussion about the value of working within the field of practitioner research. Furthermore, it has been my experience that students want to volunteer their views when they feel safe. At the time of the research, the participants had months of experiences with my classroom practices, expectations, and limitations. They had become familiar with my assessment reporting processes and, because of the explicit student-involved nature of this process, should not have felt threatened to dissent from my research agenda.

Beyond the trust that had been established between the researcher and the participants, it should be noted that the research was separated from the mark that the students received. Students had been contracting for their grades and were familiar with how their marks were determined. There was no confusion for the participants in understanding the separation of their marks from this research. For these reasons, the students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they were not under any obligation to assist me in this research.

To preserve confidentiality, my research journal, tapes, and transcriptions were stored in a locked cupboard in my home office, and will remain there for five years from the completion of the research. As the owner of the data, I controlled its access. Student participants were invited to access the data they had contributed at any time throughout the research process in order to further comment or modify the information they had expressed. Students were/will not be allowed access to other participants' material.

In the reporting of the results, pseudo-names were used for all participants in the research and for the research site. During the research information session (April 25th) one student asked, "Can I choose my own pseudo-name?" [I did not allow it because I had already begun coding]. To demonstrate to the students how pseudo-names are used in the reporting of research, I changed the participants' names when I showed them the transcripts of the first focus group. As they were analysing these texts to discuss in the Research Literature Circle meeting, one student enjoyed mocking the pseudo-name when referring to something he had said in the transcript. Using the first

two fingers on each hand to gesture the quotation marks, his voice full of mockery, and with a taunting look in his eye, he refers to himself using the pseudo-name: “Mark said...” This helped students’ understanding of how the data would be reported.

The focus group sessions, Research Literature Circle meetings, and student and parent interviews were conducted at the school site. During these events, if any troublesome issues arose, students were offered direction for support in the school system. When issues arose which required more privacy, the student was interviewed later, independently from other participants. For example, I spoke with Laura about the content of a short story that involved an abusive situation. As her teacher and as a researcher, I chose to have this conversation without her peers around. With her permission, we discussed the story in an interview setting. Laura wanted to clarify its fictitious nature, and later during an interview with Laura’s mom, her mother also wanted to discuss the short story with me. This process also illustrates how I was able to monitor students’ consent throughout the research and how they were involved in making decisions about how the data would be generated.

Ethical considerations were important throughout the research process – in the classroom, during the implementation of qualitative methods outside of the classroom, and in conversations with colleagues about “how things were going” with my research. Because my practitioner research (with additional qualitative methods) involved close relations over ten months between my self as the teacher-researcher and the students, I needed to find ways to create distance between the data production and the data analysis in this research. This is not to suggest that initial analysis and reflection did not occur during the data production. Rather, I was interested in making the data that were familiar to me on a daily basis in my classroom, “strange.” To provide this distance, I wanted to use a methodology that was in line with the theorizations offered above as well as being an approach that helped me deal with the textual data (notes, written artefacts, transcripts etc.) my research produced. As a result of these considerations, I decided to use critical discourse analysis.

4.5 Data for analysis - Policy documents

In Nova Scotia, assessment policy is found at three political levels that, in theory, are also intended to operate in a hierarchy. Assessment policy is produced at the provincial level in subject curriculum guides by the Department of Education and Culture. School Boards create specific policies about

assessment that operate within the parameters of the provincial policies. Similarly, specific schools may produce policies that communicate assessment issues within the school community (for example, exam procedures within a school site). Because the policies created by a school board or a school are required to align themselves with the provincial policies, I focus my analysis on three provincial policies that inform the Grade 8 English Language Arts curriculum. These provincial documents encouraged specific ways of working with young people such as the use of particular classroom assessment practices:

Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture. (1999). *Public School Program*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture.

Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation. (1996). *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture.

Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation. (1997). *English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 7-9*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture.

These three documents suggest the ways in which teachers should be conducting classroom assessment activities in English Language Arts. It should be noted that I understood that these policies advocated particular perspectives of assessment and openly tried to convince teachers to change their classroom assessment practices to be consistent with the vision of teaching and learning described in the policies. However, the policies do not provide teachers with explicit ways of using the practices that are suggested, making the documents impractical for implementing the ideas described in the policy. These documents are not prescriptive; they do not provide a “recipe” for conducting classroom assessment. Furthermore, the policy documents are often contradictory within and among the set, and while they were intended to “support teachers in the implementation of the English language arts curriculum” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 5), the policies take up multiple social and political discourses that were available at the time and place in which they were written. By making these points, I wish to emphasize that practitioners, while expected to comply with the vision of their employer’s policies, are also able to be critical of these documents.

The teacher is expected to be familiar with assessment policies in all three of these provincial documents to create his or her classroom program. While the *Public School Program* informs all subject areas and grade levels, the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* directs teachers of all grades about assessment in English Language Arts. The third document, *English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 7-9*, informs my specific Grade 8 classroom. These three

policy documents have specific sections that discuss assessment, which I identify in the descriptions below. To provide a background for each of the three provincial policies used in this analysis, I introduce them by explaining their stated purposes, their authors, and by providing an overview of their contents.

4.5.1 Public School Program

This 1999 document produced by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture is a handbook for school boards, administrators, and educators presenting the goals and policies of public school education in the province. It “describes what students should know and be able to do if the goals are to be reached, and describes the programs and courses offered in the public school program” (p. iii). No individual writers are identified in this document and it is revised and published each school year. The handbook is divided into six parts:

1. The Goals of Public Education,
2. School Programs,
3. Policies and Procedures,
4. Resources and Services,
5. Program and Course Description, and
6. Publications and Resources.

In Policies and Procedures is a section called “Assessment of Student Learning” which I use for analysis in this study. This section outlines the purposes of assessments, the principles of assessment and evaluation, and the role of classroom assessment in Nova Scotia schools. Henceforth, I refer to this document as the *PSP (Public School Program)*.

4.5.2 Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum

This document was sponsored in 1996 by the Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation (APEF) and written by an inter-provincial curriculum committee representing the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. It is noted in the acknowledgements that the province of Nova Scotia took the lead in drafting and revising the document, with assistance from the other provinces during reviews. In total, there were twenty people involved in writing this policy which was then “validated” by “educators, parents, and stakeholders” (p. i). The writers included six teachers, three administrators, one school board consultant, and ten Departments of Education consultants and coordinators. The purpose of this document is to provide “a framework on which educators and others in the learning community can

base decisions concerning learning experiences, instructional techniques and assessment strategies, using curriculum outcomes as a reference point” (p. 1). The text has two main parts: “Vision” and “Contexts for Teaching and Learning.”

Unlike the *PSP*, which is written in terms of aims and objectives, this document focuses on student outcomes - statements of student learning. For example, the curriculum outcomes present what “knowledge and skills” students are expected to demonstrate. The document claims that one of the “key features” of this outcome-based curriculum is that it provides a basis for assessing student achievement: “The outcomes framework provides reference points for teachers to inform their instructional practice as they monitor student progress and assess what students can and cannot do, what they know and what they need to know” (p. 2). The document presents the “Essential Graduation Learnings” for all subjects, “General Curriculum Outcomes” for English Language Arts as well as “Key Stage Outcomes” for grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. Teachers are encouraged to use these outcomes to guide curriculum design in their classroom. The outcomes framework changed the ways in which teachers were expected to plan activities in the classroom. Instead of being directed as to what text, unit of study, or specific lesson plan to use in class, teachers were expected to create curriculum that would allow students to demonstrate their ability to achieve the outcomes. This informed how I openly shared the curriculum outcomes with students. Since the introduction of the APEF outcome-based curriculum, I have shared the outcomes from the policies with students in my course outlines as well as informed them that the entire curriculum guide is available on-line. In my Grade 8 classroom of 2000-2001, students were familiar with the ten General Curriculum Outcomes as follows:

Speaking and Listening

Students will be expected to

1. speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences
2. communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically
3. interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose

Reading and Viewing

Students will be expected to

4. select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts
5. interpret, select, and combine information using a variety of strategies, resources, and technologies
6. respond personally to a range of texts
7. respond critically to a range of texts, applying their understanding of language, form, and genre

Writing and Other Ways of Representing

Students will be expected to

8. use writing and other forms of representation to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and learning; and to use their imagination
9. create texts collaboratively and independently, using a variety of forms for a range of audiences and purposes
10. use a range of strategies to develop effective writing and other ways of representing and to enhance their clarity, precision, and effectiveness (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, pp. 20-21).

These General Curriculum Outcomes would be continued in their future English classes and would direct their future English teachers' classroom practices.

In the second part of this document, "Contexts for Teaching and Learning," I used the section called, "Assessing and Evaluating Student Learning" (pp. 46-53) for analysis. These pages provide definitions of assessment and evaluation, policies about reporting, guiding principles for assessment, suggest specific assessment strategies in the English Language Arts classroom, and explain the role of external assessment and program and system evaluation. I refer to this document as the *Foundation*.

4.5.3 English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 7-9

This document was written in 1999 by a curriculum committee of twenty-four people representing each of the four Atlantic Provinces. Unlike the *Foundation* document, the positions of the authors are not identified. The majority of the committee members (eighteen) were also involved in writing the 1996 *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*. The curriculum guide was "developed to support teachers in the implementation of the English language arts curriculum" (p. 5). It contains suggestions for teaching and learning, and for classroom assessment.

The guide is divided into three major parts: Curriculum Outcomes, Program Design and Components, and Assessment and Evaluation. This third part (pp. 154-163) is the focus of my analysis. These pages are organized into headings:

- Using a Variety of Assessment Strategies,
- Involving Students in the Assessment Process,
- Diverse Learners,
- Assessing Speaking and Listening,
- Assessing Responses to a Text,
- Assessing Reading,

- Assessing and Evaluating Student Writing,
- Portfolios,
- Tests and Examinations, and
- Effective Assessment and Evaluation Practices.

This document advocates the use of a variety of assessment practices by teachers, and especially encourages them to use alternative assessment techniques beyond those that the guide refers to as “traditional” assessment practices such as tests and examinations. This document is the most specific guide provided by the Department of Education. As a practitioner, I referred to this guide more than others because it contained suggestions and examples of classroom assessment practices that coordinated with the student outcomes that were expected to be achieved by the students in my classroom. I refer to this document as the *ELA (English Language Arts)*.

The three provincial guides represent a hierarchy: the *PSP* guides all subjects and grades, the *Foundation* presents the subject of English Language Arts for all grades, and the *ELA* relates to the specific grade being taught. Each document provides increasing details about classroom assessment as evident in the number of pages that contain assessment information. Table 4.5.3 summarizes these pages showing that as the policy documents increase their focus on the subject and grade level, more specific and detailed information is provided about assessment. In total, twenty pages were used from the three provincial documents as data in this research.

Table 4.5.3 Pages used from policy documents	
<i>Document</i>	<i>Number of pages</i>
<i>PSP</i>	3
<i>Foundation</i>	8
<i>ELA</i>	9
Total	20

4.6 Data for analysis - Classroom program

Students who were interested in being involved with the research were provided options for various degrees of participation. Some data production was a component of the classroom program and so students who provided consent for the use of their work could do so without any other involvement in the research. I used the documents from the students who provided consent for their work to be used in this research as part of the data corpus. The data that were generated in this manner is presented below as classroom program data. These ways of producing data were organic to what I was doing in the classroom. For example, students were expected to design contracts and rubrics as well as write reflections about this assessment process as part of the classroom program. These

events are discussed in more detail as part of the classroom program description in Chapter 5, but I wish to signal here that data for this research included the assessment artefacts that students produced in their everyday classroom activities that contributed to their marks in class. Students were also expected to reflect on several of these assessment artefacts, producing additional data that were used in this research. These four reflections were organic to what I was doing in the classroom and are described below.

4.6.1 Student assessment artefacts

Students in my Grade 8 class produced assessment artefacts that were part of the data corpus for this research. The following list includes the artefacts that were used in this research from my classroom program, all of which are described in detail in Chapter 5:

- Questionnaire
- Journal
- Literature Circle Observational Assessment
- Literature Circle Group Reflection
- Identity Museum Object
- Letters to the editor
- Learning Logs
- Third Term Contract (including student-created rubrics and notes from student conferences)
- Gift of Giving Self-assessment
- Children's Literature Portfolio (including peer assessments)
- Reading Big Books (artefact and performance assessment)
- Process Exams

With 27 students in the class, each producing these artefacts, I needed an organizational system to manage the data. I used folders to organize the students' work and these folders were then placed in two large boxes for storage.

4.6.2 Four-Two-One

This reflection was conducted on April 27th and asked students to respond to three different prompts. The first prompt demanded four responses, the second prompt demanded two responses and the third question, one response. The students' responses were combined into one document and organized according to the three prompts:

- Suggest *four* tips for writing rubrics
- Explain *two* ways that your assessment contract reflects who you are
- What is *one* thing that I should know about your contract experience

These prompts were used to assist my practitioner understanding of student-created rubrics (the tips), to get a preliminary sense of how students understood identity in relation to assessment (how the contract reflects “who you are”), and to allow open ended inquiry about what students considered to be important for me know about their assessment experience. This method was a way for me to get a “pulse” of how students were experiencing the authentic assessment events in my classroom so that I could make changes to my classroom program if necessary, or assist students who were struggling.

4.6.3 PMI: Reflection about the Third Term Contract

This reflection was conducted on May 16th and asked student to describe their experience of using an individualized contract for the third term. Students were asked to record their ideas in a table that had three columns (P/M/I) representing Plus, Minus, and Interesting. Students had experienced this reflection strategy throughout the year. It is a frequently suggested student reflection exercise (Burke, 1999) originally developed by de Bono (1992). The students’ responses were typed and combined into one document that sorted the comments into the three categories of plus, minus, and interesting. This method also helped me to understand, in a broad way, students’ interests and concerns about the assessment practices as it related to their “self” in the classroom.

4.6.4 Student-generated report cards

On June 5th and 6th students were asked to create a report card for their life as a classroom reflection exercise. Students chose subjects that they felt best reflected what was worth assessing: entertainment, fun, happiness, cleanliness, social, homework, attitude, hockey, family, friends, for example. Numerical marks were assigned and anecdotal comments were made by the students such as these, written by different students:

Family (63%): Don’t get along with your brother too much

Friends (49%): Not much effort in making new friends

Entertainment (84%): I watch T.V., play games, and read from my growing Stephen King collection.

This method allowed me to document a brief profile of students' lives beyond the school, noting what was considered important to them (e.g., family, friends, entertainment, etc.) and how they understood their "self" in accordance to these self-created categories of life beyond school.

4.6.5 Monologues

On May 31st and June 4th, students were asked to write a monologue for a student who is at home preparing an assignment for school. These reflections were typically a page in length (250 words) and presented scenarios of students' lives at home as they prepared their school work. It was common in these reflections for students to mention distractions from their school work such as noisy neighbours or siblings, other concerns and desires, or talking on the phone. This method created depictions of students engaged in school practices in their lives beyond the school. These descriptions helped me to phrase specific questions to ask students during other methods in the research, especially when similar themes such as stress or enjoyment were noted in these monologues.

The combination of students' assessment artefacts and students' reflections about their assessment experiences constituted the data that were produced by students through the classroom program. These data were used during the research process to guide other methods of producing data that occurred beyond the normal everyday practices of the classroom. For example, students' successes, interests, and struggles with the assessment events helped to shape additional methods for producing data that would examine students' identities during the authentic assessment practices. While the classroom program data was central to my research, so too were students' understandings about how they constituted a "self" in the assessment artefacts and reflections. For this purpose, additional research methods were employed.

4.7 Data for analysis - Additional qualitative data

With various levels of student participation, this section describes the data that were generated by students and the production processes that were involved in creating the data. All of these methods produced data that were "extra" to the regular classroom program and were part of the data corpus for this research. These methods provided an additional lens to my classroom program to accompany the lenses of practitioner research and critical discourse analysis. I also intended that these qualitative methods would provide more rich descriptions of students' experiences in my

classroom and a greater understanding about my assessment practices. These seven methods of producing additional qualitative data are outlined below and in addition, more detailed descriptions about the focus groups, Research Literature Circles, and parent interviews can be found in Appendices 4.7.4, 4.7.5, and 4.7.6. These appendices provide more specific information about my interactions with students and parents during these methods, as well as the communication that occurred among them.

4.7.1 Carousel brainstorm

In this reflective activity, large pieces of chart paper were posted around the classroom. On each piece of chart paper a question was written at the top, leaving plenty of room for students' responses below. Students circulated freely to record their responses including ideas that were prompted by other students' comments. The carousel brainstorm was made available to students from May 21 to June 15. The posted questions were as follows:

- How do you celebrate your successes?
- How do you show that you are proud of your work?
- What advice would you give to someone who is unable to live up to the expectations of his or her friends?
- How do you know what I, as the teacher, want from you in an assignment?
- What criteria would you use to assess someone's expression of who they are?
- What characteristics would the "perfect" student have in Mr. Van Zoost's class?

These questions were informed by the students' reflections about their assessment experiences (Four-Two-One, PMI, and Student-generated report card, as described above). These responses provided data about how students understood power and identity to work in the authentic assessment practices in my classroom, which would then be analysed using critical discourse analysis.

4.7.2 Speaker's corner

Following Much Music's (a Canadian television station broadcasting music videos) recording-booth-on-the-street format, I set-up a video camera in the corner of the classroom that students could use to privately record impromptu responses to a series of questions that I distributed on paper. Students could access this camera during instructional and non-instructional time to record their ideas from May 21 to June 15. The students who used this format typically chose one question from the following list:

- If you could be someone else for a while, without any penalties, what would you want or do about your marks and assignments?
- Who can you really talk to about your marks? What makes you feel comfortable talking with him or her?
- How do you decide how much of yourself you'll show to a teacher? To your parents? To your close friends?
- In what kinds of spaces do you feel that you are truly heard?
- What would help your voice be better understood?
- Give an example of how you were or were not “real” in your assignments.
- When you are in an unfamiliar situation, how do you decide what is expected of you? Who made these expectations of you?
- Choose someone else in the class who might be struggling with their assignments. Pretending that you are this person, what do you think are the teacher’s expectations of him or her? What things that are important to this person are not being recognized in class? What advice would you give to this person?

Like the questions designed for the carousel brainstorm above, the speaker’s corner questions were informed by the data from the classroom program. These questions helped student discussions about identity although it should be noted that the questions do not connect to theories of multiple identity or subjectivity and instead reflect my ideas at the time, where I did not have this language myself.²⁴ Without using the theoretical language of discourse and subjectivity, these questions prompted students to consider how their “self” might be understood differently in different contexts, especially in relation to different people (in the presence of the teacher, friends, or parents). The student responses to these questions were not understood to be “correct” nor definitive. Instead, their responses provided data for critical discourse analysis.

4.7.3 Other ways of representing

Eight students were involved in creating other ways of representing their understandings of assessment experiences on May 31st. As one group of four students were involved with a Research Literature Circle meeting (described below), the remaining four students were provided with a “menu” of data production ideas. The students chose data production techniques from among the

²⁴ It must be said that because the current cultural climate emphasizes individual’s immutable identities, language to discuss identities that are socially and culturally constructed is generally unavailable to all of us – teachers and students.

following tasks that tapped into students' understandings of identity in the classroom and in their lives beyond the classroom:

- Draw a series of self-portraits that show who you are in different spaces in your life.
- Write poetry about the experience of voicing who you are in a school setting.
- Design a "school costume" with text boxes explaining the significance of your design.
- Draw masks for different places where you express yourself (e.g., my "school mask," my "home mask," etc.)
- Create a brochure for teachers explaining what teachers should know about students' sense of self and assessment practices.

Some chose to work independently, others in pairs or triads for varying intervals of time. Most commonly, students chose to paint self-portraits that demonstrated "who they were" in different spaces of their lives. The art was then video-taped and explained by the students. This tape was then transcribed and included in the data corpus.

It should also be noted that students who were involved in the focus groups (described below) created "emotional pie graphs" that represented their emotional experience of the Third Term Contract. This way of producing data was consistent with how students created responses to literature in class by describing a character's emotions in terms of colour and I considered this technique similar to the other ways of representing described in this section. Because this way of producing data was created for these specific students, I explain it here in detail. It was informed Greenbaum's (1998, p. 118) projective technique intended for focus groups, called "forced relationships": "Projective techniques generate information from participants by encouraging them to make associations with other stimuli as a way of expressing their feelings towards the specific conceptual idea, product, service, or other entity with which they are being presented." For example, animals, colours, or automobiles could be used to elicit comparisons with the subject being discussed; a lion might represent strength or a snake, distrust. This idea reminded me of a teaching technique that I had conducted earlier in the school year from Whitin (1996), "Literature Pie Graphs." In this activity, students had been asked to divide a circle into at least three colours to represent a character's emotional profile. Students proceeded to explain their diagram and what each colour represented in their drawing. I decided to adapt this technique to our focus group, asking students to do a similar exercise that reflected their own feelings about their assessment experiences.

4.7.4 Focus groups

Transcripts of two student focus groups are part of the data corpus. The conversations were recorded using a video camera (audio only) and I transcribed the tapes within four days of the sessions. The focus groups occurred near the end of my data collection (May 18), after I had collected and reviewed data from other classroom sources and had considered some of the possible emerging issues. All students who had shown interest in participating in the research were scheduled into a focus group. I considered the balances among the following categories when dividing the participants into the focus groups: males and females, demonstrated academic achievement, and school histories.

The prolonged observation of the participants throughout the school year and my reflections about the data collected in the teaching journal (presented below) helped to guide the development of the student focus group questions. The advance questions included:

1. How did you make the choice of what type of assignment you chose to include in your assessment contract this term?
2. Can you see your “real” identity in these assessment artefacts?
3. Are your assessment artefacts living up to your own expectations? What would others expect from you regarding these assessment artefacts? (Your mom? Your dad? Your brother? Bart Simpson? Your girl/boy friend? Your favourite musician / actor?)

These questions were asked first in our discussions and were intended to help me address the students’ understanding of their identities in the classroom. For example, the first question above, allowed me to understand how student perceived and managed “choice” in the classroom. I was curious as to what resources students used to make decisions in the classroom. The second question asked students to discuss the idea of a “real” identity and provided opportunities for them to consider how this identity was shaped up in the classroom. Finally, the third question above allowed me to explore how students thought of their world beyond school in regard to their assessment artefacts.

I followed these questions by three other questions I had prepared (see Krueger & Casey, 2000), but not introduced to the students in advance:

4. How does this artefact or assessment tool support who you want to be, or how you want to be known?

5. What part(s) of your life that are important to you are not / cannot be seen or heard in your assessment portfolio? Why do you think that they are not there?
6. What criteria do you use to assess things in your “real-world” outside of school?

These questions prompted additional ways of addressing the same issues of student identity and the role of students’ lives beyond school in their school life. I decided to type up the transcript from the first focus group sessions and develop a print text. This text was used in a student Literature Circle meeting to generate further data and I call this means of producing data “Research Literature Circles.” This would also prove to be a viable means of students clarifying data from the first focus group (see Appendix 4.7.4 for additional notes about the focus groups).

4.7.5 Research Literature Circles

Transcripts were made from two “Research Literature Circle” meetings that occurred on May 31st. Literature Circles are “small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to help perform that job” (Daniels, 1994, p. 13). This structure was used in our English Language Arts class throughout the year and so the student participants were familiar with this process. What the Research Literature Circles allowed was for students to determine the questions that would be discussed and how the discussion would occur. The “text” that was used for discussion was the transcript of the first focus group session conducted on May 18th. Divided into two groups of four, the participants were provided with the date, time, and location of their meeting. These students assigned themselves “roles” for the Research Literature Circle meeting (see Table 4.7.5 and Appendix 4.7.5 for a description of these roles). Hereafter, I refer to this data production method as “Research Literature Circles” whereas I use the phrase “Literature Circles” to refer to the assessment event in my classroom program. I used this method for two particular reasons.

First, the Research Literature Circles served as a form of member-checking process or what Creswell (1998, p. 233) calls “respondent validation.” In the Research

Group A	Group B
Dawson – Discussion Director	Tinia – Discussion Director
Ian – Literary Luminary	Peter – Literacy Luminary
Lisa – Illustrator	Nicole – Illustrator
Colin – Connector	Nicholas – Connector

Literature Circles students were asked to review what had been said in the focus groups

and discuss its accuracy and implications. Secondly, I hoped that the Research Literature Circles would produce data that were more “student-directed” rather than directed by me as the researcher. I was interested in what students had to say about authentic assessment when they were not prompted by my own questions and concerns. I hoped that this would be a move towards being able to see my classroom program through the eyes of the students and to generate data that used language that was not monitored by me as the teacher-researcher.

4.7.6 Parent interviews

I approached the students who participated in both the focus group and the Research Literature Circles meeting to ask if they would be comfortable with me inviting their parents to be interviewed for this research. Peter expressed concern about his parents’ involvement in the research and so they were not approached. Five of the remaining seven parents were interested or had time available to generate data through an interview process. Having taught their children, I had met with all of these parents throughout the school year. They were familiar with my teaching practices, classroom climate, and expectations of the students. I was pleased with the high level of interest that parents expressed to contribute to this research.

With permission of all participants, parents were provided with transcripts of their child’s comments. With the exception of Dawson’s parents, the interviews were held at school on June 8th. Dawson’s parents were unable to schedule a meeting, and Dawson asked if he could interview them on videotape at home (June 15th). His parents and I agreed. All interviews were transcribed and I provided a copy of his/her/their interview to the parent(s) with the invitation to make comments and provide any further points of clarification they wished. Two parents responded by making additional notes on the sides of the transcript.

The parent interviews allowed me to further probe ideas that had been foregrounded in the data generated in the classroom and student focus groups. Using the data generated from the classroom and student focus groups, I created a list of questions to use as an interview guide as suggested by Patton (1980). I used open-ended guiding questions during the interview that provided valuable data about the authentic assessment practices:

1. What general attitudes does your child have about these self-generated assessment tools?
2. Do you notice any changes in work habits/behaviour/attitude in your child when they are working on a self-chosen assignment rather than a teacher-chosen assignment?

3. Did you discover or realize anything new or interesting when you were marking your child's assignment? Did this prompt any conversation?
4. Does the type/subject matter of the assignments that your child chose surprise you? Do the choices match your understanding of his/her identity?
5. What influenced the choices that your child made in picking the assignments? (e.g., specific friends, interests, television characters)

Patton (1980, p. 203) reports three benefits of using the standardized open-ended interview format, two of which were applicable to my methodology: "the exact instrument used in the evaluation is available for inspection by decision makers and information users; the interview is highly focussed so that interviewee time is carefully used." During the interviews I took notes in my journal, and then read these notes to the parent at the end of our discussion to ensure accuracy. An unanticipated benefit of the parent interviews was that they helped me to check the validity of my initial understandings of the classroom program data as well as data that students had produced in the additional qualitative methods. Additional notes about the parent interviews can be found in Appendix 4.7.6.

4.7.7 Student interviews

Using the data generated from class, the focus groups, the Research Literature Circles, other ways of representing, and the parent interviews, I rearranged the data to create files containing data created by each student. I created a unique list of questions to use as an interview guide for each student. These interviews were for the purpose of clarifying issues that arose from the data and I chose parts of the data to review with students. At times, this involved reviewing a selected passage from a transcript, or revisiting a detail in a painting that was not previously discussed. This is an example of a kind of "member checking" process, where I was able to check with the participants if I had understood them as they had intended to be understood. Five students were offered and accepted interview appointments on June 15th. I used questions such as the following to structure the interview:

- In reviewing the transcript from the [focus group/other sources of data], is this an accurate representation of what you said?
- When you said, "... " I took that to mean "... ". Is this an accurate interpretation of what you said?
- Could you please elaborate on your statement "... " from the [focus group session/other sources of data]?

- Could you clarify what you meant when you said, “...” in the [focus group session/other sources of data]?

These questions were asked about specific sections of the transcripts that I had identified and marked for discussion with the student. Often, the issues discussed in these interviews were equally important between my role as teacher and that of a researcher. For example, I wanted to discuss the pressure to “be successful” that Peter reported in the data. As his teacher, I was concerned about the amount of anxiety that he felt to receive high marks. Tina and I similarly discussed assessment “stress.” As a researcher, this anxiety about assessment was important to understand. By contrast, Dawson’s interview focused on data clarification. I needed his assistance to understand the poem that he had written. I was unsure of its relation to assessment and wanted to verify his messages in the writing. Our conversation wandered to discuss George Michael’s music, as it appeared several times in his class assignments. Colin’s and Nicholas’s interviews focused on issues of competition and the presentation of “self” in different spaces. These were issues that both of these boys had spent a great deal of time considering in the data, and I wanted to pursue their ideas further. The student interviews were the last qualitative methods that I used and they allowed students and me to revisit and reflect on data that they had produced over the course of the research.

4.8 Teaching journal

Most of my professional growth has occurred as a direct result of my reflections in my teaching journal. I kept it with me in my classroom and made notes in it at home as I was marking. I took it with me to professional events outside of school time and used it to record my reflections after providing inservices to colleagues about assessment practices. It was not the daily account of insights which bore significance, but the re-examination of data over time. Common themes, joys, concerns, or strategies presented themselves in a slow unwinding manner that re-directed my teaching practices. My teaching journal during the 2000-2001 school year was also a research journal where I reflected on students’ participation in the research. I decided not to keep two journals, as the research was organic to what I was doing in the classroom.

The insights that I gained from my journal during this research period enhanced the description and specific implementation aspects of the assessment practices in my classroom. For example, at the back of the journal I kept paper copies of instructions that were used during assessment events, a copy of the assessment practices, as well as Post-it notes on the assessment practices that recorded

my ideas for future considerations about the assessment tool. The majority of the writing consisted of notes that I made about the methods I was using and what new curiosities were arising as the research continued. I also used the journal to record notes from informal interviews with students during non-instructional time that often led to insightful “revelations.” Patton (1980, p. 198) terms this “informal conversational interviews,” a phenomenological approach where the researcher has no presuppositions about what might emerge or what might be of importance from the onset of the conversation. I also used observation during class time, observing students without interaction, as they made decisions about assessment events, practices, and criteria.

I soon learned that I had multiple roles to play: an observer, a teacher, a participant in classes, and a researcher. As an observer, I was constantly trying to record observations in my head to write down later, more discreetly. I recorded in my journal both during observations and in solitude. Sometimes I would leave a congested setting during non-instructional time to write about a situation that I felt was important to record immediately. I empathized with Wells (1996, p. 11) when she stated, “I didn’t want to be viewed solely as a researcher with a yellow pad, either. I wanted students to accept me as a part of their world.” Yet, I discovered that the mere idea that I was constantly observing the students seemed to lead some students to meta-cognitive thinking. For example, students often approached me with data about their assessment processes without verbal prompting. It was as if they too, became observers of their classroom practices because I was visibly keeping it in the forefront of their minds by having my research journal by my side.

4.9 Limitations

Importantly, it should be noted that the findings of this research also have relevance to those beyond my classroom. Like Fecho, Davis, and Moore (2006, p. 200), I considered that “the implications of [my] work have mutual relevance for teachers, researchers, policymakers, and all other groups who hold vital interest in the education of our children.” In an immediate sense, this was apparent to me throughout this research as I was called into positions to teach pre-service teachers about classroom assessment, write policy for the department of education, review articles for an academic journal concerning identity, support teacher-researchers in graduate education courses, and offer leadership to other teachers in multiple schools. These experiences validated the interest of policy makers, other researchers, and practitioners in this research. As Somekh (2006, p. 3) states, practitioner research has the ability to “generate and communicate knowledge to those who seek it out of need.”

In this way, this research provided me with a process of becoming a “specific intellectual” (Foucault, 1980, p. 80) - an expert in a specific field who has strategic possibilities of influencing other fields.

This is not to suggest that the findings of this research can be generalized to other related fields or to all classrooms, grade levels, or teaching assignments. Instead, I agreed with Somekh (2006, pp. 3-4) who explains that “...the knowledge acquired from qualitative research is generalizable to similar settings... and that knowledge acquired from research involving close partnership with participants is quickly validated and appropriated by those in similar settings who recognize its immediate usefulness.” One of the limitations of my study is that the findings are useful for those who can identify similar settings as those described in this research. This might include, for example, similar curricular outcomes (such as the use of the policies used to teach English in Atlantic Canada), comparable school sizes and structures (such as middle schools and team teaching), or other rural school settings. “The search is not for generalizable truths or generation of theory that can be applied across multiple settings, but for generating knowledge for practical action in immediate contexts. The goal is not to articulate singularly correct forms of practice; rather, practitioner research acknowledges that what constitutes effective practice is always subject to negotiation as participants and their interests change from one context to another” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 127). Because of the contextual nature of practitioner research, I am cautious about my claims in this research and acknowledge that reinterpretations are possible in different contexts. Somekh (2006, p. 28) argues that this sensitivity to contextual nature of practitioner research makes it “more useful than traditional forms of knowledge as the basis for action.” This research also presents the implications of the research findings about authentic assessment for classroom practice. I do this in the spirit of Jacobson (1998, p. 134) who argues that in practitioner research, “Conclusions drawn from data must be applicable to practice, and must lead to actions that are critically responsive.” This way of thinking helped to assert the quality of my research by describing the findings in terms of their applicability to practice.

4.10 Directing my research question

Territories of inquiry identified in my research question - identities, reconceptualizing adolescence, and authentic assessment – are interrelated in the data. As seen in the last chapter, by theorizing identity I formulated the following guiding research questions: What were the ideal subject positions for young people? What ideal identities were resisted, adapted, or adopted? What discourses were

linked to these young people's identities in my classroom? What technologies were made available to young people through authentic assessment practices? It was important, therefore, to direct my analysis of data by determining which data helped me to address the identified guiding research questions within these territories. For example, policy data were central to examining broad discourses, but was peripheral for my questions surrounding young people's adaptation of identities. To assist in this process, I arranged the data into three subsets that allowed me to distinguish first, what was expected of students according to the policies, second, what was made available to students through my classroom program, and third, what identities students constituted as a result of the authentic assessment practices. I called these three subsets of data assessment policies, classroom program, and identities. I then matched these subsets of data with the related research questions previously identified. For example, the subset of data concerning assessment policies was matched with a question concerning ideal identities: What were the ideal subject positions for young people according to the assessment policies? A similar question could be asked of the second subset of data, my classroom program. The third subset of data was used to address questions of identities and this subset involved the data that were produced by students both through the classroom program as well as by the additional qualitative data. Each of these subsets of data were analysed using the guiding questions and are presented in chapters 6, 7, and 8 respectively. The structure of this analysis hinges around the research participants' experiences with authentic assessment in my classroom. In order to understand what students experienced in my classroom program, the next chapter describes my educational aims and the authentic assessment practices that were used with students involved in this research. This contextual chapter is placed before the analysis of the subsets of data as outlined above.

CHAPTER 5

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN MY CLASSROOM PROGRAM

Looking at authentic assessment as a practice in my classroom demands that I describe my practices more broadly and explain how authentic assessment played a part in shaping the kind of students I envisioned. The purpose of this chapter is to help readers understand the authentic assessment practices in this research by providing a rich description of my classroom program in 2000-2001. While Chapter 1 provided a description of the local economic conditions, demographic information, and the school site in which this research occurred, further contextualization of what students experienced in the classroom provides a better understanding of what I was doing as a practitioner. This is important to describe because my classroom program shaped what was made possible for young people as their identities were constituted. This chapter describes my teaching aims and the authentic assessment practices in my classroom program. The emphasis of this chapter is to present my classroom program and explain it as it was then, during the time of this research. The description of the physical aspects and the practices in my classroom were taken from accounts written by colleagues, students, an administrator, a school board curriculum supervisor, and myself in a nomination package for a national teaching award. The bulk of the chapter was developed from the notes in my teaching journal from the 2000-2001 school year.

Before moving to the description of my classroom assessment program, I want to emphasise that reading it from the vantage point of the present – after engaging in considerable analysis, reflection and theorising about what I did in that year – it now reads to me as somewhat naïve and certainly not something I would want to promote as an ideal. The program described here is subject to considerable analysis and critique in the following chapters where I quite frequently have come to see what I have done in a whole new light, or at least as connected to broader ideas and practices of which I was unaware a half a decade ago. In the final chapter of the thesis, I offer some commentary on how I see that analysis influencing my practice since that time and into the future. In what follows, I offer a broad introduction to my classroom. I then describe my program in two major sections – my educational aims, and the assessment practices I employed.

I spent considerable thought in the appearance of my classroom to help establish the tone of the classroom. It was highly decorated and full of colour and life. My classroom included a fish tank, plants, homemade curtains, many posters, a life size Darth Vader,²⁵ student calendars, and many bookcases with student reading selections. The closet door opened to reveal a spectrum of student learning games, including a *Wheel of Fortune*²⁶ wheel attached to the inside of the door. The outside of the closet door was covered with student graffiti (washable markers used on laminated Bristol Board that covered the door). I spent many summer days preparing my classroom and searching for resources at local stores. Large-scale, class-generated collages and individual student art work added to the classroom atmosphere. One picture frame in particular seemed to catch students' interest as its contents were changed daily with photographs of my travels. Student writing was posted both inside the classroom and outside the classroom, in the hall.

There was no apparent front of the room in the classroom. When necessary, I worked mostly on portable chart paper, moving quickly to the overhead or the whiteboard. Above the white board were several boxes labelled for upcoming graduations. Inside each box were "time letters" that my students had written to themselves to be opened on their future graduation day. Previous students of mine often returned to ask about their letters, or to measure their growth as their Grade 8 height was recorded in my room. Students enjoyed the diversity of perspectives in the room as they sat at tables that were often rearranged to accommodate different teaching/learning strategies.

Beyond the grouped tables, students could ask to use one of the three isolated working stations for individual work, a group conference corner, or the computer system hidden behind bookcases. Because of the number of students I taught, the two classroom doors controlled the flow of students as one door was used as an entrance and the other as an exit. At Nova Middle School there was not enough room in the halls for students' lockers and there was no school cafeteria, so most of the students' non-instructional time was spent in classrooms. I arrived to school before the students to accommodate this need and spent my lunch hours supervising the popular computer area. The classroom was enjoyed even by many students whom I did not teach.

²⁵ This cardboard cut-out of Darth Vader (the innocent-boy-turned-villain-then-redeemed-by-his-own-son-character in the movie *Star Wars*) was given to me as a gift from the parents of a previous year's homeroom class. It can be noted that many of my students shared my enjoyment of *Star Wars* as *Episode I: The phantom menace* was released on May 19, 1999, the year prior to this research, launching a new generation of fans.

²⁶ *Wheel of Fortune* is an American television game-show where contestants must "spin the wheel" to determine how much money they could win by knowing the correct question to ask about a trivia fact. I made this wheel from a hole cut into a kitchen counter to make a sink.

Once a week I provided my homeroom students with a class lunch. My homeroom students assumed many responsibilities for managing the class' activities such as conducting weekly class meetings that were moderated by a student, managing the classroom inventory of student resources, arranging for guest speakers, and writing correspondence with those beyond our classroom based on the outcomes of our class meetings. As problems/opportunities arose, the students found solutions collectively and cooperatively. They enjoyed the heightened expectations of being a self-managed class, and often requested to take over my teaching role as facilitator in class discussions.

During the 2000-2001 school year, my teaching assignment included four subjects at the grade eight level: English, Social Studies, Personal Development and Relationships, and Related Studies. While the English class is the focus of this research, it is important to note that I also used authentic assessment practices in the other courses that I was teaching. Many of the students in this research would have experienced many more authentic assessment practices than those described in this chapter as part of their English program. For example, students who were not enrolled in the music program at Nova Middle School attended a course that I developed called Related Studies. Based on students' interests, I developed several units that were assessed independently. The objectives of these units included developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills and applying school-developed skills in an experiential setting.

Many of the units cumulated into public performances, displays, or presentations. For example, the entrepreneurship unit resulted in a public fair where members of the local business community assessed the students' ideas. The magic unit developed into magic performances in local elementary schools. The film festival was made available to the public on a twenty foot screen. The art history unit not only developed an understanding of how to recognize the basic elements of visual art, but students also created their own work which was presented in a classroom that was transformed into an art gallery. These connections with the world beyond the classroom were forms of authentic assessment practices. While these specific practices were not directly part of this research, they help to illustrate how the students in this research would have been familiar with authentic assessment practices beyond the classroom program being described in this chapter for their English class.

During this research, there was a growing interest in authentic assessment by other practitioners around me and the momentum of this research continued to have effects within my teaching environment. Firstly, teachers began to come and watch my students. I believed that it was the

students' excitement about their school work that stirred curiosity into what was going on in my classroom. Secondly, my Team Teacher began using similar assessment practices in her classroom – specifically, self-assessment, observational checklists, and rubrics. This again, amplified students' assessment knowledge. Mrs. Florence and I worked to use common terms such as “criteria” and “descriptors.” Mrs. Florence and I had worked together in a student-teacher and supervisor capacity when she was studying to become a teacher and worked in my classroom for her practicum. Thirdly, the staff as a whole became involved in professional development initiatives concerning authentic assessment. This was made possible through a grant application and funding received from the Department of Education and allowed students to share common assessment language not only within a classroom but also across grade levels. While the effects of this research project on the school environment was not part of the scope of this research, it was an unexpected development in our school culture. We shared professional resources, visited other schools together, and developed “expertise” in authentic assessment practices. Because we were a rural school, we were able to make these instructional “improvements” or changes as a collective; changes in our teaching practices were quickly communicated within the local community because *all* students in the area would have had us as their teachers; there were no other options for families who sent their children to public school. Finally, other schools became interested in authentic assessment and I was invited to share my experiences with other staff. During the 2000-2001 school year, I invited students who were involved in this research to come with me and help facilitate these teacher professional development sessions. These students helped teachers in other schools create rubrics for their classrooms and participated in panel discussions about their authentic assessment experiences in my classroom.

Finally, it should be noted that students in this research were used to having connections with their local community through the variety of courses that I was teaching. For example, community members were often involved as leaders for student-in-service sessions, bus drivers, judges at the Entrepreneurship Fair, or interviewers at mock job interviews. More extensively, I made arrangements to take my class out into the community. I took my homeroom on regular visits to local museums, provincial properties, national historic sites, manufacturing plants, art galleries, backstage theatres, boat cruises in the city of Halifax, and even the municipal's sewage treatment plant in an environmental study. Oddly, these trips were not the students' favourites. They seemed to prefer the opportunities provided for them in visiting six local elementary schools. There, the grade eight students felt important and realized the significance of their role-modelling to young children. My grade eight students toured the elementary schools presenting magic shows, reading

Big Books that they created, and acted as “reading pals” to develop reading strategies. By having students experience these connections beyond the classroom, I had specific educational aims in mind. I present my educational aims below as they were described in 2000-2001. It is important to remind readers that I wanted to explain my program as it was then, describing my aims from 2000-2001 using language from that time. Since then, I have become suspicious about key features presented in my classroom program, resisted these key features, and think about them in different ways.

5.1 My educational aims

The educational aims in my teaching concerned the learner, the learning environment, and the curriculum. About the learner, I was most interested in students developing healthy relationships with themselves - self-awareness. My aim for the learning environment was to build community – to have students learn how to live together. In the curriculum, I was interested in fostering student imagination, making school experiences relevant to students’ lives, and providing challenges that interested students. In this section, I discuss each of these aims and how they were embedded in my curriculum planning.

5.1.1 Building community

I aimed at creating a learning environment where students felt a sense of belonging. I envisioned school as a model of community where school was not an escape from “real-life” but rather a microcosm of what it means to participate in society. This belief is consistent with the work of Dewey (1916) and his followers, such as Posner’s (1995) description of “experiential education” as introduced in Chapter 2, or Short and Burke’s (1991) idea of a “community of learners.” While I understood that public schooling aimed at preparing students to contribute to society, I envisioned my classroom as a place for students to not only learn about, but to also participate in, citizenship. I wanted students to experience positive interdependence where their knowledge and skills were not only valued by their peers but also at times, required. I spent a great deal of time at the beginning of the year developing peer relations in my classroom and worked at developing “active listening skills” with the students by using a dramatic role-play to have students understand the skills involved in active listening. By acting as the insolent student in the dramatization, I modelled poor listening skills. At pauses in the role-play, students made suggestions about how my listening skills could be improved – three tips at a time. After several attempts, the students became satisfied with the

listening skills they saw displayed. These experiences developed a common understanding of what was expected in the classroom and how students would relate with each other. I had two classroom rules in 2000-2001 and one of them was “No interruptions.” While this rule reflected my personal displeasure at being interrupted by school announcements, late students, and fire safety drills, students understood that interruptions should be avoided; they were not to interrupt each other while they were sharing ideas. These efforts were my attempt to create a safer classroom – one where students knew what was expected of them so that trust could be built between the students and me, and among themselves.

This sense of safety was important to me so that diverse opinions and interests would be welcomed into our classroom. I wanted students to feel safe in taking calculated risks; to experiment with ideas, to participate in classroom performances, or to share jokes. I began each day by telling the students “Two Sad Jokes” (puns). This daily infusion of humour helped to create routines that students learned to expect as they entered my classroom. My classes were organized with a posted agenda so that students became familiar with my expectations of them. I also tried to greet each student at the door as they arrived to class and spoke to each student again as they exited. I did this because I wanted to greet students into the learning environment and be able to get a quick sense of how their day was going as they arrived into the classroom. These simple classroom routines became the structure of our learning environment and I hoped they would create a sense of care and support for students.

I intentionally sought ways that I could show students that I cared for them:

I can recall the reasons why I moved my fish tank into the classroom one year when I was teaching Grade 8. While most students thought that it was for aesthetic reasons, or simply “cool” to have an old sneaker in the tank, I had other reasons. One boy in that class used to arrive at school before the front doors were opened in the morning. Jon was among a handful of students who quietly huddled together waiting for the custodian to unlock the doors. It took me a while (in retrospect, too long) to figure out why these students were always early for school. I knew many of them, and they weren’t the “keen beans” seeking extra academic support. Why would a student show up much earlier than when the door are opened? Not to GET to school, but to GET AWAY from where they came. They arrived at the door seeking a place of belonging. Enter Jon: withdrawn, jacket that needed a good wash, smiling. “Good morning, Mr. Van Zoost!” I decided I needed Jon’s help – with looking after a fish tank. Each morning I asked if he would mind feeding the fish because I was “too busy in the morning to tend to them and they could use some care.” He bought it – hook, line, and sinker (forgive me, I couldn’t resist). It was a simple gesture, but it meant a

lot to Jon. The ritual became a moment of care for Jon himself. I hope he felt welcomed (Van Zoost, 2005)²⁷.

These moments were individualized. For example, this description constructed Jon as in need of my help; as in need of opportunities to interact with a teacher, to be in a place where he felt safe, and to “care for Jon himself.” Now, I wonder how much of Jon’s need was based on my perception of him and my interests in building community in my classroom. Furthermore, my description reflected an individualized construction of a young person’s well-being and its appropriate path for “treatment” – in Jon’s case, this involved feeding the fish. My interest in building community meant that I connected with each student in particular ways. I connected with some students because of my interest in popular culture (recent movies, music, television programs). I phoned each student at home once a term, speaking first to the student and then to the parent, working alphabetically down the class roster. There were several students who would have felt uncomfortable with my public praise of their work and instead I signalled that I would be contacting them by phone. I deliberately attempted to find a common interest and connection with each student.

I also wanted to connect the students in my class with those around us, beyond the physical walls of the classroom. To do this, my class organized assemblies for all Grade 8 students, did dramatic presentations in Grade 7 classrooms, travelled to local elementary schools to read the Big Books (oversized children’s books) that they had created for young children, toured schools with magic shows, went Christmas carolling in the town, visited senior citizens homes, presented a film festival called the Junior Oscars (or J.Oscars), visited local museums, art galleries, and parks, and made field trips to Halifax, a local university, National Parks, and other historical sites in the local area. These events provided learning experiences that connected students to local culture. I wanted us to have our own set of stories as a class; our own mythology. These experiences/stories helped to create our classroom culture. We referred to these experiences in our classroom, often inducing smiles from each other as we used the coded signal for referencing our trips: “Remember when...”

The classroom culture was strong enough by the end of Grade 8 that when students left Nova Middle School, several students contacted me about having a class reunion early in their Grade 9 year. I arranged this as a transition meeting about their concerns as they adjusted to the high school structure and expectations. I taught many of these students in their Grade 11 year (I had moved to teach at the local high school), and noticed many of their friendships had continued from when I

²⁷ This description was taken from an essay I had published in a Nova Scotia professional journal designed for educators. During the time of this research, I was a regular writer for this publication entitled *Aviso*.

had met them in at Nova Middle School. I can also report that Grade 8 students from 2000-2001 sent me emails requesting another class reunion as they are prepared to graduate; I had been safe-keeping sealed “time letters” that they wrote in 2000 and promised to return to them in 2005.

5.1.2 Developing self-awareness

In 2000-2001, I wanted students to develop self-awareness. This was a call for student independence and responsibility. I envisioned an ideal student who would feel responsible for his/her own learning and be accountable for his/her decisions. This student would also be aware of specific ways that one can look after him or herself: diet, exercise, social connection, reflection. I believed that students learned best from modelling and so I often referred to my own life in class to demonstrate how adults look after themselves. For example, I would make statements such as, “While I was out on my run this morning...” or “while munching on my favourite movie snack, baby carrots...” I believed that students learned about what it meant to be an adult from those around them – their parents, teachers, neighbours, extended family, and others – and I wanted to present a version of adulthood that would be a positive image.

My second classroom rule in 2000-2001 was “No negative comments.” I wanted students to learn how to rearticulate their frustrations into productive questions and constructive comments. I wanted students to develop their thinking patterns in ways that were positive and useful rather than discouraging and disabling. At the beginning of the year when I was explaining how students could work with this rule I suggested that rather than saying “This sucks,” students should rearticulate this in ways such as “Mr. Van Zoost, could you please explain your wisdom of why you chose this particular story for us to read?” Students laughed at my re-articulation, but mockingly used it soon after. I understood the ability to re-think problems into possibilities as a technique for self-awareness.

Another technique used to help develop students’ self-awareness was the use of self-reflection questions. I encouraged students to use questions as a way of thinking. I provided students with a list of questions that they could use to help think through problems:

- What do you need to say? To whom? When? What purpose would it serve?
- What do you need to hear? From whom? Can you say it to yourself instead?
- What thoughts will enhance my quality of life? What actions?
- What thoughts will help me develop in ways that I value? What actions?

- What resources are available to me so that I could conceive of myself in other ways?

Students adopted the language of the questions during informal moments of peer support. For example, when discussing a novel in a group I have heard a student offer encouragement by asking, “What do you need to say?” One student told me that she used some of the questions when she was discussing a dating concern with her mom.

The reason I was interested in the self-awareness is that I believed that this would build student confidence to continue learning – both throughout the school year in Grade 8 and thereafter. I wanted students to leave my classroom program with confidence that they could manage themselves in the world and believe that they could make a difference in their own and other’s lives. Such a curricular aim is consistent with the those of transformational learning (Miller & Seller, 1990), where the student is changed because of the learning and educating for wisdom and compassion (Miller, 2005), where the teachers emphasizes principles of contemplation, connection, participation, and responsibility.

5.1.3 Fostering imagination

If nothing else, I wanted my classroom program to value and promote student imagination. I align my personal interest in students’ imagination with those articulated by Eliot Eisner (2002, p. 196): that “a love affair between the student and his or her work is one of our schools’ most important aims.” I believed that learning was about pursuing curiosities, dreaming of alternative ways of being, and creative expression. For me, school was a place where students should be encouraged to develop these three forms of imagination. In the texts that were chosen for English class, I was conscious of choosing a wide variety of settings, protagonists, and conflicts, as I wanted students to imagine other people’s lives and their own life differently. In my classroom program, I used three ways of promoting students’ imagination in 2000-2001; through unfamiliar experiences, stories “from away,”²⁸ and curricular choices, I aspired to promote student imagination.

Firstly, I provided students with unfamiliar experiences. Beyond the field trips, I created numerous situational games where students were asked to use their knowledge to decide what they would do. They were asked to imagine themselves in crisis situations such as in a house fire in the winter, a leaking boat on the Atlantic Ocean, or lost in the woods. Students ranked a list of 15 survival items,

²⁸ “From away” is a colloquialism in the Atlantic Canadian provinces to signal something that is atypical to the region. A tourist, or someone who has recently moved to the area, might be referred to as “a Come From Away” or a “CFA.” It is possible that a person could remain a CFA for generations. I was a CFA in the town where I taught.

debated their rankings with peers, and then heard an expert's ranking and rationale (the town's Fire Marshall, an officer from the Canadian Navy, and the head of our regional search and rescue program came to our class as guest speakers to participate in these events). These unfamiliar scenarios asked students to imagine how they would act in a time of crisis.

The survival scenarios were one part of a larger interdisciplinary unit called "Survivor: Atlantic Canada," a unit I fashioned after an American television show that debuted in 2000. To promote and model imagination (as well as community) I developed other interdisciplinary units of study that year. I grouped the four subjects that I was teaching thematically. I developed interdisciplinary units within my own classroom walls, combining English and Social Studies classes to explore: "Survivor: Atlantic Canada," and "The Offshore Natural Gas Pipeline" (a current issue concerning Nova Scotia's sale of natural resources not to Nova Scotians, but piped to Americans through an extensive piping system). Twice in the school year, my Team Teacher and I developed interdisciplinary units where we combined our two classes for a week, moved to a larger space in the school, ignored the school's bells and whistles, and developed our unique timetable. These interdisciplinary units were "The Gift of Giving" (my Dad was a guest speaker – a disgruntled Santa Claus) and "What's so funny?" (exploring the forms and uses of humour). The major topics of study in my curriculum are outlined in Table 5.1.3. I was interested in promoting student imagination by varying the curriculum and instruction throughout the year.

A second way in which I prompted student imagination was by sharing personal stories. An awareness of the self has always been interesting to me and was a comfortable topic for me in the classroom. For example, in my class I recounted my list of 125 life goals that I had written when I was 12 years old (or perhaps better described as when I was an ideal neo-liberal subject) and shared travelling stories that had led me towards these goals. The travelling stories were accompanied with enlarged photographs that were on display in the classroom as posters and in several picture frames where the photos were routinely changed.²⁹ These stories were often about dramatic experiences of working in developing countries such as India and Mongolia, experiencing cyclones, going up in a hot-air balloon, being stabbed by a five year old with a pencil, finding the ceiling of a church in Rome that I had seen in a book as a child, or my encounters with famous people.

²⁹ To assist in the financing of these enlarged photographs, I applied for and was awarded an educational grant made available through the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Nova Scotia Teachers Union for innovative curriculum practices. I make note of this here to illustrate how my interest in decorating my classroom (as described at the beginning of this chapter) and the monies that teachers spend on classroom resources (as described in Chapter 1) are related to curricular aims.

Table 5.1.3
Major topics of study

Theme and School Term	<i>English</i>	<i>Social Studies</i>	<i>Related Studies</i>	<i>Personal Development and Relationships</i>
<i>Identity</i> Sept – Nov 10	Identity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Objects • Literature Circles • Process Exam about Identity 	Historical Identity: Rebellion of 1837 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Question of Loyalty</i> • Biographical Characters • Re-enactments 	Corporate Identity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship Fair (student generated business plans) 	Personal Identity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brain • Personalities • Lifestyle Makeover • Balance • Class meetings
<i>Survivor</i> Nov 14- Feb 01	Before Christmas Break: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary Unit, “The Gift of Giving” After Christmas Break: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary Unit, “Survivor” about survival situations in Atlantic Canada 	Survivor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confederation of Canada (national identity in survival context) • Natural Gas Pipeline (survival /management of natural resources) 	Art Survival: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art History • What art survives through time? Why? • Art Show • Elementary School Magic Performances 	Survivor dilemmas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making and ethical dilemmas
<i>Quest</i> Feb 05 – Apr 12	Quest / Heroes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Literature • Making Big Books for Elementary School • Student Contract 	Settling the West: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life in the 1900’s • Where would you settle? 	Junior Oscars Film Festival: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short film festival • public showing • live “awards” show 	Career: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Real Game • resume • interviews in community places of employment
<i>Relationships</i> Apr 17 – Jun 22	Relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized Contracts, Projects, and Rubrics Interdisciplinary Unit: “What’s so funny?”	Historical Relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holocaust • Process Exam about historical fiction (combined with English) 	Lateral Thinking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relationship problem solving Photography: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 1000 Words 	Teenage Relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sexuality education • dating • adolescent development

These stories were told to make connections between learning experiences in the classroom and the world beyond the school’s community. My teaching journal maintained a list of additional travel

stories that I told during the school year. I wanted these stories to inspire imagination. I also wanted students to witness that someone who grew up on a sheep farm in rural Nova Scotia could have many experiences beyond the local. The stories told were used to build interest in the world beyond rural life in Nova Scotia and they were used to entertain students through humour and drama. Furthermore, the travel stories provided access to knowledge of other cultures and ways of being to educate students about possibilities that may or may not have been readily available in the immediate geographical location of the school. Most of the students in my class had little first-hand knowledge of life beyond the county lines. For example, in my homeroom class of 27 students, only five had been to Halifax, 70 kilometres away. Of those five students, three had gone to the mall for Christmas shopping and the other two went to a museum together when they were “much younger.” As noted in Chapter 1, the students at Nova Middle School lived predominantly in the county surrounding the school where family income levels were lower than the provincial average and geographic distances between students’ home and the school could be great.

The third way in which I promoted student imagination was through offering them curriculum choices. I was interested in students imagining what was possible for us to do as a class. I wanted students to practice making choices for themselves as I considered this to be an important skill for adulthood. I also wanted students to practice making decisions collaboratively. As a class they voted on field trip venues, they came to consensus about who to invite to our class for special events, and at times they worked by committees to make choices. For example, when I was planning the interdisciplinary unit “The Gift of Giving” with my Team Teacher, we involved a committee of four students throughout the planning process. They heard our ideas, provided feedback, and offered alternative suggestions about the content and timing of the events in the unit. My hope was that in offering students options, they would see the world as a dynamic place to be – not one that was predetermined and static.

5.1.4 Making the curriculum relevant and challenging

My classroom program aimed at being relevant to students’ lives and simultaneously challenging. I wanted students to be engaged in the curriculum; to be interested in what was being learned and involved in making curricular decisions. I was interested in students being participants in their learning experiences. This educational aim is similar to Dewey’s beliefs in “active” rather than “passive learning” (as cited in D. L. Black, 2000, p. 36). I believed that learning was an active process that was done *by*, not *to* the learner. To this end, I often asked students to generate their

own discussion questions. For example, a class discussion about a text would first address questions that students brought to the class. Their homework was not to answer questions that were asked by the teacher, but to generate their own questions that would be discussed in class. By having students create their own discussion questions, the conversations become relevant to their own understandings and challenges.

A second premise for promoting relevancy and making the curriculum challenging was that when possible, I attempted to individualize the curriculum. My classroom program sought to engage students in their learning through their specific interests that would be brought into the classroom for display and reward. I believed that the individual student was the expert about his/her own learning and that my role as a teacher was to provide resources and direction for the student's learning. Where possible, I offered students a range of possibilities. For example, students were asked to choose a novel to read from a choice of thirteen. Options were given for assignments such that not all student work looked the same. On exams, students were asked to generate their own question, or choose from a list of fourteen. I wanted to demonstrate that for every question there was more than a single answer and that they, as learners, would be expected to come to their own terms about what questions were important, and which possible solutions would be useful.

In summary, my classroom program aimed at creating learners who were self-directed, participated in a learning community, were imaginative, and capable of making choices that made their classroom experiences both relevant and challenging. These aims sought ways in which I could get to know the students better as individual learners. They guided my efforts to bring students' interests into our classroom. These aims directed the ways in which I designed curriculum and made instructional decisions. They also informed the ways in which I conducted classroom assessment. As I present the assessment events that students experienced later in this chapter, I connect them to the aims of my classroom program.

5.2 The assessment practices

The classroom program for the year 2000-2001, although planned in August before the beginning of the school year, evolved as I became familiar with the students. Throughout the school year, the types of assessment activities that were used reflected in many ways my rapport with the students in the class. The literature suggests that such experiences could be understood as "classroom

assessment environment theory” (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992) where classrooms are described as having “an assessment ‘character’ or environment that stems from the teacher’s general approach to assessment” (Brookhart, 2004, p. 444). My general approach was to involve students in the assessment processes whenever possible. I began implementing authentic assessment practices in my classroom because I saw opportunities for me to work with students in the ways in which Stiggins (2001) suggests. I wanted to explore students’ involvement in assessment practices as a means of reflexivity; as a path of student inquiry into their own learning processes. Stiggins (2001, pp. 46-47, original emphasis) says this about assessment practices:

If you hear no other part of my message in this book about the role of assessment in schools, HEAR ME ON THIS: *Your challenge as a teacher – indeed, the art and heart of your profession – is to take your students to their personal edges with enough confidence in themselves and enough trust in you, their teacher, to go ahead and step off when you ask them to. They must dare to risk failure.*

The assessment practices themselves helped me to create a classroom climate of perceived trust and dialogue. This climate supports learners in feeling more confident in their studies and themselves (Sergiovanni, 1994). The Nova Scotia Department of Education (1997) further suggests that while creating a welcoming and caring classroom, students’ learning experiences need to be personalized and individualized – another reason why authentic assessment appealed to me. I understood the assessment practices in my classroom as a means to address students’ individual learning interests and make modifications to instruction and assessment accordingly.

The assessment strategies that were used in the classroom program are presented chronologically, as they had been introduced to the students during their school year. A few examples of students’ work are used in this chapter to help describe a specific assessment practice while the majority of the students’ work is presented later during the data analysis in Chapters 7 and 8. Furthermore, I draw only from the assessment practices that were used in the English classes. As noted above, these students would have experienced similar assessment practices in other courses that they had with me. This is important to note because students were more familiar with my expectations and the assessment practices because of the significant amount of contact time that I had with the class. I refer to assessment literature to provide definitions of assessment terms throughout this section and display examples of the assessment practices that I used in 2000-2001. I have underlined assessment terms that are defined in Appendix 5.2, organized by the families of practice introduced in Chapter 2: paper and pencil assessments, authentic assessment, and personal communication. I have placed these definitions in the appendix for two reasons: the reader who is familiar with this educational vocabulary may not need explanation, and I do not wish the definitions to disrupt the narration of

my experiences with these Grade 8 students. The assessment practices are grouped into the three terms of the school year. In the first term (from September – January), two themes organized the classroom program – “Identity” and “Survivor.” In the second term, the theme of “Quest” guided the classroom program, and in the third term, “Relationships.”

5.2.1 First term: Identity and survivor

I began the school year of 2000 as I did in previous years, with several diagnostic tools to learn about the students’ abilities and interests. These diagnostic assessments would allow me to establish a small learner profile that I used to begin making connections with the students. On the first day, I administered a student questionnaire about their experiences in past English classes, their skills, their interests, and their goals in the course. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5.2.1a. In many ways, this early questionnaire acted like a self-assessment, where students identified their strengths and weaknesses about reading, writing, speaking, and listening. I was able to use the information on the questionnaires to help select texts for the first term that related to the students’ interests.

A second diagnostic tool was used in September – a journal where students identified themselves as kinesthetic, verbal, or linguistic learners (Claxton & Murrell, 1987); as a balance of eight intelligences (Armstrong, 1994; Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997; Gardner, 1993); and as predominantly left-brain or right-brain (Springer & Deutch, 1997). Students recorded their understanding of their self according to these identifications (e.g., as a kinaesthetic learner who is predominantly left-brained, etc). I hoped that students would become aware of how they learned best, and could identify the sort of classroom experiences in which they might be more readily able to engage. It became apparent when I reviewed my classroom program that the student journal emphasized the construction of a psychological self within the discourses of psychology. At the time, I used this journal because I thought it was important to help students see a variety of ways in which learning is understood and in which they might be able to see themselves as learners – this enhanced their own awareness of their strengths. I used the information from the students’ journals to direct my classroom teaching methods and to make adaptations for specific students given what I had learned about them. For example, a student who reported that he/she found it difficult to follow oral directions would also be provided with written instructions for a task, or I might check with that student privately about his/her understanding of the directions given orally to the entire class.

In the first week of classes, I presented students with a course outline (see Appendix 5.2.1b) which included the general curriculum outcomes of English Language Arts to the students. These same outcomes were presented earlier in Chapter 4. I explained how our experiences in class would provide the students with opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of these

Journal	15%
Assignments	30%
Projects	20%
Literature Circles	15%
Process Exam	20%
Total	100%

outcomes. I closely followed many of the successes that I had experienced in previous years of teaching this course. I had learned that students need time to become familiar with the curriculum outcomes and assessment language and procedures. Also on the course outline was my course evaluation plan (see Table 5.2.1a). Students had questions about the absence of tests in my course evaluation plan. They noted that tests, their most common experience of assessment, were not part of my evaluation plan. Instead, the students would be evaluated in the first term based on the broad categories of a Journal (described above), Assignments (short samples of student work), Projects (larger samples of student work that required extended periods of time), Literature Circles (described below), and a Process Exam (described below).

I surprised the students one morning by arranging all of the tables into a long buffet table. The table was set with place cards for each student, a napkin, an orange, a menu (of novel titles classified by genre), and then novels were served on platters. Students skimmed the novels and made selections for their plates. They asked each other to “pass the historical fiction” and made statements such as “You should try the fantasy dish.” From the buffet, students selected a novel that they would discuss in Literature Circle (Daniels, 1994). I chose to use Literature Circles because they allowed me to address several of my educational aims simultaneously. First, there was a high degree of individual accountability as no two students had the same homework assignment and their homework was needed by their peers in order to conduct a discussion. This high level of student responsibility allowed me to develop self-awareness. Secondly, because the students were sharing their understandings of the novel collaboratively, this promoted a sense of belonging, of participating in a learning community. Thirdly, the students chose novels that were relevant to their interests and reading level. I agreed with what one teacher reported about her use of Literature Circles in an elementary classroom:

This structure allowed me the freedom to turn ownership over to the students. Students gained greater insight by sharing literature instead of reading in isolation. Students who never participated before during whole-class discussion found a voice - Sandy Niemiera, fourth-grade teacher (Daniels, 1994, p.1).

The Literature Circle meetings were assessed using an observational checklist that was designed by the class. The dramatization of active listening (as described earlier in this chapter) was used to prompt the class to discuss what active listening looks like, sounds like, and feels like. From these notes, we developed the observational checklist (see Figure 5.2.1a) that was used with students as they worked in Literature Circles to discuss novels that they had selected from the buffet.

Figure 5.2.1a
Literature Circles Observational Assessment

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Student Names</i>				
Looks Like	Appropriate eye contact					
	Sitting up straight, edge of seat					
	Knee to knee, face to face					
	Attentive, natural, smiling					
Sounds Like	Mmhmm, yeah, oh, uh-huh					
	Restates, Summarizes, or Paraphrases					
	Supports others with positive comments					
	Asks good questions					
	Encourages others to participate					
	Thoughtful responses/demonstrates reflection on the novel					

Feels Like: Group Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 5 [five representing the greatest agreement], please rate your group on the following behaviors:

- a) _____ we felt safe to share creative ideas
- b) _____ we encouraged everyone in the group to contribute
- c) _____ we felt as though our ideas were important
- d) _____ we worked at creating a supportive environment for each other
- e) _____ we challenged each other intellectually

One thing we should try to do differently in our next meeting:

I recorded my observations of students' paraphrasing skills, active listening skills, and questioning skills. Following each meeting, the literature circle groups completed a group task where students worked together to create a visual representation of their knowledge and then presented their illustration to the class. For example, after the first Literature Circle meeting, I asked student to design a character constellation where the principle characters of the novel were represented by stars, the size of the star would demonstrate the individual character's significance to the plot, the character relations were represented by the distance between the stars, and the overall shape of the

constellation was a symbol for a theme presented in the novel. After the students presented their character constellations to each other, they conducted a peer-assessment of their group's performance in the Literature Circle discussion. They used data from my observational assessment tool and their peer-assessments to make notes for their next meeting and this event was called the Literature Circle Group Reflection (see bottom of Figure 5.2.1a). This process helped to build positive peer relations and foster a collaborative learning community.

Early in the school year, I began introducing students to rubrics, an assessment tool that indicated which of the curriculum outcomes would be addressed in the assignment, the criteria for assessment of these outcomes, as well as descriptors for various levels of achievement in each criteria. As students became familiar with the use of rubrics, I then began to present assignments and ask students to determine what criteria would best be suited to assess the product or performance. Students understood this task quickly, and I was encouraged to continue dialogues about the descriptors. Within a month, students, arranged into groups, were capable of articulating descriptors for five different levels of achievement for specific criteria and we practiced this by writing descriptors for the "Letter to the editor" assignment, where students were expected to write to the editor of a local newspaper. In this activity, students read the "Letters to the Editor" section of our local newspaper for two weeks individually and students kept track of what they considered to be the contributing factors to a successful letter. Then, after two weeks, students compared their notes with their peers and began to organize their comments on chart paper. Through this strategy, students become knowledgeable about what makes a poor example of student work, and what makes a good example of student work. Five levels of achievement for this assignment were described by students and agreed to by the class before writing began (see Table 5.2.1b). After a week of using the rubric to assess the published Letters to the Editor each day, students were ready to begin their own writing. Using the theme of survival in their writing, students used the rubric to guide their work.

This research helped me to appreciate the technical aspects of helping young people create rubrics. At the time, I was familiar with the literature about students' involvement in designing rubrics; students should be involved in the writing of descriptors so that they understand the nature of exemplary work (Andrade, 2000; Goodrich, 1997; Stefl-Mabry, 2004). What this allowed was for students to raise questions about levels of achievement.

Table 5.2.1b
Descriptors for a letter to the editor

1	2	3	4	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ sources are not reliable ❑ fact are not correct ❑ no opinion given ❑ provides less than 3 facts about the survival situation ❑ errors in mechanics, punctuation, and spelling make it difficult to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ few details of the survival situation are discussed ❑ many errors in writing mechanics ❑ opinions are expressed but only explained in a sentence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ information is reported accurately ❑ the key issues about the survival situation are identified and summarized ❑ has expressed their own opinion about the survival situation ❑ 3-5 errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ the key issues about the survival situation are well organized ❑ writing has a logical structure ❑ the opinions are supported with clear arguments and evidence ❑ 1-2 errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ the letter to the editor demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the survival situation ❑ the author has spent considerable effort reflecting on the survival situation and making connections to their life ❑ 0 errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling

Instead of a scale from 1-5, or “excellent,” “very good,” and “not yet,” these more detailed descriptors provided guidance to students as they completed their work, a common suggestion in the literature about rubrics (Wiggins, 1998). Students used these details to determine if they had completed the assignment to their liking; they had often marked their assignment before they passed it in to me to assess. Now, looking back at this practice, I could also understand it as a technology where the descriptors for a letter to the editor, constructed collectively, increases the pressure on the young person to align his or her self with the assessment expectations. In this way, the effects of the assessment practices are amplified when the assessment criteria are known not only to the student who is being assessed, but also to others who will witness the assessment; the young person is assessed not by one formal assessor (the teacher) but also by multiple informal assessors (peers). This reflection signalled to me that in my analysis of my classroom program I would need to be concerned with the social ways in which young people were constituted into identities in my classroom.

Continuing to work together and having had success at determining assessment criteria and writing descriptors for various levels of achievement, as a class we produced our first rubric that was used to assess their skills for writing a short story (see Table 5.2.1c).

Table 5.2.1c					
Rubric for a short story					
Criteria	5	4	3	2	1
<i>Presentation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> all writing is legible <input type="checkbox"/> paragraphing is done properly <input type="checkbox"/> no mechanical or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 90 % of the writing is legible <input type="checkbox"/> few paragraphing problems <input type="checkbox"/> few mechanical or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 80 % of the writing is legible <input type="checkbox"/> several paragraphing problems <input type="checkbox"/> several mechanical or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 70 % of the writing is legible <input type="checkbox"/> lack of understanding in paragraphing formats <input type="checkbox"/> proofreading has not been done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> illegible writing <input type="checkbox"/> so many mistakes in the spelling or mechanics that it is difficult to read
<i>Effort</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> the elements of the short story / play are explored thoroughly <input type="checkbox"/> more than 5 pages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> all of the elements of a short story / play are included in the writing <input type="checkbox"/> 5 pages of writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> not all of the elements of a short story / play were followed <input type="checkbox"/> less than 5 pages of writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> several elements of a short story / play are missing <input type="checkbox"/> too short 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> lack of understanding of the elements of a short story / play <input type="checkbox"/> only partially completed
<i>Creativity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> story is interesting from beginning to end <input type="checkbox"/> well planned <input type="checkbox"/> uses a wide range of vocabulary to express ideas <input type="checkbox"/> keeps the reader wanting more <input type="checkbox"/> has lots of suspense / mystery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> chooses words carefully to describe events / characters <input type="checkbox"/> interesting story / characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> chooses common words to describe events / characters <input type="checkbox"/> some creative ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> word choice should be improved to better describe events in more detail, or with more descriptive words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> “child-ish” words choice <input type="checkbox"/> lacks interest <input type="checkbox"/> lacks suspense / mystery <input type="checkbox"/> boring

The dialogue throughout this process guided my teaching because it allowed me understand students’ knowledge about the elements of a short story. We used student-chosen exemplars of “successful” short stories that they had read to determine the critical components that would need

to be included in their own writing. Discussing the assessment criteria with the class is encouraged in the literature about rubrics (Arter & McTighe, 2001; Creighton, 2000; Malby, 1999; Schurr, 1999; Wiggins, 1998), and I also relied heavily on the literature that suggested that students should be involved in the creation of rubrics to be used in our classrooms (Andrade, 2000; Goodrich, 1997; Stefl-Mabry, 2004). What I liked about students' involvement in designing rubrics was that: the assessment tool that was created provided students with appropriate learning challenges; the vocabulary that was used in the rubric was relevant to the students; it was created collaboratively; and it was used to assess individual students.

One of the early assignments in October was a product, an "Identity Museum Object." I asked students to create an object that would represent how they understood themselves. On the day of the Identity Museum, students delivered their objects to me discreetly, and during lunch I set up the museum – the objects were set on tables around the perimeter of the room, identified by numbers. This form of assessment could be likened to an exhibition. The students were excited to see the variety of artefacts: sculptures, masks, collections. They circulated the room with clipboards, surmising the creator of each object. After students had sufficient time to record their guesses, they presented their identity objects to the class one by one. They told of how the materials represented their character (such as "the birch bark shows that I'm rough around the edges") or why certain forms were indicative of their self-understanding (such as how "the overall shape of the object is a cross, to show my Christian upbringing"). In this assignment, students used their imaginations to express their self-understandings creatively. When their Identity Museum Objects were shared in class, students seemed amazed at each other's work and exhibited a great deal of excitement: cheering, laughing, clapping, and statements like "That's really good!" and "I *knew* that [object] was you!" This assignment addressed all of my educational aims: students were asked to develop self-awareness, participate in the classroom community, use their imaginations, and construct something that was relevant to their self-understanding.

As students read texts throughout the fall of 2000, they kept learning logs about the theme of "identity." These were notes, questions, and ideas that arose from their course readings. I met with each student in a conference before the school's mid-term report and students shared highlights from their learning logs with me. The learning logs were sites to explore questions about identity that would then be used in their Process Exam in December. I made anecdotal records from these conferences as a way of monitoring and documenting students' progress and possible further

supports that would be needed to prepare the students for their Process Exam. While the school required that students in my English course must write an exam, there were no specifics as to the sort of exam that could be designed. I chose to use a Process Exam so that students could have time to show more elaborate thinking processes. The instructions on the exam read as follows:

Your Process Question: You are responsible for choosing your own question about the theme "Identity". I must approve of your question by November 30th. Your answer will be in the form of an essay. You will be completing different steps that will lead you to your final copy on December 10th. Your essay **MUST INCLUDE** four different arguments to support your answer. For each argument, you will need to find two pieces of evidence from material covered in any Van Zoost course. Two of your sources may be from outside of school texts. All eight of your pieces of evidence must be from different sources and you must use at least four different types of sources. **DON'T PANIC.** I will walk you through the steps. If you are having trouble thinking of a question on your own, you may choose from the following questions:

1. What is identity?
2. How is identity formed?
3. Does a person's identity influence their actions?
4. Which is more important, a personal identity or a social identity?
5. Can other people change someone's identity?
6. Identities often clash. How can their differences be resolved?
7. Can your identity be "better" than someone else's identity?
8. Can a person's identity change?
9. How are a person's roles in life different from their identity?
10. Can adults control their children's identity?
11. Do all people discover their identity in the same way?
12. Is there a part of our identity that is universal?

The exam asked students to make many choices during the week long writing period. For example, they were invited to create their own question about identity – essentially choose the content of the entire exam. For those who required some guidance in designing a question, some choices were offered. Students who struggled with choosing a question were asked if they would like me to make the decision. In such cases, I chose the first question, "What is identity?" because my previous experience with the exam led me to believe that this most readily accessible question for students to address. The Process Exam asked students to challenge their thinking about questions that were relevant to their experiences. Several students asked if I would photocopy their final essay that was submitted so that they could have a copy to keep (the school required all exams to be locked in filing cabinets in the office for two years). Students also completed a reflection about their process exam in January to review their marks and my anecdotal comments.

Just before the Christmas break, students participated in a week-long interdisciplinary unit (IDU), “The Gift of Giving” with my Team Teacher’s (Mrs. Florence) class. We worked with a committee of students to organize the IDU and incorporated students’ ideas and interests into the week. Because Mrs. Florence and I taught both of our classes (she Math and Science, and I English, Social Studies, and Related Studies), students were familiar with our expectations as teachers. We combined our classes in one large room (an old industrial arts laboratory that was no longer being used in the school) and prepared eight different student groupings and table arrangements for the various activities that we had planned. The activities in this unit were self-assessed by students at the end of the busy week (see Figure 5.2.1b).

Figure 5.2.1b
The Gift of Giving: Assessment of the week

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Bites</i>				<i>Rocks</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
Guest Speaker					
Carousel brainstorm about gifts to give					
Reading of “The Best Christmas Pageant Ever”					
Media analysis					
Drama activities in the gym					
Interview with an elderly family member					
Guest speaker panel					
Christmas puzzle centres					
Gift making					
Personal narrative assignment					
Case study					
Creating the Documentary of “The Best gift I’ve ever Given”					
The Grinch					
Letter to Santa about the gifts I am going to give this year					
Our visitation to an elementary school					
Workshop sessions					

Describe your highlight of the week:

What did you do to make this week better for yourself? The group?

This simple activity was typical of the sorts of prompts that I used to encourage student reflection. Included in the prompts are indications of my educational aims of self-awareness (“What did you do to make this week better for yourself?”) and building community (“What did you do to make this week better for the group?”)

5.2.2 Second term: Quest

Following the Christmas break, I introduced student contracts (Boak, 1998; Knowles, 1986) to the class. This allowed students to see all of the planned assessment events from January to March Break and to determine the percentile weighting of each of these events (see Figure 5.2.2 for a sample of a contract).

**Figure 5.2.2
Contract for Heroic Adventures Unit**

Instructions: Listed below are all of the assignments that you will have in English Language Arts this term. Under the Choice column, you may decide the weight of each assignment towards your final mark. All assignments must be completed and you can choose from 10% - 30 % for any one assignment. The total, of course, must add up to 100%. Once your choices have been agreed upon by your teacher, they cannot be changed. Choose wisely!

Assignment	Choice	Mark	Percentile	Final Points
Quest Test				
Children’s Literature Writing Portfolio				
Reading of Big Book				
Hero Project				
Literature Circle				
Interdisciplinary Unit				
Mechanics and Spelling Unit				
Totals	100 %	-----	-----	/ 100

Under this contract, every student completed all assignments, but each student had a unique evaluation scheme at the end of the term. The contract encouraged students to make choices for their own learning and assume responsibility for their choices.

Included in the assignments was a Children’s Literature Writing Portfolio, where students were asked to engage with a variety of children’s literature forms (nursery rhymes, fables, parables, fairy tales, myths, and modern books). Students were able to choose 10 assignments from a list of 34 choices to respond to the range of literary forms. Students matched their own 10 choices of children’s literature (covering all six forms) with two assignments from each of five groupings of

assignments. For example, one student created a 911 recording³⁰ for “Little Miss Muffet” for assignment C4. Another student went to the local police station to get a copy of an actual police incident report to fill out for “The Big Bad Wolf” when he completed assignment D2 (see Table 5.2.2a for the list of choices in this assignment).

Table 5.2.2a Children’s Literature Portfolio	
<p>A</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. rewrite the ending 2. write a modern version 3. rewrite, changing the point of view 4. write a sequel 5. write a politically correct version 	<p>B</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. write a limerick 2. write a sonnet 3. write a poem in free verse 4. write a haiku 5. write a riddle
<p>C</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. read the story onto tape 2. interview a character 3. write a rap song 4. make a 911 recording 5. make a video of the story 6. do a dramatic presentation 7. do a puppet show 8. make a message in a bottle 	<p>D</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. research the story on the internet 2. write a police incident report 3. write a newspaper article 4. research the author 5. write a journal for a character 6. do a critique of the story
<p>E</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. make a jigsaw puzzle 2. draw a scene from the story 3. design a kid’s toy based on the story 4. use HyperStudio³¹ to retell the story 5. design a poster to advertise the story 6. make a book cover 7. draw a character sketch 8. make a “want ad” for a character 9. make a cartoon 10. make a collage 	

I was interested in offering this range of possible assignments because it allowed students to choose those that might better suit their interest or abilities. These assignments were shared with other students to elicit feedback and suggestions. On the museum day (my adaptation of an exhibition to have several simultaneous student presentations), students were excited to see, hear, read, and play with each other’s creative work.

³⁰ This is a recording of an emergency phone call. “911” is the telephone number that is used in Nova Scotia to contact the police, fire stations, ambulances, and other emergency services. These phone calls are recorded and are used by the local media to report news.

³¹ HyperStudio is a software program used to organize visual and audio material to create a presentation.

The survey of children’s literature led to a project: students were asked to create a “Big Book” (a large sized book suitable for shared reading by a class) based on the exemplars of successful children’s literature techniques such as the use of repetition, rhyme, use of diction and syntax, interesting characters, visual appeal, etc. The unit concluded with a performance assessment – reading their Big Books in local elementary schools to Grade Primary and Grade 1 audiences. We had developed a rubric for their reading skills that was used to assess their presentations (see Table 5.2.2b).

Table 5.2.2b: Reading your Big Book			
Criteria	3	2	1
Writing of the book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Wowzers (Mr. Van Zoost will decide this) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Great illustrations <input type="checkbox"/> Good use of: rhyme, pattern, or repetition <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate vocabulary for a young reader <input type="checkbox"/> Could be neater <input type="checkbox"/> Completed on time <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil marks are completely erased
Use of voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strong clear voice with effective volume <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear voice, appropriate volume <input type="checkbox"/> Uses different voices for characters where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to hear <input type="checkbox"/> Voice is unclear
Involves the reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear and effective use of eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Reader takes time to stop and talk about the story and asks questions <input type="checkbox"/> Audience reacts positively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Good cooperation with the reader <input type="checkbox"/> Uses the illustrations to highlight the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Little eye contact with the students <input type="checkbox"/> Does not attempt to socialize with the younger students

This rubric was created by students and presented problems that I agreed to work with: some of the language was not specific (such as “great” and “good”) and the students wanted to have some opportunity for my subjective judgements in their assessment tool (“Wowzers”). Because students felt strongly about experimenting with the rubric and I felt that we had viewed sufficient examples of effective and ineffective illustrations and reading children’s literature aloud, I agreed to use the tool without changing the language to be more objective. In this instance, my aim of building community superseded my goal of making assessment practices more specific. The successful student in this project would have been one who: (1) was willing to engage with children’s literature and was able to make individual choices for their writing portfolio, (2) had synthesized what made good children’s literature and was willing to imitate some of these features in his/her writing, (3) could create a big book independently, (4) could read with enthusiasm and appropriate character

voices, and (5) was comfortable reading his/her own work to an unknown (and often unpredictable) younger audience.

Beyond these obvious curricular goals, I hoped that students would show pride in their work and that this enthusiasm for learning and performing would be apparent and contagious for the elementary students. Previous experiences of taking middle school students out to an elementary school (e.g., to perform magic tricks that the Grade 8 students had created) had been successful because the middle school students returned beaming and excited about their experiences in different classrooms. They were anxious to share their stories with each other and many told humorous anecdotes on the bus ride back to the middle school. The experience was an example of self-awareness and of building community. Stories from this Big Book experience were often told as “Remember when...” throughout the remainder of the year.

5.2.3 Third term: Relationships

In the third term (mid-March until the end of June), students again contracted for the percentile weighting of each of their assessment events, but they also contracted for what these events would be. I had been experimenting since 1998 with this format. In the spring of that year, after a similar year of assessment experiences, two students approached me right after lunch asking if the class could have five to ten minutes to discuss something important. They wanted to change some things in our class – only they could not tell me what it was, and they asked that I not be in the room. Knowing that a teacher was legally required to be present in the room, they had arranged for a high school biology teacher to come and supervise this meeting so that I could leave. I asked if they needed help setting up a discussion framework, and they looked at me as if I had two heads: “We KNOW how to lead discussions, Mr. Van Zoost!” True enough. Oddly, these two girls were not the discussion leaders - they were the spokespersons for the class who would act as negotiators with me. The class already had a plan of action: a speaker’s list, chairperson, chart paper notes, door monitors to ensure I was not sneaking any peeps in the windows, time monitor – and these were the only details that they would tell me when I was allowed back in the room. What they had decided to ask me was to have “complete control” over their assessment tools for the final term in their year: choose their own assignments that reflected the curriculum outcomes, contract for their grades, and generate their own assessment tools for each assignment.

So, in the spring of 2001, following a structure that I had adopted in my English classes since 1998, students developed their own assignments that would demonstrate the curriculum learning outcomes in a thematic unit about relationships (see Figure 5.2.3).

**Figure 5.2.3
Contract for Relationships Unit**

Instructions: This term in English you will have a lot of control over your assignments – including the type of assignments and how they will be assessed. Listed below are the assignments that everyone will do. The spaces are for you to decide the title of the remaining assignment and how much each will be worth. You may choose to do between 3 and 5 assignments, none less than 10% nor greater than 25%. When you are choosing your assignment, refer to the 10 General Curriculum Outcomes for Grade 8. You will need to defend how your assignment choices demonstrate your abilities in all 10 outcomes. You will also want to consider the theme of this term, “Relationships” and what texts might be available to you. Thirdly, consider carefully the types of assignments you could do – challenge yourself! For each assignment, you will be creating your own rubric. I must approve the contract and each individual rubric BEFORE you begin the assignment. ONE assignment will be marked by a parent or guardian using the rubric I have approved in advance.

Assignment	Rubric	Due Date	Choice	Mark	Percentile	Final Points
Final Exam	N/A		20%			
Literature Circle	N/A					
Totals	-----	-----	100%	-----	-----	/100

Each student submitted a proposal for the term’s assignments and articulated how their design would demonstrate their skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing. I provided posters of more than 300 possible generic assignments: a speech, diorama, short film, myth, panel discussion, sculpture, exhibition, play, commentary, commercial, computer

program, pantomime, journal, mock trials, and etcetera. Students used these posters as a resource in planning their negotiations with me.

In our negotiation process, students were required to have my stamp of approval (literally) on their contract before they could begin each task. Even more significant was the stamp of approval on each assessment tool that students designed (student-created/student-involved assessment tools) for every assessment event. Students created their own rubrics, determining the criteria and providing explicit descriptors for various levels of achievement. I held conferences with each student and we agreed to an assessment event as well as how it would be assessed before the student began the assignment. During the conferences, one assignment was chosen to be marked by a parent or guardian (see Appendix 5.2.3 for a copy of the letter that was sent home to parents). This assignment would also be marked by me, and the final mark on the assignment would be the average of the parent's and my mark.

Opportunities arose for students to demonstrate their abilities to achieve the learning outcomes/standards in ways that I, as the teacher, had not imagined possible. For example, under the umbrella theme of "Relationships," several students worked together to design a group assignment, a short video about teenage dating. The students wanted to demonstrate how teenage dating could be successful. Their video was a parody of television formats and was a cooking demonstration where the ingredients were symbolic of required components in a healthy teenage relationship. The project responded to learning outcomes about teenage relationships, dramatic performance, and technological competencies. The final video was a game-show called "Cooking for Love" where the adolescent contestants explained the ingredients needed in a recipe for teenage dating. Ingredients such as communication, patience, and adult supervision were mixed, formed in a pre-heated oven, and cooled to create the perfect taste; the ideal teenage relationship. In this assessment experience, students' creativity and interests came to life in the classroom (see Table 5.2.3a for the student-created rubric for this project).

Unlike Lythgo (1987), my negotiation of the curriculum with students was not motivated by issues of classroom management, or discipline. While classroom management was not the impetus for negotiated projects, I did experience many of the benefits that much of the literature reports: negotiation encourages student involvement and responsibility for their learning, and provides a

more active, student-centred learning environment (Johnston & Dowdy, 1988; Lythgo, 1987; Woodward, 1993).

Table 5.2.3a				
Student-designed rubric for a video project				
Criteria	4	3	2	1
Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> Voices are clear <input type="checkbox"/> Taping job is very well done	<input type="checkbox"/> Voices are clear most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Taping job is satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Voices are not clear <input type="checkbox"/> Poor taping job	<input type="checkbox"/> Mumbling voices, can't make them out <input type="checkbox"/> Unfocused, blurry, heads are cut off in the taping job
Organization of Material	<input type="checkbox"/> Everyone is equally included in the video <input type="checkbox"/> Everything is organized <input type="checkbox"/> Game show has a description on how it works	<input type="checkbox"/> Most people are included in the video <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of game show is clear and easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/> Un-equal participation <input type="checkbox"/> Game show is hard to understand	<input type="checkbox"/> One person hogs the show <input type="checkbox"/> Game show doesn't make sense at all
Development of Relationship Ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> The relationship idea in the video is clearly stated <input type="checkbox"/> In the end, two of the people end up together	<input type="checkbox"/> The relationship in the movie is understood but not clear <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships are evident	<input type="checkbox"/> You have somewhat of an idea of the meaning of the relationships of the people in the show	<input type="checkbox"/> You have no idea what this has to do with relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Meaningless show <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't s work like a T.V. show
Effort and Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Individuals participate a lot and works cooperatively with other group members <input type="checkbox"/> Very creative ideas for a film	<input type="checkbox"/> Group members work cooperatively most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Keeps audience interest most of the time	<input type="checkbox"/> Group members are totally un-cooperative <input type="checkbox"/> Slow moving and boring parts	<input type="checkbox"/> Group doesn't communicate effectively <input type="checkbox"/> No participation <input type="checkbox"/> Very boring T.V. show

This was consistent with my educational aim of “self-awareness.” While I held conferences with students about their self-generated assessment tools, I explained that they were not in complete control, although this was frequently their misinterpretation of the process despite me reminding them that I, the teacher, had the ultimate say about their individualized assignments; I had the

stamp. I also held a conference with students at the completion of their Third Term Contracts to discuss their assignments and marks.

The 2000-2001 school year concluded with a final Process Exam, as an exam was required by the school but I chose the format of the exam. I repeated the same process that students had experienced in December about “Identity,” except this time the theme was “Relationships.” Students used literature in similar ways to support their arguments in responding to a self-developed question, or chose from a list that I provided:

- What is a relationship?
- Why are relationships important?
- Are relationships for males different than they are for females?
- What are the characteristics of a good relationship?
- How do relationships grow/change/evolve?
- How are relationships formed?
- How can I improve my relationship with my mother? Sister? Boyfriend?

The exam was assessed by using a student-modified version of the rubric that was used for their December Process Exam. By having students involved in adapting this rubric for the final exam, the language on the rubric was student-friendly and represented what they had identified as important skills that needed to be demonstrated in their final assessment. Another key aspect of the exam was changed. Students were not required to write an essay, although they could if they wished. I asked to students to explain their arguments in any written form that they wished and provided some suggestions: diary/journal, poetry, newspaper or magazine article, letter, speech/eulogy, or a short story.

Providing students with choices on the content (the question and texts that they had read throughout the term) and the format of the exam seemed like an appropriate conclusion to a year of student-involved assessment practices. This final exam reinforced student’s self-direction and imagination while tailoring the exam to be relevant and challenging to the individual learners. I set out a table of texts that were used by students throughout the term to create a reference area in the classroom. Students had been recording reviews of their readings on cue-cards³² and posted these cards on a wall throughout the term and some of the most rewarding conversations that I have

³² “Cue-cards” are small pieces of paper typically used for indexing information such as cooking recipes. They typically have lines for writing on one side and no lines on the other. Instead, I used recycled pieces of paper from and called them “cue-cards.” My father routinely contacted a local publishing company and saved these pieces of paper for me to use in the classroom.

overheard were prompted by these cards. As students sought resource material to support their arguments on the “Relationships” Process Exam, they referred to each other’s reviews and met informally to share their ideas: “Oh, you should read this one! It has a lot to say about sibling competition.” I had purchased children’s birthday party hats to use as “thinking caps” for the Grade 8 students during the exam. I watched a student who was struggling with a question squint at the ceiling in concentration. Another student dropped a thinking cap on his desk and smiled. It seemed obvious that students supported each other as they worked on answering their self-generated questions about relationships; self-awareness occurred with the support of a learning community. My educational aims of my classroom program seemed to be captured in these small, rewarding moments.

In my classroom, I was trying to achieve four educational aims; I wanted students to develop their self-awareness, participate in a learning community, value their imagination, and experience relevant and challenging curriculum. The aims of my classroom program were evident in the assessment tools that I used throughout the year. Table 5.2.3b summarizes the tools that were described in this chapter, and which of my educational aims they supported.

Assessment practice	Building community	“Self-awareness”	Imagination	Relevant and challenging
Questionnaire	✓			✓
Journal		✓		
Literature Circle Observational Assessment	✓	✓		✓
Literature Circle Group Reflection	✓	✓		
Identity Museum Object	✓	✓	✓	✓
Letters to the editor				
Learning logs		✓	✓	✓
Third Term Contract (including student-created rubrics and conferences)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gift of Giving self-reflection	✓	✓		
Children’s Literature Portfolio	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading Big Books	✓		✓	✓
Process Exams	✓	✓	✓	✓

I was interested in the work that authentic assessment practices could do because I believed that they could assist students in having positive experiences in school. I witnessed students’ excitement to be a part of our class. I saw opportunities for students to have pride in their school work and I

wanted to learn more about how assessment practices could work as a strategy to reach this goal. Common in my classroom program was the involvement of students in the classroom assessment events. Like Stiggin's work, such as *Student-Involved Assessment for Learning* (2005b), I hoped that students would be engaged with the curriculum and understand how they could improve their learning. The professional literature about student assessment supported the involvement of students in assessment events to improve learning (A. Davies, 2008; Earl, 2003; Wiggins, 1998; Woodward, 1993). I also thought that by involving students in the assessment activities that this would increase student motivation and responsibility to create "self-directed learners" (Brown, 2002; Costa & Kallick, 2004). At the time, I felt engaged, involved, and connected to my classroom community. I equated assessment with learning; assessment as learning (Delandshere, 2002; Earl, 2003; Stiggins, 2005b; Sutton, 1999).

5.4 Summarising the key features of my classroom program

Broadly speaking, the key features of my classroom program can be aligned with discourses commonly associated with progressivism. That is, my classroom program focused on the individual's identity and this identity was understood to be relatively fixed and measurable over time in order to show growth along a developmental path. Furthermore, my classroom program can be understood as "student-centred," where young people were encouraged to be engaged in their school experiences and to take individual responsibility for their learning. The key features of my classroom program can be aligned with progressivism because they emphasize students' individual experiences and their developmental needs. Below I identify two key features of my classroom program and then outline how my understanding of my classroom program is disrupted in later chapters.

One of the key features in my classroom program that I have revisited is the notion of the self it supports. It is possible for me to argue now that my educational aims of 2000-2001 illustrate a particular kind of self – one who is taken up in the project of self-improvement and the belief in progress. My classroom program emphasizes the individual as a worthwhile project and this involved the individual making choices in order to be successful in the classroom program. This self-improvement was expected in terms of how young people conduct work on their self to build connections to others, develop their self-awareness, use their imagination, and to play an active role in making curriculum relevant and challenging for their lives beyond school. Such a goal of shaping the conduct of the self is a traditional goal of English teaching (Hunter, 1996) although historically

students have had to demonstrate what they had learned about self-conduct via essay writing and responding to literature in traditional ways such as in exams. In this way, it was possible for me to understand that many of my educational aims may have sought the same ends as traditional curriculum and assessment practices. This was an important insight for me because it called my classroom program and its supposed innovations into question. I wondered if young people in my classroom would be constituted into identities that were similar to those constituted in traditional ways of teaching English, despite the use of non-traditional practices such as authentic assessment. This understanding was only possible through reflection, suggesting to me the importance of practitioner research that puts taken-for-granted concepts such as the self under erasure.

A second key feature of my classroom program was its emphasis on students' "real-lives" beyond school. My classroom program expected that young people could present an "authentic" self by connecting assessment events in school with their lives beyond the school. This focus on authenticity was part of my educational aims of self-awareness and making the curriculum relevant to students' lives, and was supported by the practices of authentic assessment. Presenting a "real" self was congruent with the vision of authentic assessment.

This research has helped me to conceptualize how as a teacher, I help "structure the possible field of action" for young people (Foucault, 1983, p. 221) and therefore need to be attentive to the ways in which I participate in structuring this field, such as through authentic assessment practices. The impetus for this research was my suspicion that there was more going on in the authentic assessment practices in my classroom than the characteristically technical literature about authentic assessment suggests. Instead of focusing my attention on the universal ideals of authentic assessment (e.g., that it is better or more humane than traditional assessment practices), I am interested in how I might challenge this dominant story of authentic assessment through deconstructing my good intentions – my classroom program – as a micro example of how young people are governed into particular forms. If, as Foucault claims, "everything is dangerous," then my authentic assessment practices and my good intentions as a teacher are also of concern. Because I am a producer of authentic assessment, now I realize that I need to be more alert to its effects and this research seeks to determine what these dangers and possibilities may be.

To begin such a task, I deconstruct my good intentions as a practitioner in subsequent chapters. In order to address my research question, *how are young people's identities constituted in my classroom through*

authentic assessment practices? I determined what the ideal subject positions in my classroom program were. However, I created my classroom program by using assessment policies to direct me. While I had my own educational aims as described in this chapter, they were layered on top of those expected from my employer and expressed through policy. Consequently, the ideal identities in my classroom program were informed by those of the assessment policies. Following this line of thinking, I turn first to determine how young people are idealized in the assessment policies in Chapter 6 and then revisit my classroom program in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

ASSESSMENT POLICIES

Assessment policies signal to teachers what is desirable in our classrooms (at least according to its sponsors). Stevens (2006) argues that, “Policies, broadly construed and narrowly enacted, act as a key technique of the state, communicating what is meant to be done by educators on behalf of the government.” In terms of assessment, policies encourage particular assessment practices and can suggest alternative methods than those that are commonly used. Because my classroom program was informed by such provincial documents, these policies are important to my research. These policies framed my teaching and indirectly influenced students’ experiences in my classroom. Because of this influence, it was important to include the policies as part of my analysis. My research question asks, *how are young people’s identities constituted in my classroom through authentic assessment practices?* Policies contribute to the subject positions that were made available to students in my classroom program and so I became interested in how three policies, a subset of data with specific pages introduced in Chapter 4, might shape up young people: the *Public School Program, Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*, and *English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 7-9*.

The analysis of these policies was not only useful in terms of how they informed my classroom program but also in positioning my classroom program within wider political and social events (Fairclough, 1992, 2003) within Canada. Other provinces were similarly experiencing a rapid renewal of education policies (e.g., see Dudley-Marling & Wien, 2001). These policies were written at a time of change – just as neo-liberal/neo-conservative discourses were beginning to break through into the field of education. Since the publication of the Nova Scotia policies in this research, increased public attention at a national level has been given to standardized testing and teacher accountability and less on classroom assessment and specifically authentic assessment (Murphy, 2001). That is to say that these policies were written in a particular time and place, and envisioned the education of young people in particular ways. Teachers use these policies to develop their own classroom programs that constitute students in different ways, but the provincial policies suggest common ways of working with young people and provide a common vision of their education. The inclusion of policies in my

analysis allowed me to consider the broader societal influences on Nova Scotia students. Understood as a text in discourse analysis, the policies are “constructive of social formations, communities, and individuals’ social identities” (A. Luke, 1995, p. 7). That is, the policies were produced with social objectives, distributed to, and consumed by educators, and then had an impact on what students did in classrooms. These discursive practices of production, distribution, and consumption of the policies trace how educational change was initiated and implemented in the Nova Scotia school system.

The policies used in this research were written at a time of educational reform in Nova Scotia. While the *PSP* is produced annually with minor changes, the *Foundation* document signalled a significant change in the way in which teachers were expected to work in their classrooms. For the first time, the Nova Scotia Department of Education collaborated with the three departments of education from the other Canadian Atlantic Provinces to create common curricula for English, Social Studies, Math, and Science. A “Foundation” document was created for each of these subjects, followed by more specific curriculum guides for various grade levels (P-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12). The *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts* document used in this research was the first of such documents to be written. What was new in these documents was the outcomes-based framework that provided educators with statements of what students were expected to know and be able to do. Because new curriculum guides were written for four common subjects at all grade levels in an inter-provincial collaborative manner within a new outcomes-based framework, this signalled a time of change for the educational system. The policies were an indication that teachers needed to do something different from what they were currently doing; that they would need to change the way they were assessing students and align their assessment practices with the vision and purposes of the policies.

A significant change in this outcomes-based educational reform was the shift in emphasis on *what* students would be expected to know and be able to do in English Language Arts. Luke (2002b) suggests that policymakers should be concerned with what type of literacies citizens need in society and the new Nova Scotia policies signalled a change in what literacies were deemed necessary for today’s world. In the past, English skills had focused on reading and writing as their primary concerns. The new policies demanded a balance of six skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing. This validation of a broader range of English language arts skills would demand assessment experiences other than those from the family of practices of paper

and pencil assessments. Speaking, for example, would need to be assessed through an authentic, alternative, and performance assessment (such as a video) or through personal communication (such as an interview). “Traditional” assessment practices, as the policy refers to paper and pencil assessments such as tests and examinations, would not be appropriate for these student outcomes.

To distribute these new policies, the Nova Scotia Department of Education offered inservicing for educator “teams” from each school board. Each team included the school board consultants who would be responsible for the implementation of the curriculum within the board, and teachers representing various grade levels, schools, and geographic regions within the boards. These teachers received four days of professional development to become familiar with the policies and were then expected to be the “experts” on the curriculum documents within their school boards. I was a member of this “English Language Arts Leadership Team” in my school board. This team was responsible for conducting inservicing for all English teachers about the structure of the policies, to indicate what was new in the policies, and suggest teaching methods that would be consistent with the new policies. Teachers were expected to be familiar with the policies and how to use the student outcomes in their teaching practices, including their classroom assessment activities. Fairclough’s (1992) work helped me to understand how the inservicing teams operated as practices of consumption and distribution of the policies. An “intertextual chain” is evident in the description of the events above as they are “transformationally related to one another” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 130). For example, the policy was interpreted by staff at the Department of Education and consumed by educator teams in a variety of ways (presentations, conversations, additional professional resources in print form). These educators, now “experts” about the new policies, re-distributed them to teachers within their own boards, changing the ways in which they were consumed (e.g., by using activities, PowerPoint presentations, and involving examples from classroom practice to illustrate ideas). Individual teachers subsequently transformed the ways in which the ideas of the policies were consumed by students in classrooms (e.g., as specific learning activities and assessment events).

Throughout this intertextual chain, the distribution and consumption of these policies produced different versions of young people. As I observed students in my own classroom and became curious about the ways in which they constituted a self, I understood it to be important to trace aspects of this chain – to look critically at the impetus for the change in our policies and the suggested ways of working with young people. The policies, as texts, demanded a critical analysis for understanding what versions of young people were being valued or dismissed as they moved through

this intertextual chain. Such an analysis offered me an understanding of what ways of being were on offer to students because of these policies.

This chapter addresses in relation to this textual chain, four specific analysis questions that emerged from those identified at the end of Chapter 3:

1. What assessment practices were expected to be completed by/with young people?
2. How were young people described in authentic assessment practices?
3. What was the young person expected to do in authentic assessment practices?
4. What were the ideal subject positions for young people?

The first question allowed me to identify the assessment practices that are supported in the policies - practices understood as technologies for constituting student identities. The second and third questions are addressed largely through the textual analysis of the policies. The fourth question provided me with ways of thinking about the ideal students as described by the policies. One purpose of this chapter was to determine the ideal subject positions that are valorised by the policies so that I could then compare these with my classroom program (see Chapter 7) and with the identities taken up by my students (see Chapter 8). A second purpose of this chapter was to relate the ideals of the policies to broader political and societal events so that I could more fully understand how the students in my rural Nova Scotia classroom, some of whom could be characterized as living in geographic isolation and/or in poverty, were connected to wider global economic changes because these policies informed my classroom program and consequently, what was made available to the young people in my classroom.

6.1 Assessment practices in the policies

To respond to the question “What assessment practices were expected to be completed by/with young people?” I began by making a list of the assessment practices that were identified in all three documents. I then sought ways to categorize the assessment practices and used concepts from the literature of Chapter 2 to provide guidance. I used the framework introduced in Chapter 2 to categorize classroom assessment practices into families of practice: (1) paper and pencil assessments, (2) authentic, alternative, and performance assessments, and (3) personal communication. I then determined which families of practice were emphasized in the policies. Rather than being an ideal reader of the policies, this analytical process allowed me to consider what their particular emphases were for teachers and students.

Following this process, I concluded that the three provincial policies used in this analysis identify forty-two different assessment practices that should be used to assess students. Details about the assessment practices are not offered within the policies and teachers are left to other professional sources of information to learn about them. I created a master list of these practices and then organized them according to their families of practice. Because the details of the assessment practices are not provided within the policy documents, I relied on frameworks from Stiggins (2005b) and Burke (1999) to help classify the assessment practices that could be used in several ways. Sometimes, this classification process required direct guidance from the literature. For example, the policies endorsed the use of a “learning journal.” A learning journal is a paper and pencil form of assessment, but it can also be a means of communicating with the student. I used the details from Stiggins’ chapter called “Personal Communication as Assessment” (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, pp. 177-198) to classify a learning log as belonging to the family of practices of personal communication instead of the family of practices called paper and pencil assessment.³³ This organization of the assessment practices revealed an emphasis on authentic, alternative, and performance assessment practices in the policies. For example, of the forty-two assessment practices mentioned, twenty-one were authentic, alternative, and performance assessment practices according to this classification system. This is equivalent to half of the assessment practices listed in the provincial policies. Table 6.1a summarizes the number of assessment practices that are presented by all three policies organized into the three families of practice.

It should be noted that many of these assessment practices are often used in combination, such as a conference between a student and the teacher (a form of personal communication) about the student’s portfolio (an authentic assessment tool) (Burke, 1999). Because of the interconnected possibilities of the assessment practices, it could be argued that many of the practices that I have sorted as personal communication may also be connected with other authentic practices and thereby increasing the emphasis on authentic, alternative, and performance assessments. While this approach for classifying the assessment practices does not account for the possible connections among the families of practice, it does highlight the emphasis that is placed on authentic, alternative, and performance assessment practices in the policies.

³³ Stiggins suggests that the following forms of assessment are all examples of personal communication: questions and answers during instruction; conferences with students; student contributions during class discussions; oral examinations; and journals, diaries, and learning logs (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 178).

Table 6.1a			
Families of practice in the policies			
	<i>Paper and pencil assessment</i>	<i>Authentic, alternative, and performance assessment</i>	<i>Personal communication</i>
<i>Assessment practices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anecdotal records • examinations • external assessment • miscue analysis and running records • pencil and paper products • program and system evaluation • quizzes • rating scales and analytic scales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artefacts • checklists • demonstrations • exhibitions • holistic scales • investigations • media products • observations (formal and informal) • peer assessment • performance assessments • performance tasks • portfolios • presentations • reviews of performance • rubric • scoring guides • seminars • simulations • technology as a process and/or product • video or audio tapes and photographs • work samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conferences • interviews • inventories • learning journals; student journal • learning logs; log books • questioning • questionnaires • self-assessment • surveys
Number of practices identified	12	21	9
Percentage of overall practices identified	29%	50%	21%

Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) argue that students are the primary users of assessment results to set further learning expectations of themselves. Looking at the assessment practices in Table 6.1a, four of these practices are not intended to be used by students. Two of the paper and pencil assessments practices (anecdotal records and teacher journals or log books) do not directly involve students; young people do not participate in the assessment event. Instead, the assessment is completed by

the teacher, without student input. These assessments are more *done to* young people, than *done with* them. Both of these practices rely on the teacher's observations of students' skills. Two other paper and pencil assessment practices (external assessment and program and system evaluation) require student participation although the results are not intended to be used directly by students to guide further learning. I highlight these four assessment practices because while they assess students, they are not intended to be *used* by students to further their own learning. Understood in this way, the number of assessment practices mentioned in the policies for student use is significant: thirty-eight of the forty-two practices. Secondly, the number of paper and pencil assessment practices for student use is eight, showing the lesser importance of this family of practice compared to authentic, alternative, and performance assessments, (21 practices) and personal communication (9 practices).

The policies are openly concerned about the use and role of paper and pencil assessments in the English Language Arts classroom. The policies' statements about paper and pencil forms of assessment - what the policies refer to as traditional assessment practices - actively discourage their overuse and question their reliability [emphasis added]:

Traditional tests and examinations are by themselves *inadequate instruments* with which to measure the learning required by this curriculum (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 160).

Response, reasoning, and reflection are significant areas of learning in English language arts, but do not lend themselves readily to *traditional assessment methods such as tests* (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 161).

Tests play a minor role in the total assessment program and should be used in appropriate balance with other assessment practices to ensure that students have frequent and varied opportunities to demonstrate their level of performance in relation to curriculum outcomes (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 2001a, p. 53).

In general, the provincial policies discourage the use of traditional assessment. While the policies distance themselves from these traditional assessment practices, they encourage other practices that "promote learning" and "help students to recognize their learning strengths and needs and to identify the ways they can further develop as learners" (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. 1). Typically, these practices are either authentic, alternative, and performance based assessments (such as a portfolio) or personal communication events (such as a student learning log). It is important to remember that these authentic, alternative, and performance assessment experiences do not replace the mental processes that are often associated with pencil and paper assessment practices. The authentic assessment practices may also be after many of the same mental

processes that are often associated with traditional forms of assessment such as testing and examinations.

The provincial documents demonstrate a particular moment in assessment policy. Here there are policies actively advocating authentic, alternative, and performance assessment practices. Indeed, there is some anxiety evident in the documents that teachers will not engage in these forms of assessment as indicated by the frequency and consistency in which they are suggested in the documents. Fairclough (1992) calls this repetition of vocabulary that can be detected through textual analysis “overwording,” a concept he attributes to the work of Halliday (1978) and his similar concept of “overlexicalization” - the dense wording of a domain” (as cited in Fairclough, 1992, p. 193). For Fairclough (1992, p. 193), overwording signifies an “intense preoccupation pointing to the peculiarities in the ideology of the group responsible for it.” In terms of the policies under scrutiny, this preoccupation concerns the emphasis on the implementation of *multiple* assessment practices compared to traditional emphasis on a few forms. Table 6.1b provides examples of this overwording, including synonyms, which are used to encourage teachers to use varied assessment practices beyond those that the policies consider traditional.

Table 6.1b	
Examples of overwording in the call for varied assessment practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Appropriate balance with other assessment practices ● Assessment activities include, but are not limited to... ● Broad range of assessment strategies ● Broad range of strategies ● Different aspects ● Diverse ● Diverse and multiple opportunities ● Diverse ways ● Frequent opportunities ● Full range ● Including, but not limited to ● Many types ● Multiple indicators of student performance ● Multiple opportunities ● Multiple sources of information ● Optimal opportunity ● Range 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Range of questions ● Rich collection of information ● Rich information for making judgments ● Supplement observations ● Use strategies in an appropriate balance ● Varied opportunities ● variety of assessment strategies ● Variety of assessment strategies ● Variety of formats ● Variety of information-gathering strategies ● Variety of opportunities ● Variety of record-keeping systems ● Variety of sources for their assessment ● Variety of ways ● Variety of ways ● Various purposes ● Wealth of information ● Wide range ● Wide variety

This anxiety is evidence of assumptions in the policies that teachers are not currently conducting authentic assessments, or need a great deal of assistance in implementing these practices.

Conversely, it could be said that the overwording indicates assumptions in the policies that teachers are, and should not be, emphasizing tests in their classroom programs and that these policies signal an interest to change this. In this way, the policies work on the teacher-reader to demonize traditional forms of assessment and simultaneously encourage the adoption of other non-traditional forms of assessment. The ideal reader of these policies would reduce traditional testing in their classroom and offer young people a wide variety of assessment experiences.

6.2 Young people in the policies

To understand what conceptions of young people were offered in the policies, I focused on the labels and verbs that were used to describe what it was the students were to do during the assessment events in the documents. This process allowed me to compare the three policy documents by focusing on the vocabulary that is used to describe what students do and should be doing during classroom assessment events. Discourse analysis, as Gee (2001b, p. 125) points out, “is not primarily about counting things. We use such numbers simply to guide us in terms of hypotheses that we can investigate through close scrutiny of the actual details and content of the [text].” My focus on labels and verbs helped me to identify patterns in the texts and this should not be understood as the primary way in which I conducted my analysis, but rather as a process that helped me direct further critical discourse analysis. I asked two questions of the policies - one that focused on the labels used in the documents and one that addressed the verbs. These questions allowed me to “read” the text in new ways as it disrupted a common reading and understanding of the text. Instead of reading the text in sequence, for example, the questions I asked of the text had a particular motivation to interrupt the overt purposes of the texts (described in Chapter 4) and derive new understandings about how the texts position young people through the assessment events; re-arranging the texts into patterns of labels and verbs allowed a different reading of the policies. This does not presuppose that this was an objective process of analysis that led to a definitive interpretation. Many interpretations of the policies are possible because “the questions we ask necessarily arise from particular motivations which go beyond what is ‘there’” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 15). The questions I asked were motivated by my interest to understand how the policies had social effects and consequences; how they shaped up young people in particular ways in my classroom.

6.2.1 Labels

The second question I asked of the policies was, “How were young people described in authentic assessment practices?” The premise of this question derives from the literature review in Chapter 2, where the label of “adolescent” suggested certain ways of understanding young people – as neither child nor adult and secondly, as a predominantly psychological construct. Because the label of adolescent has had significant impact in the ways that schooling for young people has been developed, such as the “solution” of middle schools, I was curious about the ways in which young people were labelled in the policies when discussing their involvement in assessment events. I asked this question to see if there are labels that positioned young people in particular ways during assessment experiences. This positioning was important to know because texts have social effects (Fairclough, 2003; A. Luke, 2002a); the policies indirectly influencing students’ experiences in my classroom. The ways that students are positioned in policies influences my classroom program and students’ assessment experiences. Secondly, understand the positioning of young people in the policies allows me to compare such constructions of young people with those of their own (see Chapter 8) and those that are constructed through the dominant discourse of adolescence. To facilitate this analytic process, I identified and recorded the labels that were used to describe young people into separate files for each policy document and then combined the labels from all three documents to synthesize the depiction of young people involved in assessment activities. Table 6.2.1 provides details about the 106 labels used in the three provincial policies. The number of labels used in each document is proportional to the number of pages used in analysis. For example, it is not surprising that the *Foundation* and *ELA* use

significantly more labels (44 and 45 respectively) than the *PSP* (17 labels), because the *Foundation* and *ELA* texts are longer than the *PSP*. In all three documents, the most common label used to describe young people is “student” or “students.”

The notion of the young person as “student” is a relational concept; student is defined in relation to a teacher. As “students” young people are defined by their dependent relationship with the teacher – they are dependent on the knowledge and skills of the teacher. Using the label of “students” to define young people positions them within the specific

Document	Labels	Count	Total
<i>PSP</i> 3 pages	Student(s)	14	17
	Learners	2	
	Lifelong learners	1	
<i>Foundation</i> 8 pages	Student(s)	37	44
	Language learners	2	
	Language users	2	
	Beginning readers	1	
	Children	1	
<i>ELA</i> 9 pages	Student(s)	43	45
	Learners	1	
	Lifelong learners	1	

political structure of schooling where young people are understood to be accountable to teachers and receive rewards and punishments accordingly. In assessment terms, these rewards and punishments could be in the form of marks, the public sharing of student work, or the promotion of a student to another grade (or not). As “students,” young people are understood in the institutional terminology of schooling that assume particular expected roles of subordination to educators and the creation of a public identity that will be assessed within the institution. Defined as “students,” young people are represented in terms of their relationships with adults within the school community. They are tied – by definition- to the institution of school.

The emphasis on the label “student” made me consider a tension that existed in the policies’ descriptions of authentic assessment events. For example, how authentic or “real-world” could the representation of young people be in our classrooms when they are to be understood in terms of the relations with teachers and the institution of school? The label “student” in authentic assessment presents a paradox which positions the young person as one who is dependent on the institution of schooling while simultaneously working against this dependency to experience more authentic ways of being.

The other labels (see Table 6.2.1) cluster around notions of the young people as “lifelong learners” or “learners” and “users” of language. As “students,” they are dependent on others to assist them in moving from “beginning readers” or “children” to “lifelong learners” independent of teacher and school support. The *PSP* describes the aspiration to create “lifelong learners”:

Students who are empowered to assess their own progress are more likely to perceive their learning as its own rewards and develop as *lifelong learners* (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. C5, emphasis added).

Here, the student is described as a “lifelong learner” – this collocation³⁴ suggests a normalized way of understanding learning as an on-going process that is not tied to one particular institution (such as the school). This collocation suggests a specific relationship of the learner to knowledge and a relationship with the self. Firstly, the learner is expected to learn over time (“lifelong”). A lifetime of learning requires the learner to invest in a belief that values learning. Secondly, a lifetime of learning requires that the learner is capable of being self-directed in this learning. Teachers and schooling, however, are understood to be only a part of a student’s lifetime. This independence is emphasized in the second reference to “lifelong learners” as found in the *ELA*:

³⁴ “Collocations are more or less regular or habitual patterns of co-occurrence between words” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 213).

To become *lifelong learners*, students need to wean themselves from external motivators like grades and marks (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 155, emphasis added).

The student is asked to “wean” him/herself from not only the teacher, but also the rewards of schooling, grades, and marks. This strong metaphorical image reinforces the goal of assisting young people in becoming independent or, possibly, to internalise the values and knowledge that were previously externally rewarded.

Because there are so few labels in the text, their use is particularly significant in identifying how policy might describe an ideal student who is successful in his/her assessment experiences. The labels signal that young people are understood to be dependent on their teachers and (somewhat paradoxically) that assessment should assist them in becoming independent “lifelong” learners, independent of their teachers.

6.2.2 Processes

The third analysis question was, “What was the young person expected to do in authentic assessment practices?” For this question, I made lists of the verbs used in the policies to describe what the students were *doing*. For example, students are described in the policies by what they do: “It is important that students *participate* actively in the assessment of their own learning, *developing* their own criteria, and *learning* to *judge* different qualities in their work” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 155, emphasis added). I made a list of verbs that included the words *participate*, *developing*, *learning*, and *judge*. This process allowed me to focus on the student activity. By focusing on the verbs found in the policy, my attention was drawn to identifying what students were encouraged to do during, or because of, the assessment events. Combining the three policy documents, two hundred and eighty-one verbs were used to describe the student involved in assessment events. Table 6.2.2a lists the verbs in all three policies that had more than one

Verb	Count
Demonstrate	17
Use (e.g., knowledge)	16
Develop(ing)	10
Reflect(ing)	10
Participate	7
Make(ing) (e.g., meaning)	6
Set goals	6
Work(ing)	6
Apply(ing)	5
Understand	5
Assess(ing)	4
Consider(ing)	4
Produce(d)	4
Engage(d)	3
Explore	3
Identify(ing)	3
Learn(ed)(ing)	3
Perceive	3
Read(ing)	3
Select	3
Aware	2
Build	2
Change (in thinking)	2
Collaborate	2
Contribute(d)	2
Discuss	2
Evaluate	2
Examine	2
Express(ing)	2
Find	2
Improve(ing)	2
Know	2
Recognize	2
Rehearse	2
Seek	2
Take responsibility	2

occurrence. *Judge*, for example, is not listed in Table 6.2.2a because it is only used in the policies once. The most common verbs (*demonstrate*, *use*, *develop*, and *reflect*) illustrate a young person who is internally active (e.g., *reflect*), changing (e.g., *develop*), and productive (*demonstrate*, *use*). Unlike traditional assessment that emphasized that ability is fixed (e.g., bright kids do not have to develop, they “are” bright, as proved by assessment instruments that measure intelligence quotient, etc.), authentic assessment is moving young people into a different kind of regime characterised by reflection, constant change, and productivity. These processes can be seen as establishing a warrant for forms of governmentality where the subject must work on their self to demonstrate their capacities in ways that will be acknowledged and rewarded in the classroom. Instead of using verbs that define a student’s abilities as fixed, the policies describe the successful young person as being involved in the related processes of reflecting, changing, and producing. To assist in creating a more specific reading of the policy, I re-classified the verbs in terms of their types of processes beyond listing their overall frequency in the documents.

Using the identified verbs that described students during assessment practices, I conducted a sub-analysis on transitivity (Halliday, 2004). Grammatically, clauses have at least one participant and may or may not be augmented circumstantially. Halliday (2004, p. 176) presents these relations graphically as three concentric circles with the process in the centre, surrounded by participants, and then circumstance. I read the policies and identified the processes that were associated with a constant participant – the student(s). I did not include clauses where teachers or assessment practices (for example) were participants in relation to the process of the clause. This allowed me to focus on what the young person was expected to do, according to the policies. What resulted were tables that organized the verbs of each document into material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural, and existential processes. Halliday (2004, p. 174) explains that “part of the ‘flavour’ of a particular text...lies in its mixture of process types.” The three main types of process are material, mental, and relational. Mental processes are those that involve thinking, feeling, or perceiving. Material processes are those that involve doing. Relational processes are those that concern being or having. Halliday (2004, p. 171) points out that there are “further categories located at the boundaries [of the three main processes of material, mental, and relational]; not so clearly set apart, but nevertheless recognizable in the grammar as intermediate between the different pairs – sharing some features of each, and thus acquiring a character of their own.” On the borderline between material and relational processes are verbal processes: those that concern speaking. Behavioural processes are those that are part mental and part material (such as “listen”). Existential processes are those that

describe things to “be” – to exist – and are on the borderline between relational and material processes.

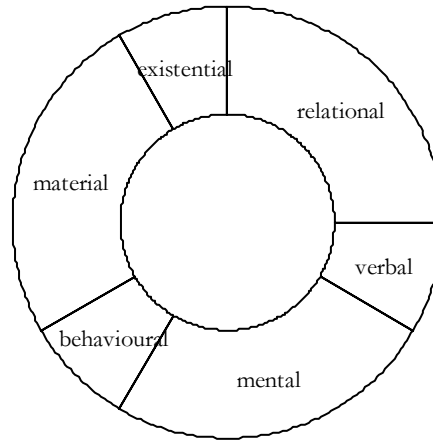
These relations among the processes are noted in Figure 6.2.2.

Because these processes share close relations with each other it is possible to describe one process to be what Halliday (2004, p. 251) calls “near” to another. For example, “doing (to)” or “acting” is a material process, but can be understood to be “near

behavioural” because it is also part mental and material. In my analysis I proceeded by making a new file that merged the verbs from all three provincial policies. I used the data to determine which processes were emphasized in the policies and which specific verbs were used most frequently. This analysis provided more detail about the ways of being that were expected of the young person in the policies. Such an approach allowed me to determine which processes were favoured and to comment about what ways of being would be important for young people during assessment events.

By conducting the sub-analysis on transitivity, I determined that 40% were mental processes, while 48% of the verbs (135 of 281) were material processes. The remaining thirty-three verbs were behavioural (eight verbs), relational (seventeen verbs), verbal (three verbs), and existential (five variations of students “are aware” and “are responsible”). “*Discuss* in small groups,” “*discuss* their ideas” and “*talking* about their own writing” [emphasis added] were used in the *ELA* to describe what students do and were the only verbal processes used in the three policies. From this, I suggest that students were envisaged as subjects who think and do (mental and material processes), and much less as subjects who engage in speaking (verbal processes). Many of the verbs imply talk (e.g., *demonstrate*). Talk, therefore, is embedded and not made explicit in authentic assessment practices. In such a way, authentic assessment is similar to traditional assessment in as much as it is biased towards print texts. While speaking and listening is involved in authentic assessment, this is not brought to the teacher’s attention. Table 6.2.2b summarizes the processes used to describe the activities of students in assessment practices in each of the three policy documents, sorted by

Figure 6.2.2
Types of processes
Adapted from Halliday (2004, p. 172)



material, mental, and other (behavioural, relational, verbal, and existential) processes. Of particular interest was the emphasis on mental and material processes. I discuss these processes separately.

Document	Mental Processes	Material Processes	Other Processes	Totals
<i>PSP</i>	13	13	9	35
<i>Foundations</i>	28	55	5	88
<i>ELA</i>	72	67	19	158
Totals	113	135	33	281

6.2.2.1 Mental Processes

Traditionally, schools have been concerned with mental processes, validating knowledge and thought, and so I was not surprised by the number of verbs that involved mental processes in the policy documents. In this way, authentic assessment is not so different from other forms of assessment: it also valorises traditional models of student work such as abstract thought. I sorted the verbs used to describe mental processes according to their frequency of use in the policies. Table 6.2.2.1 identifies the verbs that were used two or more times when the verbs from all three policy documents were combined into one list. Inspired by Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy, Fogarty and Bellanca (1989) created a “Three-Story Intellect” that has often been adapted to demonstrate a hierarchy of mental processes as defined in terms of verbs. I used a hybrid adaptation of this framework (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997; Burke, 1999) to identify three types of ways of working with knowledge: encountering knowledge, processing knowledge, and applying knowledge. I used this framework to consider the kinds of mental processes that were most commonly described in the policies:

Verb	Count
Reflect(ing)	10
Make(ing) (e.g., meaning)	6
Set goals	6
Develop(ing)	5
Understand	5
Assess(ing)	4
Consider(ing)	4
Explore	3
Identify(ing)	3
Learn(ed)(ing)	3
Perceive	3
Read(ing)	3
Change (in thinking)	2
Evaluate	2
Examine	2
Improve(ing)	2
Know	2
Recognize	2

- Encountering Knowledge: *understand, identify, learn, perceive, read, know, recognize*
- Processing Knowledge: *reflect, develop, assess, consider, evaluate, examine*
- Applying Knowledge: *make, set goals, explore, change, improve*

The most frequently used verbs in the policies (*reflect, make, set, and develop*) are those that involve the processing and applying of knowledge – “higher-order” ways of thinking (Bloom, 1956; Fogarty & Bellanca, 1989).

The policies openly encourage this higher-order thinking:

Some aspects of English language arts are easier to assess than others – the ability to *spell* and to apply the principles of punctuation, for example. Useful as these skills are, they are less significant than the ability to *create*, to *imagine*, to *relate* one idea to another, to *organize* information, to *discern* the subtleties of fine prose or poetry (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 161, emphasis added).

The importance of processing and applying knowledge is highlighted in the *Foundation* document. Regardless of the form of assessment, higher-order thinking is referenced in this document. For example, I offered a classification system of student assessment events in Chapter 2 that organizes classroom assessment into three families of practice: (1) paper and pencil assessment, (2) authentic, alternative, and performance assessment, and (3) personal communication.³⁵ In the *Foundation* document, there are examples of all three of these families of practices that involve higher-order thinking:

Paper and pencil assessment: “Tests should be designed to encourage thinking and problem solving rather than memorization and recall of factual information” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 53).

Authentic, alternative, and performance assessment: “Performance assessment gives information about a student’s ability to think flexibly and creatively, changing strategies when a particular approach does not work” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 50).

Personal communication: “Effective high-level, open-ended questions challenge students to use cognitively complex skills” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 50).

This classification system of families of practice is my own, and I impose it here on the *Foundations* document to illustrate that higher-order thinking skills are described in multiple forms of assessment events while mental skills such as memorization and recall are discouraged. Teachers are encouraged to use assessment practices that address students’ abilities to process and apply knowledge.

A common way of combining both the processing and the application of knowledge that is endorsed by the policies is through the use of student “self-assessment.” The mental processes involved in self-assessment suggest a cyclical pattern of reflection, goal setting, and further learning:

“Assessments help students to reflect on how well they have learned, to redirect their efforts, and to set goals for their future learning” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. 1).

According to policy, these higher-order thinking experiences benefit the learner and promote specific goals:

³⁵ Section 6.1 illustrated how the assessment practices found in the policies can be categorized into these “families of practice.” Here, I use this structure to emphasize the diversity of ways in which higher-order thinking skills are involved in policies.

Students learn best when they have frequent opportunities to assess their own learning and performance. Student self-assessment promotes the development of a) metacognitive ability (the ability to reflect critically on one's own reasoning), b) ownership of learning, and c) independence of thought (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 2001a, p. 51).

The policies claim that such assessment experiences develop “independence of thought” and feelings of control: “It can help students to become more self-reflective and feel in control of their own learning” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 161).³⁶ A paradox is evident in self-assessment. The student is considered to be capable and encouraged to think independently and simultaneously required to align his/her thinking with the teacher and peers. In such instances, students are asked to self-reflect (to think for themselves) while at the same time use externally provided assessment criteria to judge themselves (to think like the teacher or peers). The policies also suggest that students should collaborate and compare their judgements of successful classroom work:

Students benefit from the opportunity to participate in the creation of criteria for the evaluation of written work and to practice scoring pieces of writing, comparing the scores they assign for each criterion. Such experiences help students to find a commonality of language for talking about their own and others' writing (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 159).

The assessment criteria used in self-assessment are established externally (either collaboratively as a class, or imposed by the teacher) while the student has feelings of control over his (or her) learning as he aligns his thinking to these externally set criteria. Described in this way, self-assessment is perhaps better understood as “guided thinking” where the student is led to think in an agreed upon or imposed manner/structure. Thought of in this way, self-assessment is much less about “independence of thought,” and more about doing the thinking that is required, independently - all by one's self. In fact, policies explicitly state that teachers “can use self-assessment to determine whether the students and the teacher have similar views of expectations and criteria for assessment” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p.52). Here, the self-assessment is used as a technology that aligns students' mental processes with those that have been determined to be important according to the teacher and/or the class. Reviewing what the document reports to be involved in students' self-assessment, it can be seen that it is not, as is claimed, about independence of thought. Instead, it is about doing a particular kind of authorised thinking on one's own.

³⁶ Students' “self-assessments” were not the only assessment events that the policies suggested created feelings of “control”: “Portfolios engage students in the assessment process and allow them some control in the evaluation of their learning” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 159).

I also watched for the repetition and omission of particular verbs among the three policies. In general, the three policies used similar verbs to describe young people although the blend of processes was different in each policy (see Table 6.2.2b above). Of interest to me was how specific sentences were repeated or changed among policies. For example, the *PSP* states that:

When students are aware of the outcomes they are responsible for and the criteria by which their work will be assessed or evaluated, they can make informed decisions about the most effective way to demonstrate what they know, are able to do, and value (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. C5).

The *ELA* repeats this sentence on page 155, but changes the last phrase to “what they know and are able to do” omitting what students “value.” While the *PSP* is intended to guide all subjects taught in Nova Scotia schools, the *ELA* is specific to English classes and therefore this adaptation could be understood as a move away from being attentive to students’ values in English classes. This is consistent with the analysis of other mental verbs that do not stress students thinking about values or ethics but rather their capacity to reflect in order to conduct an authorized thinking on one’s own. This removal of an interest in students’ values in the *ELA* concerned me because my educational aims invested in ethical considerations, as I will show in Chapter 7.

In retrospect, the analysis of the mental processes helped me to understand how the policies depicted a young person who was encouraged to think pragmatically to achieve the outcomes and that this emphasis on rational thinking avoided students’ values and their emotions. Halliday (2004) explains that mental processes are about sensing and Janks (1996b) explains that sensing has three forms: thinking, feeling, and perceiving. Of the 113 mental processes in the policies, 108 were related to thinking, five were associated with perceiving, and none with feeling. The young person in the policies thinks without feeling. Describing students as being strictly rational beings did not match my practitioner understanding of young people or, as I will show in the next chapter, my ideal versions of young people in my classroom. Because of this emphasis towards a thinking subject, it could be said that the policies depict young people to be determinable and in a course of schooling that can be navigated by rational thought. Conversely, emotion, as an absence in the policies, may not have a place in the classroom and in fact, may even distract from the purpose of assessment events – to demonstrate rational thinking. This way of describing young people is consistent with traditional assessment where the student is silent, impassionate, and rational. My analysis of the mental processes in the policies suggested to me that authentic assessment may not be all that different from other forms of assessment, especially in the ways in which students are expected to be rational thinkers who avoid emotion.

6.2.2.2 Material Processes

Forty-eight percent of the policies' verbs emphasized material processes. This emphasis suggests that the provincial policies were strongly endorsing that students should be seen in classrooms doing something during assessment events. In assessment terms, this signals to teachers that they should be using assessment activities where students *demonstrate, use, participate, apply, develop, or produce* something that can be assessed. I sorted the verbs representing material processes by their frequency to examine the more common ways in which student activities were depicted in assessment events. Combining the three policies, Table 6.2.2.2a summarizes the verbs that were repeated two or more times. At the top of this list are the “catch-all” verbs *demonstrate* and *use*.

While *demonstrate* is a material process, it also may signal the involvement of mental processes. For example, in order for students to *demonstrate* something, they must first *know* something. By examining the context of the verb *demonstrate*, I was surprised how often this material process connected with more traditional mental processes of “knowing.” Most frequently, students were asked to *demonstrate* their knowledge or understanding. Table 6.2.2.2b lists the seventeen uses of the verb *demonstrate* in the policies. Eleven of the seventeen uses of *demonstrate* relate to knowledge. The verb *demonstrate* could be understood as a material process that was near to behavioural processes. Demonstrating something involves “doing (to)” or “acting” and this is consistent with Halliday’s (2004, p. 172) classification of these verbs – as material verbs near behavioural. However, other processes - such as verbal processes when a student answers a teacher’s question - could also be involved in *demonstrating* knowledge. The verbs *use* and *apply* are also examples of material processes that are near behavioural. For example, Table 6.2.2.2b lists the sixteen occurrences of the verb *use* in the policies and the five occurrences of the verb *apply*. While these verbs reflect an outward rather than inner activity, they are also related with mental processes making the classification of the verbs near behavioural – or what Janks (2001) calls “part mental and part material.” These three verbs – *demonstrate, use, and apply* – are material processes close to behavioural but the statements in the policies do not provide sufficient direction as to *how* students are expected to *demonstrate, use or apply* knowledge. Because these verbs, as used in the policies, are

Verb	Count
Demonstrate	17
Use (e.g., knowledge)	16
Participate	7
Work(ing)	6
Apply(ing)	5
Develop(ing)	5
Produce(d)	4
Engage(d)	3
Read(ing)	3
Select	3
Build	2
Collaborate	2
Contribute(d)	2
Express(ing)	2
Find	2
Rehearse	2
Seek	2
Take responsibility	2

words that could involve indeterminable processes, I focused my attention on the other material processes.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) 2. Demonstrate (knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours) 3. Demonstrate (the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours) 4. Demonstrate (their knowledge, skills and attitudes) 5. Demonstrate (what they know, are able to do, and value) 6. Demonstrate (what they know and are able to do) 7. Demonstrate (what they are capable of) 8. Demonstrate (what he/she knows and can do) 9. Demonstrate (what he/she knows and can do) 10. Demonstrate (their learning) 11. Demonstrate (their learning) 12. Demonstrate (their level of performance) 13. Demonstrate (their personal best) 14. Demonstrate (originality) 15. Demonstrate (respect) 16. Demonstrate (success) 17. Demonstrated (progress) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use (cognitively complex skills) 2. Use (checklists) 3. Use (in scoring) 4. Use (notes) 5. Use (the class time) 6. Use (these goals) 7. Use (these goals) 8. Using (the texts) 9. Use (concepts) 10. Use (knowledge) 11. Use (appropriate form and style) 12. Use (language structures) 13. Use (pragmatic cues) 14. Use (prior knowledge) 15. Use (reason) 16. Use (strategies) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply (a range of skills) 2. Apply (the principles) 3. Apply (their learning) 4. Apply (their skill and knowledge) 5. Applying (criteria)
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Looking back at Table 6.2.2.2a, these verbs (notwithstanding the exclusion of *demonstrate*, *use*, and *apply*) most often emphasized that students should be “interactive” in the classroom assessment experiences. By interaction, I mean that students are depicted in the policy in terms of their actions with other people in the classroom. This student interaction is characterized in the policies as “student involvement” or “participation” in the assessment practices. The following three examples illustrate such characterizations of student interaction:

1. Many of the more frequently used verbs suggest that students should be interactively involved in the assessment experience: *participate*, *collaborate*, *rehearse*, *contribute*, and *express*.
2. Students are called into participation in the assessment experience: “It is important that students participate actively in the assessment of their own learning” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 155).

3. The provincial policies state that teachers should consider to what extent their assessment practices “involve students in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 162).

This interpretation of the material processes reveals a student quite different from a more traditional view of an assessment event: seated alone, working independently on a paper and pencil form of assessment that requires silence.

This image of the interactive student is particularly endorsed by the *ELA*. This document suggests ways of making traditional assessment experiences into those that are more interactive and participatory. For example, instead of students writing individual tests or exams, the policy suggests: “Creating opportunities for students to collaborate on a test or an examination can be a legitimate practice and useful strategy in an interactive classroom” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 160). Further suggestions include that students might “*work* in pairs or small groups,” “*negotiate* meanings,” and “*rehearse* possible responses.” These verbs depict a student who is socially capable of verbally expressing his/her ideas and interested in discussing them with other students. Opposing this understanding is the fact that only three verbs in the policies were identified as verbal processes. As a practitioner, I was interested in the fact that the policies did not address the difficulties that arise when students are not, for a variety of reasons, interested in participating in activities within the classroom. While the *ELA* does recommend a variety of assessment practices to “accept and appreciate learner’s linguistic abilities” (p. 155), the learner is assumed to be willing to be interactive in the classroom by participating and being involved in the assessment experiences.

6.2.3 Conceptions of young people

The assessment policies conceptualize young people in authentic assessment differently in some ways (and the same in other ways) than traditional ways of working with young people; a different kind of student is being invented through authentic assessment practices. The policies emphasize students’ interactivity in the classroom, although verbal processes are embedded in the authentic assessment practices and not made explicit for the teacher using the policies. The young person is expected to be interactive during the assessment events, rather than keeping to themselves, as typically imagined in traditional assessment events such as a paper and pencil test. Furthermore, there is a sense here that while traditional mental processes of assessment are not abandoned in authentic assessment (e.g., the mental processes emphasize thinking more than feeling or perceiving), young people are also expected to be involved in the processes of change and production. What I am arguing is that

authentic assessment creates an amalgam of an old and a new type of subject – one who can “think” in approved ways (a traditional subject of assessment) and as one who changes and develops and is, above all, active and collaborative (a new subject).

In my preliminary analysis, the young person is understood to be both dependent on, and independent of, the teacher; to “think on one’s own” (an introverted activity) and interact in the classroom (an extroverted activity), although a bias for the latter was noted in the policies. Furthermore, the young person is understood to be currently a student and also a “lifelong learner” and although being encouraged to have “independence of thought,” the young person is expected to derive ideas that will be rewarded by the teacher and peers. These diverse ways of being provided me with an approach to thinking about young people as positioned among competing ways in which to become successful in Nova Scotia schools. If assessment is understood to be the method in which we measure the success of young people, then students are expected to find means in which to work within these competing ways of being and constitute a temporary self that can step forward and be marked. Policies, however, do not directly constitute the young people in my classroom. Instead, they inform my classroom program and therefore *indirectly* contribute to the constitution of a student self to be marked. What ideal subject positions are on offer, according to the policies, will be shaped not only by my classroom program, but also by the ways in which the policies suggest *how* this should occur.

6.3 Ideal subject positions in the policies

The ideal subject positions are those that capture what students must be like to be successful in the assessment practices described in the policies. Asking the fourth analysis question, “What were the ideal subject positions for young people?” allowed me to think about how the policies contribute to changing the Nova Scotia educational system, specifically in the ways in which educators think about and work with young people. I was interested in what type of young person my employer might be interested in constituting, as I wanted to know if these notions about young people would be similar to mine as a practitioner. I wondered if these ideals would use dominant discourses of adolescence to constitute young people and if there were other social and political influences that shaped these ideals. For example, no longer considered as worthy or productive, paper and pencil assessment practices are actively discouraged in the policies and other ways of assessing students such as authentic, alternative, and performance assessment practices are encouraged. As noted in Chapter 2,

Lesko (2001) explains that discarding practices is part of a larger social process of redefining young people. On the evidence of the policies I reviewed, traditional assessment practices are one such process that is to be discarded, or at least diminished in students' English classroom experiences. If, as the policies stress, authentic, alternative, and performance assessment are to be emphasized in classrooms, what sorts of ideal students will these practices constitute?

I name two ideal subject positions in the policies and I recognize that other interpretations are possible. These subject positions are constructs used to illustrate how the policies are not neutral – they seek to shape young people in particular ways. My objective here is to illustrate how these ideals were apparent across the policies. I refer back to the assessment practices as well as the labels and transitivity analysis that were previously described in this chapter, and use examples from the policies when these occasions provide further insight into my arguments. I suggest that the policies offer two ideal subject positions that I have labelled “the self-developer” and “the new worker.” I present them separately and discuss their effects on thinking about young people.

6.3.1 The self-developer

By “the self-developer,” I refer to an ideal young person who does work on their development or “growth” and therefore can be understood in psychological terms of developmentalism as introduced in Chapter 2. The self-developer is noticeable in the labels and processes that the policies use to describe young people as well as the assessment practices that the policies endorse. The self-developer, as an ideal young person, is one who plays an active role in his or her own development as a “learner.” “Learner,” one of the labels used by the policies (see 6.2.1 above), suggests that the young person is understood to be a participant in their education, not a recipient. This notion is also noted in the processes that the policies use to describe young people. For example, young people engage in *reflection*, *making meaning*, and *apply* this knowledge to *set learning goals* [emphasis added to highlight the processes discussed in 6.2.2 above]. These processes depict a young person who is active in the assessment activities rather than passive. The young person takes on the ideal of the self-developer through a variety of assessment practices that support student reflection for the purpose of guiding his or her further learning: *conferences*, *interviews*, *inventories*, *learning journals*, *learning logs*, *log books*, *self-assessment*, *reviews of performance*, *peer assessment* [emphasis added to highlight the assessment practices identified in 6.1 above]. The successful self-developer will internalize these reflective technologies and become, as the policies label, a “lifelong learner.” To recap, the self-developer plays an active role in his or her learning and is reflective about this learning.

The self-developer is positioned in one of the contradictions that were noted above about the conceptualization of the young person in the policies: the self-developer is in-between states of dependency (dependent on the teacher) and independence, working towards becoming a “lifelong learner” who is independent of the teacher. (After all, the collocation is not “lifelong student”). To achieve this, the self-developer processes and applies knowledge through the assessment events so that he/she can direct his/her learning and “growth.” This is achieved by using the teacher’s supervision of the young person’s reflections:

Teachers can use student self-assessment *to determine whether the students and the teacher have similar views* of expectations and criteria for assessment (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 52).

Assessment strategies should also provide the feedback *teachers need to determine areas requiring intervention and support* and to tailor instruction to the individual learning needs and styles of their students (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. C5).

This exchange between the self-developer and the teacher characterizes young people in two ways: firstly, young people are understood to be in need of change, and secondly, they are expected to learn how to be calculating as they manage risks, look to the future, and determine the best option for themselves during the assessment events. I discuss these two characteristics of the self-developer below in separate sections.

6.3.1.1 Seeing your self as in need of improvement

The self-developer is understood to be engaged in processes of change and what can be characterized as “self-improvement” because the *act* of becoming a “lifelong learner” is the focus of the assessment practices for the self-developer. This ideal student uses the assessment practices to understand how he or she can improve. As the *ELA* document explains:

...students should be asking themselves questions such as, What have I learned? What can I do now that I couldn’t do before? What do I need to learn next? Assessment must provide opportunities for students to reflect on their progress, evaluate their learning, and set goals for future learning (p. 155).

The young person, by engaging in assessment practices that require reflection and further goal setting about their learning, is understood to be “in need” of change; the young person is in the process of “becoming.” The self-developer is one who understands the self to be incomplete and in progress. The successful developer is concerned with documenting growth of the skills that are demanded in the classroom program. The assessment practices used in the classroom are used to assist this documentation process of what the student can do before, during, and at the end of the

classroom program. In the following selections from the policies (*Foundation* and *ELA*), I emphasize the words that illustrate that the purpose of assessment, according to the policies, is to document young person's "change" and "development":

Foundation

Teachers can use student self-assessment to determine whether there is *change and growth in the students' attitudes, understanding and achievement* (p. 52).

Observation ...can *assess developmental characteristics* (p. 49).

ELA

[Effective assessment practices]... allow [teachers] to provide relevant, supportive feedback that *helps students move ahead* (p. 161).

[Effective assessment practices should] reflect where the students are in terms of learning a process or strategy and help to *determine what kind of support or instruction will follow* (p. 161).

One thing to note about this ideal way of being is that it positions young people as deficient. The self-developer is constituted as one who is in need of change and placed in environments where if change is not documented through the assessment events, the student is punished (e.g., with poor grades, remedial assistance at lunch, conversations between the teacher and the parent(s) to discuss how disappointing it is that the young person has not "grown"). To understand young people as deficient is to uphold psychologized versions of adolescence where the student is understood to be in a developmental phase characterized by problems and rapid change (Arnett, 2002; Dorman & Lipsitz, 1984; Gleitman, 1986; Head, 1997; Manning & Bucher, 2005; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997).

Another reading of these policies is that they position young people as in the process of "becoming someone" (e.g., an adult) and it can be assumed that such a student does not already "know" who they "are." This process can be likened to the concept of "becoming somebody," where young people "...want to be somebody, a real and presentable self...and this is what life in...school is all about" (Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996, p. 155). Such a student is understood to be in process and their current self-understanding is implicitly understood to be incomplete or unfinished.

As an ideal, the self-developer is understood to be deficient – struggling and in need of change – and therefore in need of help but also helping themselves. Approaching the middle school environment with such a belief about the adolescent learner effects the ways in which teachers and students

conduct classroom assessment. Young people are understood to be deficient as they “are” and in consequence, are in “need” of the teacher’s help.

6.3.1.2 Learning to be calculating

Authentic assessment events frequently require young people to participate in the self-management of their learning. The self-developer can be understood as a calculating subject (du Gay, 1995; Giddens, 1991) – one who manages risks, looks to the future, and determines his/her best option in the assessment event. Giddens (1991), discussing the kind of person being constituted by “late modernity” calls such a self “the capable individual” and suggests that in modern times, the individual must make complex choices with limited help as to which options should be selected (Giddens, 1991, p. 80). The self-developer is provided with a variety of assessment options and must calculate which assessment choice might produce what results and postulate their possible effects.

Developmentalism implies that young people are on a trajectory that is unilateral and inevitable. The ideals in these policies, while being shaped by the discourse of adolescence and its presupposition of developmentalism, also trouble these same premises. Instead of describing a student going along a fairly set pathway (as implied by developmentalism) during assessment events, the policies depict a young person who is engaged in the classroom and visible in the ways in which he or she acts. Key verbs such as *use*, *reflect*, *make*, *set*, *apply*, and *develop* suggest that the young person is involved in making decisions about his or her learning experiences. In the following sections from policies I emphasize words that illustrate that the purpose of assessment, according to the policies, is to help students look to the future, manage risks, and determine his/her best options in the assessment experiences by setting goals:

PSP

Assessments help students to reflect on how well they have learned, to *redirect their efforts*, and to *set goals for future learning* (p. C4).

Foundation

Students need frequent opportunities to reflect on what they know and can do and *what they need to learn next* (p. 51).

Assessment strategies should: *enable students* to discover their own interests, strengths and weaknesses; *engage students* in assessing, reflecting upon and improving their learning; encourage students to *take responsibility for their own growth* (p. 48).

Teacher-developed assessments... have a variety of uses, such as: providing feedback to improve student learning; certify that students have achieved certain levels of performance; *setting goals for future student learning* (p. 46).

ELA

The emphasis should be on helping the student to recognize and build on writing strengths and to *set goals for improvement* (p. 159).

The student should *update goals* on an *ongoing basis* (p. 159).

I suggest, therefore, that the policies encourage teachers to understand young people as “planful”; students are not passive, they are active in imagining and shaping a future. If young people are to be planful - indeed calculating subjects - then the ways in which teachers work with young people is paramount in re-conceptualizing students in Nova Scotia. Put another way, the policies envisage teachers working with young people to help them become mindful of their future – to become “planful” about their lives.

As an ideal subject position, the self-developer focuses teachers’ attention on helping students understand themselves as a “work in progress” and on creating assessment experiences that allow students to demonstrate that they are capable of reflecting, changing, setting goals, and being planful. This is a different emphasis for the teacher than is commonly associated with traditional assessment practices where teachers are expected to pay attention to the possibility of students cheating on a test or plagiarizing in an essay. The policies, by describing the self-developer and openly advocating for authentic assessment practices, imply that a new kind of teacher is also required – one who will change his or her assessment practices to emphasize reflection, learning goals, and change. The self-developer demands that teachers value (and reward) the processes involved in learning and not only students’ final products.

6.3.2 The new worker

As described in Chapter 1, employment in Nova Scotia, as it is elsewhere, is influenced by the effects of economic globalization (Yon, 2000). Traditional livelihoods in rural Nova Scotia such as fishing and farming may not be reliable sources of income for young people in their futures, nor can their education be limited to learning these trade skills and expertise from their families and neighbours. Instead, the young people in my classroom will need diverse skills to be productive in a changing and increasingly global economy (Nixon, 1998b; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996). This changing focus of educational policies to create citizens with diverse literacies has been observed in

Canada (Yon, 2000) and elsewhere such as in the United States (Harste, 2003; Lesko, 2001; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996), England (D. Johnson & Kress, 2003), and Australia (Nixon, 1999). While the policies describe an aspiration to create “lifelong learners,” I suggest that this involves creating “lifelong workers” who can adapt to changing employment opportunities within Nova Scotia and beyond. Employment opportunities are rapidly changing in Nova Scotia and jobs are being created that were previously not conceivable.³⁷ To compete in a global economy, young people in Nova Scotia will need to be prepared to be flexible in their employment skills as well as the geographical location of this employment. Furthermore, young people will need diverse and flexible skills to live in times of economic and social globalization. The policies advocate for young people to take up the ideals of a “new worker” as a means of working towards these identified needs.

I label this ideal way of being “the new worker” (Lankshear, Gee, Knobel, & Searle, 1997); a new kind of learner who will be seeking employment in a changing social and political world with multiple literacies and new social and personal skills for the work place. For example, the new worker in Nova Scotia with economies shifting away from traditional fishing and farming could be understood to need “people skills” more than fishing skills, to communicate with a wide range of people in multiple locations rather than few people locally, and to represent ideas in multiple ways (print, media, electronic, etc.) rather than relying solely on oral traditions. In the policies, the ideal identity of the new worker describes young people in two particular ways: first, the new worker uses “new literacies,” (Castleton, Ovens, & Ralston, 1999; Galbreath, 1999; Gee, 2000; Lankshear, 1997; McLaren & Lankshear, 1993) and secondly, this ideal identity learns how to be a partner in assessment who participates in the development of the assessment events. I discuss these characteristics of the new worker in separate sections below.

6.3.2.1 Using new literacies

The new worker responds to the significant educational changes that were canvassed in these policies. Of particular note were the “new” literacies signalled in the policies: media literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy. These literacies are often considered essential skills of the future workforce: “...computer literacy is constructed as a newly established ‘skill’ essential for future job and life chances of the young generation....the argument is made that new forms of literacy

³⁷ For example, Headz Gamez International announced that they would be relocating their production facilities from China to Parrsboro (a used-to-be fishing village of 1500 people in rural Nova Scotia) and will be employing 1800 people by 2008 (Burman, 2006). The cost of land and labour are sourced as the economic reasons for locating this company in the province.

and pedagogy are required in the world of today and tomorrow and that they will be superior, stimulating and enjoyable” (Nixon, 1998b, p. 36). The *ELA* document contains separate sections to describe the importance of each type of literacy in the overall program design of the curriculum. A further section called “Integrating Technology with English Language Arts” further emphasizes the importance and possibilities of these new literacies. The *Foundation* document reports that

...the curriculum at all levels extends beyond the traditional concept of literacy to encompass media and information literacies, offering students multiple pathways to learning through engagement with a wide range of verbal, visual, and technological media (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 1).

While these sections were not part of the textual analysis conducted in this research, they signal a shifting emphasis in what is expected of teachers and students, and consequently support a rationale for changing teaching and assessing methods.³⁸

The introduction of these new literacies suggests that the policies envision a student who will need skills beyond reading and writing printed texts to be successful in the world. The policies seek to constitute young people as a new kind of adult worker in the making through new forms of literacy. In terms of the documents analysed in this research, the concerns of media, information, and technology informed the ways in which students should be educated and assessed as evidenced by their emphasis in the policies. While curriculum outcomes concerning reading and writing may be considered traditional aspects of English classroom programs, these policies introduce four additional curricular strands that support the new literacies – speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing. While traditional assessment practices such as tests and essays may be useful for assessing students’ abilities to read and write, new assessment practices would be required to assess students’ speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing in the classroom. Alongside the increased scope of the curriculum outcomes, the policies supported a wider range of assessment practices. What this means is that the wide range of assessment experiences in the policies reflects the array of student skills required in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use a variety of assessment practices in their classroom program to demonstrate that students have achieved the outcomes [emphasis added]:

³⁸ The Atlantic Canada Education Foundation subsequently published another policy document, “Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Technology Education Curriculum” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 2001b) which describes additional learning outcomes that address students’ technological literacy. Instead of rewriting all of the curriculum documents, this additional policy document concerning technology was intended to supplement all curricula in the province.

[These assessment principles] highlight the need for an assessment process that provides *a variety of means* for students to demonstrate their learning (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. C4).

The teacher's use of *a broad range of assessment strategies* and tasks affords students multiple opportunities and *a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge*, skills, and attitudes. Teachers may rely on *a variety of sources for their assessment* including [nineteen assessment suggestions] (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999, p. C4).

The assessment program should reflect *the full range of student learning* in English language arts (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 47).

This preoccupation to use a “variety” of assessment events in the classroom, as noted above in section 6.1, reflects the addition of curriculum outcomes that support the new literacies valorised elsewhere in the policy documents in specific sections about media literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy. For example, in the section about media literacy, the following practices are suggested: producing a radio ad or creating a video, a school radio show, or announcements for the school PA (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 104). However, in the sections describing assessment that were used in this analysis, the policies do not reference specific technological tools (e.g., specific software for assessing students or specific hardware such as a digital camera for recording students' performances), but they are described in broad terms that allow these new literacies to be assessed. For example, The *ELA* suggests that, “Teachers might also consider the inclusion of audiotapes and videotapes in students' portfolios to document their growth and achievements” (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 156). Consequently, the new worker is one who is able to embrace these new literacies and their subsequent assessment practices.

6.3.2.2 Learning to be a partner in assessment

Assessment practices in the policies support the new worker by providing technologies that work to position the young person as one who is involved via social processes in the construction and implementation of the assessment. Instead of a student coming to class to write a teacher-designed test, the new worker becomes an important part in the construction of the assessment event. One section of the *ELA* is entitled “Involving Students in the Assessment Process,” enforcing the students' partnership in creating assessment events. In fact, all three policies reinforce students' involvement in the development of the assessment events [emphasis added]:

PSP

Students also benefit from opportunities to *negotiate assessment and evaluation procedures* (p. C5).

Foundation

Self-assessment strategies include the use of *collaborative planning and goal-setting involving students* in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, forming options for future learning experiences and making decisions about what they will do to meet their learning goals (pp. 51-52).

ELA

Students should participate in decision making regarding the contents of their portfolios and *in developing the criteria* by which their portfolios will be evaluated (p. 155).

In this way, the new worker is a willing contributor to the very technologies by which their classroom activities will be measured.

The ideal of the new worker creates a version of young people who are seen and heard in the classroom more emphatically than traditional assessment practices. Instead of imagining a student seated at an individual desk, silently writing a test, the policies work to have teachers imagine their classrooms differently: young people are visibly and collaboratively active during many of the assessment events as they *participate, engage, collaborate, contribute, and discuss* in the classroom.

Foundation

...students are *engaged* in authentic learning experiences, for example: as students work with a group on a task that requires *collaboration*; when they *participate* in an oral reading activity such as readers' theatre (p. 48, emphasis added).

ELA

Students may be given opportunities to *discuss their ideas with classmates* and to *seek response* to their first draft (p. 160, emphasis added).

Self-assessment strategies include the use of questionnaires... to determine how well the *group functioned* as a team and how well the individual student *participated* and *contributed* to the effectiveness of the process/product (p. 51, emphasis added).

Do the students *participate in discussion*, listening to others, considering their ideas, and presenting their own thoughts? (p. 157, emphasis added)

This visibility of the new worker in the classroom suggests to me that the young person is asked to be active in determining their levels of participation in an assessment event. Instead of the teacher determining what young people do in a paper and pencil assessment event (e.g., all student must complete a test), the new workers must determine their levels of involvement in the authentic assessment events and produce a self in the classroom that can be seen and heard by the teacher and

their peers. This ideal version of young people is consistent with the demands for employment in Nova Scotia in *New Times* where employees are expected not to work in relative isolation (e.g., ploughing a field or mending a lobster trap), but in social contexts such as tourism, cultural industries, or entrepreneurship. The policies describe the new worker as skilled in being able to collaborate with others in their work including other students/“co-workers” and authority figures such as the teacher/“employer.” This is not to suggest that the policies describe the classroom as a place of employment for young people. Instead, I am suggesting that the ideal of the new worker in the policies describes the kind of activities that are anticipated to be necessary in a future work force. Particularly emphasized in these “employable” classroom activities is the use new literacies and being able to work with other people.

As an ideal subject position, the new worker focuses teachers’ attention on creating assessment experiences that allow students to demonstrate that they are capable of using new literacies and working with other people. This is a different emphasis for the teacher than is commonly associated with traditional assessment practices where teachers are expected to use paper and pencil assessments and students are expected to work independently. The policies, by describing the new worker, imply that a new kind of teacher is also required – one who will change his or her assessment practices to emphasize authentic assessment practices and student activity and collaboration in the classroom. The new worker demands that the teacher will value (and reward) the collaborative processes involved in learning and the use of multiple literacies to display what students know and are able to do.

The two ideals – the self-developer and the new worker – share linked characteristics. While these characteristics are shared between the ideal subject positions, these characteristics are also used differently by the two ideals. First, both ideals depict young people as flexible. Young people are understood to be adaptive in the classroom and capable of using a wide range of new literacies and practices. The self-developer uses this flexibility to make improvements to the self while the new worker uses flexibility to use a wide range of literacies and to work with multiple people in the classroom. Secondly, both ideals suggest that the young person is able to self-monitor and be calculative. As noted above, the self-developer uses this self-monitoring to calculate further goals. The new worker also uses self-monitoring to calculate how to best produce work (through new literacies and partnerships) that will be rewarded in the classroom. The teacher, therefore, is provided with the task of creating assessment experiences that allow students to practice being

flexible, self-monitoring, and calculative. This is a new kind of teacher – one who helps young people become aware of and articulate their own thinking processes and skills. Traditionally, in assessment, the teacher has been expected to judge students’ final products such as a test or an essay. The self-developer and the new worker both encourage teachers to be mindful of the students’ processes – both their inner learning processes and their social processes. The teacher who is interested in the ideal subject positions of the policies is expected to value students’ processes as well as students’ products. For those in the profession who have relied heavily on traditional assessment practices, this will be a new way of thinking about students and teaching.

It is important to note that the ideal subject positions of the self-developer and the new worker do not work directly on the identities of the young people in my classroom. As ideals, they influence how I construct my classroom program and therefore indirectly inform the constitution of students’ identities. The ideal subject positions of the policies discussed in this chapter therefore need to be put up against the ideal subject positions of my classroom program and because the policies informed my classroom program, it could be expected that certain continuities and discontinuities might exist between the ideal subject positions of the policies and those of my classroom program. This comparison of these ideal subject positions is described in next chapter.

6.4 Policy gaps and globalization

The analysis in this chapter helped me to think about how the policies are distinctive “texturing” of social processes (Fairclough, 2003). That is, the selected policies are a production that is intended to inform specific readers about how to work with young people in particular ways; the policies seek to persuade educators of ideal ways of assessing students. Teachers (directly or indirectly) use policies to construct classroom programs that shape what is made possible for students through assessment experiences. The three provincial policies discussed in this chapter legitimate authentic, alternative, and performance assessment and discourage teachers from using traditional paper and pencil assessment practices. It should be noted however, that the process analysis signalled that authentic assessment may not be that different from traditional forms of assessment as first appears, as both emphasize students’ mental skills, and especially their thinking skills. The policies support a wide variety of assessment practices other than traditional assessment practices, and in many ways, the flexibility offered to the teacher by the authentic assessment approaches matches the kind of flexibility that is idealised in the student subject. Thus, the teacher required to work with these

policies is newly flexible and calculating. In other words, these policies are asking teachers to be different kinds of people who, as Giddens (1991) puts it, are responsible for what we make of ourselves. What is absent in the policies is a recognition of the political contexts surrounding the implementation of the policies that teachers encounter, and critical and social aspects of working with young people in New Times. I discuss these gaps in turn below.

The policies were inattentive to political aspects of teaching; the policies do not address many of the issues that I know arise for practitioners when they implement policies. For example, parents frequently made comments to me about their children's assessment experiences in my classroom and told me that this was not what they experienced when they were in school. Informing the parental community about this change in classroom assessment practices is not discussed in the assessment policies, but is a task that falls to practitioners when using the policies (see Van Zoost, 2007). A second example of the policies' lack of consideration about the local politics surrounding their implementation is the absence of a discussion about students' marks. Young people are encouraged to bring their interests from beyond the school into the classroom through authentic assessment practices and at the same time are expected to receive a mark on these same practices. This places young people in a difficult position of determining how their interest beyond the school might contribute to their success in school. Furthermore, while the policies endorse a variety of assessment practices, they do not suggest how a student's final mark is to be determined or how it should be used to make decisions about the student's progress in school (see O'Connor, 2000, 2002, 2007). Instead, this work is left to local policies at the school board level and unofficial guidelines created at the school level.

There is much taken for granted about how schools work, and it can be said that the policies are (perhaps deliberately) naïve about the everyday responsibilities of practitioners in regard to the significance of students' final marks that determine their academic standing between grade levels. "Getting a mark" can be considered an ever-present concern of students yet the assigning of marks is so familiar and taken for granted that it is not written in the provincial policies. Instead, practitioners work out how to assign marks for student achievement. My school board developed additional assessment policies that explained how students would receive one of the following three

indicators at the bottom of their year-end report card and in the students' individual cumulative file³⁹ based on the teachers' marks:

1. promotion (the student has “passed” all required courses with a final mark of 50% or higher),
2. placement (the student has not “passed” all required courses, but teachers have decided that the student should continue to the next grade level), or
3. retention (the student has not passed the required courses and teachers have decided that repeating the current grade would benefit the student).

These decisions were made at the end of the year through a “Promotion Board” that consisted of all of the students' teachers and discussion would lead to a decision about each student who had not passed the required courses. Determining students' academic standing within a grade level, such as “Honours” or “Honours with Distinction” was also negotiated by staff.⁴⁰ The assessment policies (the *PSP*, *Foundation*, and *ELA*) do not address the traditional “gate-keeping” nature of assessment and instead, practitioners are left to create their own ways – individually and collectively – to address practical issues not addressed in the policies. In these ways, government policies and local realities create tensions for the practitioner. This places me in a contradictory position as someone who is introducing authentic assessment and believes in working with students in these ways and yet I am aware that I am still involved in doing the traditional gate-keeping job of assessment; authentic assessment is played out within the discourses of schooling that involves, supposedly, merit selection, while my experience as a practitioner has led me to understand that this turns out to be more about social selection.

A second gap in the policies concerns the vision of young people for today's world. Before pointing out this gap, I first review how the policies envision young people as future citizens. That is, the ideal subject positions discussed in this chapter can be understood as evidence of social practice to shape young people into working citizens with (hoped for) employable skills, such as technological and media competencies. The policies explicitly refer to changes in society that demand such skills:

Pervasive, ongoing changes in society – for example, rapidly expanding use of technologies – require a corresponding shift in learning opportunities in order for students to develop

³⁹ “Cumulative files” retained information of the student's schooling experiences from previous years and included report cards, diagnostic test results, medical information, and parent/guardian contact information.

⁴⁰ I can trace the changing regulations for determining what staff considered student “Honours” and “Honours with Distinction” on their final report cards by reviewing my teaching journals. These regulations changed from year to year until in 1995 I wrote them on chart-paper and posted them in the staff room where they remained for an entire school year. At the end of that school year, it was decided to publish these regulations as *guidelines* in the student handbook. This publication was discussed by school board staff, and subsequently these guidelines became *policy* for the school board (with minor adaptations) and were distributed to all schools first as a letter from the Coordinator of Programs with notification of this amendment in 1999, followed by the complete policy with editorial changes.

relevant knowledge, skills, strategies, processes, and attitudes that will enable them to function well as individuals, citizens, workers, and learners. To function productively and participate fully in our increasingly sophisticated, technological, information-based society, citizens will need broad literacy abilities, and they will need to use these abilities flexibly (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 4).

Using policies to initiate education reform that seeks to prepare people for today's world of increased economic globalization is not unique to Nova Scotia. Nixon (1998b, p. 21) reports similar initiatives in an Australian context:

As future citizens, young people are also central to government economic, education and cultural policy which attempts to position Australia competitively within the global economy. Young people, and adults charged with their education and care, are thus at the intersection of technology-related socio-political developments.

The ideal subject positions in the policies used in this research represent a vision of the future that involves multiple literacies and technological skills. This vision of young people needing to learn multiple literacies is consistent with a range of educational research and policy pronouncements in New Times (Gee, 2000; Lankshear, 1997; Lankshear, Gee, Knobel, & Searle, 1997; A. Luke, 2002b). As well as promoting new kinds of literacy competencies, assessment practices supported in the policies suggest a wider range of skills will need to be assessed than those in the past:

How do teachers assess students' progress?

Just as students learn in different ways, so too do they have different ways of demonstrating what they understand and can do. For this reason, teachers use a wide variety of methods to gather information about student learning, and to develop valid and reliable snapshots of what students know and are able to do (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 2001a, original emphasis).

Because the policies support a wide variety of assessment practices such as authentic, alternative, and performance assessment, these classroom events can be understood as part of a broader social practice of preparing young people for a range of experiences that are anticipated to be in their adulthood and employment. Interpreting the policies in this way suggests that Nova Scotia teachers need to offer students opportunities to take up these new ways of being so that they can engage in a global economy. In fact, teachers would be remiss *not* to offer students assessment opportunities that support their future ways of constructing meaning so that they can produce knowledges that are productive for their lives. For this reason, teachers have responsibilities to examine their classroom assessment practices to ensure that they support the future employment of Nova Scotia's young people.

On the other hand, there are ideological problems associated with the new worker that place me, as a practitioner, in an ambiguous position. The ideological problem is that the new worker is motivated by the economy but that their ethics are not something of concern. What the policies leave out is the notion of a moral citizen. The policies evacuate critical issues of preparing young people for New Times. For example, the policies do not describe a citizen who can care for others or act morally and this, according to Belsey (2005, p. 76), is typical in policies: “Care of the self and even moral education remain largely unwritten in school policies and seldom form explicit goals of education.” For example, the suggestions for working with students in the policies do not ask young people to engage in concerns about the environment, aging populations in our communities, or poverty. Instead, the suggestions describe young people to be engaged in self-reflection, constant development, and productivity by using new literacies. Speaking broadly, the kind of ethical subject envisioned in the policies is defined in scientific and economic ways: the self-developer is understood to be articulated through psychology and the new worker is invested in constituting a self that is linked with the economy. While religion and laws may have been linked to ethical subjects in the past (Foucault, 1997), the policies suggest that scientific and economic knowledges are appropriate means for taking up positions in today’s world and that somehow these preclude the need for ethical considerations. Foucault’s work helped me to realize that ethics need not be connected to science and economy and that other possibilities exist. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 3, such a connection between science and ethics may be untimely, as we are currently in a “scientific crisis” where science produces massive risks. As a practitioner, my ambiguous position is characterized by being expected to implement the policies but also have both reservations and additional interests beyond those expressed in the policies.

While wanting to help create new workers in Nova Scotia, I had other education aims as well. For example, as described in the previous chapter, I was interested in developing students’ self-awareness, building a sense of community in the classroom, fostering students’ imagination, and making the curriculum relevant and challenging for the young people in my classroom. These aims contained principles about shaping the inner characters of students and, as I will show in the next chapter, Foucault’s notion of care of the self helped me to understand how my educational aims could be considered ethical in nature as they focused students’ attention on how they constitute a self. By contrast, the assessment policies, while describing a self-developer, do not suggest that this development involves attentiveness to the ways in which one is constituted and instead unproblematically use scientific knowledge (e.g., developmentalism) to describe the ideal student

subject. Furthermore, my educational aim of making the curriculum relevant and challenging shares some of the ideals of the new worker such as the use of new literacies. However, my aspiration was to involve students' interests in the assessment practices while the assessment policies described the relevance of curriculum to students' lives in terms of their technological skills. In addition, two of my educational aims, building community and fostering imagination, are not represented in the ideal young person described in the assessment policies. This placed me in a position of ambiguity, where, as part of my job, I was expected to uphold the policies' recommendations for working with young people, but I designed a classroom program with more in mind. I was concerned with the lack of ethical considerations in the ideal new worker and understood that I was interested in a different type of worker – one who was interested in his or her inner character, quality of life, purpose, and building a sense of community with those around them.

As noted above, critical issues for young people in New Times are absent from the policies but so too are social dimensions of working with young people. While there is an emphasis on the individual in the policies, the social identity aspects of students' lives (e.g., race or poverty or rurality) are not stressed. The policies do not address young people in poverty, such as those who were in my rural Nova Scotia classroom nor do they address the social reproductive aspects of assessment.⁴¹ I also had my own concerns about the policies and the ways in which they promote a new worker who is concerned only with technical, not ethical considerations. I questioned the policy's impact on local places and knowledges as it emphasizes skills supposedly required for economic globalization such as using new literacies and does not account for skills and knowledges of local (albeit declining) economies such as farming and fishing. It could be said therefore, that the policies depict education as a process of learning to live somewhere else (Gruenewald, 2003), that is, somewhere other than rural Nova Scotia. Unexamined in the policies are the effects of such an education on local communities and economies such as those surrounding Nova Middle School. The policies, through the implementation of authentic assessment practices help to prepare young people to live elsewhere. Hass and Nachtigal (1998) point out that rural educators need to help students connect with their local communities and resist giving students impressions that the "good life" can only be found someplace else, preferably someplace more urban. In my context, I considered how the policies, by preparing young people to live someplace else, may have supported such impressions. The policy

⁴¹ This divide between the descriptions in the assessment policies and the realities of the practitioner, signalled a need for practitioner involvement in the creation of policies and I became interested in writing local curriculum for the Nova Scotia Department of Education because of this realization. I was able to do this as part of a writing committee for Advanced English 11 (2004-2006) and as the curriculum contract writer and web-page creator for Advanced English 12 (2005-2007).

analysis made me rethink my role in contributing to a global work force that was flexible; a process that could diminish the ability to economically sustain local communities in rural Nova Scotia. As much as I was in favour of using authentic assessment practices to help achieve my own educational aims, I also realized that these same practices could be understood as a mechanism for producing citizens such as those that the policies describe – the self-developer and the new worker. This suggested to me that my own classroom practices, because they were informed by these policies, may be contributing to the exodus of rural workers and citizens in the province; I may have been contributing to an “endangered” way of rural life in Nova Scotia. This is not to suggest that I felt responsible for changing local and global economies, but that I felt responsible to scrutinize my classroom program to understand what sorts of ideal subject positions were imagined and what identities were realized by the students in my class.

The ideal subject positions discussed in this chapter indirectly influence students’ experiences in classrooms. Teachers intercede between the policies and students and create classroom programs that take up some of the ideal subject positions that are made available through policies, adding to these offers, or create other subject positions that were not made available in the policies. My interpretation of the three provincial policies highlights that the authentic assessment activities that students experience offer young people ways of being that prepare them for their future lives in a global economy. Authentic assessment could be considered a front line for developing a new kind of learner/worker. I was wary of this understanding because I understood school to be more than creating workers for a changing economy. My interpretation positions me in a contradictory state because, while I was interested in implementing authentic assessment in my classroom program and understood the economic imperatives of educating young people, I had other educational aims that were layered onto those described in the policies. Furthermore, these policies ignored the politics faced by practitioners when implementing the policies and they did not acknowledge critical and social aspects of young people’s lives such as rural poverty in our changing economy. While this chapter has addressed the ideal subject positions made available to young people through the policies, the next chapter describes those of my classroom program in 2000-2001. The ideals of the policies, the self-developer and the new worker, were taken up and reshaped through the assessment practices that I used with the young people in my classroom program.

CHAPTER 7

MY CLASSROOM PROGRAM

While the previous chapter addressed the policies that were a context for and influence on my classroom program, the purpose of this chapter is to analyse my classroom program and determine what subject positions were made available to students. The next chapter illustrates what students *did* with the subject positions on offer. In relation to this textual chain, this chapter addresses four specific analysis questions that emerged from those identified at the end of Chapter 3:

1. What assessment practices were expected to be completed by/with young people?
2. How were young people described in authentic assessment practices?
3. What was the young person expected to do in authentic assessment practices?
4. What were the ideal subject positions for young people?

These four questions parallel those asked of the policies in the preceding chapter and I followed a similar organization in this chapter: the first question is addressed in a separate section; the second and third questions are combined in a section called “Young people in my classroom program” that focuses largely on the textual analysis of my description of the classroom program and provides me with ways of disrupting my assumptions about the classroom program and about young people and offers news ways of thinking of both; and the fourth question (concerning the ideal subject positions) is presented in a separate section.

The subset of data that is used for analysing the classroom program was described in Chapter 4. One key data source was my teaching journal that included assessment instructions and assessment practices. I also draw on supplemental data based on classroom artefacts to illustrate how the assessment worked out in practice. These latter data were necessary because my classroom program evolved with student input. That is, the structure of the classroom program brought students’ assessment events into the program. For example, the classroom program required that students create a contract for the third term of the school year and in this chapter I illustrate how this occurred by using student samples. I use these artefacts to show *how* the classroom program worked and leave the focus of *what* students did with what was on offer for Chapter 8. The student

examples in this chapter also help to show how the classroom program combined a series of related assessment events into a pedagogical sequence. I also bring other data to this chapter with the same intentions: these include comments from students and parents about the classroom program which help to contextualize the subject positions that were on offer. The chapter weaves these data together to respond to the analysis questions.

7.1 Assessment practices in my classroom program

The first question I used to approach my classroom program was, “What assessment practices were expected to be completed by/with young people?” This question, as used in the preceding chapter in relation to policies, allowed me to re-conceptualize the work of the assessment events in my classroom program. Instead of understanding them as a linear, time-bound pedagogical story, as described in Chapter 5, this question helped me to consider them as human technologies that worked to shape young people into particular ways of being in my classroom. I analysed the assessment practices as human technologies and noted how often, one assessment practice offered multiple human technologies. In this section, I show how various human technologies (confessional, promotional, developmental, envisioning, internalized, social, and calculating technologies) were

made available to young people in my classroom through authentic assessment practices. First, however, let me reiterate the assessment practices that were used in my classroom program.

I re-present the assessment practices used in my classroom program in Table 7.1a. This table was created by using the list of assessment events from Table 5.2.3b in Chapter 5 and the families of practices used

<i>Pencil and paper assessments</i>	<i>Authentic, alternative, and performance assessment</i>	<i>Personal communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process Exams • Letter to the editor • Quest Test • Hero Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Term Contract: Student-created rubrics • Identity Museum Object • Literature Circle Observational Assessment • Literature Circle Group Reflection • Children’s Literature Portfolio • Children’s Literature Portfolio Peer Assessment • Creating Big Books • Reading Big Books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Term Contract: Conferences • Journal • Learning Logs • Questionnaire • Gift of Giving Self-assessment

in the policy analysis of the previous chapter. I organized the assessment tools used in my classroom according to these families of practice: paper and pencil assessment; authentic, alternative, and performance assessment; and personal communication. What is striking about the classification of the assessment tools used in my classroom program is that it shows a similar balance of the families of practice with those identified in the policy analysis. Close to half of the tools emphasized authentic, alternative, and performance assessment events.⁴² Table 7.1b compares the families of practice that were used in my classroom program with those that were suggested in the policies.⁴³

<i>Family of practice</i>	<i>Paper and pencil assessment</i>	<i>Authentic, alternative, and performance assessment</i>	<i>Personal communication</i>
Number of tools identified in the policies	12	21	9
Percentage of overall tools identified in the policies	29%	50%	21%
Number of tools identified in the classroom program	4	8	5
Percentage of overall tools identified in the classroom program	24%	47%	29%

As noted in Chapter 3, assessment events in my classroom program could be understood as human technologies that sought to shape young people towards particular ideals or subject positions. That is, the assessment events did work on young people to constitute themselves in particular ways. In retrospect, and as a result of this analysis, I can see how effective my practices were in shaping students towards the ideal subject positions identified in the policies. I accomplished this by tapping into students' interests and desires and by providing opportunities for students to connect these

⁴² It is important to remember that within the students' contracts, a wider range of assessment tools was used than those that I had designed for all students in the classroom program. For example, some students included a demonstration (such as the video project, "Cooking for Love") as part of their Third Term Contract. The tools used for analysis purposes were those that were included as part of the overall classroom program that was designed for all students.

⁴³ While the classification of the classroom program's assessment events through the use of families of practice appears similar in balance to those found in the policies, it is likely that students' involvement in these practices shaped both the subject positions that were available to students and the ways in which students "took up" these subject positions differently. For example, while the policies list twenty-one authentic, alternative, and performance assessment possibilities, I used eight in my classroom program. I did not use eight of the twenty-one events suggested in the policies; I added two of my own: the contract and student-created assessment tools. Importantly, both of these events sought to directly involve students in the creation of the assessment event. This spirit of student involvement in the creation of the assessment events was evident in many of the other assessment practices in my classroom program. For example, the assessment tool that was used for Literature Circles in class was created by using students' language and ideas following a class dramatization of active listening skills. The rubric that was created for assessing the Big Books was created as a class, following discussions about what makes a successful children's book and reading experience. Thirdly, the conferences were conducted with the use of many questions that students had individually prepared in advance of their interview, further illustrating their involvement in creating the assessment experience.

interests and desires with the learning outcomes and ideals of the policy documents. This can be understood as a form of governmentality, a form of indirect action upon the action of others where no obvious coercion was involved. This, as suggested by Foucauldian analysis, could be achieved through technologies made possible by the authentic assessment practices. My analysis helped me to look at my assessment practices and consider the kinds of human technologies that they were. My analysis revealed that several kinds of human technologies were made possible through the authentic assessment practices used in my classroom program: confessional technologies, promotional technologies, developmental technologies, envisioning technologies, internalized technologies, social technologies, and calculating technologies. I describe each of these technologies in turn below.

My classroom program set up confessional practices as a technology to shape students. As described in Chapter 3, “confession” occurs when students “reveal” who they “are” to the teacher or peers so that it can be worked on, reshaped, or assessed. Table 7.1c provides samples of questions from different assessment

Table 7.1c	
Directions used in assessment practices	
a)	“Describe your highlight of the week” (Self-assessment from the Interdisciplinary Unit, “The Gift of Giving”)
b)	“How can I improve my relationship with my mother? Sister? Boyfriend?” (Process Exam question for the thematic unit “Relationships,” June 2001)
c)	“What was your favourite part [of your identity essay]? Why?” (Student reflection on the Process Exam)
d)	“Rate your group on the following behaviours: we felt as though our ideas were important / we worked at creating a supportive environment for each other / we felt safe to share creative ideas” (Group reflection, Literature Circles, Fall 2000).

events that encouraged the young person to produce who they “are.” I used questionnaires, self-assessments, learning logs, and journals to document the results and held frequent conferences with students for them to say what they knew or did not yet know about how to be successful in my classroom. In Chapter 5, I described how I used the information I learned from conferencing with students to think about how I might work at “supporting” students learning as they prepared for another assessment event, the Process Exam: “I made anecdotal records from these conferences as a way of monitoring and documenting students’ progress and possible further supports that would be needed to prepare the student for their Process Exam” (as noted in my teaching journal). These activities worked to refine the students’ learning, or, put another way, worked to refine the identities that they would constitute in further assessment events.

In another example of “confession,” students’ identities were constituted through the technology of a student journal. Journals were where students “identified themselves” and “I used the information

from the students' journals to direct my classroom teaching methods" (as recorded in my teaching journal). The young person was expected to demonstrate "self-awareness" in his/her journal and this was intended to provide the student (and myself) with insight into how their learning might be supported in the classroom environment.

For example, a series of reflections were recorded in students' journals about what they learned about their brains. Table 7.1d illustrates how students kept records after each class activity that involved learning about the brain.⁴⁴ This required communication between the student and the teacher and demanded that the young person constitute an identity, and in this particular case, an identity that accounted for a learner profile with a "unique" balance of intelligences (Gardner, 1993) and learning

Table 7.1d	
My brain journal	
	What I learned
Brain Quiz	
Brain Readings	
Left Brain / Right Brain	
Learning Modalities	
Multiple Intelligences	

styles (Claxton & Murrell, 1987). The young person had to decide what to share with the teacher - what sort of identity to produce in his or her student journal. This articulation of a self was a naturalised process in the classroom program and the assessment tools provided the technologies for this self to be constituted and displayed. The "confession" was not the only form of technology evident in my classroom program.

Students used the authentic assessment practices as promotional technologies, where the student "promoted" a self that was on display for assessment, expecting that this self would be rewarded (e.g., with marks or social recognition). Promotional technologies are consistent with what du Gay (1995) terms an "entrepreneur of the self" where the subject is constituted as autonomous, responsible, calculating, and required to promote a self. In the authentic assessment practices used in my classroom program, students produced a self that would be assessed in the Identity Museum. These artefacts were representations of the students' self that were guessed (students matched the

⁴⁴ The "Brain Quiz" was a True/False quiz involving facts about the brain. "Brain Readings" were a series of readings (Jensen, 1995) that students divided into small groups to discuss and then used a Jigsaw format (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997) to share the readings with other students in the class. The remaining activities "Left Brain / Right Brain," (Springer & Deutch, 1997) "Learning Modalities," (Claxton & Murrell, 1987) and "Multiple Intelligences" (Gardner, 1993), were self-assessments that students used to learn about their learning strengths. Literature about "brain-based learning" was part of my professional library that I used to develop the classroom program (Armstrong, 1994; Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997; Parry & Gregory, 1998; Ronis, 2000).

artefacts with the names of the students in the class) and then explained (students presented the merit of their artefact by explaining how the object represented who they “were”). In a second example, students were expected to put themselves up for examination by others during the peer assessment of the Children’s Literature Portfolio: students were expected to find other people to assess their work by asking others to review their portfolio. A third example: the student-created assessment tools in the Third Term Contract were a way in which students proposed how they would be assessed. Put another way, students were expected to promote their interests when they met with me to have their assessment tools approved. A way of understanding these activities is to consider that students were asked to become an entrepreneur of the self and produce a version of their self that they were expected to promote in the classroom.

The assessment practices also provided developmental technologies, where the young person used reflection and subsequent changes or “improvements.” This occurred, for example, in the Literature Circle Group Reflection where students monitored their weekly progress in group discussions and made a record of what skills they wanted to “improve” or emphasize during their next meeting. Students were expected to use this technology to shape their ways of being in the classroom. A related practice could be thought of as what I have labeled an “envisioning” technology, where students were asked to look to the future and imagine who they might be. This happened not only when the students considered how they wanted to improve (for example, as noted above in the Literature Circle Group Reflection), but also when they made plans for how they would constitute themselves in the classroom in the future. This was made possible, for example, through the Third Term Contracts where students were asked to articulate individualized assessment plans that would demonstrate how they would achieve the curriculum outcomes in the third term, including the assessment events that would provide evidence of these outcomes, and the assessment tools that would be used to assess their levels of achievement.

Some of the assessment practices in my classroom program worked like Foucault’s notion of the panopticon, or what I refer to as an “internalized technology.” During the Literature Circle Observational Assessment, the students were first observed by me close to their tables and I kept records of their active listening skills, but then, as I walked around the classroom continuing my surveillance and record keeping of their behaviour, they could not see what I was writing in my notes. As I moved around the classroom, students monitored their own behaviours using these same assessment criteria and governed themselves to be “active listeners” (it was always possible that

I was watching them from the other side of the classroom). In this way, the assessment practice continued to act as a technology for shaping students and students shaped their selves even when I was not present to make comments about their active listening.

Social technologies were also made available to students when they were asked to constitute a self within social contexts. This occurred, for example, during the Literature Circle Group Reflection where students were asked to complete the reflection collaboratively. In other assessment practices, such as the assessment of students reading their Big Books to elementary students, the young person was constituted with an audience in mind. During the students' conferences they interacted with me, and in the peer assessment of the Children's Literature Portfolio, the students interacted with each other. Each of these assessment practices could be understood as social technologies where the young person was expected to constitute a self that was informed by social interactions.

Other assessment practices could be understood as "calculative technologies." I use this phrase to signal when students constituted a self that was the result of assigning marks, and where these marks, like Foucault's idea of the examination, yielded some "truth" about the student. In my classroom program, rubrics, contracts, and report cards were used to create such marks and it was generally assumed that these marks were indicative of students' abilities and therefore signalled some "truth" about the young person. Table 7.1e summarizes the various technologies that were made available to students through the authentic assessment practices.

What is interesting about Table 7.1e is that it illustrates how it was possible for students to use multiple technologies within one assessment practice. For example, the Literature Circle Group Reflection involved developmental, envisioning, and social technologies. This reflection demanded that students illustrated "improvement" in their active listening skills over time (a developmental technology), determined how they would work on these skills the following week (an envisioning technology), and required that students worked together as a group to make these decisions (a social technology). This illustrates the complexity of how young people were expected to use human technologies to constitute a self in the classroom program that would be assessed.

Table 7.1e	
Human technologies and the assessment practices in my classroom program	
<i>Human Technology</i>	<i>Assessment Practice</i>
Confessional technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment from the Interdisciplinary Unit, “The Gift of Giving” • Process Exam question for the thematic unit “Relationships” • Student reflection on the Process Exam • Literature Circles Group reflection • The Brain Journal • Process Exam
Promotional technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Museum Object • Peer assessment of the Children’s Literature Portfolio • Student-created assessment tools in the Third Term Contract
Developmental technologies (e.g., illustrating improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Circle Group Reflection • Student reflection on the Process Exam • Questionnaire
Envisioning technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Circle Group Reflection • Student-created assessment tools in the Third Term Contract • Questionnaire
Internalized technologies (e.g., Foucault’s Panopticon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Circle Observational Assessment • Student-created assessment tools in the Third Term Contract
Social technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Circle Group Reflection • Performance assessment: Reading of big books • Conferences • Peer assessment of the Children’s Literature Portfolio
Calculating technologies (e.g., Foucault’s Examination)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubrics • Contracts • Report cards

7.2 Young people in my classroom program

Having considered the assessment practices as human technologies, I move now to examine the young person who was constituted in these practices through the second and third analysis questions: how was the young person described in these practices and what were the things that they must do? These analytical questions allowed me to think about my own conceptions of the young people in my classroom. I was interested in this process to elicit my own assumptions about young people and examine how these assumptions informed my assessment practices. Such a process aims to point out how the ways in which we conceptualize young people direct the practices that we use to work with them in classrooms and vice versa.

7.2.1 Labels

Table 7.2.1 presents the labels that were used to describe young people in my teaching journal. Beyond the common reference to young people in the classroom program as “students,” I described these students as “individuals” and as “experts in their own learning.” As I did the policies, I described young people in relation to a teacher (a “student”). However, unlike the policies, I did not use the collocation of “lifelong learners” but instead associated the label “learner” with being “self-directed,” “individual,” and “diverse.” The focus for the “learner” in my classroom program was on freely determining what was best for his or her own learning, which it was assumed, may well have been different from what other individuals would decide.

Many of these depictions of young people as “individual students” were naturalized⁴⁵ conceptions of young people who are understood to be unique and have static identities with specific and individual learning interests. Similarly, the label “learners” was unchallenged in my description of students and it assumes that young people were interested in learning and were “individual” and

Table 7.2.1 Labels used to describe young people in my classroom program
students individual students the expert about his/her own learning self-directed learners learners individual learners diverse learners the “keen beans” seeking extra academic support discussion leaders the spokespersons for the class adolescent contestants

“diverse” in their interests. The naturalized use of these labels to describe young people was common in my teaching journal. Fairclough (1992, p. 90) states that “people may find it difficult to comprehend that their normal practices could have specific ideological investments.” For this reason, it was important for me to find ways of making the everyday “strange” and to disrupt my reading of my teaching journal through critical discourse analysis because the naturalized labels about young people informed the ways in which they were conceived in my classroom program; the young person was conceived to have a stable self of his or her “own.” For example, the word “own” was used thirty-five times in my teaching journal. Students had their “own” understandings, questions, interests, learning, assessment tools, and lives. I had my “own” classroom, choice of words, and life. “We” had our “own set of stories, our own mythology.” The word “own” signified personal ownership and responsibility, and underpinning that was an individual and stable self.

⁴⁵ Fairclough suggests that some words “are so profoundly naturalized within a particular culture that people are not only quite unaware of them most of the time, but find it extremely difficult, even when their attention is drawn to them, to escape from them in their discourse, thinking, or action” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 195).

In my teaching journal, the word “self” either was a reflexive pronoun (herself, yourself) or hyphenated, indicating that the self is always related with other concepts:

- Self-directed (used four times)
- Self-understanding (used twice)
- Self-aware
- Self-care
- Self developed
- Self-reflection
- Self-generated

Here, the self is understood in terms of what the self is able to do: direct, understand, care, generate, etc. It also carries multiple meanings of introspection (self-understanding, self-aware, self-reflection) and action (self-directed, self-care, self-developed, self-generated). The “self” works reflexively, using knowledge about social life to direct introspection and action. While my teaching journal emphasized a self, by denaturalizing the text and focusing on word meaning (Fairclough, 1992), it became obvious how this word was used to represent the struggles of constituting a classroom identity. My classroom program constituted a young person who was willing to identify and declare a self. The student was expected to construct a self that was understood to be interested in learning, was willing to direct his/her own learning, and conducted his/her self as an individual with specific learning interests and abilities and the classroom program shaped up this self to be assessed. Conversely, young people who were unwilling or unable to construct such an identity may not have been successful in the classroom program and the subsequent assessment events.⁴⁶

My analysis of the labels revealed a preoccupation on the self in my classroom program. This emphasis on the self was not found in the policies. My classroom program, unlike the policies, paid attention to questions about identity and even included a themed unit, “Identity,” in the year-long plan. This emphasis on identity is also a focus for popular conceptions of adolescence (see Chapter 2), where the young person is understood to be in transition and “becoming.” My classroom program invited students to partake in what I will call “identity projects”: students were required to scrutinize their self so that they could constitute an identity and this was the process that would be rewarded through the assessment events in my classroom. I am not suggesting that identity constitution would not have occurred with different assessment events. I am recognizing that my classroom program brought this process to the centre of the assessment process. This analysis heightened my interest in the vocabulary that I used to describe young people and work with them in

⁴⁶ What students were able to do through the classroom program is described in Chapter 8. Included in this description, is what happened when students were not successful.

the classroom; because of this focus on identity and the self, I was attentive to the labels that I used with, and for, young people.

7.2.2 Processes

One way I used to determine how young people were represented in my classroom program was to focus on the verbs that were used to describe what students must do in the classroom program. Table 7.2.2a lists the most common verbs that I used to describe young people's actions in my teaching journal. The most frequently used verbs conceptualize young people as reflective (choose, learn,

Verb	Count	Verb	Count
Choose	14	Became/become	4
Write	12	Imagined	4
Make/made	11	Participate	4
Create	10	Present	4
Use(d)	10	Practice	4
Develop(ing)(ed)	6	Tell/told	4
Feel/felt	6	Work	4
Share	6	Aware	3
Ask	5	Begin	3
Design(ed)	5	Complete(d)	3
Learn(ed)	5	Contract(ed)	3
Understand/Understood	5	Identify	3
		Read	3
		Wanted	3
		Went	3

understand), productive (write, make/made, create, use, develop, design), social (share, ask) and emotional (feel). Taking my lead from the previous chapter, I conducted a transitivity analysis to determine which processes were emphasized in the classroom program. Table 7.2.2b reports the blend of mental, material, and verbal processes that I used to describe young people in my teaching journal as well as a

<i>Type of process</i>	<i>Types of processes described in the policies</i>		<i>Types of processes described in the classroom program</i>	
	Number of occurrences	Percent of usage	Number of occurrences	Percent of usage
<i>Mental</i>	113	40%	173	46%
<i>Material</i>	135	48%	122	33%
<i>Verbal</i>	3	1%	22	6%
<i>Other</i>	30	11%	58	15%
<i>Total</i>	281	100%	375	100%

comparison to those found in the transitivity analysis of the policies in Chapter 6. Some of these processes share emphasis with those found in the policies (mental and material processes),

while a greater emphasis on verbal processes was used in my classroom program, although it was still the smallest category. A closer examination of each of the processes emphasized in my classroom program (mental, material, and verbal) allowed me to determine in what ways my classroom program adopted and adapted the processes found in the policies.

7.2.2.1 Mental Processes

Similar to the policy analysis, mental processes were emphasized in the classroom program. Janks (1996b) suggests three types of mental processes: thinking, feeling, and perceiving. I classified the mental processes that were used to describe students in my teaching journal into these three categories and Table 7.2.2.1a presents the number of verbs in each of these three classifications.

<i>Types</i>	<i>Policies (Count)</i>	<i>Classroom Program (Count)</i>
Thinking	108	139
Feeling	0	24
Perceiving	5	10
Total	113	173

Unlike the policy documents, a proportion of feeling and perceiving verbs was used to describe young people. I suspected that this was because, as I claimed in my teaching journal, “I believed that [the assessment practices] could assist students in having positive experiences in school. I witnessed students’ excitement to be a part of our class.” Emotion, it seemed, was connected to students’ work in the classroom program.⁴⁷ The shift of emphasis in my classroom program towards feeling processes (and to a smaller extent, perceiving processes) is further evidence of assessment practices that go beyond simply learning information and to engage students’ personal affect and sense of self in school.

Examples of verbs in my teaching journal that described students’ feelings are listed in Table 7.2.2.1b. These verbs included those that express desire (“wanted,” “wished,” “liked”) and emotion (“felt strongly,” “beaming,” “show pride”). The classroom program offered students assessment practices that allowed them to express their feelings about learning and their “positive experiences in school.” These practices privileged students who *had* positive experiences to express. They suggest

⁴⁷ While this discussion is about processes, it is interesting to note that as a noun, the word “work” was consistently used in association with students’ feelings throughout my teaching journal:

- have pride in their school work
- show pride in their work
- was comfortable reading his/her own work
- were amazed at each other’s work
- were excited to see, head, read, and play with each other’s creative work
- would have felt uncomfortable with my public praise of their work

Emotion and work were entwined in the description of students in my classroom; students are understood to bring and display feelings that related to their school work. The display of student work was not described as a posting on a bulletin board, but conveyed through feeling processes. The “successful” student would be one who was capable and willing to articulate particular feelings. This idea is picked up in the discussion of the feeling process and Table 7.2.2.1b.

particular ways of being in the classroom: optimism about learning, an interest in exchanging ideas and work with other students, and a capacity to express feelings within the classroom community. These verbs depicted a confident young person who was “willing to engage” in the classroom program.

Because there was a heavy emphasis on the “thinking” classification of mental processes, I conducted a further analysis of these verbs. Like the policy analysis, I arranged the thinking verbs

into three ways of working with knowledge: encountering knowledge, processing knowledge, and applying knowledge. I used this framework to consider the kinds of mental processes that were most commonly described in the classroom program:

- Encountering Knowledge: *understand, identify, learn, aware*
- Processing Knowledge: *develop, consider, refer, support*
- Applying Knowledge: *choose, write, imagine, practice*

There were thirty-three verbs that were classified as “encountering knowledge,” twenty-nine described “processing knowledge,” and seventy-seven referred to “applying knowledge.”

The most frequently used verbs in the policies (*choose, write, imagine, and practice*) were those that involved the processing and applying of knowledge – “higher-order” ways of thinking according to Bloom (1956) and Fogarty and Bellanca (1989). My classroom program, using my version of authentic assessment practices, focused on the application and use of knowledge. This emphasis on applying knowledge endorsed specific ways of being in the classroom where cultural motives of educating, such as vocational preparation, were valued. By applying knowledge, students became “users” of knowledge by practicing skills that were deemed important for life beyond the classroom and beyond their schooling. My classroom program, therefore, through the assessment events, supported young people in preparing them for worlds beyond my classroom by emphasizing thinking skills (processing and applying knowledge) that were transferable to other subjects and situations. Furthermore, my classroom program called attention to students’ feelings. Unlike the policies, young people were described in my classroom program to feel (and like the policies, to think and to a lesser extend, perceive). This description of a student who experiences feelings through the

Table 7.2.2.1b Mental processes: Feeling
“beaming” and excited about their experiences feel responsible for his/her own learning feel safe in taking calculated risks feeling more confident felt a sense of belonging felt strongly about experimenting felt welcomed show pride in their work students liked to discuss they wished wanted to change some things in our class wanted to demonstrate wanted to have some opportunity willing to engage with children’s literature

authentic assessment events suggested an interest in a different type of young person – one who was involved in not only thinking, but who also cared or showed interest in their ideas. Instead of being detached from emotion to conduct rational thinking, the young person in my classroom program was described as being emotionally invested in their thinking. It goes to follow that this shift towards emphasizing students’ feelings in my classroom program signalled a change in the ideal subject positions on offer; the ideal subject position in my classroom would be somewhat different from those discussed in the previous chapter. As I show below, the analysis of mental processes helped me to describe continuities and discontinuities between these ideals.

7.2.2.2 Material Processes

One hundred and twenty one verbs (out of three hundred and forty-two) in the description of students in my teaching journal were material processes. I grouped these verbs into sub-categories based on the frequency of their use. Table 7.2.2.2 indicates the number of verbs associated with each of these sub-categories. The sub-categories of material processes allowed me to see the sorts of activities that students were doing in my classroom: making/creating, working together, extending curricular experiences beyond the classroom, negotiating, performing, and working as a process. While the policies’ emphasized the material processes of “demonstrate” and “participate,” my classroom program provided more specific details of how students could have achieved this: “making/creating” and “working together.”

Sub-category	Number of occurrences
making/creating	31
working together	28
extending beyond the classroom	19
performing	15
negotiating	15
working as a process	13
Total	121

Students were most often depicted as making or creating something that would be assessed such as “create a visual representation” or “design a poster to advertise the story.” The emphasis in this form of action was to create a product that became part (or all) of the assessment event. Most often, these creations were “other ways of representing,” one of the curricular strands of the English language arts curriculum. The production process was not one of replication indicative of a “factory model” where all students created the same product. Instead, all thirty-one references in my teaching journal to making, creating, generating, or producing suggest that the student must conceive of an idea of their “own” – one that is unique to the specific task at hand. Most often, this involved a combination of texts and genres. For example, a student created a 911 recording (genre) for a

specific character in a story (the text being reviewed, such as the nursery rhyme of “Little Miss Muffet”) to create a recording of Little Miss Muffet who is “attacked” by a spider and calls 911. What was created was a new text that combined parody, suspense, sound effects, “scripted responses” and tones in the voice of the operator – a “unique” product. Products such as this were created by individual students and with peers.

The second most frequent sub-category of material processes was “working together.” “Work” was most often used in my teaching journal to describe students working together. All five uses of the verb “work” describe students in relation to each other [emphasis added]:

- As a class they voted on field trip venues, they came to consensus about who to invite to our class for special events, and at times *they worked by committees* to make choices.
- From these notes, we developed the observational checklist that was used with students as *they worked in Literature Circles* to discuss novels that they had selected from a “buffet.”
- Following each meeting, the literature circle groups completed a group task where *students worked together* to create a visual representation of their knowledge and then present their illustration to the class.
- For example, under the umbrella theme of “Relationships,” *several students worked together* to design a group assignment, a short video about teenage dating.
- It seemed obvious that *students supported each other as they worked on answering their self-generated questions* about relationships; “care of the self” occurred with the support of a learning community.

Classroom “work” was social work. Students were understood to be engaged in work if they were supportive of each other. “Work” was defined and valued in my classroom program more in terms of social negotiation than individual production. This was consistent with my own perception of daily routines in my classroom – students were organized to sit together in multiple arrangements (depending on the pedagogical purpose) and the classroom was, more often than not, filled with the sounds of students working together. This complicated the work of constituting an individual self as previously highlighted. The young people were expected to constitute an individual self, but this self was tied to social practices in the classroom.

The young person in my classroom program was partly conceived as someone who was capable of being creative and who was interested in working with peers. Such an understanding of young people is consistent with my educational aims of “imagination” and “building community” as presented in Chapter 5. Positioning the young person as capable of these material processes reflects

my enthusiasm for working with young people; students in my classroom were expected to be actively involved in their learning by “making/creating” assessment artefacts and by “working together” in the classroom. The analysis confirmed my suspicions described in Chapter 5 (see Table 5.2.3b) that my educational aims of “imagination” and “building community” could be achieved through the assessment events but they also raised questions about the kinds of imagination and community that would be generated.

7.2.2.3 Verbal Processes

Of particular interest was that there were more verbal processes in my teaching journal depiction of young people than there were in the policies discussed in Chapter 6.⁴⁸ In my teaching journal, students were described in terms of what they said, asked, and told. This suggests that I expected to hear young people in my classroom and that speaking was encouraged during the assessment events. This did not surprise me, given the number of assessment events that emphasized conversation (conferences) or presentations (such as the “Identity Museum Object” or the performance assessment of students reading their Big Books – see Table 7.1a above). Table 7.2.2.3 lists the verbs that were used to describe students’ verbal processes. These verbs depict a young person who interacts with his/her peers as well as with the teacher.

Table 7.2.2.3 Verbal processes	
<p>“check in” with the teacher asked each other to “pass the historical fiction” asked if I would photocopy asked if they could bring in a text asked that I not be in the room asking if the class could have five to ten minutes to discuss conduct a discussion contacted me about having a class reunion couldn’t tell me what it was discuss novels discuss what “active listening” looks like heard an expert’s ranking and rationale made statements such as made suggestions reported that he/she found it difficult sent me emails requesting another class reunion sharing their understandings of the novel collaboratively to share jokes told humorous stories told of how the materials represented their character were asked would tell me</p>	

I was struck by how several of these verbal processes were associated with negotiating what would be allowed in the classroom or how class time would be used; the young people made requests for time, for photocopying, for class reunions, for bringing in texts from outside the classroom, and for my absence from the classroom so that they could discuss ideas without me. Through classroom

⁴⁸ “Discuss (in small groups)” was used in the *ELA* to describe what students do and was the only verbal process made explicit in the three policies.

conversation, students negotiated their relationships with me; the “teacher” was no longer assigned a fixed role of authority. Because the teacher was no longer assumed to have automatic authority, students used these verbal processes as a means of negotiating their self in the classroom, their social relationships with other students in the class, and their relationships with me as their teacher. These verbal processes offered students a means of influencing what goes on in the classroom. Together, with other processes, the young person was, according to my teaching journal, able to shape what was possible in the classroom program. In sum, my program expected students to talk, negotiate and discuss, constituting a self in relation to his/her classmates and the teacher.

7.2.3 Conceptions of young people

The labels and processes discussed above suggest particular conceptions of young people. Firstly, young people were understood to be skilled; they are not empty vessels waiting to be filled. Students were not represented in my classroom program as docile and as reiterating fixed knowledge. Instead, students were expected to choose and use a variety of modalities to convey higher-order thinking skills. This required complex tasks of the young person and the young person was assumed to be literate in diverse ways - perhaps even in ways that I, as the teacher, could not have “taught” nor imagined. The young were understood to have valid ways of contributing to their own learning as well as to the learning of their peers. The classroom program assisted young people to achieve this end by encouraging their involvement in the creation of the assessment events and in making choices about what, how, when, and who would assess them. My conceptualization of young people directed the assessment practices that I used with them in the classroom; I used practices that offered opportunities for students to demonstrate that they were, indeed, capable of complex tasks and literacies that demanded making decisions and “self” direction.

A second observation about the conceptualization of young people: students in my classroom program were conceptualized less in terms of generalizations about their age (e.g., the label “adolescent” was used once in my teaching journal to describe a specific student-created assessment event that uses “adolescent contestants” in a game show), and more in terms of defining individual identities. This was apparent in the labels that were used to describe young people such as “individual students,” “individual learners,” “the expert about his/her learning,” and “self-directed learners.” The analysis of processes also contributes to this interpretation as they suggest that students must create individual and “unique” assessment artefacts as they “choose” and “imagine” what sorts of ways to represent their self in the classroom.

Complicating the way in which young people were expected to constitute a self was the social dimension of the classroom program: students were expected to constitute a self in social contexts as they worked together in multiple groupings. This social context expected students to talk, negotiate, and discuss their self with their classmates and me. This social aspect of self-constitution raised concerns about how different combinations of students produced evidence to be assessed (e.g., Literature Circle Observational Assessment) and signalled possible dangers such as how particular combinations of students could limit, create, or favour particular opportunities for students to adopt, adapt, or resist the subject positions on offer. Success in the classroom may have been dependent on whom students worked with, how many other people were involved, and even what common interests may or may not have existed among participants. This was much more than simply “getting along” in a group. Demonstrating active listening skills in a Literature Circle demanded that an individual student would rely on the contribution of other students in order to demonstrate that they could actively listen, paraphrase, and ask questions. In this way, the young person was vested in the social interactions of the classroom and the ideal subject was one who could use social relations to demonstrate his or her capacity in a specific skill.

In broad terms, the conception of young people in my classroom program was one of a skilled student who was able to define an individual identity and who was capable of working with his or her classmates in social contexts. Such a vision of young people was in some ways similar to that described in policies where young people were described as being active and collaborative. On the other hand, the policies depicted a young person who was a traditional subject of assessment (who can “think” in approved ways) as well as one who changed and developed. By contrast, my classroom program emphasized that young people had multiple skills, including those involved in material and mental processes, as well as verbal processes, and that young people had individual selves. This is not to suggest that my classroom program worked against the conceptions of young people in the policies, but that it had a particular emphasis on understanding young people as individual, skilled, and social learners. Furthermore, my classroom program layered an emotional dimension to students’ learning: mental processes stressed “feeling” verbs, while the policies did not. Therefore, my classroom program was about a somewhat different kind of student than the policies – one who was willing to engage emotionally during the assessment events. These emphases, as I describe below, impacted the ideal subject positions that were made available to the young people in my classroom.

7.3 Ideal subject positions in my classroom program

Because students were expected to constitute an identity that would be assessed, my third data analysis question follows: What were the ideal subject positions for young people? Raising this question allowed me to further explore which ways of being were valued in my classroom program and what versions of young people would be successful in terms of the program. The ideal student in my classroom was not automatically realized. Young people took up these ideal subject positions and reworked them into forms that suited them. Conversely, they may have resisted these ideals or combined them with others from the classroom program or from elsewhere. What students did with these ideal subject positions is discussed in Chapter 8. The focus here is to identify them and compare them with the ideals of the policies, the self-developer and the new worker.

Because my classroom program was designed to support the policies (as a teacher, that was part of my job), I was not working against the policies as much as layering ideas of my own onto those already established in the policies. My analysis shows how the ideal subject positions in my classroom program were informed by those of the policies but also supplemented and adapted these ideals with effects on the subject positions made available. The transitivity analysis (see 7.2.2 above) showed that there were many similarities between my classroom program and the policies (e.g., the emphasis of mental and material processes), but also that my classroom program described a different kind of young person – one who was an individual, skilled, and social learner, as well as one who was willing to engage emotionally during the assessment events. These differences were not a direct move away from the policy ideals of the self-developer and the new worker, nor did these differences diminish the importance of the policy ideals in my classroom program. For these reasons, the supplemented and adapted ideal subject positions of the policies emerged as the most important ones in my classroom program. I use the term “supplement” to signal how a policy ideal was enriched by my classroom program. That is, my classroom program took up a policy ideal, but then filled it out to be something more so that it was not exactly the same as the policy ideal. This supplementation occurred through additional specific practices in my classroom program. I describe this process as “working with and supplementing” an ideal subject position of the policies, namely, the self-developer. By contrast, I use the term “adapt” to describe how a policy ideal – the new worker - was changed to create a new, but related, ideal in my classroom program, namely, the authentic worker. Adapting in this sense refers to a move away from the premise of “work” embodied in the ideal of the new worker (e.g., future employment) and a move towards a different premise of “work” in young people’s immediate lives thereby creating the need for a different label

for this ideal subject. The distinction between supplementing and adapting a subject position is important because it illustrates how closely aligned my classroom program was with certain ideals (and therefore built on such ideals), and how other ideals, because of practical concerns, needed to be adapted in order to be implemented into my classroom.

In what follows, I identify two ideal subject positions in my classroom program and acknowledge that other interpretations (or combinations) are possible. The ideal subject positions are constructs used to illustrate how the classroom program was not neutral – it sought to shape young people in particular ways. My intention here is to illustrate how these ideals were apparent across a range of data. I use specific assessment events to show how they work as technologies to shape young people into these ideal subject positions. I refer back to the labels and transitivity analysis that was described above, use examples of students' work to illustrate what the program was about, and include comments from students and parents from interviews when these comments offer further insight into my arguments. I want to stress that these ideal subject positions were not necessarily apparent in every assessment event, nor could they be used to determine ideal subject positions in authentic assessment practices at large. These ideal subject positions were informed by my version of authentic assessment and by the educational aims of my classroom program.

7.3.1 Working with and supplementing the self-developer

One ideal subject position in the policies was the self-developer who saw their self as in need of improvement and learned to be a calculating subject. My classroom program, for the most part adopted this subject position by emphasizing the ways in which young people conducted work on their self to show improvement over time. Like the policies, the ideal subject in my classroom program saw their self as in need of improvement. My classroom program described an ideal subject who took responsibility for this self-improvement and displayed an interest in directing his/her learning. This was an ideal subject who demonstrated capacity for independent thought and responsibility, who was capable of making choices that directed his or her learning, who reflected on decisions, raised and pursued his/her own questions, and created his/her own assessment tools to assess their learning. The ideal subject in my classroom program was also like the self-developer of the policies in that the young person was expected to make choices and reflect on their behaviour and thinking. In my classroom program, such self-direction was evident in the assessment events and is illustrated later in this section: during the Process Exams, in the Children's Literature Portfolio, in the creation of individualized assessment tools in the Third Term Contract, and in the

Literature Circle Group Reflections. These assessment events can be understood as technologies that could be used to by young people to shape their identities into the ideal subject of the classroom program.

Regardless of the assessment event being described below, the young person was involved in three entwined practices when directing his or her learning in my classroom program. These practices were used by the young person to take up the ideal subject position of the self-developer in my classroom program. These practices were identified by relating the common processes (see 7.2.2) of the classroom program (e.g., “choose,” “write,” “share”) with individual assessment events (see 7.1) to determine which practices were most common in my classroom program. Of these practices, the following two were consistent with the ideal subject position of the self-developer in the policies and that of my classroom program:

1. *Make choices*: The young person must make decisions such as choosing from among texts, questions, assignments, and assessment criteria. This is consistent with the process analysis in 7.2.2 where a significant cluster of thinking verbs focused on “choosing.” Students were described as in the processes of “choosing,” “determining,” and “selecting.” The student was expected to care about these choices – to deliberate and make careful selections.
2. *Reflect*: The young person must engage in reflection to determine what has gone well and what steps they will take next to direct their learning. For example, students conducted a Literature Circle Group Reflection after each meeting of their Literature Circle group that directed how they would attend to specific “active listening” skills in their next meeting. The ideal subject shows interest in directing their self and sees this as a worthwhile task.

However, young people did not simply take up the ideal of the policies in my classroom program through these two practices. Importantly, my classroom program also supplemented the self-developer to include additional interests in defining a self and making this self relevant for other people inside and outside of the classroom. My version of authentic assessment showed how young people did not take up the ideal of the self-developer on their own – they involved others. In this way, my classroom program adjusted the self-developer of the policies to be something that was not exactly the same but was something more; my classroom program supplemented the ideal of the self-developer by involving others and being concerned about the social aspects of self-development. Therefore, the self-developer in my classroom program entailed an additional practice that complicates the practices of self-developer of the policies:

3. *Involve others*: The young person must involve others – usually the teacher or peers – when directing his or her learning. The classroom program was designed to allow students not only to choose assessment events, but also to create and co-create the assessment events with the teacher and with peers. In this way, the ideal subject was attentive to the ways in which he or she interacted with others in the classroom.

The student used these three practices to shape up an ideal subject position in my classroom program; the young person during an assessment event had to make choices, reflect, and involve others. Of course, the balance of these practices was different with each assessment event, making the process more complex. Therefore, rich descriptions are needed to show the kind of work that went on in my classroom when this supplemented subject position was taken up. The four assessment events described below were the most common ways in which young people reflected on their self and therefore I selected them to display from my set of data. The assessment events demonstrate how the ideal student was to be a self-developer.

7.3.1.1 The Process Exam

The Process Exams demanded that students make four large decisions that directed the assessment event. First, the student was required to create a question (or choose from a list) that became the focus of their entire exam. Second, the student chose quotes from texts to support their ideas. Third, students chose the format to express their ideas in a written form (e.g., as diary, a newspaper article, a eulogy, a letter, a short story, a poem, etc). Finally, students helped to choose the assessment criteria in advance of the exam and created the assessment tool - the rubric - that was used to assess their writing. This exam, unlike more “traditional” examinations where students might be required to respond to teacher-chosen questions about teacher-chosen texts in a limited time constraint, aimed to “reinforce students’ self-direction and imagination while tailoring the exam to be relevant and challenging to the individual learners” (as described in my teaching journal).

In the Process Exam that addressed the theme of “Identity,” students, while able to choose from twelve questions, were encouraged to create their own question or modify one of the questions on offer. Of importance was that the Process Exam allowed some students to tackle questions about their own values, especially those students who chose questions such as “Can your identity be ‘better’ than someone else’s identity?” or “Does a person’s identity influence their actions?” These sorts of exam questions demanded that young people consider their moral stances about the role of the individual in relationship to others and their self. Besides the chosen exam question, the arguments

Figure 7.3.1.1a
Colin's writing outline for the Process Exam

<p>Please use a pencil on this page</p> <p>Process Question: How is identity formed?</p> <p>Arguments What YOU think Give 5 different reasons that support your answer.</p>	<p>Evidence Find two specific examples from any play, novel, short story, etc. that support your argument. All examples must come from different sources.</p>	<p>Source Write down the name of your source. Example: <i>The Outsiders</i></p>	<p>Type of Source Write down the type of your source. Example: novel You must use at least four different types.</p>
<p>1. Contact with other people and their identity.</p>	<p>a) If you are forced to hurt someone and you regret it, then because of that situation part of your identity is remorse or regret. b) If you don't like someone and there identity then you may make your identity unlike theirs.</p>	<p>The Sniper Skipper</p>	<p>Short Story Short Story</p>
<p>2. Find what you like and dislike. Having pleasant or unpleasant situation with someone or something (you are involved with)</p>	<p>a) If you enjoy doing something criminal for example then you are a criminal and that is part of your identity. b) If you want to be a soldier and go to war because you like it that's part of your identity.</p>	<p>Family Affair Question of Loyalty Pleasantville</p>	<p>Short Story Novel Movie/Video</p>
<p>3. Your family, the way and where you were brought up.</p>	<p>a) If you are brought up one way and that becomes you sometimes it is hard to change. b) If you are born a greaser and all your friends are greasers, that makes up some of your identity.</p>	<p>The Outsiders On the sidewalk bleeding</p>	<p>Novel Short Story</p>
<p>4. What other people think about you and your identity.</p>	<p>a) When other people want you to do something and it does or doesn't matter to you if "you" actually want to do it, that's part of it. b) Attitude is a small thing that makes a big difference.</p>	<p>The Nest Multiple People</p>	<p>Short Story Saying/ Common phrase.</p>
<p>5. Your attitude is a large part of your identity</p>	<p>a) Your Identity can be formed if you change your attitude because you realize you don't like that part of you</p>	<p>Us part of Us</p>	<p>Short Story</p>

that students used to support their answer were also “unique” to individual students. For example, two students, in answering the question, “How is identity formed?” each created their “own” arguments and selected supporting quotes from different course texts. Colin and Dawson chose to respond to the same question on their exams, although their arguments and supporting quotes were different. Figure 7.3.1.1a presents Colin’s writing outline that organizes his essay. Colin’s and Dawson’s arguments and text selections as they wrote in their writing outlines for the exam are described in Table 7.3.1.1.⁴⁹ What was striking about this assessment event as a technology was that it constituted young people as “independent learners” with diverse questions and interests. The Process Exam was designed to allow young people to construct themselves as individuals with differing ideas, even when they answered the same question.

Colin		Dawson	
Process Exam question: How is identity formed?		Process Exam question: How is identity formed?	
<i>Argument</i>	<i>Texts used for supporting quotes</i>	<i>Argument</i>	<i>Texts used for supporting quotes</i>
1. Contact with other people and their identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “The sniper” (short story) ● “Skipper” (short story) 	1. Our identity may be formed by the way the general public or other people dress or act.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Teen” (magazine) ● <i>Pleasantville</i> (movie)
2. Find out what you like and dislike. Having pleasant or unpleasant situations with someone or something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Family affair” (short story) ● <i>Question of loyalty</i> (novel) 	2. TV and the media try to change or form our identities the way that they want it or think it should be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “When television ate my friend” (short story) ● “For better or for worse”(cartoon)
3. Your family, the way and where you were brought up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Pleasantville</i> (movie) ● <i>The outsiders</i> (novel) 	3. Mentors or role models we look up to can influence our identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Mr. Washington” (short story) ● “Be like Mike” (poster)
4. What other people think about you and your identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “On the sidewalk bleeding” (short story) ● “The nest” (short story) 	4. A person’s role in society can change their identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Antz</i> (movie) ● <i>A question of loyalty</i> (novel)
5. Your attitude is a large part of your identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Saying ● “U is part of us” (short story) 	5. People’s appearance can change their identity temporarily or make them feel they have a different identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Feeling good looking great” (play) ● “Balabloc” (video)

⁴⁹ Interested readers can find Dawson’s entire essay about “How is an identity formed?” in Appendix 7.3.1.1.

Students were expected to further “self-direct” their learning from the Process Exam in January, when they received it back with my comments and the mark. This was apparent in the sequence of questions used in the formative assessment tool, “My reflections on my identity essay” (see Figure 7.3.1.1b). This reflection demanded that students determined what went well, what went wrong, and what the young person planned to do to improve their next piece of writing.

Students used this reflection as a technology for guiding their further learning. For example, when asked “What was your favourite part [of your identity essay]?” students responded:

- My favourite part of my essay is my introductory paragraph because it was worded well. I also liked looking up evidence (Colin).
- My favourite part of my essay is the ending because it concludes my feelings on the topic so well. It really says what I wanted my essay to say (Dawson).

Figure 7.3.1.1b
My reflection on my identity essay

1. My favourite part of my essay is... because...

2.

Mistake	Reason	Correction

3. Three things to improve my writing are:

4. One thing I have learned is...

These statements were typical of most students’ self-assessments. The statements demonstrate how the student was expected to constitute an identity (and claim the artefacts by using possessive pronouns such as “my”), state preferences about his or her work, and demonstrate how they can work on their self-development. The identity essay can be understood as a means for students to practice care of the self as they choose among multiple alternatives and set their own goals in attempt to transform their self.

7.3.1.2 Children’s Literature Portfolio

Another assessment event in the classroom program that worked on students to take up the ideal subject position was the Children’s Literature Portfolio. In this assessment event, students combined their choice of ten assignments (from a list of thirty-four) with six genres of children’s literature to create a portfolio that would be unlike any other student’s in the classroom. These choices, according to my teaching journal, “allowed for the diverse learners in my classroom to choose assignments that might better suit their interest or abilities.” The portfolios differed greatly among students. For example, Table 7.3.1.2 illustrates the variety of assignments completed by Colin as he made choices about how to tailor his assessment artefact to “suit [his] interest or abilities.”

Table 7.3.1.2
Children's Literature Portfolio

<i>Title of children's literature</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
Rub a dub dub, three men in a tub	Nursery rhyme	make a message in a bottle
Cinderella	Fairy tale	write a limerick
Curious George	Modern books	write a poem in free verse
Humpty Dumpty	Nursery rhyme	make a "want ad" for a character
The tortoise and the hare	Fable	design a kid's toy based on the story
Hercules	Myth	write a sequel
Medusa	Myth	write a politically correct version
The lion and the mouse	Fable	write a rap song
If you give a mouse a cookie	Modern books	draw a scene from the story
Peter Pan	Fairy tale	make a cartoon

This portfolio reflected the specific student's choices of assessment artefacts and he was proud of his assignments because they were distinctly different from every other student in the class. This sense of pride was made clear not only from students involved as participants in the research, but also in parental interviews, such as this transcript of an interview with Colin's parents:

Van Zoost: Do you notice any changes in Colin's attitude when he is working on a self-chosen assignment rather than a teacher-chosen assignment?

Colin's mother: I think humans in general like to have some say over what they do in life. I notice his enthusiasm to do these assignments with you.

Colin's father: There's an assignment that he did, say, six weeks ago. There was saran wrap involved – he called it 3-D. He took that one so seriously.

Colin's mother: He didn't do anything else that entire weekend but work on that.

Colin's father: I watched him put something together and then he wasn't happy with it and he then he took it apart and started going again. I know myself, I'd be like, "Well, that's good *enough!*" [laughter]. But then the worst part of it, when he left with it – he was doing some last minute touch – and I missed it. I never got to see it when it was done and it never came back. It was such a big thing to him. I missed it as it went out the door. I guess I'm saying that because it was such a big deal to him, and it had to be perfect in his eyes.

Colin's mother: The whole idea of you allowing them to make their own choices is promoting their own creativity. That's the most important thing I've seen from this.

Colin's father: And I think that they want to prove that their choice is a good one. As a result, that's part of that "it's not good enough, that's not good enough" and they want to prove that they made a good choice.

Colin's mother: To me, it's a great builder of self-esteem for a young person. Instead of always having legislation, they're actually making good choices for themselves. And

yet, mature choices – this isn't just an excuse for getting out of things that you would have them do. I think it's a really positive thing.

Colin's parents emphasized that it was the premise of *choice* that allowed Colin to take pride in his work, be creative, develop responsibility, and build self-esteem. Here, the assessment event offered Colin a particular way of being as he worked on his school assignments outside of the classroom: he was "self-directed." His father lamented that Colin worked so independently that he did not get to see his son's final assessment artefact before it was donated to an elementary school classroom. His parents understood this process as a "positive thing" as they believed that he was making "mature choices" – those that will be needed beyond adolescence and into adulthood.

The Children's Literature Portfolio permitted students to consider their own moral positions. Colin addressed how he understood "ugly" and the problems of social ostracization at school in his assignment, "A politically correct version of the myth of Medusa." In the ending of this assignment he writes how a younger Medusa is welcomed by others to eat lunch with them in attempts to include her in social groupings in the classroom. Through his writing, Colin articulated his moral position of welcoming and including difference into social groups. One of the benefits of the portfolio was that it allowed each student to choose different assignments and children's literature as well as include different moral dilemmas in their assignments. For example, Tinia's portfolio included a "911 recording" from the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill," and this assignment choice ("911 recording") and the specific nursery rhyme were not used in Colin's portfolio. However, like Colin, Tinia included her own sense of moral obligations in her assignments. She involved environmental concerns and a moral dilemma of stealing water in her "911 recording" imagined after Jack has bumped his head:

Jill: Sniff! Our well went dry. We bought one of those water machines to drink with, the ones with mineral water. They don't hold enough water to shower with so mom sent me and Jack to fetch water from our neighbour's well. Oh my gosh! I wasn't supposed to tell anyone! You won't tell, will you?
Operator: How is Jack doing?

In this dialogue Tinia identified several competing moral dilemmas: stealing water, reporting crimes to authorities (or not), and whether or not that operator should help a criminal (Jack) by saving his life. The assignment was an opportunity for Tinia to clarify what she valued as important when facing moral dilemmas. At the end of the assignment, Jack is saved, Jack and Jill are arrested, and the operator is discovered to be a neighbour.

The Children’s Literature Portfolio required the young person to involve others in the assessment: students were asked to consult with their classmates to conduct peer assessments of their Children’s Literature Portfolio. My teaching journal described this event as: “These assignments were shared with other students to elicit feedback and suggestions.” Students used a simple checklist of five criteria to elicit peer feedback: uses details from literature, demonstrates meaning of the story, creativity, effort, and neatness of presentation. Moving around the classroom, students traded the ten assignments in their portfolio with different students, having them “sign off” when they had completed the assessment form. “Signing off” ensured that all ten assignments in the portfolio were viewed. Secondly, this ensured that the assignments were reviewed by ten different students in the class. This formative assessment allowed students to share their work with excitement. It privileged socially confident students who were comfortable approaching their peers to assess their work. It also demanded that students worked collaboratively with people they may or may not have chosen to socialize with outside of the classroom. The students also had to reflect and provide direction to others about their school work in a way that showed critical reflection and continued peer support. Furthermore, this ideal student must have been willing to receive praise and criticism from peers within this social context. In this assessment practice, the young person was expected to be mindful of his/her social development and to treat others with sensitivity.

7.3.1.3 Literature Circles Group Reflections

The young person was required to vocalize their willingness to work with others in the post-Literature Circle Group Reflections, use these assessment events as opportunities to demonstrate that he or she was capable of receiving this feedback, and continue to work with others in productive ways; the ideal young person was capable of using these social experiences to direct his or her further learning. This event was a formative assessment where students determined what they would do differently the next time the Literature Circle Group met. At the end of each Literature Circle meeting, the students were expected to complete a Group Reflection after they had reviewed my observational records and comments. This reflection was based upon how students felt during the Literature Circle meeting [emphasis added]⁵⁰:

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your group on the following behaviours:

- a) _____ we *felt safe* to share creative ideas
- b) _____ we *encouraged* everyone in the group to contribute
- c) _____ we *felt* as though our ideas were important
- d) _____ we worked at creating a *supportive environment* for each other

⁵⁰ The words that are emphasized here demonstrate how feelings were expected to be discussed by the “self-directed learner” during this reflection. “Feeling” was a mental process presented earlier in section 7.2.2.1.

e) _____ we *challenged each other* intellectually

One thing we should try to do differently in our next meeting:

The rating process elicited group conversation about how they interacted and students often referred to specific incidents in their meeting to derive consensus about the rating. Because students met once a week for a month in their Literature Circle groups, they used these Group Reflections to guide subsequent meetings. For example, Laura recorded for her group in their first meeting that “One thing we should try to do different in our next meeting: We should try to stop interrupting each other even though we’re really excited to talk.” In their second meeting, this group noticed dramatic differences in the frequency of interruptions (based on my observational records) and decided to pursue this further. In their second meeting, their Group Reflection reported that “One thing we should try to do different in our next meeting: We should take 10 second pauses where no one talks and we all just stop and think before we start speaking again. The Discussion Director will lead this.” This assessment event required that students work collaboratively to find ways to improve or change the ways in which they work together in the Literature Circle meetings; they reflected to find ways to demonstrate that they were interested in growth over time and thereby develop their self. The assessment event contained a strong social element that emphasized the involvement of others to reflect on their “active listening” skills so that they could focus their efforts in the next meeting. In this instance, reflection was an important component of self-development.

7.3.1.4 Third Term Contracts

A fourth assessment event in the classroom program that constituted young people as self-developers occurred when students formed individual contracts for the third term of the school year under the theme of “Relationships.” Because students had created individual contracts with individual assessment events, they were required to not only choose and design their own assignments that would demonstrate the outcomes of the course, but they also had to choose the assessment criteria for each assignment. To assist in these decisions, I posted lists of possible assignment ideas on posters around the classroom and as a class we generated a list of possible assessment criteria that could be used in an assessment event. Students used the following list as a “touchstone” to choose their assessment criteria and create their individual rubrics:

- Spelling
- Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, quotation marks)
- Clarity of purpose
- Paragraph organization

- Word choice / syntax / style
- Evidence / convincing / supporting information
- Presentation skills
- Effort
- Multiple perspectives
- Visual layout
- Creativity
- Organization of material
- Development of ideas (details, specifics)
- Point of view / tone / stance
- Overall achievement of purpose
- Structure
- Body language
- Vocal impact
- Control of design elements
- Character development

Students chose the assessment criteria to match the outcome(s) being assessed (e.g., writing, speaking, etc.). These decisions were made individually, but not always independently. For example, students had opportunities to share their rubrics with their peers and often incorporated each other’s ideas into their own individualized rubrics. The contracts encouraged students to achieve the learning outcomes in ways that I had not predicted as I noted in my teaching journal: “Opportunities arose for students to demonstrate their abilities to achieve the learning outcomes in ways that I, as the teacher, had not imagined possible.... a parody of television formats... a cooking demonstration where the ingredients were symbolic of required components of a healthy teenage relationship.” In Table 7.3.1.4a, I compare the assignments of four students to illustrate the range of interests among students in creating assessment artefacts, and the ability of the classroom program to create

opportunities for students to design individualized assessment plans.

Table 7.3.1.4a			
Examples of students’ Third Term Contract assignments			
<i>Nicholas.</i>	<i>Laura</i>	<i>Brenda</i>	<i>Peter</i>
Dragon Ball M	Cooking show ⁵¹	Song	Voyager
Short Story	Diary	Magazine	Enemies of a kind
Love Diary ⁵²	Autobiography	Photographs ⁵³	Dragon Ball M
	Game Board	Poster	The great adventure ⁵⁴

⁵¹ This assignment was presented in Chapter 5 as part of the classroom program description. This was an assignment done by four students where they made a video about teenage dating in the genre of a television cooking show.

⁵² This assignment is illustrated later in this section.

⁵³ This assignment is discussed later, in section 7.3.2.4 as an example of how students bring their “real-lives” into the classroom program.

⁵⁴ This assignment is discussed later, in section 7.3.2.4 as an example of how students involve interests from outside of school into the design of their assignments. In this case, Peter infuses technology into “The great adventure.”

Each of these assignments designed by the student included a description of the project which was discussed with me in a conference, followed by a second conference to approve an assessment rubric designed by the student for the assignment. For example, Nicholas' contract proposal included the following description of the "Love Diary" assignment:

Title of Assignment: Love Diary

Description of Assignment: A man is in a relationship with his girlfriend. They are both at university and have to make some tough decisions when the girl gets pregnant.

Curriculum Outcomes: 1. Students will be expected to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audiences, and purpose. 2. Students will be expected to use writing and other ways of representing to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and learning; and to use their imagination.

This assignment allowed Nicholas to address a moral dilemma that interested him - teenage pregnancy. Involved in this assignment were several opportunities for Nicholas to clarify his values towards sexual conduct, abortion, post-secondary education, marriage, and modern families. (Other students addressed topics in their assignments that demanded moral stances, such as domestic violence, sexual/family abuse, and environmental concerns which are presented in the next chapter).

Nicholas then, using the assessment criteria generated as a class, created a rubric (see Table 7.3.1.4b) which was approved before he began to create the "Love Diary." This assignment, once the rubric was approved, was completed by Nicholas and he received 24/25 on the "Love Diary" rubric and an anecdotal comment from me:

Nicholas – this writing is different in style from your short story! [Another assignment completed for his contract]. I'm so pleased to read such a variety in your writing. The ending was very clever in how you tied it all together and stated the narrator's overall view/perspective about teenage pregnancy. Congratulations, Mr. VZ.

The "Love Diary" is an example of students' assessment artefacts that were individually negotiated within each student's contract. This "tailoring" of the assignments for each contract offered students opportunities to create "self-directed" assessment experiences and to shape themselves as an ideal subject who cared about his or her learning.

The young person was expected to frequently involve others in their "self-directed" learning experience of the contract. For example, students frequently received guidance from their interactions with me during the conferences to discuss their assignment proposals and rubrics.

Table 7.3.1.4b “Love Diary” rubric					
<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>Spelling/ Mechanics</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-10 mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> Many mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to read
<i>Word Choice</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Superior choice of words <input type="checkbox"/> Lots of adjectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Great choice of words <input type="checkbox"/> Chooses words that show a wide range of vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/> Good choice of words <input type="checkbox"/> Some adjectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair choice of words	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor choice of words <input type="checkbox"/> No adjectives
<i>Effort / neatness</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Superior effort <input type="checkbox"/> Lots of creative ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Plot flows smoothly	<input type="checkbox"/> Great effort and neatness <input type="checkbox"/> Original work	<input type="checkbox"/> Good effort and neatness <input type="checkbox"/> Some creative ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair effort <input type="checkbox"/> Not very neat	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor effort <input type="checkbox"/> Sloppy <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to read
<i>Character development</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> You feel like this person is your best friend	<input type="checkbox"/> You feel like this person is your neighbour	<input type="checkbox"/> You feel like this person is an acquaintance	<input type="checkbox"/> You feel like this person is a stranger you've met only once	<input type="checkbox"/> You feel like this person loves in outer space

These conferences allowed for the “fine-tuning” of the assessment event. Seen another way, these conferences acted as technologies that “fine-tuned” the ways in which students would be constituted. During the conferences, students often required assistance with creating their individual rubrics in two ways: choosing assessment criteria and in writing descriptors that describe various levels of achievement of the assessment criteria. Students created collective advice about generating rubrics (see Table 7.3.1.4c) and they referred to these notes for assistance and then asked for further help during our conferences. This way of students working together to create collaborative advice illustrates how my classroom program was not strictly about students constituting an individual self but also involved considerations of how this self was constituted within social context; the ideal subject position in my classroom involved others when directing the self.

According to my teaching journal, the most common form of question I would ask students during the conferences was “What does that look like?” I used this question to help students envision what the most successful assignment would look like and conversely, a poorly done assignment.

Table 7.3.1.4c
Advice about writing rubrics from Grade 8 students

Frequently suggested ideas

- Be descriptive but not overly complicating
- Be creative
- Take your best strengths and put them into the project
- Do a rough copy first
- Make the criteria resemble the assignment
- Use some humour
- Be honest
- Make sure you know what you're talking about
- Explain your criteria well, but keep it short
- Use as many original ideas as possible for your criteria
- Choose a variety of criteria
- Don't choose criteria that are the same in any way, choose them wisely
- Put down criteria that you need to improve on
- Be realistic
- Don't always make your rubric in a 5 point scale
- Make it so that someone who does not understand your project can mark it with your rubric
- Make it easy for the teacher and others to understand
- Make sure you have to do a lot of work to get a check on your rubric
- Make it simple enough to make others give you the same mark
- Don't make it too complicated
- Think a lot about it before putting it on paper
- Explain what effort *looks* like
- Pick what marks *you* think is fair
- Don't over-rate your effort
- Ask questions instead of just putting one word in the criteria
- Don't make a rubric that is too easy on yourself
- Have fun

Comments that make you go hmmm...

- make yourself think about the stuff you want to do and how to do it
- write down things you can accomplish but at the same time make it challenging
- don't be too easy on yourself
- keep within your limits yet challenge yourself
- if you're not good at the assignment make the rubric easier
- take your time on it
- really think about what you're writing
- think about why you chose *that* to put on your rubric
- be responsible

These conversations required the student to share their ideas openly and be willing to receive direction from me, their teacher, about the assignments. In my teaching journal, I wrote about my concern with the process of conferencing with students:

While I held conferences with students about their self-created assessment tools, I explained that they were not in complete “control,” although this was frequently their misinterpretation of the process despite me reminding them that I, the teacher, had the ultimate say about their individualized assignments; I had the stamp.⁵⁵

I was most aware of this “stamping” process during the student conference process as we discussed (one-on-one) each proposed assessment tool. One student who wanted to write a short story produced a rubric with the following assessment criteria: presentation, creativity, clarity, and effort. During our conference I had agreed to these criteria, with the addition of one more – elements of character. Because I was familiar with this student’s action-packed, plot-drive, descriptive-lacking writing style, I wanted to see him focus his attention on developing the story’s characters – something we had addressed in our examination of literature. In this case, the student was required to resubmit his rubric for final approval after he had added the “elements of character” to his assessment criteria (see Figure 7.3.1.4 for a copy of this rubric).

In our discussion, I spoke with the student about the strengths of his plot devices in his creative writing and the absence of thick description as a means of creating mental images for the reader. He too, claimed to be interested in developing his writing skills such that he would be able to better describe the settings and characters of his imagination. At the time, I was sceptical if his interest was genuine, or a result of my pre-requisite to include this criterion in his writing.


I also met with students to discuss their assignments after they were completed and used the following questions as a guide for our conference:

- What did you like best about your assignments this term?
- Of the work you’ve done, what do you feel most confident about? What do you still not understand?
- What impact has this assignment had on your interests, attitudes, and views?

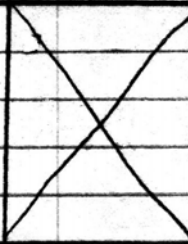
⁵⁵ A reminder of the purpose of this stamp, as described in my teaching journal: “Students were required to have my stamp of approval (literally) on their contract before they could begin each task. Even more significant was the stamp of approval on each assessment tool that students designed for every assessment event.”

Figure 7.3.1.4
 Rubric for a story/myth with "elements of character"

Story/Myth



Apr. 2

Criteria	5	4	3	2	1
Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> no spelling mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 or 2 spelling mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 or 4 spelling mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 spelling mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> far to many spelling mistakes
	<input type="checkbox"/> very neat	<input type="checkbox"/> organized <input type="checkbox"/> neat		<input type="checkbox"/> messy	<input type="checkbox"/> incomp
Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> gets/keeps reader's attention	<input type="checkbox"/> an original story	<input type="checkbox"/> some original ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> too slow <input type="checkbox"/> un-interesting	<input type="checkbox"/> puts reader to sleep
	<input type="checkbox"/> very interesting	<input type="checkbox"/> interesting			
Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/> easy to see the relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> can see a relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> there is a relationship, but an unimportant one	<input type="checkbox"/> almost no relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> no relationship at all
	<input type="checkbox"/> easy to follow the story				
Effort	<input type="checkbox"/> well-thought-out story	<input type="checkbox"/> told the story	<input type="checkbox"/> told the basic story	<input type="checkbox"/> less than 1 page	<input type="checkbox"/> thrown together at the best
	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 3 pages	<input type="checkbox"/> got the main idea across	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 page	<input type="checkbox"/> almost no details	
	<input type="checkbox"/> much time put into story	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pages	<input type="checkbox"/> not very detailed		
	<input type="checkbox"/> very detailed	<input type="checkbox"/> some detail			
Elements of Characters	<input type="checkbox"/> interesting characters	<input type="checkbox"/> original characters	<input type="checkbox"/> more than one character	<input type="checkbox"/> no reason for these characters - pointless	
	<input type="checkbox"/> details of the characters	<input type="checkbox"/> describes characters			

(Note the "sunshine" stamp reading "Fantastic!" used to indicate the approval of this rubric.)

This time, the conference worked to validate students' experiences of being a "self-directed" learner. The first two questions above asked students to reflect on their assessment experiences and turn their reflections into direction in the third question. Students were required to share their learning processes and celebrate their academic achievements – with me. This final conference reinforced the value of being a learner who was interested and capable of directing his or her self. In this way, the Third Term Contract asked students to insert ethical elements into their work by being concerned about their self as well as their peers in their school work.

The Process Exam, the Children's Literature Portfolio, the Literature Circle Group Reflection, and the Third Term Contract are all examples of the classroom program's design to involve students in directing their assessment experiences and the assessment artefacts made possible in the classroom program encouraged students to think of their work as "their own." In addition, all four of the assessment events discussed above required that the young person considered how to make choices, reflect, and involve others. Like the self-developer in the policies, the ideal subject position in my classroom program understood the self to be in need of development and to be a calculative subject. However, the student in my classroom program supplemented the self-developer of the policies to include specific practices of involving others. Table 7.3.1.4d reviews the practices that were used by young people during the assessment events to constitute an ideal subject position in my classroom program that supplemented the self-developer ideal of the policies.

What this table illustrates is the variety of ways that the assessment events, as technologies, worked at constituting the young person as one who "self-directs" his or her learning. It should be noted that self-direction and making choices underpinned the practices of reflecting and involving others in the authentic assessment events; students made choices about further activities when they reflected and they made choices about how to involve others in their assessment events. This emphasis on young people making choices is important because young people were not required to address critical issues when they made choices in their assessment events. These choices were left up to the individual student making it possible for students to avoid critical aspects of literacy. My version of authentic assessment, because of its emphasis on individual choice and students' individual interests, ignored some of the critical aspects of English language arts. Thus, authentic assessment emphasized freedom and choice and could produce young people who were technically adept but not necessarily equipped with the abilities to address issues of fairness or equity.

Table 7.3.1.4d				
Examples of the practices used by the self-developer				
	<i>Process Exam</i>	<i>Children's Literature Portfolio</i>	<i>Literature Circle Group Reflection</i>	<i>Third Term Contract</i>
<i>Make choices</i>	The student chose quotes from texts to support their ideas	[Students chose] ten assignments (from a list of thirty-four).	[Students chose] "One thing we should try to do differently in our next meeting."	[Students] were required not only to choose and design their own assignments..., but they also had to choose the assessment criteria for each assignment.
<i>Reflect</i>	Students determined what went well, what went wrong, and what the young person planned to do to improve their next piece of writing.	The students also had to reflect and provide direction to others about their school work.	Students determined what they would do differently the next time the Literature Circle Group met.	[Students were asked]: Of the work you've done, what do you feel most confident about? What do you still not understand?
<i>Involve others</i>	Students helped to choose the assessment criteria in advance of the exam.	Students were asked to concur with their classmates to conduct peer assessments of their Children's Literature Portfolio.	This assessment event required that students work collaboratively to find ways to improve or change.	Students had opportunities to share their rubrics with their peers and often incorporated each other's ideas into their own individualized rubrics.

That being said, authentic assessment in my classroom had the potential to be used to help young people address critical issues. Some students in my classroom did raise critical questions and chose to address hard social issues and morals in their assignments as noted above:

- the Process Exam allowed some students to tackle questions about their own values,
- the Third Term Contract allowed Nicholas to address a moral dilemma that interested him - teenage pregnancy,
- the Children's Literature Portfolio was an opportunities for Tinia to clarify what she valued as important when facing moral dilemmas.

However, although my classroom program involved such critical issues, this was done by individual student choice.

The self-developer was an ideal in my classroom program that worked largely within (neo-)liberal discourses to foster individualistic identity projects. This neo-liberal subject was characterized by

individual choices not only in the assessment events, but was also understood to be making choices about who they were. Furthermore, the ideal of the self-developer in my classroom program fit well with the ideal of the self-developer in the policies as well as with a progressivist paradigm.

Therefore, as an ideal, the subject constituted a self within neo-liberal and progressive discourses that was capable of making choices, reflecting, and involving others in their self-development. Authentic assessment in my classroom was an ideal means for delivering this kind of learner.

7.3.2 The authentic worker

I use the label “the authentic worker” to describe the ideal subject position in my classroom program that adapted the policy ideal of the new worker. I use this label in the same spirit as much of the middle school literature (A. Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Manning & Bucher, 2005) which emphasizes students’ experiences and relates “authenticity” to students’ “real-lives” outside of school. This “authenticity” of the ideal subject position in my classroom program is very close to its characterisation in the authentic assessment literature where “authenticity” is connected to learning experiences that are seen to be “worthwhile,” “significant,” or “meaningful” (Archbald & Newmann, 1988). This emphasis on making school relevant to young people’s immediate lives was the preoccupation of the authentic worker.

In general, the policies valued learning that would help the young person operate in a world after, or beyond, school in only one sphere – the economic sphere. However, given the context of my classroom, there were limits to how I could enact the policies. I found that while my classroom did work with the ideal of students as new kinds of workers (e.g., using new literacies and being a partner in assessment), the end result remained invested in practices of school rather than work, where young people were assigned marks and these marks were believed to reveal some “truth” about the self. There were limits to what my classroom program could do to produce the new worker given the fact that students were not working (e.g., employed), may not have had easy access to computer technology (a “new literacy” deemed important in the policies for working in New Times), and there were limited materials to create authentic assessment events in my classroom (e.g., those that I purchased such as costumes for performances). While the new worker was concerned with the economic sphere of the “real-world,” the authentic worker in my classroom program focused on the world beyond the economic sphere. My classroom program adapted the ideal of the new worker to be more concerned with students’ immediate lives.

The worlds beyond my classroom included the classroom next to mine, the school across town, the student’s home, or the neighbouring city. The subject used the ideas learned at school to transform how they thought and acted beyond the classroom as well as brought evidence of these worlds into the classroom through the assessment events. The authentic assessment practices provided opportunities for students to demonstrate that they were capable of making these connections - of bridging the learning that occurred in my classroom and their experiences beyond my classroom and the school. In such a way,

the young person constituted a self that took up the ideal of the authentic worker by assuming responsibility for making connections individually to the “real-world” beyond school. In my teaching journal, verbs signalled how the students worked to extend his or her learning beyond the classroom (see Table

Table 7.3.2	
Verbs that signal learning beyond the classroom	
	arranged for a high school biology teacher
	brought [their own interests] into the classroom for display and reward
	did dramatic presentations in Grade 7 classrooms
	get a copy of an actual police incident report
	gone to the mall
	had been to Halifax
	left Nova Middle School
	participate in society
	questions that students brought to the class
	read the Big Books (oversized children’s books) that they had created
	reading their big books in local elementary schools
	toured schools with magic shows
	travelled to local elementary school
	visited local museums
	visited senior citizens
	went Christmas carolling
	went to a museum together
	went to the local police station

7.3.2). The verbs described young people bringing their ideas from outside of the classroom into the class (such as getting a copy of a police incident report) and taking their work and skills from class out into other spaces (such as touring local elementary schools and senior citizen homes). In such a way, the student was constituted as an actor in their worlds beyond the classroom. What was encouraged, were ways of being that related classroom learning to life beyond the classroom such as reading to the young or visiting the elderly.

The ideal subject in my classroom program used the assessment practices as an instrument to connect the classroom and the world beyond the classroom, as evident in the students’ assessment artefacts displayed in this section. For example, the assessment practices described in my teaching journal positioned the student as a mediator between the curricular outcomes of the classroom and the students’ lives beyond the school: the Identity Museum Object asked students to create an artefact using materials from outside of the classroom that would represent how they understood

themselves; the Literature Circle Observational Assessment provided feedback about “active listening skills” deemed useful beyond the classroom; Big Books were created to connect the Grade 8 students with younger children in different schools; and individualized contracts allowed students to create assessment artefacts that extended beyond the classroom’s daily activities and into students’ homes, such as the “Teenage Dating Cooking Show” that was created by four students outside of class, filmed in a kitchen, and brought into the classroom. The assessment practices allowed the student to create artefacts that demonstrated his or her ability to be a connector of classroom learning with the world beyond the classroom. Unlike the new worker who was interested in students’ future employment, the authentic worker was interested in students’ grounded and connected knowledge in their current lives.

Associated with making connections were two other related practices that young people engaged in to take up the authentic worker in my classroom program: making the learning relevant, and producing and performing, rather than selecting, a response during the assessment events. These practices were identified by relating the common processes (see 7.2.2) of the classroom program (e.g., “make,” “create,” “use”) with individual assessment events (see 7.1) to first determine which practices were most common in the assessment events, and then how these practices related to the ideal subject position. The balance of these practices was different with each assessment event, making the process more complex. These three practices are described as follows:

1. *Connect*: The young person had to connect classroom learning experiences with the world beyond the classroom and produce evidence of these connections in the authentic assessment event.
2. *Make it relevant*: The young person was expected to direct his or her learning in efforts to “make their classroom experiences relevant to their own interests and lives” or “construct something that was relevant to their self-understanding” (as described in my teaching journal). This might include, for example, the involvement of students’ interests beyond the classroom such as friends, family relationships, or computers in the assessment activities.
3. *Producing and performing a response*: The young person had to create a product or performance to be assessed. Unlike “traditional” assessment events that require students to select a response, my classroom program provided opportunities for students to produce assessment artefacts and “personalize” them.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ In Chapter 2, I described (using the assessment literature) how “traditional” assessment practices typically promote teacher-determined knowledges and skills while authentic assessment practices have the potential to promote student-determined knowledges and skills.

These practices demonstrate how the authentic worker was taken up by young people in my classroom. As I interpret assessment events as vehicles for connecting the classroom and the world beyond the classroom, making the assessment experiences relevant to students' lives, and allowing young people to generate assessment artefacts, I refer to specific assessment artefacts that were constructed through the classroom program to illustrate how young people were positioned as a connector or medium in this process. The ideal student was one who transcends the classroom and brings back evidence of their experiences in worlds beyond the classroom. The assessment artefacts serve as the evidence of such "authentic" experiences.

7.3.2.1 The Identity Museum

The Identity Museum asked students to create artefacts that would be symbolic representations of themselves. These artefacts were diverse in materials, size, and concept – often relating not only students' self-understanding, but also revealed their worlds outside of school. David constructed a wooden sculpture in the shape of a three dimensional cross, covered in fragments of mirror, birch bark, slate rock, and strips of white cotton material. There was a large metal chain wrapped around the object and a red electric light fixed to the top of the cross. He presented the object with the following speech:

I have made something that is to represent me and how I am. Well, let's start with the glass [mirror]. The glass represents how I try to become or act like my surroundings. The rock represents how on the other side, I can be cold, selfish, and mean. The plain wood you see is rough and jagged, showing how I am not perfect. The cloth shows how I try to hide my faults, but as you see, they still show up somewhere. The bark shows how I was raised far from towns or cities and I am kind of rough around the edges. The chain represents my will power: solid and strong. The light is my life - as long as it does not break I should be okay. The cross itself is just something that has shown up a lot in my life.

In his presentation, David referenced his world beyond the classroom: "I was raised far from towns or cities"; the shape of the cross is symbolic of religious exposure; the materials used are readily accessible for a young person living in a rural environment (rock, scrap wood, birch bark, chains). The sculpture presented David's role as a connector between abstract thinking and concrete artefacts; between personal understanding and public presentation; between school and his world beyond the classroom. It was relevant to his life in that, as my teaching journal stated, "David told me today that he used the sculpture to connect with his estranged father." Such connections, I argue, would have been less likely to be made through "paper and pencil" forms of assessment, or if the event had taken place entirely within the classroom with limited resources. David was able to use

resources from his world beyond the classroom to create his sculpture and present his self in the classroom.

7.3.2.2 Literature Circles Observational Assessment

During the Literature Circles, I used an observational assessment tool to provide feedback about the students' speaking and listening skills.⁵⁷ The assessment criteria were chosen in conjunction with me so that we would have a common understanding of the language used on the assessment tool. The assessment criteria were chosen to reflect practical skills that would be needed in everyday conversations such as: appropriate eye contact, attentive, natural, smiling, paraphrases, supports others with positive comments, etc. Students "over-played" these criteria at first as they practiced the skills that may or may not have been part of their worlds outside of the classroom. They did not simply select a predetermined response to use in social situations, but instead, generated responses that were appropriate for the social context. For example, it would be common for me to overhear a student loudly proclaim "That's a good idea, Nicholas" so that I would hear and validate "supports others with positive comments" on the assessment tool. This produced a great deal of jousting until students were assured that the assessment tool and my comments would reflect their actions.

My anecdotal comments to students were directed to individual students ("Be careful not to 'lecture' your ideas to others" / "Good waiting to share ideas" / "Be careful not to interrupt" / "Homework is only partially completed" / "Offered encouragement to the group when stuck") and to the group as a whole ("This group discussion went for twenty-five minutes after the sharing of homework assignments" / "This group works well together and all members have thought lots about the novel"). The assessment criteria guided the students' behaviour during the assessment event.

Students practiced these skills as if they could be used in worlds beyond the classroom such as in job interviews, conversations with friends or family, or working with the public. I recorded in my teaching journal that "at lunch... students used overt paraphrasing to solve an argument about who was 'right' about a hockey game score." The development of "life skills" was supported by Nova Middle School's Mission Statement, middle school literature, and authentic assessment literature. The ideal student in this classroom program was one who was preparing for a particular life beyond school; one who was being prepared to participate in society as a citizen with specific dispositions for working with other people, as well as an interest in conducting work on their self.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 5 for the observational assessment tool used for Literature Circles.

7.3.2.3 Reading Big Books

The assessment event of creating and reading Big Books assisted students in developing skills that are transferable to the world beyond the Grade 8 classroom as well as giving direct experience of a world beyond my classroom. In this assessment event, students were expected to demonstrate their understanding of audiences beyond the classroom (young children). The ideal student was successful at using skills such as “clear and effective use of eye contact”⁵⁸ in the “real-world” beyond our classroom. Skills practiced in the classroom were then produced in new environments to ensure that students could apply them outside of the classroom. “Eye contact,” practiced through Literature Circles Observational Assessments, was re-assessed in the “Reading of Your Big Book” with a different audience and composition (students addressed a Primary or Grade 1 class rather than a small group of peers). In this assessment event, students were also expected to use a “strong clear voice with effective volume” and an “enthusiastic voice.” The intonations used for the characters and the narrators in the Big Books were generated by the students’ ideas. These communication skills were assessed by a variety of people: the elementary school teachers, volunteer parents, older elementary school students (who were soon to “become” those very Grade 8 students), and two colleagues that I brought with me from Nova Middle School. With multiple and varied assessors, the young person practiced their communication skills for a world beyond the classroom. The students read to an “authentic” audience of elementary school children and this event could be understood as training for the world beyond my classroom that could help students baby-sit, relate with younger siblings, and develop effective parenting skills for their possible future lives.

7.3.2.4 Third Term Contracts

Students demonstrated their ability to transfer skills and knowledges between the classroom and the world beyond the classroom through the individualized assignments arranged in the Third Term Contract. These assignments provided opportunities for students to demonstrate that they were capable of making their school learning experiences meaningful for their lives. For example, the classroom program description in Chapter 5 referenced an assessment artefact that was created through this assessment practice: a short video about teenage dating. This video demonstrated the students’ personal knowledge and information from school texts about teenage relationships and addressed concerns that they had in their lives outside of school. The classroom program provided opportunities for students to design assessment events that related to their own lives and students negotiated their lives into the assessment artefacts. This negotiation was found in the assessment

⁵⁸ “Clear and effective eye contact” was a descriptor used in the rubric used to assess students’ reading of their Big Book. This assessment tool was introduced in Chapter 5.

artefacts created by the Grade 8 students where their interests outside of school were incorporated into their school work. This articulation of curricular outcomes and student lives was evident in the proposals that students wrote for each of the assignments in their Third Term Contract. I use two student artefacts to illustrate this process; one by Peter, the other by Brenda.

Peter chose to create a game called “The Great Adventure” as one of the assignments in his Third Term Contract. He identified the following curriculum outcomes⁵⁹ to address in his assignment:

- Students will be expected to use a range of strategies to develop effective writing and other ways of representing and to enhance their clarity, precision, and effectiveness.
- Students will be expected to attempt to use various technologies for communicating to a variety of audiences for a range of purposes.

The curriculum outcomes in the policies bypass the classroom program and go straight to the student, ignoring the ways in which teachers design the possibilities for young people to demonstrate the outcomes. In my classroom program, Peter was able to use computer technology to create “The Great Adventure” as computer programming was one of his interests outside of school. He recognized that his interest in computer programming could be included in his English contract and constructed a game that would address the curriculum theme of “Relationships.” In his project proposal, he described “The Great Adventure” as follows:

Description of assignment:

This is a male/female relationship.⁶⁰ You start out as the male and you are trying to get to your girlfriend at the top of the building. The building has five levels and she is on the roof. Every level has a puzzle which you must figure out.

Assessment criteria:

relationship, overall presentation, effort

After meeting with me, he proceeded to create a rubric for “The Great Adventure” that I would then use to assess his assignment. The rubric used assessment criteria and descriptors that aligned themselves with the curriculum outcomes addressed in the assignment (see Table 7.3.2.4a for Peter’s rubric). Peter achieved 13.5/15 on the assignment and it was assessed by his mother and me.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The General Curriculum Outcomes were introduced in Chapter 4 and explained in terms of the classroom program in Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Peter’s focus of his assignment – on a male/female relationship – can be understood in terms of the dominant discourse of adolescence that is about forming (heterosexual) relations.

⁶¹ Readers may be interested in the anecdotal comments written about the assignment:

“Peter – I enjoyed your game and had a great time. I got trapped on one of the challenges and couldn’t find my way out! [diagram included to explain the problem] Thanks! Mr. VZ ☺” – comment written by me.

“Lots of effort and time went into this short game. In all fairness, if bonus points were to be allotted they would be deserving. For a young programmer, it was well put together and enjoyable to play, especially with the sounds (an added bonus)” - comment written by Peter’s mother.

Peter also contracted for three other assignments, following the same process: a short story titled “Voyager,” a movie called “Enemies of a kind” and a cartoon on computer called “Dragon Ball M.” Each student in my English class constructed assignments of their own, incorporating interests from outside of the classroom into the assessment artefacts.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Relationship</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows a relationship but a small one	<input type="checkbox"/> Good relationship but not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows good relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Clear	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship is in your face and develops through the story <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships is the main part of the story
<i>Overall presentation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No story line <input type="checkbox"/> So many text mistakes that you can’t read <input type="checkbox"/> Boring game	<input type="checkbox"/> Little or no story line <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to read text <input type="checkbox"/> Don’t want to play	<input type="checkbox"/> Good story line <input type="checkbox"/> Not more than 10 mistakes <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting	<input type="checkbox"/> Interesting plot <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 mistakes <input type="checkbox"/> Want to play game	<input type="checkbox"/> Awesome plot <input type="checkbox"/> No spelling mistakes <input type="checkbox"/> Great game
<i>Effort</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Little or no effort	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows some effort	<input type="checkbox"/> Can tell maker put effort into it	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows lots of effort	<input type="checkbox"/> A lot of effort <input type="checkbox"/> Spent lots of time on it

Brenda created four assignments in her Third Term Contract about the theme “Relationships”: a song, a magazine, a poster, and photographs. She described her “Photographs” assignment in her proposal as follows:

Description of Assignment:

I will find photographs of relationships between different people and tell only you Mr. VZ about them like why I chose them and why they are relationships.

General Curriculum Outcomes of the Assignment:

- Students will be expected to speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, and experiences – [Brenda’s connection to the assignment] I will speak about the photographs and then I will clarify as to why I chose those photos from my thoughts and experiences.
- Students will be expected to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering this situation, audiences, and purpose - [Brenda’s connection to the assignment] Because I will be talking about other people’s relationships for most of them with great amounts of sensitivity considering deeply the purpose for my choice of activity.

Assessment criteria:

Mechanics (spelling, capitalization, punctuation), Visual Layout, Evidence, Effort, and Clarity.

Brenda's "Photographs" included four of her family and one of a close friend. Her descriptions were personal in tone: "We are a closely knit family. As you can see from this picture we enjoy all coming together to celebrate or just to be together...." Similarly to Peter, she used the assessment event as a way of negotiating her world into the classroom program; of talking about her personal relationships with family and friends in her school work. Each student created between three and five assignments, following the process illustrated above with Peter and Brenda's assignments. The ideal student in the classroom program was one who provided evidence of their world in their assessment artefacts. The classroom program facilitates this process, but it was left to the individual students to determine how much of the "real-world" would be brought to school.

All four of the assessment events presented above (the Identity Museum, Literature Circles Observational Assessment, Reading Big Books, and Third Term Contracts) belong to the family of practice called "authentic, alternative, and performance assessments" (see Table 7.1a above). As discussed in Chapter 2, the assessment events that belong to this family of practice seek to involve students in the assessment practices (Stiggins, 2005b, 2008; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005) so that young people generate rather than choose a response (Burke, 1999). All four of these assessment events required that the young person connected their learning in my classroom with their worlds outside of the classroom, made their assessment experiences relevant to their lives, and produced and performed (rather than selected) their "own" product or performance. Table 7.3.2.4b reviews the practices that were used by young people during the assessment events to constitute an authentic worker. This table was completed by using direct lines from above.

While these practices were established in these assessment events above, the authentic worker used these events for additional purposes; to prepare for his or her current and future roles in society. The ideal subject strove to show how his or her skills were useful for integrating the self into society. However, it should be noted that because of the great extent of individual choice in the classroom program, it was possible, for example, for students to avoid issues of power and ethics in their school work. Instead, the authentic worker was a particular sort of citizen: one who was able to participate in polite, yet meaningful, conversations. I make this claim based on the skills that the ideal subject pursued. For example, the Literature Circle Observational Assessment and the Reading Big Books events assessed the ability of young people to communicate using effective eye-contact

and control of their voice. This ideal subject was observed by a variety of assessors who ensured that the young person was personable through his or her eye-contact and use of voice. Such skills can be seen to be ones which operate across social contexts.

Table 7.3.2.4b				
Examples of the practices used by the authentic worker				
	<i>The Identity Museum</i>	<i>Literature Circles</i> <i>Observational</i> <i>Assessment</i>	<i>Reading Big Books</i>	<i>Third Term Contract</i>
<i>Connect</i>	David was able to use resources [wood, bark, chains, etc.] from his world beyond my classroom, to create his sculpture.	Students practiced these [“active listening”] skills as if they could be used in worlds beyond the classroom such as in job interviews, conversations with friends or family, or working with the public.	Skills practiced in the classroom are now produced in new environments to ensure that students can apply them outside of the classroom.	This video demonstrated the students’ personal knowledge and information from school texts about teenage relationships and addressed concerns that they had in their lives outside of school.
<i>Make it relevant</i>	David... used the sculpture to connect with his estranged father.	At lunch... students used overt paraphrasing to solve an argument about who was ‘right’ about a hockey game score.	[The assessment event] could be understood as training [to]...help students baby-sit, relate with younger siblings, and develop effective parenting skills.	[Peter] recognized that his interest in computer programming could be included in his English contract and constructed a game that would address the curriculum
<i>Produce and perform a response</i>	The Identity Museum asked students to create artefacts that would be symbolic representations of themselves.	[Students] generated responses that were appropriate for the social context.	The intonations used for the characters and the narrators in the Big Books were generated by the students’ ideas.	Brenda created four assignments in her Third Term Contract about the theme “Relationships”: a song, a magazine, a poster, and photographs.

In sum, my classroom program sought to help young people shape themselves into productive forms – productive not only for school, but also for their lives outside of school. The authentic worker was an ideal that connected my classroom with the local and immediate lives of young people, especially their families and communities. Unlike the new worker that was concerned with the future employment of young people, the authentic worker was interested in the current lives of students and to make their schooling experiences relevant to their lives. As an ideal, the subject brought their

life from outside of school into the classroom and constituted a self that was capable of making connections between their life and their school work, of making school tasks relevant for their lives, and by producing and performing responses to be assessed. Authentic assessment in my classroom was an ideal means of delivering this kind of learner.

7.4 Progressive and neo-liberal subjectivities – issues and possibilities

The two ideals in my classroom program, the self-developer and the authentic worker, operated mostly within progressive discourses that emphasized self-improvement. That being said, I could also see how authentic assessment in my classroom program could have been easily been deployed within neo-liberal discourses to create ideal workers and consumers. That is, the practices associated with these ideal subject positions are consistent with the descriptions of neo-liberal subjectivities that emphasize the individual who is concerned with freedom and choice. As noted above, the practices of the ideal subject positions in my classroom included making individual choices, reflecting, involving others in their self-development, connecting school with life, making school work relevant, and producing and performing responses. Such practices are congruent with Nicholas Rose's (1999) description of how neo-liberal subjects are to become "entrepreneurs of the self." That is, the ideal subject positions in my classroom program shaped their self through the choices that they made from among those available to them in my classroom program and from those available to them in their lives outside of the classroom. Because the ideals of my classroom program are closely aligned to progressive and neo-liberal subjectivities, my classroom program raises several issues.

My analysis of authentic assessment practices shows they can be powerful in shaping students and therefore need to be used with care. I understood that the assessment practices in my classroom program acted as technologies that governed and helped students govern themselves into these particular ways of being. These ideal ways of being were evident in the assessment practices, the labels used to describe young people and the verbs used to describe their activities in the classroom program, and in the assessment artefacts that were created in the classroom program. These ideal subject positions were shaped by my own ways of understanding young people and my role as a teacher. These ideal subject positions were not, however, exactly those that my employer articulated in the policies.

Broadly speaking, it could be said that the ideal subject positions of the policies and my classroom program emphasized the idea of student “ownership” over their learning where young people were expected to have some level of control over curricular choices and this was not described as problematic. As Dudley-Marling and Searle (1995) point out, student ownership is a “slippery concept.” Despite my wariness towards this sense of student control in my classroom program, I understood that the policy and classroom program ideals assumed a great deal about students’ interest and ability to assume responsibility for their learning. In this regard, the ideal subject positions were similar. What was taken for granted in the policies and in my classroom program was that young people were interested in making individual choices and that young people had a great deal of freedom to make these choices. My analysis helped me to understand that this freedom was “supervised” (Hunter, 1994) and my role as a teacher was to assess how students had done at making choices in the classroom as they constituted a self. Young people who were interested in being successful in my classroom were “free” to make choices that aligned with the ideals of the self-developer and the authentic worker.

My classroom program, through authentic assessment, made projects of the self available to young people and these identity projects involved the ideal subject positions. These ideals acted as foils for young people to use during the constitution of their identities; young people used the ideal subject positions on offer to consider what sort of work they would conduct on their self. For example, while students’ choices in my classroom program involved my surveillance as they constituted a self in the classroom, these choices simultaneously demanded that young people were mindful of their self-constitution.

In retrospect, I understood that my classroom program was underscored by variations of what Foucault (1986, pp. 43, 45, 67) calls the process of “care of the self”:

It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice.... In ancient times this was often understood to involve a “cultivation of the soul.”.... In earlier times this was a matter of self-mastery, but over the course of history it became more a matter of learning to shape one’s own inner character.

I was not aware of Foucault’s notion of care of the self when I developed my classroom program and this was not an intentional aim of mine. However, through my analysis of the classroom program, I understood how aspects of Foucault’s care of the self could be used to understand and describe authentic assessment in my classroom. For example, my classroom program expected that

students would have a relationship with their self that allowed them to constitute that self as a subject of his or her own actions. This, as I described in Chapter 5, could be done by the following ways:

- the student would feel responsible for his/her own learning and be accountable for his/her decisions,
- this student would also be aware of specific ways that one can look after him or herself through diet, exercise, socialization, and reflection,
- the student would learn how to rearticulate their frustrations into productive questions and constructive comments,
- the student could manage their self in the world and believe that he/she could make a difference in their own and other's lives.

The care of the self was one means of working within neo-liberal discourses that emphasized freedom and choice.

The ideal subject positions in my classroom program invested in progressive and neo-liberal discourses, and in so doing moved students towards the idea of ownership and created possibilities for students to take care of the self. The specific practices involved in authentic assessment described in this chapter showed that authentic assessment was a powerful tool for conducting projects of the self. Authentic assessment can be seen to have constituted people in particular ways and provided specific technologies to do so. This has been absent in the literature about authentic assessment as have discussions about the politics of this process. Instead, the literature focuses on the individual and does not consider critical and social implications of authentic assessment. This is also a criticism of my classroom program; my classroom program had strong continuities with the assessment policies especially in the avoidance of critical and social aspects of working with young people or, at least, making such work up to the individual. Put another way, my classroom program was an offer to young people to engage in identity projects that may or may not have involved critical or social issues for young people in New Times. What students did with this offer is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

STUDENT IDENTITIES

Identities, as introduced in Chapter 3, are “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (Hall, 2000, p. 19). To be a successful student in my classroom program, young people needed to constitute themselves in ways that would be rewarded and this involved taking up subject positions that would earn marks. As noted in the key ideas from the previous chapter, there were two main ways of being a successful student in my classroom: young people had to demonstrate that they could achieve the curriculum outcomes by taking up the ideals of being a self-developer and/or an authentic worker. These ways of being can be considered subject positions to which students were invited to create attachments (temporary or long-term) in order to be seen as a successful student in my classroom (e.g., by earning marks through the assessment events or by receiving praise from me or a parent). This chapter explores the ways that students did or did not take up the subject positions on offer in my classroom and in doing so, provides vital insights for my broad research question, *how are young people’s identities constituted in my classroom through authentic assessment practices?*

The data in this chapter illustrates that in real students’ lives, official policy and school discourses do have power, but equally, other discourses cannot be ignored. I explore this issue first by examining how students brought additional discourses into the classroom beyond those that were on offer through my classroom program. Frequently, students brought the discourses of rural life, families, friendship, and romance into the classroom. Then, I illustrate how particular students constituted identities. My intention here is to illustrate how these identities - these temporary attachments to subject positions - were apparent across a range of data. Other interpretations are possible, such as illustrating an identity that occurred during a Literature Circle meeting or another specific authentic assessment event. Instead, I am using a “wide-range perspective” and only considered something an “identity” when I saw it as emerging across a range of assessment events in my classroom. That is, to be labelled as identities they had to exhibit some level of stability beyond a single event. I pay attention to the various ways in which students, subtly or unsubtly, worked around, appropriated or

outright resisted, the subject positions on offer in my classroom program and consider some of the alternatives that they took up in terms of broad identity patterns in my classroom. In relation to instances where students both were and were not able to align themselves with the ideals on offer, I am interested in exploring the discursive resources that students had available to them and what difference this made to their positions in the classroom. I then go on to discuss how the constitution of identities in my classroom in authentic assessment involved working within the discourses of assessment and that this process involved students governing themselves into particular forms that were in line with teacher and curricular expectations in order to earn marks.

It should be noted that in my discussion of student identities, I use data in multiple ways: I use examples of students' work to illustrate how young people took up identities; I refer back to the ideal subject positions discussed in previous chapters concerning policies and the classroom program; and I include students' and parents' comments from interviews when these data are relevant. My analysis shows that my classroom was not a place where all students could be successful, but my authentic assessment practices did make space available for alternative discourses from those usually valorised by schools, and I claim this allowed some students to be more successful than they would usually be. That having been said, there were also some students who were probably no more successful than they would have been in a classroom that used traditional assessment practices. I use the data in this chapter to reflect on why that might be and I also point out how other factors besides authentic assessment contributed to the constitution of students' identities.

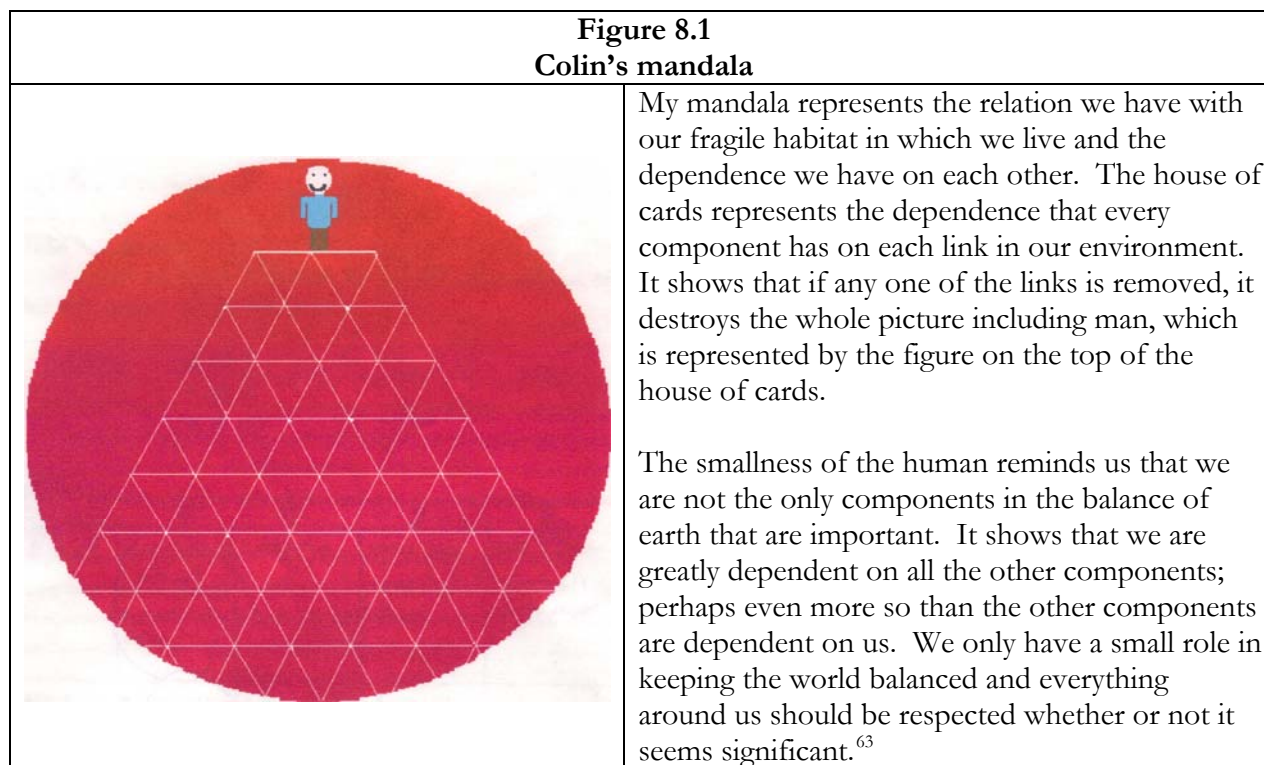
8.1 Bringing in non-school discourses encouraged by authentic assessment

In previous chapters, I identified various discourses associated with policies and my classroom program such as adolescence, psychology, measurement, technology, globalization, employment and neo-liberal, neo-conservative, and progressivist discourses. Collectively, I refer to these as “policy and school discourses” and authentic assessment practices brought some of these discourses into the classroom. However,

Table 8.1 Authentic assessment events in the Third Term Contract (count)
Mandala (6)
Poster (6)
Song (5) Board Game (3)
Collage (3)
Computer Game (2)
Film (2)
Map (2)
Photo Display (2)
Play (2)
Cookbook
Constellation Map
Cooking Demonstration
Diorama
Drawing
Family Scrapbook
Family Token
Graph
Greeting Cards
Painting
Picture
Radio Show
Sculpture

young people brought other discourses into the classroom through these same practices. Using authentic assessment to create a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993) created possibilities and dangers for young people as they brought non-school discourses into their school work. That is, I understood my classroom program to be a permeable space – one where authentic assessment opened up my classroom to other discourses. For example, in the Third Term Contract, students used authentic assessment events to work with their friends outside of class such as during the creation of computer games, video productions, and plays (Table 8.1 reports the authentic assessment events that were created by students during the Third Term Contract). These events allowed some young people to bring their interests and lives from outside of school into their English assignments and thereby brought discourses into the classroom. For example, the discourse of romance was brought into the classroom through students’ assessment artefacts, such as Nicholas’s “Love Diary,” the teenage dating video called “Cooking for Love,” and Peter’s “The Great Adventure” assignment (see Chapter 7). The discourse of environmentalism was brought into the classroom by Colin in his mandala assignment (see Figure 8.1)⁶².

Figure 8.1
Colin’s mandala



⁶² A mandala is a visual representation of a culture’s moral community. “Mandala is the ancient Sanskrit word for a circle that symbolizes the cosmic order. The mandala includes within its borders all that is sacred or, in moral terms, all that has intrinsic moral value” (Boss, 2003, p. 117).

⁶³ It should be noted that the transcripts in this research were edited to remove the “errs” and “ums” that signal pauses in dialogue. This was a request from two participants after they had read the transcript from the first focus group. I honoured this request and decided that it was better to treat the transcripts consistently.

Before I introduce specific identities that students constituted in my classroom, I offer a survey of common discourses that students brought in to the classroom. While I understood that each student brought a different blend of discourses into the classroom or created specific versions of similar discourses, my intention here is to illustrate how students frequently brought in similar discourses, specifically discourses of rural life, families, friendship, and romance. These discourses were commonly authorized by the classroom program through authentic assessment practices and in general worked with the ideal subject positions of the self-developer and the authentic worker. I offer these four common discourses as a broad picture of students' identity work in my classroom.

8.1.1 Bringing in discourses of rural life

On the first day of school in September 2000, Conrad arrived late. He appeared at the door, looking timidly through the small rectangular window in the door and caught my eye inside the classroom. Holding his baseball cap and sandwich in one hand, he handed me a note with the other hand, written in what appeared to be haste: "Conrad is late for school because the oxen got out of the fance [sic] and he had to get them back in." The following week, he procured another note from his mom: "Please excuse Conrad for Wednesday and Thursday because he was working at the Bill Lynch Shows."⁶⁴ My students brought their rural experiences into the classroom and created assessment events that depicted rural understandings of the world.

Incidents such as Conrad's notes were ways of bringing rural discourses in the classroom. Part of being a flexible authentic worker involved adaptation, and students in my classroom illustrated their ability to connect their local experiences with school skills and identities; they were able to adapt and use their rural experiences to demonstrate their English skills. This was made possible through the authentic assessment practices as, by their very nature, authentic assessment practices sought to create learning experiences that are meaningful to the student (Archbald & Newmann, 1988) and therefore connected students' experiences in rural life outside of the school with those in the classroom. As an authentic worker, students could legitimately bring their "authentic" experiences of living in rural Nova Scotia. In this way, authentic assessment invited rural discourses into the classroom. Young people were able to achieve this by firstly extending the learning experiences beyond the classroom and into the students' homes and community (e.g., touring elementary schools

⁶⁴ Bill Lynch Shows was a touring entertainment company that managed the "Midway" (an area for amusement park rides) of our County Exhibition. County Exhibitions showcase local farmers' produce and livestock, students' school work, arts and crafts, animal showings, equestrian events, and tug-of-war competitions.

with magic shows, conducting dramatic presentations in Grade 7 classrooms, reading their “Big Books” in local elementary schools) and secondly, by bringing their rural life experiences into the classroom. For example, many of the students’ assessment artefacts in the Third Term Contract signalled students’ rural life in that they reflected a sense of place. These artefacts included local culinary recipes, maps of off-road biking trails, pictorial representations of place (painting, photos, greeting cards), and descriptions of students’ rural experiences in various types of texts (diaries, family scrapbooks, questionnaires, short stories). These artefacts are listed in Table 8.1.1a.





Hall (2000, p. 19, original emphasis) explains that “...an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is ‘hailed’, but that the subject invests in the position, [and therefore]... that suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than a one-sided process, and that in turn places *identification*, if not identities, firmly on the theoretical agenda.” The assessment artefacts from my classroom were evidence of how young people were “hailed” by rural discourses and simultaneously invested in them. For example, in the assignment “Cooking for Love” (described in previous chapters), students were constituted through rural discourses (the recipe that was being made was local, as were the examples of places and activities for dating such as bowling, skating, skiing, or renting a movie). Furthermore, the local place was used by students to constitute identities outside and within the school. Beyond the nick-names of local communities and their specific appearance (e.g., one community prides itself on referencing a hunting jacket as a “blazer”), students understood that their local geographies informed “who they were.” As presented in Chapter 7, David used wood, bark, and chains from his home to create an identity sculpture that he felt represented himself, “...raised far from towns or cities.” A pronounced way in which students brought rural discourses into the classroom was in their creative writing. Table 8.1.1b presents excerpts from two short stories written by Dawson and Nicholas. In these passages, the students use their comprehensive knowledge of and interest in rural life to describe setting and character.

Table 8.1.1a Assessment artefacts that depicted rural life (count)
Cookbook
Cooking Demonstration
Diary (3)
Family Scrapbook
Family Token
Greeting Cards
Interview
Letter
Magazine (2)
Mandala (6)
Map
Newspaper Article (3)
Painting
Photo Display (2)
Picture
Play (2)
Questionnaire (2)
Short Story (2)
Song (5)

Table 8.1.1b	
Rural discourses in students' creative writing	
<i>Excerpts from Dawson's short story, "When I realized the point"</i>	<i>Excerpts from Nicholas' short story, "Pure hearts"</i>
<p>...We drove in Dad's deep green pick-up truck to the lake where our camp sits on the shore. We have a small boat house to store our life jackets, gas, rods, the boat and almost everything except the bait. We buy the bait from one of Dad's college friends for really cheap. When he isn't home we just use raw bacon; it attracts the bass extremely well. It takes up thirty-five minutes to drive to the cottage.</p> <p>...As the greyish-green bass jumped out of the water into the air its tail slapped the sides of its body. Todd was telling the truth - that was one of the largest bass any of us had hooked this year. Dad prepared the net to scoop the fish into the boat as he coached Todd on his technique of reeling in his catch. The idea was to wait until the fish bit the bait then you would pull on the rod forcing the sharp hook into the fish's mouth or gills. After you hooked the fish you reel hard challenging the fish's effort to escape. If you give the line too much slack, chances are the fish will get off the hook. If you constantly pull and tug on the rod the line will break. So the theory is to challenge the fish then give it some slack and then challenge and slack until the fish is tired enough for you to reel it in. Dad passed me his rod to attend to as he helped Todd.</p>	<p>...In the distance a father and his son were working in the field of golden wheat. The wheat waved gently in the late August sun promising a bountiful harvest.</p> <p>...Eric peered across the blowing wheat and searched the flickering shadows for the girl. Sunlight dotted the tall grass beneath the towering oak. He could not see her. He looked more closely and realized that one of the spots of sunlight was Terrah's bent head. Suddenly, she turned towards them.</p> <p>...The three young people started into the shadowed woods moving single file down the well-worn path of fallen pine needles.</p> <p>...The woods were much cooler than the field had been and there was a damp earthy smell in the air. As they approached the small wooden building that Terrah explained was the storage shed, they thought they heard something moving in the trees above them.</p>

However, bringing rural life into the classroom was not always possible or done consistently by students. Some students considered that school did not have a place for their rural interests or ways of being and instead understood that "school" ways of being were not compatible with those experiences in their lives beyond the school. For example, Nicholas created four self-portraits, each in a different place. He explained his paintings to me on video tape and then I transcribed his descriptions. These self-portraits are presented in Figure 8.1.1.

Figure 8.1.1
Nicholas' self-portraits

<p>Relaxed Self: “Okay in this one, it takes place at my cottage. When I’m fishing for mackerel, I like to relax and take it easy. That’s when I get to relax and take a break from everything and be myself. This is my quiet self: relaxed, calm, beautiful. [I taught Nicholas again in Grade 11 and he recalled creating the paintings in Grade 8, adding that his favourite place was still fishing at his cottage. He added one more detail that he had not included years before – he fished with his grandfather.]”</p>	
<p>Hockey Self: “My hockey. Whenever we’re playing street hockey we like to fool around. It’s like a crazy side but without grown-ups. This is probably the one I like most besides that one [fishing] because I like to be lazy in these teenage years: energetic, crazy, being myself.”</p>	
<p>Recess Self: “This is sort of my recess and noon sort of thing in school but not too crazy. Like when we were doing the IDU thing and learning disco and things - that was fun. It’s sort of like my crazy side when there’s grown-ups around because I don’t want to be too crazy. Like when there’s rules - like lots of rules. Crazy, funny, giddy. [Nicholas is referring to an interdisciplinary unit (IDU) where, at one point, I combined all 150 Grade 8 students in the school and taught them choreography to disco music.]”</p>	
<p>School Self: “And this is like my serious self. Well, I <i>try</i> to be serious in school. Well, there’s lots more parts of me than this. I wanted to put [the painting] into four main parts. I try to be serious in school to focus on my work and try to get my work done. Sometimes is get a little out of control. The posture is straight. It’s business-y – like a businessman when he’s going for a job interview. Serious, focused, funniness.”</p>	

Nicholas's artistic representations depict four places: in a boat on the water, on a street playing hockey, in an undefined space dancing, and at school as a "student." These representations of his "self" depicted a young person who understood himself to be primarily outdoors and engaged in leisure activities – except for when he was at school. This raised questions for me about how students brought their home and community identities into the school and "made it count." I understood that Nicholas did not present a completely different identity in school than outside of school, but that he used authentic assessment to negotiate shifts in subject positions. The move between subject positions of home/community and school is complex. Some students, such as Nicholas, did not take up the offer to be "authentic" or "real" by not bringing their "real-lives" into the classroom. Except for this one assignment, he did not bring fishing or hockey into any of his authentic assessment assignments in my classroom (although as I described earlier, some of his written assignments used rural discourses). I understood that students were being highly selective in taking up the ideal of the authentic worker. Furthermore, Nicholas' shift in subject positions to a "School Self" (see Figure 8.1.1) suggested to me that he understood this shift to be informed by notions of work. In this last self-portrait, as a "student," Nicholas describes himself as "serious" and "focused" and makes references to "work" and "business." The references to "work" and "business" in his school portrait amplify the role of schools in shaping young people to become a worker (new or not) and as one who is preparing for adult life and work.

This illustrates the complex practices that young people like Nicholas had to engage in to take up the subject position of the authentic worker – he separated his beyond school understandings of himself from his school work by not including his specific interests in his Third Term Contract. Instead, he completed paper and pencil assessments of writing a short story (which did involve rural discourses of place as described above), a "Love Diary," and computer game assignment, "Dragon Ball M," a joint project with his long-term friend, Peter. This signalled to me that authentic assessment in my classroom program, even though it made opportunities for students to bring additional discourses into the classroom, did not necessarily do so. Instead, Nicholas mostly used discourses that he thought would be valued in school: he created a paper and pencil assignment and used technology collaboratively with someone else in the class, although he did use rural discourses to discuss a heterosexual relationship. In spite of my intentions, some young people did not bring their lives into school, or only did so in minor ways, perhaps because they believed these lives would not be recognized or valued. In this way, there is no guarantee that authentic assessment in practice will be all that different from traditional assessment practices where young people are expected to produce

knowledge that is valued in school. While many of the students' assessment artefacts were connected to their rural experiences, Nicholas adapted his "school identity" (see his self-portraits above) to minimize rural discourses and instead presented himself as "all business." In this way, rural discourses were adopted, adapted, and avoided by students as they constituted identities in my classroom authentic assessment practices. Some students were highly selective and careful about the self they displayed in my classroom.

8.1.2 Bringing in discourses of families

Involving students' families in the assessment artefacts was one of the ways in which students used the authentic assessment events to bring additional discourses into the classroom. Unlike traditional assessment events that stress how young people work independently and in isolation, the authentic assessment events provided means for students to utilise their connection to their families. In my classroom program students used the Process Exams, the Children's Literature Portfolio, and assignments in the students' Third Term Contract to bring in aspects of their family lives.

Illustrating how young people were a family member was a common practice for students to use to show that they were interested in their relationships with their families.

In the Process Exams, students were asked to use arguments to respond to a question and use evidence from texts used in the course to support their arguments. Included in the exam guidelines was the line, "Two of your sources may be from outside of school texts." I had included this guideline because I imagined that there would be texts (print and non-print) that students would have read, viewed, or heard outside of school that I wanted to acknowledge as "sources of evidence." I had not anticipated how many students used this guideline to bring in voices of their families. For example, Tim asked permission to use a "non-print" text – a quote that his grandfather said often, "Live for today." Pat quoted her mother, "No two kids are alike," and Colin his father, "Attitude is a small thing that makes a big difference." These statements illustrate how students deployed expressions commonly used in their families' lives as sources of evidence for their arguments in the Process Exam. I allowed this to occur because I wanted to recognize and discuss what students considered to be authorities of knowledge in their lives. Furthermore, it made little sense to me that I would allow a popular singer's lyrics as a published text to be included as evidence and not the words of a student's grandparent.

It was also possible to discern that some students brought in discourses of families and offered reflections about their own lives through their assignments. For example, Colin included an assignment about the myth of Hercules in his “Children’s Literature Portfolio.”⁶⁵ He used the assignment to connect to his own life, specifically his worry about his father’s job (see Table 8.1.2a).

<i>Title of children’s literature</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Excerpt from assignment</i>	<i>Connection to Colin’s family life</i>
Hercules	Myth	write a sequel	“Hercules saves the town [the economy] from Wal-Mart [a large American department store that has been known as a threat to small businesses]”	Colin’s father was an entrepreneur and Colin told me that he might be moving to Halifax if Wal-Mart came to the area as his father would have to end his small local business. This, in fact did happen the following year and Colin’s family moved. In Colin’s sequel, Hercules uses his strength to expedite the transportation of goods in and out of the town, which reduces the cost to consumers and makes small rural businesses more competitive. Working together, the small business owner approach Hercules to “save the town.”

Looking at Colin’s connection between his school work and his life, authentic assessment can be understood as a means of using non-school discourses to be successful in school.

In the Third Term Contract students involved their families as part of the assessment artefacts that were created through the individualized assignments. For example, Heather used the assignment of a “Family Scrapbook” and “Greeting Cards” to demonstrate some of the English curriculum outcomes and she explained in the first focus group on May 18th about how she valued close familial relationships:

...and then there’s the family scrapbook. We have a really close family. And the greeting cards are just me, because I like to give of myself and I like to make people feel happy and the greeting cards do.

These opportunities encouraged students to reflect on how the knowledges they were learning at school in English might be useful to their lives beyond the school. Similarly, Brenda created a version of a family scrapbook as one of her English Language Arts assignments that she called “Photographs.” In this assignment, she selected family pictures, interviewed older family members,

⁶⁵ See Chapter 7, Table 7.3.1.2 to view all of Colin’s assignments in his Children’s Literature Portfolio.

and wrote descriptions of what was going on “behind the scenes” of the photographs.⁶⁶ This example makes a clear connection between Brenda’s application of knowledge (specifically, the English language arts curriculum outcomes of speaking, listening, writing, and other ways of representing) and her “self” as a member of her family. Brenda included her interests in her family and babysitting in her assignments “Photographs,” “Song,” and “Poster.”⁶⁷ I line these assignments up with the General Curriculum Outcomes concerning “Speaking and Listening”⁶⁸ in Table 8.1.2b to illustrate how specific outcomes were addressed in more than one of her assignments, how she connected the curriculum outcomes to her assignments, and how these assignments were relevant to her life outside of school.

	<i>(General Curriculum Outcomes) Students will be expected to:</i>	<i>Brenda’s assignment</i>	<i>Brenda’s rationale for how her assignments address the outcomes</i>
<i>Speaking and Listening</i>	<p>speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences</p>	Photographs	I will speak about the photographs and then I will clarify as to why I chose those photos from my thoughts and experiences.
	<p>communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically</p>	Song	I will be singing the song I wrote to my sick grandmother than explains the reasons why I love her.
		Poster	I will be presenting my poster about babysitting to a Grade 7 class in our school.
	<p>interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose</p>	Photographs	Because I will be talking about other people’s relationships for most of them with great amounts of sensitivity considering deeply the purpose for my choice of activity.
Song		Because my grandmother is sick, I need to make sure that I don’t upset her emotionally.	

What this table illustrates is how authentic assessment allowed Brenda to demonstrate the curriculum outcomes in ways that were meaningful for her life outside of school. In other examples from the Third Term Contract, students brought in aspects of their family lives: Carol made a “Family

⁶⁶ I taught Brenda again in Grade 11 and Grade 12 and she made reference to how her family continues to use the family scrapbook. In 2005 (when Brenda’s grandmother was ill) and in 2007, her mom conveyed to me that the family continues to re-read this assignment.

⁶⁷ Brenda’s assignments were introduced in comparison to other students’ assignments in Chapter 7 (see Table 7.3.1.4a). Brenda’s assignment called “Photographs” was described in section 7.3.2.4 where I explained how she matched the curriculum outcomes with the assignment and provided a rationale.

⁶⁸ Other General Curriculum Outcomes address reading, viewing, writing, and other ways of representing. These were presented in Chapter 4.

Cookbook” with recipes and stories and Tim wrote and performed a song as a tribute for his terminally-ill grandfather.

Using authentic assessment to create a permeable curriculum created possibilities and dangers for young people as they brought family discourses into their school work. Using Brenda’s “Photographs” described previously, it is possible to understand that this assessment event allowed her to share her enjoyment of and gratitude to her family not only with me, but also, and I suggest more significantly, with her family. This assignment may have created possibilities for Brenda at home to share her school work with family members who may not have been as interested in a test result or reading an essay; this practice therefore reached beyond the purposes of school assessment, and was used to connect with other family members. While it is possible to understand the Family Scrapbook as a productive technology, ethical dangers also arise: What if another student in the classroom did not have positive family experiences? Should Brenda have been permitted to proudly display her photographs of her family in class? Knowing that positive family experiences would not have been a universal experience for the students in my classroom, the Third Term Contract assignments were presented, for the most part, to me individually. This is not to say that students did not share them with each other outside of class time, because they did.

I was attentive to the students who may have come from more difficult family situations. Such was the case with Tim, one of the students who received additional support from the resource teacher and who had little family support. Tim’s family did not have a vehicle and lived far from school and one day when he was sick at school and needed to go home, the Vice-Principal drove him and I accompanied him. This allowed me a small glimpse of his family’s life. I realized when I read and then heard Tim’s song that he had written for his terminally-ill grandfather, that there would not be another audience besides myself for Tim’s song. In such instances, I made efforts to find additional audiences for students’ assessment artefacts. In Tim’s case, I asked all of his teachers to gather to hear his song after having his permission to play for them at lunch. I also made arrangements for him to play at the local hospital so that his grandfather’s nurses could hear the song. Unlike Brenda’s family who were eager to share her assignment of family photographs, Tim’s primary audience for his assessment artefacts (including those that he used to demonstrate that he was a “good family member”) were his teachers. Because of the disparities between families such as Tim’s and Brenda’s, I did not ask students to share such works during class times as I was concerned about students making comparisons among and judgements about each other’s families.

Most of the students in my class experienced positive family relations. Evidence of this was noted during the focus groups as students responded to what they believed other people would expect of them in their assessment artefacts.

Ian: [My mom]... expects me to write the great 21st century novel, sort of thing.

Colin: [My mom]... expects a lot from me but I think that's good. She knows what I'm capable of. She expects me to do really good on these assignments and to try hard. If I don't she won't - she wouldn't - get mad or anything. She'd tell me to try harder next time. Her expectations are high, but not too high.

Heather: ... [My cousin is] going through a lot right now. Her expectations [of me] would be not high, but not low either because she knows what I'm capable of. She's seen me do things really great and really bad. And in the past she'd just say something like, "You know, Heather that was really stupid of you." And I'd say "Yah, I know it's kind of stupid."

Nicholas: [My mom]... knows my best work, and if I don't do my best work, she's like, "What's this? This isn't your best work!" But I don't think - well her expectations are pretty high but if I do bad she'll just say, "Why did this happen" and then I'll tell her and she'll say, "Well, what can you do to fix this?"

In other parts of the focus group transcript, students referred to their relationships with their parents. For example, Lisa explained that "I think only two of my projects really show what I want to be known as and how I am. I think the essay is one of them because it shows that my family is the biggest part of my life." Being a family member was one way for students to show that they were authentic workers who were interested in productive relationships with other people.

It can also be said that a "family-like atmosphere" (Davalos & Griffin, 1999) existed with our classroom and school. As one teacher told me that year, "I am teaching the third generation of students now." Staff and students' families had lived in the rural community for a long time, solidifying social connections, rides to school, and who to ask for lunch money at school. As a researcher, these connections between home and school and among students and staff allowed relatively easy access to generating data; students, parents, and staff were willing participant and/or supporters of both my classroom assessment practices and this research. The interviews conducted with parents in this research highlighted the close family lives that these rural students experienced. When I interviewed Laura's mother, she made reference to her other child, a son, who she felt would have more difficulty in authentic assessment practices. Home and school connections such as this conversation between Laura's mother and me were important when, chances were, based on population numbers, I would also be Laura's brother's teacher (as it turned out, I was).

Laura's mother: Now, you see, Laura's brother has never been really strong at Language Arts and I can see him having a great difficulty with this. But Laura is fluent in English and doesn't have difficulty getting into the detail of assignments.

Van Zoost: That would be one of my expectations of Laura – to show a great deal of detail in her work. You can see that in even in the detail of her rubrics.

Laura's mother: So you can tailor your expectations to each student.

Van Zoost: That's right.

Laura's mother: Well that's good then.

Laura's mother made additional comments on this section of the transcript when I sent it home for clarification: "I was delighted to learn that students had to review and have rubrics approved by you. I think this is key to having the rubric system work successfully. I agree wholeheartedly."⁶⁹ When I taught Laura again in Grade 11, her mother mentioned that she was pleased that I would be using rubrics again at the high school level. My team teacher from this Grade 8 year subsequently changed her teaching assignments and moved soon after me to the local high school where we continued to find ways of working together in the high school structure. Laura's mother called the two of us Laura's "other parents." I had my picture taken with the "entire family" at Laura's graduation – her request.

Discourses of families made it possible for young people to take up the subject positions of the self-developer and the authentic worker. For example, in line with the authentic worker who brings his/her "real-life" to school, students brought their family experiences into the classroom through authentic assessment events. These decisions also allowed young people to align with the self-developer as they practiced making choices and involving others in their assignments. The discourses of families worked with the ideal subject positions in my classroom because family experiences were easily accessible for most, but not all young people. Of concern to me was how some students were more comfortable than others to bring family discourse into the classroom and I wondered how this may have privileged some students and created difficulties for others. While I did not require young people to bring their family experiences into the classroom, many did through the authentic assessment events and students used this discourse to work with the ideal subject

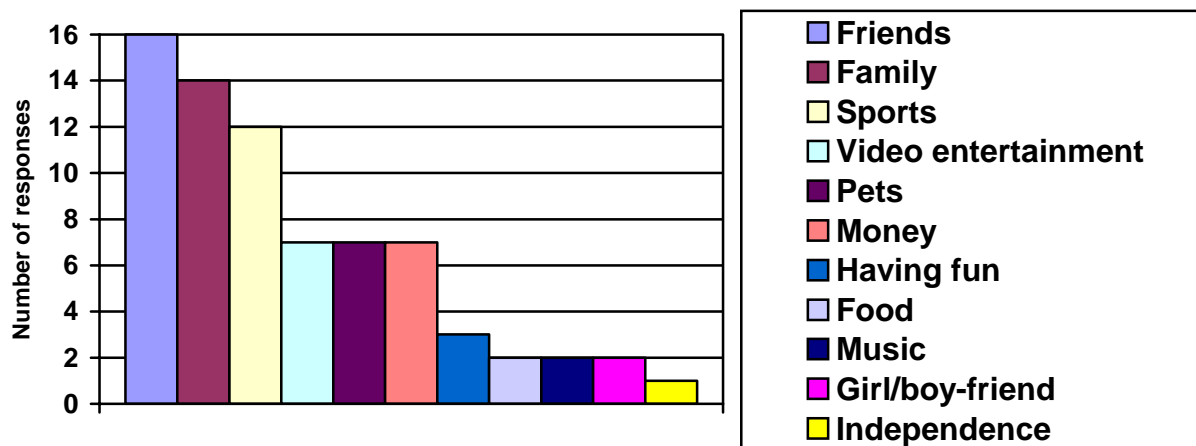
⁶⁹ This is an example of a form of "member-checking" process that was part of the methodological design of the research where participants were provided with copies of the transcripts so that they could make additional comments or reflections and return them to me.

positions on offer, especially the authentic worker. Those who resisted using family discourses in their school work would have to find other ways to show that they were “authentic” or “real.”

8.1.3 Bringing in discourses of friendship

According to Spicker, Southern, and Davis (2004), compared to urban youth, rural youth experience a stability in their surrounding population. One of the effects of this stability is the development of close friendships and young people interacted with a variety of others in a comfortable way. This was evident in the close relations within my classroom and the general willingness of students to work together. Figure 8.1.3 reports what the twenty-seven students in my classroom claimed to be the two or three most important “things” to them. These data were compiled from students’ reflections written in class and organized by the frequency of common responses. The young people in my classroom especially valued their friends and families.

Figure 8.1.3
What students considered important



Being a “good friend” was one way for the students to demonstrate that they were interested in productive relationships with those within and beyond the classroom. Through the authentic assessment events, students had opportunities to work together - something that may not have been possible through traditional assessment practices that emphasize students working independently.

Within the classroom, students were frequently re-grouped into multiple configurations. For example, Literature Circles arranged students into discussion groups based on their choice of novel and students had to make decisions about how they would work with others during these assessment events, such as demonstrating “active listening skills” under my observation and receive anecdotal comments that I made during this observation; the Children’s Literature Portfolio demanded that

students share their work with ten students in the class (as well as respond to ten students' work) and students worked with their friends as well as people they may not have normally socialized with; and some of the assignments designed in the Third Term Contract allowed students to work in different peer groupings such as Nicholas and Peter's joint cartoon production "Dragon Ball M" and the video "Cooking for Love" by other students. Students acknowledged in the second Research Literature Circle that these teacher-initiated groupings helped them to "get to know each other" in different places and contexts and practice being a "good friend":

Laura: Like the teacher helps you get in touch with other students. Mr. Van Zoost and Mrs. Florence did mix us a lot. I didn't know you guys very much [at the beginning of the year].

Nicole: Yeah, they're like, in school, playing God and putting people in

Laura: different groups and

Nicole: yeah. They have a lot of control over you when you are in school and your relationships and all that.

Peter: They control the relationships you have with people, well, sort of. Not at recess and noon, that's when you do what you want. [Peter, ironically, often hung out in my classroom at recess and noon, helping me prepare for classes.]

Being a good friend in my classroom was a readily accessible identity for students to take up because the classroom assessment events provided opportunities for students to value relationships both within the classroom and in the community. For example, Colin's writing in the Children's Literature Portfolio demonstrates how he was interested in productive relationships and he used the assignments to reflect on his own life including his concerns about people who are "friendless" and the interdependency of people (see Table 8.1.3a).

<i>Title of children's literature</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Excerpt from assignment</i>	<i>Connection to Colin's life</i>
Medusa	Myth	write a politically correct version	"We should not be afraid of ugly people in the modern world as they can do harm to themselves."	Colin's politically correct version was sympathetic towards Medusa who was understood to be "friendless." While Colin did not lack any friends at school, he was conscious of "reaching out" to those who did.
The lion and the mouse	Fable	write a rap song	"We need everybody, every person, every child/I still need you, whether meek or mild."	Colin's rap described his view of how people need to realize that they are interdependent.

In addition, the thematic unit for the third term of the school year on “Relationships” created ample opportunities for young people to be good friends and express their close relationships. Table 8.1.3b presents how several students used discourses of friendship in their Third Term Contract assignments.

Table 8.1.3b	
Discourses of friendship in students’ creative writing	
<i>Excerpt from Aleta’s fictional journal of “Jenny”</i>	<i>Excerpt from Donny’s fictional radio show, “D’s People”</i>
<p>...Today I was at school and we got a new kid in school. He needed to be shown around the school so I did. When it came time to go home I invited him over for dinner. He was very nice to my parents and had very good table manners.</p> <p>...Today Mom took me out for ice-cream and told me Justin called and explained the whole thing to her because I would have slammed the phone on him. After I heard his side of his story I called him and said I was sorry for slapping him.</p>	<p>...Bill Gosby: Friends are mostly decided by what people have in common like if they like the same sports, same kind of music, or if they like doing the same hobbies. Friends are often people who help each other if they’re feeling down or having a few problems. A friend can also be a role model. If someone has something in their life that can relate to you, they can sometimes be your role model.</p>

This is not to assume that young people automatically or easily involved friends in their assessment events or that they were consistently “good” friends with one another. This first point was evident in students’ decisions about what they included and excluded in their assessment events, as expressed during the second focus group on May 18:

Van Zoost: What parts of your life are *not* found here, in your contract?

Lisa: Deep-rooted friendships, I think.

Van Zoost: Deep friendships?

Lisa: I have friendships with friends, but I find that now that since I’m in Grade 8 I’m finding that I’m sort of growing apart from them and I’m looking for other people to hang out with... I tried out for basketball - I was there to try to get onto the team and there was no other friend. I made friends with people who belong on the team.

Van Zoost: How did you decide to edit that out of your assessment contract?

Lisa: I didn’t feel it really didn’t have much to do with relationships [the curricular theme of the unit in class] and it really didn’t tie into my essay.

Lisa, because her basketball experience did not involve “deep rooted friendships,” did not consider these new friends as significant, nor consider these new basketball friendships to be capable of illustrating a relationship that could be discussed in an assessment artefact.

Complicating the practice of being a good friend, friendships that were formed through the classroom assessment events were not universally and consistently “friendly.” For example, as noted below in the clarification interview with Nicholas on June 15th, sometimes good friends were competitive and would make fun of each other and their school work.

Van Zoost: Nicholas, can you tell me more about this competition that I’ve recently learned about.

Nicholas: Well, we’re always trying to beat each other in marks – Peter and me. Well, Colin too, because he gloats a lot so I guess we do want to get higher marks than him. Well, I guess, before he even moved here we were always in the same Sunday School class,⁷⁰ and we’d always try to put up our hands more times than the other. We were eleven or twelve [years old]. I guess I laugh at him just because it’s Peter because he never gets a bad mark. I wouldn’t really – well, I would laugh at him at first, but then I’d tell him I was joking – even though I’m not, I’d just say that to make him feel good! [laughing]. He laughs at me too, so. We don’t usually get bad marks, so.

Van Zoost: Well now, “inside sources” have led me to believe that there was a formalized competition for marks going on third term. Is this true?

Nicholas: Well, [laughing], yes. Well, every time we got a Math or Science test back or whatever, me and Peter would be like, “Oh, yes! 100%!” and then we’d ask Courtney what she got and somehow she would get like, 11 out of 10! [laughter] She always is one step ahead of us! Peter and Courtney were going out then, so Colin and I teamed up and said that we were going to get higher marks than them. I don’t think we did though. We all got Honours with Distinction.⁷¹

Van Zoost: So, who won?

Nicholas: [laughing] We never did actually figure that out! Now that you mention it, we’ll have to go and figure that out. Now that I think about it, that’s probably why – the competition – I had such good marks, I was actually trying to beat somebody. That was the first time I had Honours with Distinction in Grade 8.

As evidenced by the “friendly competition” described by Nicholas, he enjoyed close connections with Peter and Colin. They had a sense of connection before I met them and perhaps before they were arranged into this Grade 8 classroom. Students often had conversations about their connections from previous years in school. They “joked around” with each other and made issues about assessment, identity, and relationships into a “game.” In the case of these “competing” boys who made fun of each other for not achieving, they were able to be successful in school because they had their identities lined-up. By this I mean that the identities that were significant for them outside of school matched those in school. As friends, these boys challenged each other outside of school

⁷⁰ “Sunday School” occurs at local Christian churches.

⁷¹ Honors with Distinction meant that a student achieved an average of 90% or higher on all courses except for Personal Development and Relationships, and no mark below 70% in their final grades.

about their work in school, they shared resources (such as a computer, video equipment, etc.) from outside of school to collaborate on their school work, and they made reference to each other as friends in their school work. For these students, taking up discourses of friendship and school allowed them to constitute themselves as authentic workers who had evidence of their “real-lives” outside of school in their assignments.

As a teacher, I was aware of how the friendships that students brought into the classroom or those that formed and dissolved in the classroom might affect students’ assessment results. Although students worked together during assessment events, there was never a “group mark.” During the Literature Circles and Children’s Literature Portfolio, for example, students were assessed individually. For the assignments that were completed in the Third Term Contract and that involved more than one student, individualized rubrics were used to assess how each student’s contribution to the project demonstrated specific outcomes. It was even possible that students would be demonstrating different outcomes by working together in the same project such as when one student was working on an outcome that involved writing and another student speaking. I raise this point here to signal how students could practice being a good friend during the assessment events and not be penalized or rewarded for their friend’s lack of effort or conversely, their exceptional achievements. This was important so that students could take calculated risks in their choices to involve each other in the assessment events. This was one of the advantages of using authentic assessment practices in my classroom: young people could bring discourses of friendship into the classroom and focus their attention on how they worked together rather than on “who did what” to create an assessment artefact.

8.1.4 Bringing in discourses of romance

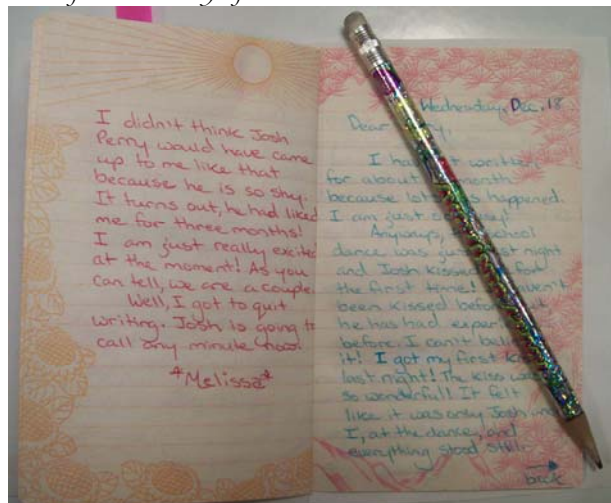
A fourth common discourse that students brought into the classroom through authentic assessment events was that of romance. Accounts of “boy meets girl,” break-ups, and heartache were common themes in students’ assignments. When students referred to romance, they referred to heterosexual romance among young people or, in cases of combining discourses of family and romance, made direct referral to their parents or grandparents. Students avoided accounts of romance among adults other than their family members or accounts of love that were not heteronormative. Broadly speaking, students used discourses of romance to discuss their ideas about teenage dating. Particular emphasis was placed on describing the beginning and ends of romantic courtships and how friends related with dating couples. Discourses of romance allowed young people to bring their “real”

experiences into the classroom (like the authentic worker) and to provide evidence of self-reflection and change (like the self-developer). Most frequently, students brought discourses of romance into their assignments by choosing formats that were reflective and personal in nature such as personal letters, advice columns, diaries, and learning logs. Figure 8.1.4 illustrates how six different students used discourses of romance in their Third Term Contract. I also include sample images of students' assignments to provide a sense of the variety of styles and media that students used to produce their school work.

Figure 8.1.4 Examples of romance in the Third Term Contract	
<p><i>Aleta's fictional letter</i></p>	<p>My dear Frankie, Hello, it is me again. I know things have not been going well between us in our relationship. Maybe because you've moved on with your life. I feel very lonesome without you here with me.... The pain I keep bottled up inside me is unbearable and if I keep going on like this then it will be time to end our relationship.... It has been every little girl's fairy tale being with you which makes me wonder why I am writing this to you. But sometimes even fairy tale can't make everyone happy.</p>
<p><i>Tinia's magazine article, "Love Q&A"</i></p>	<p>Wants her back.</p> <p>My ex-boyfriend wants us to be a couple again. I still love him, but he really hurt me when he dumped me. Should I take him back?</p> <p>It's good that you haven't allowed getting hurt to turn you into a cynical ice maiden. You don't get all the cool stuff about being in love unless you open your heart a crack and let the guy in....</p>

Figure 8.1.4
Examples of romance in the Third Term Contract

Téa's fictional diary of "Melissa"



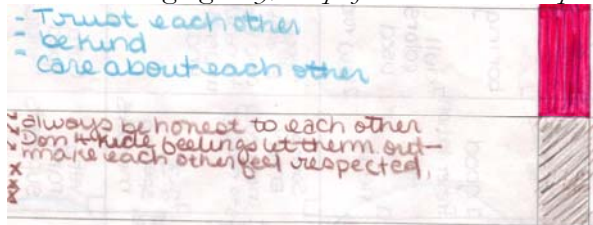
Dear Diary,
 ...the school dance was just last night and Josh kissed me for the first time! I haven't been kissed before but he has had experience before. I can't believe it! I got my first kiss last night! The kiss was so wonderful! It felt like it was only Josh and I at the dance and everything stood still. Josh is a really sweet guy and he is always there for me. He's a real cutie too! I just love his personality. We have a lot in common as well such as sports, movies, hobbies, music...all that kind of stuff.

Jennica's Diary

Dear Diary,
 Sometimes, I don't think people work certain relationships. Mainly [boyfriend/girlfriend ones]. For example, when one of my best friends started "dating" a guy in my class, it was the funniest thing I have ever seen! They "dated" for 4 months but they never talked to each other! Maybe a "Hi" the odd morning or holding hands whenever I made them. (That was only twice because I was getting tired of them.) They never did anything or went anywhere. She did have him over once (mostly because I nagged him a whole lot) but they hardly even talked then! It was the funniest relationship I have ever seen in my life!

...Sometimes, I don't think people know how to work certain relationships. Mainly [boyfriend/girlfriend ones]. For example, when one of my best friends started "dating" a guy in my class, it was the funniest thing I have ever seen! They "dated" for 4 months but they never talked to each other! Maybe a "Hi" the odd morning or holding hands whenever I made them. (That was only twice because I was getting tired of them.) They never did anything or went anywhere. She did have him over once (mostly because I nagged him a whole lot) but they hardly even talked then! It was the funniest relationship I have ever seen in my life!

Nicole's learning log entry, "Tips for other relationships"



[Couple 1]: Love each other no matter what. Keep close friends no matter what.
 [Couple 2]: Trust each other. Be kind. Care about each other.
 [Couple 3]: Don't do stuff you don't want to do. Keep relationship strong and tight....

Figure 8.14 Examples of romance in the Third Term Contract	
<p><i>Phil's learning log entry, "My worst relationship ever"</i></p> <p>by and it was going on again. Me flirting ne. Plus people telling us oh you two illy didn't want to go out with her again, and my heart tells me another and I. Well my mind was telling me go out ou did wrong the last three times it'll pped to listen to what my heart had to two weeks later we were going out.</p>	<p>...I was getting to know [Elsie] pretty well, flirting with her a little bit and really just getting to know her. We talked almost everyday sitting together just talking our heads off. Then the questions started. Do you like [Elsie]? Will you go out with [Elsie]? Me being in grade seven I only knew a little bit about the whole boyfriend/girlfriend thing. So I thought about it and I really didn't know whether to go out with her or not because I didn't know whether she really liked me....</p> <p>[a year later] About two weeks had passed and you know how most people would want to go after the guy or girl the person cheated with – not me. I wanted to make her feel sorry for what she did. I actually planned on saying to the guy she cheated on me with, "Thank you for saving me."</p>

Because authentic assessment opened up my classroom program to additional discourses that young people were encouraged to bring, authentic assessment demanded that I would be capable of working with these same discourses. Unlike traditional assessment practices such as a test, authentic assessment practices created uncomfortable positions for me as a teacher when I was called upon to respond to personal and romantic relationships with young people. The extent of Phil's confession of his personal relationships with others in the class was unexpected and caused me to reconsider how I use authentic assessment practices by explaining what sorts of topics or interests I am not interested in reviewing in students' assignments. In Phil's case, I responded to his learning log entry "My worst relationship ever" with the following comment: "This is quite an emotional story/experience. You are commended on writing down your story – this itself can be a way to explore your emotions. I can't offer you any advice about your relationships, but I'd be happy to share with you some ways that I know of managing emotions concerning a break-up." My comments took up a psychological discourse of "managing emotions." I came to understand that when alternative discourses such as romance are brought into the classroom they are met with official policy and school discourses including psychological discourses. Authentic assessment allowed young people to bring additional discourses into the classroom and disrupt business as usual, but then I may have discredited these discourses or responded to them by shifting them towards approved (e.g. psychological) discourses. Thus, authentic assessment made aspects of students' lives

available to me as an English teacher, to which I could respond and provide guidance – something that Hunter (1996) has shown is the traditional work of English in schools.

A concern I had about the discourses commonly brought into the classroom for display was that young people had unequal access to resources needed to constitute identities by using these discourses. For example, some students may not have had close relationships, or did not want to expose or “confess” the ones that they did, in my classroom. While I had not anticipated that students would use close relationships with other people to take up the identity offers in my classroom, it became apparent through this analysis that this was one way in which students negotiated their identities. Students brought discourses of family, friendship, and romance into the classroom and while some students had a wide-range of possibilities within these discourses, others did not. For example, Tim had opportunities to bring dramatic examples of personal relationships into the classroom because of his life experiences (his grandfather was dying) as did Phil (he had experienced a dating relationship with Elsie). Other students, such as Brent (as I describe below) were not willing to bring their family life into the classroom. The invitation from authentic assessment to bring additional non-school discourses into the classroom is not impartial, nor is this invitation automatically equitable for young people. Instead, authentic assessment privileges certain students who are willing to share their “real-lives” in school and creates problems for other students who are either unwilling or have a limited range of personal experiences that would be deemed appropriate for school display.

I also questioned what discourses were not brought into the classroom and how my role as the teacher made these discourses not welcome because they contradicted my educational aims and what I was trying to do in the classroom. While discourses of rurality, families, friendship, and romance were authorized or at least tolerated, I acknowledge that other discourses were not readily brought into the classroom due to school policies and my expectations of students. These discourses included, but were not limited to, versions of peer discourse that emphasized hyper-masculinity such as violence (e.g., “blood, guts, and gore” in students’ written assignments or fighting in videos) and vulgarity (e.g., swearing), and peer discourses that were characterized by indifference in the classroom (e.g., seeing school work as a negative thing, apathy towards an assignment, or laziness in classroom conversations). Such versions of peer discourses did not commonly appear in students’ assignments, and when they did, were punished with verbal reminders of the school’s policies or my expectations. For example, during the student conferencing for the Third Term Contract, when

students were proposing their assignments, I reminded Peter and Colin that violence in their film “Enemies of a kind” would not be acceptable. During the Literature Circle meetings, if a student was not participating in the conversation, I would discuss their indifference (or their resistance, or their difficulty, etc.) privately and ask how I might be able to assist them to be successful in the task. It is important to note that some of the practices of peer discourses that were made unwelcome – violence, vulgarity, and indifference – might have been, for some of the students who lived in poverty, common experiences in their lives outside of school. Through authentic assessment, young people were expected to take up only certain ways of being, or what some researchers (Jones, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) call the middle-class discourses of teachers and schooling. These circumstances privileged some students, especially those who had access to “proper” views of the world and ways of acting in it.

8.2 Constituting identities

While some discourses were commonly brought into the classroom, this is not to suggest that all students constituted their identities homogeneously. Students took up particular stances within discourses and used discourses to serve different purposes. I present four mini-cases that illustrate particular students’ identity work. I show how young people were constituted within competing discourses of policy and schooling, those commonly authorized by the classroom program (rurality, families, friendship, and romance), and other discourses (authorized and unauthorized) that were brought into the classroom by individual students. My goal is to show how young people fluidly formed identities within these diverse discourses. Gee (2001a) suggests that subjects constitute a “core identity” and it is in this spirit that I use labels to identify the students’ identities below as I was interested in looking at students’ identities across a wide range of data rather than at one particular time or in one specific assessment event. I understood these to be “hybrid identities” (Jones, 2006) where students use multiple discourses and practices to constitute a self. The four students presented here illustrate contrastive identities that young people constituted through authentic assessment practices. I chose these particular students to show a range of students in my classroom; and because my analysis showed that these four students were representative of the spread of identities in my classroom. That being said, it was easier to draw these cases for the more successful students in the class because of the richness of data for students who were interested in participating in the class events. For example, of the four students described below, I had the least amount of data concerning Brent because he withdrew from school. Ian, while having the highest marks in the

class produced a lot of data, but not as much as others who were more social and verbal than him, such as Laura and Peter.

8.2.1 Peter, the stressed-out student

Peter was a “town student” who walked to school with his neighbour and long-time friend in the class, Nicholas. Peter’s mother and father both worked outside the home earning a middle class income and he had one younger sibling who, like Nicholas and Peter, I taught again in high school. During the qualitative data production, Peter consistently reported that he was stressed from his school work. In the opening activity of the focus group he described his experiences with authentic assessment in the form of a pie graph (see Figure 8.2.1a). Peter divided the graph by colours to represent his emotions but creatively used these divisions to create the overall impression of a face. In this pie graph, Peter explains that the authentic assessment experiences caused him great stress – enough that it “takes over the rest of [his] life.” While authentic assessment literature claims that involving students in the assessment event increases their motivation (Burke, 1999; Clark & Clark, 1998; Earl, 2003) and allows students to experience “the power and joy of learning” (Stiggins, 2002b, p. 35), the literature does not sufficiently describe what happens to students who take their involvement and responsibilities in the authentic assessment events seriously.

Figure 8.2.1a
Peter’s pie graph



This is my cool picture. I guess the red would represent my stress level. Like it’s surrounding me, and it’s starting to move in on my life because I’m always stressed about something in life and I’m always trying to do as good as I can. Like what Laura said – I’m always able to find something that I did wrong. I want to do the whole thing over again but I can’t. The yellow is I’m happy because I get to choose everything I do. It’s fun. I guess the green is the envy because I think that I did a good job but then I see someone else’s and I think that they did a lot better and I wish I had done as good. And the black is when I made mistakes doing things. For example, the relationship doesn’t develop [a criteria in Peter’s rubric] in my game on the computer because I couldn’t find any way to make it develop. The blue is just, I don’t know, it’s just blue. And over all, the happy face, it’s happy because I get to choose everything I do.... [As the due date approaches, the red part] gets a lot bigger. It overpowers the rest of the colours. It takes over the rest of my life. I get totally stressed-out.

Peter's account of his experiences in my classroom made me question how my authentic assessment practices, while working to tap into students' desires, also tapped into students' fears of not succeeding. For Peter, his stress was not a singular occurrence for a particular assignment. He repeatedly experienced stress and reported this over the course of three dates in the additional qualitative data production events: in the focus group on May 18th, in the Research Literature Circles on May 31st, and in a clarification interview on June 15th.

Focus group: I push myself and I'm in constant stress to try to do the best that I can. I'm never non-stressed. I'm always stressed. There's always something in my head that I get stressed....I wanted to do things [in the Third Term Contract] that I thought wouldn't give me any stress, but I failed.... I try not to get stressed but I *do*. No matter *what* I do, it's stressful. I don't know *why* I do.

Research Literature Circle: I do a project, and get the mark back and go, "Oh, why can't I live up to my expectations?"

Clarification interview: I know I can't do that [spell]. Let's say for my exam, I forgot to put in a really important piece of evidence, or something that I knew I should have put in, and I'll get mad at myself for not putting it in. Like, the story I made [a short story called "Voyager" included in Peter's Third Term Contract], I'm still trying to find stuff that I did wrong and I can't find all that much. I'm still trying to find stuff.... Sometimes the pressure is there and sometimes it's not. I think a lot of the pressure comes from myself - afraid that I'm going to fail it. Am I going to get it in on time? Is it going to be any good? Will the teacher think it's good?

Peter's fear of academic failure motivated him to "push" himself and put himself in "constant stress." This was conveyed in Peter's monologue written as part of the classroom program data (see Chapter 4.6.5), where he imagined what it was like to work on an assignment at home. Emphasis is added to indicate words that represent the ways in which Peter represented his internal state as self-critical, with high expectations, built around the judgements of others:

Here I am, in my room.
Working
Slaving
Will I *live up to* the expectations?
Will I get a good mark?
I don't know, I am so *confused*...
What will I do?
The *stress is building*
Am I doing my best I *don't know*...
Will the teacher accept it?
What will my friends think?
Will they compliment me or *find my faults*
Their *words will hurt me* if they *find my faults* but I will not show it
I hate this
I want to do it over but.....

Not enough time, I know I won't like it
Even a perfect mark will not *quench my thirst* for improvement
I can't do a thing, *I will fail this*
What did I do *wrong* - why do *I hate it*?
It will not affect me though, only one more assignment of the many
I am almost done, I like it now
It shows myself, but only I will know
My secrets in this work, my self
I finish the assignment; I *look at it in disgust*
I should *throw it out*
Nobody will like it anyway, oh well as long as it
HA!
Oh well I am *tired*
I shall sleep.
Tomorrow will be better

In this monologue, Peter suggested that expectations and marks were some of the causes of his stress. Authentic assessment, for Peter, was less about responding to his interests (one of the claims of authentic assessment) and more about responding to the interests of schooling – to be rewarded with marks.

Peter understood that he was different at school than at home. Figure 8.2.1b presents four of Peter's self-portraits – a home self, a social self, a school self, and a stressed self when school assignments are due. What is interesting about these self-portraits is how Peter presented a school self that was “serious and professional” in class and “stressed out” about his school work that contrasted with a home self and social self who was lazy, relaxed, and had “freedom.”

In a clarification interview I asked him more about his understanding of these contrasting self-portraits:

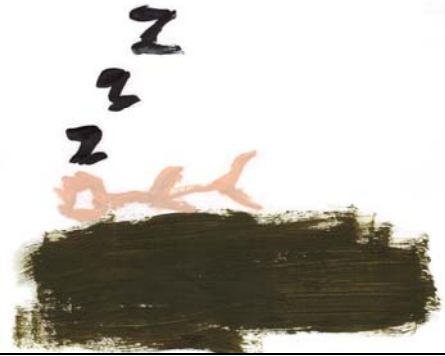
Peter: You don't really change your personality; you change how you present your personality.

Van Zoost: Can you tell me more about how school informs you of how you present your personality? What sort of things help you present yourself, or discourage you from presenting yourself?

Peter: Um, well little things. Like when you say, “Good morning” to each of us before the bell goes – that sort of helps me to be more friendly to everybody else in the morning because I'm pretty tired. And it helps me to present myself in a better way, like, not all business - like doing my work, or being all quiet. I don't like being really quiet. But I don't really open up until recess. Like, you come in, the bell goes, and then you do all work until recess and then I come alive.

Figure 8.2.1b
Peter's self-portraits

Home self: "This is my home self, I usually laze about watching T.V. or playing computer or sleeping. During the summer a lot of my energy is used for swim team so I don't do a lot of other things."



Social self: "This is me at school at dances or during breaks, I am relaxed and I just want to talk to my friends and enjoy the freedom while I have it, and sometimes I just want to dance!"



School self: "This is my failed attempt at me in school during class hours, it shows how I try to be serious and "professional" in doing my work, but sometimes that doesn't happen when I am around my friends. LOL" ["Laugh Out Loud" in instant messaging computer shorthand].



Stressed-out self: "This is myself when projects are due and I get very stressed out. I feel like biting someone's head off, and I am usually cranky because I have late nights because of working on projects. My hair is that way because it shows how stressed I am, if it could my hair would be standing on end."



Van Zoost: Is there anything that teachers can do in classes to help you change that business suit that you are wearing in that picture? [Mackenzie's self portrait at school]

Peter: Um, no. I guess it's just the way I am in class. Not everyone wears a suit. Sometimes [specific friend] doesn't. [Another specific friend] never wears a suit.

Van Zoost: What gives it away if they are wearing a suit?

Peter: If they're doing their work or not. If they're socializing or not. If they are actually paying attention to school not just what's around them. Not wearing a suit is being leisurely, talking with your friends, relaxing. I'm not saying that I don't relax in class sometimes.

Peter's identity at school was primarily concerned with productivity and being "all business" (doing work, being quiet, and not socializing) while outside of the classroom he was interested in watching television, playing on the computer, sleeping, swimming, and talking to friends. What struck me was how these interests from Peter's life outside of school were not the ones that he involved in the authentic assessment assignments in his Third Term Contract.

Peter's Third Term Contract assignments included a short story "Voyager" about the relationship between the sun and planets, a film called "Enemies of a kind" concerned with how to resolve interpersonal conflict, a digital cartoon "Dragon Ball M" that illustrated "necessary sacrifices in friendships," and a game called "The great adventure" about a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship (introduced in Chapter 7.3.2.4). These assignments, like many of the other students in the class involved discourses of friendship and romance, however, they did not consistently involve Peter's interests from outside the classroom. In a student-generated report card (see Chapter 4.6.4), Peter identified and gave marks to some of his interests from outside the classroom:

Karate:	90	Good effort! Always tries to improve!
Swimming:	98	Awesome! Good form and speed! Keep up the good work
Reading:	100	Awesome! Good reading skills reading various genres
ICQ: ⁷²	95	Good Conversations. I like the amount of time you put into this

Peter's assignments did not directly include karate, swimming, ICQ,⁷³ reading, watching television, playing on the computer, sleeping, talking to friends, and, as he explains below, karate. Peter's assignments of "Dragon Ball M" and "Enemies of a kind" involved the computer and collaboration

⁷² ICQ is a software program for instant messaging on the internet. Another more popular example of this type of software is Microsoft Messenger.

⁷³ Recently, I had two Grade 12 students edit their four-year history of online messaging to create a short play in the style of Shakespeare's characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from *Hamlet*. I offer this to illustrate how it would have been possible for Ian's interest in ICQ to be involved in his classroom assignments.

with a friend, but his other interests were not brought into the classroom. Peter made choices about which of his interests he would bring into the classroom and which he would leave out. By this I mean that Peter was calculative about which of his interests he believed would be rewarded in the classroom program and which might be punished or ignored. I considered that in my authentic assessment practices some students “edited” their self if they did not know if I, as the teacher, would approve of them. This became clear in a conversation with Peter. His mom had told me that he was taking karate lessons, although he was unaware that I knew this. When we spoke of what was “left out” of his Third Term Contract he replied:

Peter: ... Some things that I like, like karate and swimming, are not there.

Van Zoost: Peter, those things are important to you. Why did you leave them out?

Peter: Um, I thought you might get bored with all of the things I like to do.

Van Zoost: That *I'd* get bored?

Peter: I already showed you that I like writing. I like writing and I like acting.

Van Zoost: So where's that [in your contract]?

Peter: *You* like doing that so *I* did it. I think you like to act – you used to act - and you like writing, I think. I tried to do things that *you* like *and* I like so you wouldn't get bored when you were marking.

Van Zoost: Wow. Isn't that a scary thing, Peter? To think that you didn't pass in an assignment that you really liked.

Peter: I love it. I mean I loved it but I chose something that you would love too, not just something that I would like.

Van Zoost: [mockingly] Oh, Mr. Van Zoost, get out of my head!

Peter: I made a list of the things I would love to do and then I looked at this list [of possible ways of demonstrating outcomes] and then I thought what would *you* like, then what would *I* like to do, and then I sort of averaged it out. I thought you'd like the acting and the writing, and then I like computers so I chose a ZZZT game [computer writing software].

Van Zoost: Now, would it change your mind if you knew that my father recently got a black belt in karate and it took him five years, and I don't know very much about the sport and I'm interested in learning more about it?

Peter: Yah, I think it would. Now! But I've already made my commitments and I've already done the assignment.

It also occurred to me that perhaps karate and swimming (as topics) were either too far removed from the English curriculum outcomes for Peter to make connections, or that they were not easily linked to the new literacies that were deemed important in the curriculum. Other students questioned Peter's line in the transcript "I thought you might get bored with all of the things I like to do" and discussed this during the Research Literature Circle:

Dawson: Why would Mr. Van Zoost get bored with important things in Peter's life? What would make Peter think this?

Lisa: I think Peter may think that it would bore him because Mr. Van Zoost has heard about them already. Peter knows what Mr. Van Zoost likes and so maybe Mr. Van Zoost wouldn't want to hear more about it.

Dawson: Well then, maybe Peter, as he knows his teacher – remember how we said that knowing your teacher better would help you express yourself?- maybe knowing his teacher, in this sense, made him NOT express himself in his contract. So in a sense there might be some stuff that you don't express to your teacher when you're writing for him.

Dawson reflected on how students negotiated identities by actively *not* presenting specific ideas that they held about themselves to the teacher. I likened this to how students invent a particular identity to display in the classroom where they must report on their lives, such as in school writing assignments or in "morning talks" in the kindergarten (Comber, 1999; Gilbert, 1989). The young people were actively constructing a version of themselves for my consumption as their teacher and they decided how much of their life beyond the classroom they would reveal in the assessment events. For Peter in particular, this process was stressful as it involved determining what parts of his life he would put on display in the classroom and how this would be rewarded or punished through marks.

Repeatedly, Peter made comments throughout the focus group to imply that decisions concerning his assignments in my classroom were governed by my (and not his) expectations:

I do what you think should be done. Like in my story, I do everything that you expect me to do, and then I do what I expect to be done. I do that. And then after that, I like it. But I don't like it after [a while].... I want the teacher to be happy with my work before I am because I *know* that I can't be.... You need someone with expectations so that you can try to live up to them.... Because it's about how they look at you, it's their view of you. It matters how you look at yourself, but it matters how others look at you more.... I think the expectations that you have are larger, but they're not the same. They are a lot bigger. Like, right now, adolescence, I don't (pause), nobody (pause), I don't care really about what I think - I do - but what other people think is more important to me. Your expectations [of me] are worth a lot more than mine, and they're a bit different. Like, mine are to do with what I think I need to do to get better and yours, (pause) I don't know... [trails off]

Peter's comments concerned me as a practitioner because I had believed that authentic assessment was a move towards student-directed learning when instead it may have hidden some of the effects of power. This placed students such as Peter in positions of uncertainty about what to expect of himself and simultaneously created a different version of teacher-directed learning—one that was not explicit about what was needed to be successful and was instead dependent on students' interpretations of my expectations. While I had thought that the student-created rubrics helped to articulate common expectations between the student and me for each assignment, Peter signalled to me that there was more to authentic assessment than producing explicit assessment tools. Authentic assessment did not escape the discourses of schooling such as measurement or adolescence. For example, Peter depicted adolescence as a time of subordination of young people to adults; a time when what adults think is more important than what young people think; a time when young people do not care about what they think themselves, but rather what adults think of them. For Peter, authentic assessment may have created stress by challenging his conceptualization of adolescence and expecting him to make decisions under the premise that what young people think is important – that he should care about his decisions – and that he, not strictly adults, was responsible for his schooling. While authentic assessment in my classroom may have worked to move young people into conceptualizing themselves in such a way, this was not done without inherent dangers.

Table 8.2.1
Peter and the discourse of work

<i>Peter's characterization of the discourse of work</i>	<i>Data</i>
Work is stressful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It over-powers the rest of the colours. It takes over the rest of my life. I get totally stressed-out. • I feel like biting someone's head off, and I am usually cranky because I have late nights because of working on projects. My hair is that way because it shows how stressed I am, if it could my hair would be standing on end. • I'm pretty tired. • If they're doing their work... • I like the amount of time you put into this.
Work is judged by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>You</i> like doing that so <i>I</i> did it. I think you like to act – you used to act - and you like writing, I think. I tried to do things that <i>you</i> like <i>and</i> I like so you wouldn't get bored when you were marking. • I want the teacher to be happy with my work before I am because I <i>know</i> that I can't be • Will the teacher accept it? What will my friends think?
Work is separate from leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But I don't really open up until recess. Like, you come in, the bell goes, and then you do all work until recess and then I come alive. • Some things that I like [leisure activities], like karate and swimming, are not there [in the Third Term Contract].

Peter was constituted within a hybrid of policy and school discourses as well as non-school discourses to produce an identity of the stressed-out student. This range of discourses as well as the variations within discourses was what made identity constitution complex in my classroom. To illustrate this complexity, I focus on one discourse. For Peter, the discourse of work was central to his identity in my classroom and this discourse had three features: work was stressful, was judged by others, and was separated from leisure as a binary. Table 8.2.1 revisits data that were presented above to exemplify how the discourse of work constituted an identity for Peter.

There is a kind of discourse of work being deployed here to suggest that work was stressful, involved the judgement of others, and was separate from leisure. While authentic assessment invited young people to bridge their “real-lives” with their life in school, students like Peter understood their lives in-school and out-of-school to be separate and different and made a distinction between leisure and school work. While some of Peter’s interests were brought into school to be representations of work (such as creating a computer game and working with a friend on a video assignment), other interests such as karate and swimming were left out of Peter’s assignments suggesting that they were leisure activities that were not easily or desirably transferable to school work. I questioned how some students in my classroom may have had particular leisure activities that were more conducive to being transformed into school work than other students. In this regard, authentic assessment events privileged students who had leisure activities which were in line with the kinds of things school valued (such as using new information technologies) and may have created obstacles for young people who had leisure activities that were less valued in school (such as hunting). Students like Peter tended to present a view of leisure/work as a binary and sorted their activities accordingly. This was not something that could be entirely attributed to the authentic assessment practices in my classroom. For example, the school environment may also have contributed to this sense of separating leisure and work, as students’ time during the day was routinely divided into instructional time and non-instructional time (e.g., recess and lunch), and students tended to understand these to be very different times for work (instructional time) and leisure (non-instructional time). That being said, Peter’s identity work helped me to think about how my authentic assessment practices asked students to sort their activities outside of school using this binary and determine which of their interests might be useful for school work and which interests were not. I understood that for students to take up the ideal of the authentic worker, they had to determine which “real” events they would bring into the classroom and which ones they believed to be impractical or not valued in school.

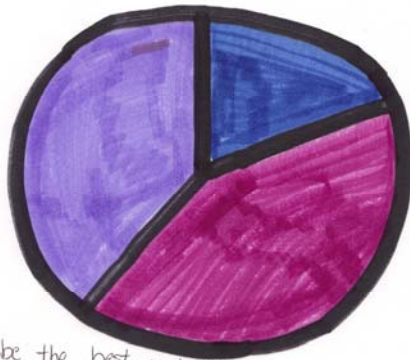
8.2.2 Laura, the striving student

Laura lived roughly twenty kilometres west of the town where Nova Middle School was located. Her father, who had not finished high school, earned a middle class income, and her mother had a post-secondary degree but was not employed. Laura had an older brother who, like herself, I taught later in high school. Laura was a hard-working student and liked to know how she was doing in school in terms of her marks. On the PMI: Reflection on Third Term Contract (see Chapter 4.5.2), Laura wrote that it was interesting “How you always were up to date with your final mark.” Authentic assessment provided Laura with challenges and opportunities that she claimed were unavailable to her in her previous years of schooling, and she was interested in challenging herself.

By “allowing” or demanding that students make choices in the number and type of assignments that they would complete in their final term, students were being asked to articulate their academic aspirations. In general, having choice did not mean that students chose to do poorly in my classroom. Instead, students often spoke with enthusiasm about their decisions and spoke of “doing their best” in the assignments. Laura was consistently enthusiastic about her school work, especially when she was able to make significant decisions about her assignments and their assessment. Creating challenges for students was consistent with the assessment policy documents and the aims of my classroom program. For example, the assessment policies encouraged meaningful student challenges: “Schools need to consider how learning can be organized in more authentic and meaningful ways. Experiences of real and significant challenge need to be built into students’ experiences of the school curriculum” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 27). As noted in Chapter 5, my classroom program aimed to create meaningful experiences that were relevant to students’ lives and provided challenges that interested students. Laura explained in the focus group on May 18th how she took up this call for meaningful challenges as she described her assessment experiences in a pie graph (see Figure 8.2.2a).

Laura claimed to push herself – to strive – in her school work. Laura’s dissatisfaction with the assignments she created signalled the complexity of setting personal challenges. It was not a straightforward task for students to articulate the “best they could do.” She made reference to her striving nature in the focus group as noted in these excerpts from the transcript:

Figure 8.2.2a
Laura's pie graph



This is the pink [bottom right part of the graph]. It is my strive [sic], to like, push myself. Each assignment has to be the best I can do. [The purple, on the left side of the graph, is] trying to relate each assignment with something that I love - to make each assignment enjoyable. [The smaller dark blue part at the top of the graph represents] unsatisfied things about each assignment.

- Strive to be the best work it can be. Trying to work my absolute hardest in each assignment
- Trying to relate each assignment with something I love, to make each assignment enjoyable.
- Unsatisfied things (thoughts and feelings) about each piece of assignments. (Negative)

When I start [an assignment], I think that this is going to live up to my own expectations. I think, "Wow. This is going to be *so* good!"

[When I get an assignment back] I think, "No. He's over-marking me. I could have done better than that." Even if I get 100% I just want to do it all over. But I'm sure that if I do, that I'll get it back and still see something else that I didn't like - even if I could get 100% on it.

I think that you [referring to me] and I do have some of the same expectations of myself. Sometimes I expect more of myself than you do. We both expect the best out of me but "the best" is different for me and for you.

[The Third Term Contract] definitely makes you think about what's important to you in your life, who is important to you, your expectations, and who's expectations of you - just with one project - it really makes you think!

You always need someone who is looking for something out of you, expecting something out of you so you can strive and do your best.

Laura did not shy away from the challenges of authentic assessment in my classroom. She was committed to her school work and strived to do her best. This was something that was echoed in an interview with her mother:

She's a perfectionist - that's internal. We strive for her to do well at school, but we don't put a lot of pressure. We push, but not pressure.... She's a great homework student. She'd work at [her homework] a little harder, [when she is] picking out her own assignments. I think that as the year has progressed, I think her self-confidence has increased but I think she has also enjoyed picking out her own assignments and taking on more responsibility.

In this interview, Laura's mother also suggested that Laura's perfectionism was not limited to her school work and also involved her social life. At the end of the interview I asked Laura's mother the open-ended question, "Is there anything else that I should know?"

You should know that when I told Laura that, "I am going to tell him honestly what I thought initially of this [the contract and student-created rubrics]" she said, "Oh, Mom, don't do that." She didn't want me to offend you or she didn't want to think that you would think less of her because her mom didn't initially like it – which is again her perfectionism. I hope that as she matures she'll become more comfortable in her shell. I'm hoping and I think in senior high school she'll be more relaxed about not always being perfect and not always fitting in.

Not fitting in and striving to do so was evident in Laura's self-portraits. She painted three versions of her self: one at home, one at school, and one with friends (see Figure 8.2.2b). In talking about her self-portraits, Laura described herself as trying to fit in and be like everybody else when she is at school and this was concern for Laura's mother:

[looking at Laura's painting of school self and quoting Laura's description in the transcript about the self-portrait] "Feel like I have to be like everyone else," not *need* to be but *have* to be – see what I mean, that's what I'm saying. I feel like she's driven to the point sometimes when I feel like saying, "Laura, relax. It's okay. You don't have to be like everybody else." Especially the girls – there's so much pressure at this age to belong, as there always was but I think it's even more such now.... So, yes, this [referring to the self-portrait] is very important to her, right now. I felt like saying to her, like, you have to stand like a tree by yourself before you can be part of the forest. You really need to have your own self identity. As a parent I feel bad because sometimes I can see her cringing with fear thinking that she's going to be losing this type of thing [a clique of girls] and that's what I'm saying about Laura being a perfectionist – even in her social life.

Laura used her interest in peer discourses, especially in those of friendships and romance in two of her assignments for the Third Term Contract - a video in the format of a cooking show about teenage dating called "Cooking for love" (introduced in Chapter 5.2.3) and a board game about boyfriend/girlfriend relationships which was played in and outside of the classroom by female peers. Teenage dating was of interest to Laura because of her recent relationship with a boy in the class. Laura's mother explained:

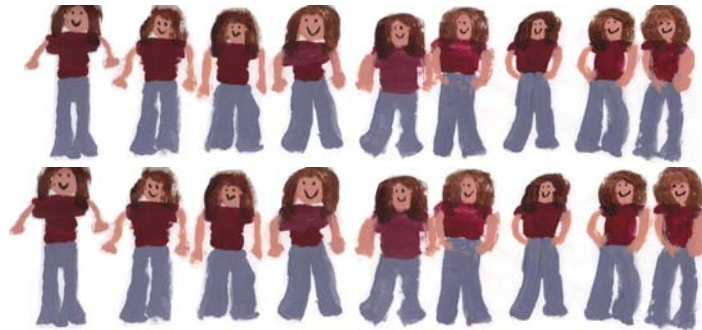
It's difficult being a kid now a-days. With the age of technology makes it more difficult too. Her relationship with [Laura's boyfriend] was for the first 6 months, on ICQ [an instant message service on the internet]. It's only in the last few weeks that we've made the jump to the telephone, which is a little more intimate. And that's good, although we don't want it to become too intimate. But the technology, well, it's like my mom says, "It's no wonder that we have a bunch of door slammers in this generation."

Figure 8.2.2b
Laura's self-portraits

Home self: "This is me at home. This is me being what ever I want to be. I don't feel like I have to hide anything. I can be crazy, wild, purple hair, purple arms. Whatever I want to be. Me. Just me. It's for me."



School self: "This is me at school. Trying to be like everyone else. That's just how I feel when I'm in school – I have to be like everybody else. I just feel like I'm always trying to make myself be like my friends and everybody else I see. Copying like. I wouldn't be able to tell myself apart from the other people in the picture. I know that I'm trying to make myself look like everybody else and act like everybody else. That's just how I see it. Everyone else is the same."



Social self: "This is me with my friends where I feel that I can be crazy and wild and be myself and yet I still have to maintain that image of fitting in and trying to be like everybody else so they accept me I guess."



Ironically, besides the video recorded, no technology was used in Laura's assignments. In sharp contrast to the playful nature of her video and board game, Laura's other two assignments, an autobiography and a fictional diary, were done individually and as Laura explained in the focus group, this was done to show that she was also a "deep person":

In my movie, I show you that I am up, and happy, and bubbly. I love people and I love to be like that. But I also like to show people that I'm deep and that I have thoughts of my own; I can be an individual. You can see that in my diary. I guess each assignment shows a different part of me. I mean, the movie, when you see it, you're not like, "Oh wow, she's a deep person. She has deep thoughts!" [laughter from all of us, recalling Laura's comical video called, "Cooking for Love."] It's just a fun thing to show that I am a fun person but the other part, the diary, shows that I'm a deeper kind of person. I have thoughts and stuff. So I guess each one is different. It shows me in each [assignment], but in a different way each time.

The autobiography and fictional diary brought discourses of rural life and families into the classroom, and like my discussion above about Phil's assignment "My worst relationship ever" concerning romance, I found myself in a dilemma with Laura's work. In the speaker's corner (see Chapter 4.7.2), Laura recorded "I think I'm real in all of my relationship assignments because they are such a personal topic – relationships." I was reminded of this when I read her assignments. In her fictional diary she wrote about a young girl who was sexually abused by her grandfather:

Dear Diary,
Mom and Dad didn't come home until really late last night. Peter fell asleep early so I was left alone with Grampie. He came into my room again... He usually does when I'm over. He touched me again in weird places. It doesn't feel right. My Grampie tells me that this is how all Grampies show their granddaughters that they love them. He also said that if I told Mom or Dad about his visits to my room that they would be very, very angry with me. I don't want them to be angry with me so I'll just go to the lake and try to forget about it.

Further entries in this fictional diary resolved the character Matilda's situation, however after receiving this assignment from Laura, I felt that I now had a dilemma – authentic assessment practices had allowed the subject of abuse to be brought into the classroom for my response and comment. In many ways this could be understood as an authorized discourse of school well-being that encourage students that "it's okay to tell" in efforts to teach students about self-protection. Was Laura looking for guidance from me by choosing this topic? Sexual abuse by a grandparent was not something that I had considered would appear in my classroom by offering students opportunities to involve their own interests in the assignments. As if predicting my response, the day after Laura had passed in this assignment she approached me before school started to tell me "I wanted to make sure you know that the diary is made-up, Mr. VZ. You don't have to worry about me" (I had recorded

this in my teaching journal). I decided to raise my concern with Laura's mother when she came to the school for an interview for this research and she explained:

She did an assignment not all that long ago about child abuse. That came about – we had a conversation.... about what she was mulling over and what she was going to choose as a topic and for some reason we were talking about what I was like as a child and for some reason we got talking about my sister. Very sadly, my sister was in a situation – she was just telling me about it very recently. She was down to a friend's cottage outside of [a specific place in Nova Scotia] a few times in the summer and she stumbled in on the grandfather molesting her friend and she found that very traumatic, of course. So I was explaining to [Laura] how sad that was and how that this poor girl wanted my sister there for security but she also didn't realize, because they were quite young at the time, until [my sister] sort of said, you know what's going on here. She didn't realize that this wasn't happening to all the girls at her age. So Laura and I had quite a long discussion about child molestation and she said, "I think that I would like to do a story about child abuse," so I think that's where that came from. I was then a little bit worried because I thought, well, if she knows a bit about this, maybe she's trying to tell us something in a round about way. But I think that's where that plot came from and I was quite delighted that she had picked up on it and chose to write about it.

From Laura's mother's comments, I considered that abuse was a topic within her family discourse that aligned with school well-being discourses. I understood Laura's interest in working through the moral dilemma of sexual abuse through her assignment to be a means for her to constitute an ethical self: one who had supervised freedom through authentic assessment practices to take up an ethical stance. Furthermore, it can be said that Laura was practicing a particular form of Foucault's notion of taking care of the self whereby she was concerned about her ethical existence and she deliberately chose to conduct work on her self to better understand her own sense of moral obligation and the kind of moral being she aspired to be. For example, beyond the telling of a story of abuse, Laura's assignment continued by describing what actions the abused girl could take as well as determining the roles and moral responsibilities of the friends of the abused girl. In this way, Laura used the assignment to think through and describe how she believed victims and those who know victims have moral responsibilities and how they should respond to an incident of abuse.

By opening up my classroom to students' interests through the authentic assessment events, it was not possible to foresee the discourses (and ethical work) that would enter the classroom or how students would react with each other's discourses. Students were interested in openly playing Laura's board game about teenage dating, but only two students (to my knowledge) showed interest in reading her diary about sexual abuse. While many students commonly brought in discourses as previously described (discourses of rural life, families, friendship, and romance), Laura was the only

student to bring the topic of sexual abuse into the classroom. In the focus group I asked students how they decided what to include in her assignments. Laura and I had this interaction:

Laura: Um, you know I did choose things that *I* liked. I wasn't thinking about what you liked. I love acting and I wanted to do it. If I'm going to do an assignment I'm going to want to enjoy it and I put relationships into my contract but I didn't really put things in about my life. In the diary, there's a mother/daughter relationship, a friend relationship, and a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship but it doesn't relate back to me – it's not my relationship. So I left out *my* relationships.

Van Zoost: What made you do that?

Laura: I love the fictionalous [sic] sides of things – I love creating things. And privacy maybe.

Van Zoost: You felt there is a line to draw.

Laura: Yup...I think I like to show myself to people - who I am - but only to a certain extent. There's some part of me that I don't like to put into [the assignments], it's just for me, and my family, and people that really, really know me. I just like to keep it for me. I don't want to show everything about me, but enough.

Van Zoost: How do you decide what's "enough"?

Laura: I don't know. I guess... I really don't know. I guess whatever I'm comfortable with I guess. I write and then think, "No. I don't want people to know that." Not necessarily directly about me, but people could relate it back to me.

Van Zoost: Does what you chose depend upon the audience?

Laura: Yeah. Showing the people in the class, I guess. Like showing a teacher, you want the teacher to know about you, not just *so so* much about you. There are just some things that you'd like to keep to yourself, you know? And slowly as you learn to trust people and know people then slowly you can let them in a little and let them know who you are and how you like to express yourself.

It could be said that Laura, the striving student, while bringing discourses of well-being, romance, family, and friendships into the classroom was also constituted through school discourses, especially the discourse of adolescence as noted in her comments in the focus group such as:

Laura: At this stage in life, what other people think and expect of you is very, very important and sometimes it's even more important than what you expect from yourself. I guess it's the age maybe, the time of life. We're in a period in our life where what other people think is really important to you – teachers, parents, friends, boyfriends and girlfriends, and then you.

Laura aimed to please herself in the authentic assessment events by choosing assignments that tapped into her desires and made school enjoyable for her. At the same time, Laura worked to

please her parents and myself by getting good grades and being successful at school. The balance of pleasing others and herself characterized her work in my classroom program and she defined herself as a striving student.

Laura's mini-case exemplifies how young people used a range of discourses to constitute an identity. Like many of her peers, Laura used discourses (as described in 8.1 above) of friendship and romance in her authentic assessment school work. She explained that at school she was "Trying to be like everyone else" and created assignments with her friends about teenage dating. Like Peter, she used strong language of work, striving, and self-confidence. Of particular note was the ease in which Laura was able to move among discourses from out-of-school to school discourses. For example, Laura's mother explained that Laura was a perfectionist at home and at school, making it easy for her to line up home and school discourses. Her mother said, "I hope that as [Laura] matures she'll become more comfortable in her shell" suggesting to me that discourses of developmentalism and psychology – common policy and school discourses - were evident at home. Elsewhere in the interview with Laura's mom, she used the discourse of adolescence to explain her daughter's social behaviour: "there's so much pressure at this age to belong." Like her mom, Laura used the discourse of adolescence to explain herself: "I am up, and happy, and bubbly." She used phrases such as "at this stage in life," "period in life," and "I guess it's the age maybe, the time of life." As noted above, Laura was able to align a topic she knew about from her family life - abuse - with school well-being discourses in her fictional assignment concerning a character experiencing abuse from a family member. She also demonstrated that she was in touch with school counselling discourses when she told me that, "I wanted to make sure you know that the diary is made-up, Mr. VZ. You don't have to worry about me." For Laura, it was easy to match home discourses and school discourses.

Authentic assessment can be understood as an open space in which young people bring in a variety of discourses. Laura's identity work showed me that for some students it was easy to move between discourses from out-of-school (such as those accessed via the family) and school discourses. In Laura's case this was possible because these spaces shared common underpinnings in psychological/developmental terms. Authentic assessment may not have been the only contributing factor that allowed Laura to match home discourses and school discourses. My approach to teaching may have encouraged Laura to feel welcomed in the classroom and this may have made it easier for her to bring home discourses into the school. Furthermore, due to the rural location of the students in my class, family discourses may have been more prevalent in my school than in other contexts – in

other words, there was not a strict separation or binarization of school and home. I raise these points to suggest that there were other factors besides authentic assessment that may have allowed Laura to match home discourses and school discourses in her school work. It should also be noted that for students who experienced similar discourses at home as in school, such as Laura, constituting identities at school was a happy experience but in no way is this identity understood to be simply “authentic.” Instead, Laura’s identity work was the result of hybridity and flexibility as she combined discourses to constitute a core identity - the striving student. Laura’s identity can be understood to be a move towards the ideal subject position of the self-developer in my classroom program where she constituted an identity that was reflective, calculative, and interested in ways of caring for other people as well as her self. Secondly, her identity can be aligned with many of the features of the authentic worker as she brings her “real-life” into the classroom for display and finds ways to be a partner with others during the assessment events. Perhaps because of this “double-move” towards both of the ideal subject positions in my classroom, she was able to be an “ideal” student in my classroom and was successful.

8.2.3 Ian, the uncertain student

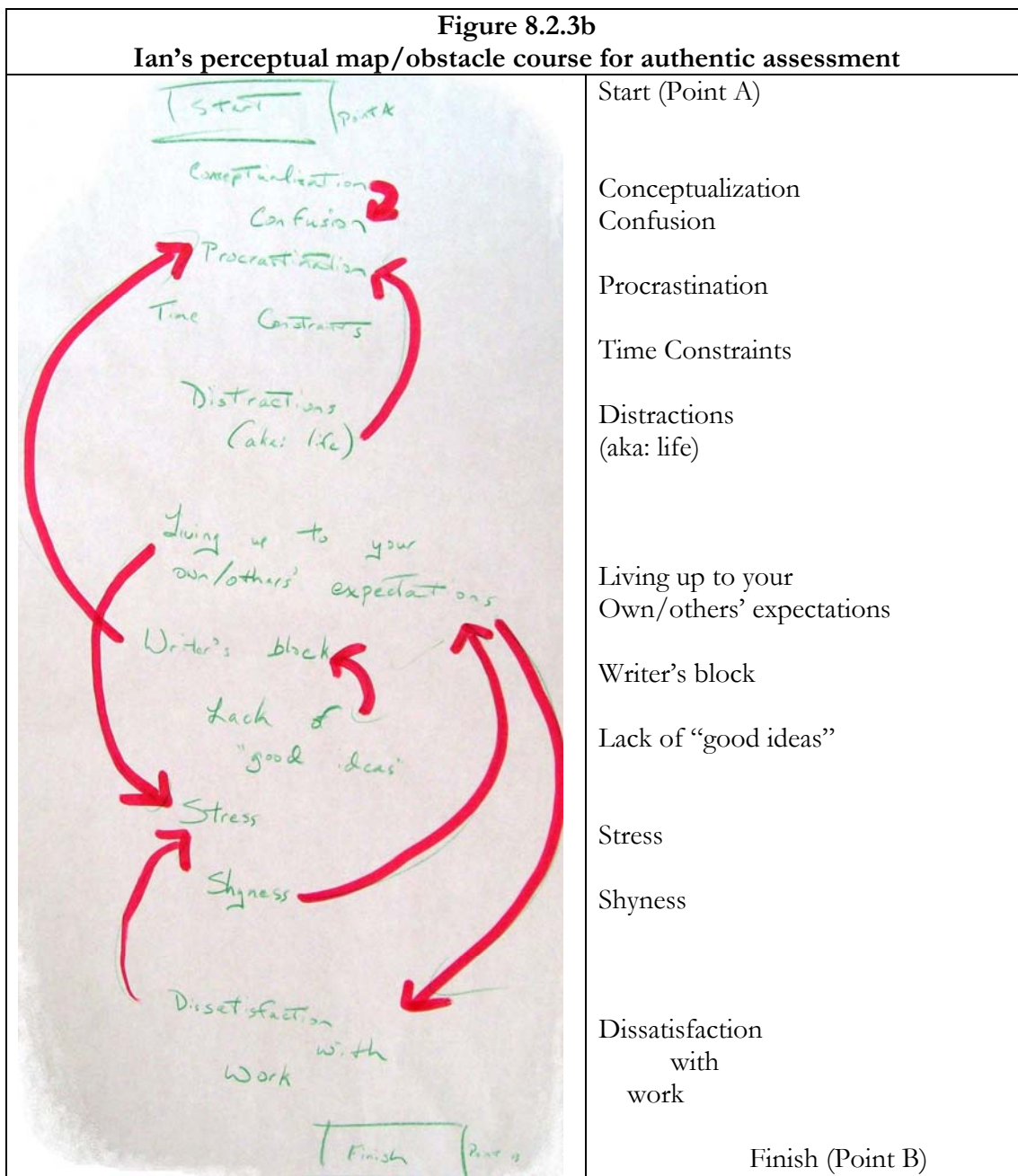
Ian lived twenty kilometres east of Nova Middle School. His mother had two post-secondary degrees and was employed full-time. Ian was an only child and I taught him again in high school. Ian was the most successful student in my English class in 2000-2001 according to the students’ final marks. He was well liked by his peers for his wit and intellect and they referred to him by the nickname that he had given himself and occasionally used to identify himself in the top right-hand corner of his school work, “Da Brain.” Ian was the only non-Caucasian student in the class and his Asian parents had immigrated to Canada before he was born. He described his experiences with the authentic assessment experiences in my classroom in a pie graph (see Figure 8.2.3a). The assessment practices constituted Ian as being afraid; he had a fear of his potential failure on the assignments. Ian was concerned about his choice of assignments in the Third Term Contract and he did not *want* to be in a position of choice; he saw this as a position of uncertainty. Ian’s pie graph during the focus group was a signal that he, and perhaps some of the other students, constituted an identity where uncertainty and fluidity were key elements.

Figure 8.2.3a
Ian's pie graph



Fifty percent of my pie is blue. That's because I'm worried about how I'm going to do. I'm a pessimistic person. I didn't have much confidence in what I was doing. I expect the worst. I feel better when I'm done. I actually had to think about these assignments and my own abilities and that made me more worried because I don't trust myself.

Instead of painting self-portraits (such as those above presented earlier of Nicole, Nicholas, Peter, and Laura), Ian and I modified the idea of a perceptual map (Schratz & Walker, 1995) to take the form of an obstacle course that described how he understood the process of authentic assessment in my classroom. Ian's illustration (with some additional enhancements to improve the visibility of the arrows) can be found in Figure 8.2.3b with a typed version of Ian's writing in the right-hand column. Ian's depiction of his experience with authentic assessment indicated multiple cyclical processes that made the journey from start to finish complex. It could be said that Ian understood authentic assessment to be a series of set-backs and inevitable moments of confusion, procrastination, stress, and dissatisfaction. This interpretation surprised me because of Ian's high academic performance. The additional qualitative methods provided me with a way of seeing the authentic assessment experiences in my classroom through Ian's eyes – a “backstage pass” to the practices of a successful student. I learned that, for Ian, authentic assessment involved wrestling with insecurities about his academic abilities.



In the data production of Four-Two-One (see Chapter 4.6.2), on April 27th, Ian reported that the one thing I should know about his Third Term Contract experience was that “choosing assignments is challenging.” He created three assignments in his Third Term Contract: a computer game that was “an interpretation of *Rainbow Wars* (Rogers, 1985) examining how difference can affect relationships between people”; a short story that examined the “strained relationship between a father and son”; and a diary spoken at lunch to a small group of friends that was “a log of events leading to the

deterioration of a friendship in the Rebellion of 1837.”⁷⁴ During the focus group when I asked Ian how he chose his assignments, he responded:

I chose assignments that I'd be comfortable doing and that I'd get a good mark on. I didn't make my assignments worth all that much because I didn't have that much faith in my abilities.

Throughout the focus group on May 18th and later in an interview on June 15th, Ian continued to express that he was insecure about his abilities and afraid that he would not be successful.

Focus group: I think these assignments show that I'm insecure in my own work. It shows that I don't have much confidence. I didn't make them worth all that much and they're not as challenging as they could have been.... I strive for better, harder things. But it's almost like I'm afraid to try doing new stuff.

Interview: I like to expect the worst in stuff. I'm just pessimistic; always look for the worst case scenario so I won't feel as bad if I *do* do bad.... [I have] a fear of being wrong.

Ian experienced stress and self-doubt as he determined if his work would be valued by others. This was a point that was picked up in Ian's poem called "An Assignment" written as part of the additional qualitative methods of producing data of "other way of representing" (see Chapter 4.7.3). He deliberated the merits of his assignments against his own criteria, the teacher's criteria, and those of his peers. I add emphasis to words that express Ian's self-doubt:

An Assignment (sung to "A Day in the Life")

I got a book to write, oh boy.
What should I write about, *I don't know?*
And though the rubric's rather good,
Well, I had to think,
I had the writer's block...

I have no good ideas,
There is so little time,
*I need to be more creative,*⁷⁵
I've done it all before...
But life is getting in the way...

I'm oh so confused...
Wrote it, showed it to my peers,
I felt so proud and really good.
On the way to school, I had a look
And *I noticed it was bad.*
Thought a bit and *got real mad,*

⁷⁴ The descriptions of Ian's assignments were quoted from his Third Term Contract proposal. The Rebellion of 1837 in Canada was an event that we had discussed in the Social Studies class that I was teaching Ian.

⁷⁵ One of Ian's assessment rubrics, having received my "stamp of approval," included the criterion "creativity" to which he refers in the lyrics.

And someone spoke and *I got dissatisfied...*

I got a book to write, oh boy.
How to live up to what they want?
And though I've got lots to say,
I *don't know what* to write.
Life just got in way...

I'm oh so confused...

Ian's lyrics presented a young person who exhibited self-doubt when trying to determine what to write so that others would approve of his work ("How to live up to what they want?"). The persona in the song was one who criticizes his work to the extent that he undermines what once made him feel "so proud and really good" and left him "dissatisfied." This effect of the young person was far from what the policies set out to create as an ideal, the self-developer, yet connected in some ways to my classroom program's ideal of the authentic worker and notions of "authenticity" when Ian asks of himself if he is "really" bright. Here, the young person in my classroom illustrated some of the costs and dangers of the constantly calculative, self-reflective subject who questions his academic abilities.

Ian's mother in an interview on June 8th claimed that Ian was "worried of making mistakes" and she felt that Ian put too much pressure on himself and was too tense for a boy his age:

He [is] a great kid because he has so many ideas, but he's so enclosed. He's so protected. He doesn't want to open up and he's tense all the time. I can see that right from his poem [above] that he's tense. The first minute of the day when he wakes up until the last minute when he goes to bed, he feels there's always pressure. I try to ease this pressure but I think this invisible pressure is always there. I don't know where he picked up the traits from. People would never make fun of him. Maybe he's afraid to lose that status of being looked up to and that if he open[ed] up, "Maybe they'll feel that I'm dumb." This is the way that he's feeling right now. "I can be very smart if I don't ask [anything]." So I think he's very confused about this right now and I can see this right from his poem.

Ian's mother wished that her son was more "open" towards others and developed more social relations with his peers. She said that Ian had grown up surrounded by adults in his life and this may be why he appeared more "mature" for his age, but she wished that he would expand his experiences beyond knowledge acquisition through reading books. Instead, she wished that Ian would become more like an authentic worker – one who is not engrossed in books but has more "real-life" experiences:

I find that he's very mature. He's sort of – he's so busy in doing everything else, but he hasn't had anything involved to do for himself, as a thirteen year old. Like, right now, at

home, he's been reading psychology books, and then after this 2-3 months he may go on to something extremely different.

Ian chose assignments in his Third Term Contract that did not directly involve other students (such as Peter's collaboration with friends to create a film and a digital cartoon, or Laura's collaboration with classmates to create the video "Cooking for love"). Furthermore, he chose assignments that were not directly autobiographical (such as Phil's learning log entry "My worst relationship ever" or Heather's "Family Scrapbook"). This is not to suggest that his assignments were not in some way representative of him or his interests. Ian's assignments involved his interests in technology (a computer game), writing (a short story), and history (the diary). In the focus group Ian explains:

There is some stuff about me [in the assignments] it's just that it's subtle. I don't like explicitly saying "this is me." I just give little hints about how I'm feeling at the time I'm writing, what I'm thinking. I would do the through a character or through the tone of what I'm writing.

For one assignment of their Third Term Contract, I had asked that parents (or another adult advocate such as another teacher, neighbour, etc.) mark one of the assignments (see Chapter 5.2.3 and Appendix 5.2.3). I also marked the assignment and averaged the two grades. This technique promoted further discussion among the student, parent, and me about the child's abilities and progress. The extent of parental communication with the student because of the assessment practices in my classroom was made clear during the parent interviews. Ian's mother, having read all of his assignments in the Third Term Contract offered that his work represented "who he thinks he is":

I think in his stories, in his characters. Even in his diary of the character from 1867, or the medieval period. I feel he want[s] to be a certain person and I think he's searching [for] what he can be and he's trying to look for an answer through his characters rather than expressing himself as, "I want to do this and you might think that I'm crazy." So I think that he chooses different characters in different time frames so that you wouldn't really notice what he's writing. I think he's using it as a substitute, and through his character writing he's writing about himself and what he wants to do. A lot of times it makes me feel that he wants to achieve a lot – from these different characters - but he doesn't want anyone to make fun of him so he takes it very serious. I think... he's afraid that I'm going to make fun of him. I think that his writing is him, but he's using the characters to hide himself.

Writing fiction could be understood as an ethical practice of constituting a self – a way of working out moral obligations and ethical stances. In Ian's case, his short story called "The Narrative of Luke Myers" was about the relationship between a son and his alcoholic father. Ian wrote:

I had just finished a sheet of questions when I heard loud obscenities and blasphemies being shouted outside. I looked out of the window and noticed my parents arguing. This was not at all uncommon, but for some reason I knew that this time was different. I saw dad drive away angrily and I knew that he would be gone for good.

...

At the time, I was playing a recording of the Beatles, while copying answers for an upcoming test. Mom called to me from downstairs to turn the volume down, but that only gave me another incentive – to turn it up louder. I was an unruly child, yes, but I was also at a rebellious age.

...

“Your mother’s death has been hard on the both of us, but if you want to vent your anger out on me, that’s perfectly acceptable. I know I haven’t exactly been a good father, but...”

“Please, go away. I want to be alone,” I said bluntly.

“But...”

“I want to be alone.”

“Well, if you ever need me, then just give me a call,” my father offered.

“There ain’t a chance in hell I’ll ever do that,” I told him as he left the funeral home.

I sat down with my face buried in my hands, and began to weep.

In his writing, Ian presented a son who must decide if he will reconcile with an estranged alcoholic father after the death of the mother. His writing involved moral discourses concerning families (“parents arguing”), adolescence (“rebellious age”), cheating (“copying answers for an upcoming test”), and grief (“vent your anger,” “began to weep”). The excerpts from the short story portray a thirteen year old writer who was cognizant of family disturbances and emotional trauma. However, because this was fictional writing, I did not presume that this was necessarily indicative of Ian’s life experiences but considered that they might have been deeply personal reflections. When the personal was brought into the classroom, students were expected to constitute and claim an identity that tells the teacher (and the class) about who they “are.” This practice led Ian to believe that he had overstepped his boundary – he had revealed more of his self than he wanted to in the assessment events. I asked Ian during the first focus group on May 18th, “What parts of your life that are important to you are *not* in your assessment contract?”

I think most of my important parts of my life are included here [in the contract]. There might be a little more than I wanted. I think it tells more about myself than I want people to know.

While dissatisfied with the self that he had constituted in his assessment events, Ian simultaneously naturalized the notion that presenting a self was part of the assessment experience and that this self was understood to be something that he - and others - could “know.” To be successful in the classroom, Ian engaged in determining which of his interests he would leave out of the classroom and, in retrospect, wished he had left out more: there was “a little more than I wanted.”

Because Ian (and perhaps others) felt insecure about their school work I attempted to help students talk about their successes in English. I posted the carousel brainstorm question (see Chapter 4.7.1), “How do you show that you are proud of your work?” Students provided the following responses:

- I don't throw it away
- Share it with others
- Frame it
- Place it somewhere where I can see it
- Show my mom/dad
- Get a haircut (tell my hairdresser)
- Brag
- Smile
- Save it
- Show my Nanny and Puppy [grandparents]
- [say] “Yes! Finally Yes!”

Similarly, in the carousel brainstorm I asked, “How do you celebrate your success in English/Social studies?”

- Eat
- Take a bath
- Play football
- Listen to music
- Snowboarding
- Ice cream
- Feel good about what I have accomplished and do what I want to do
- Dance to rap
- Watch TV
- Pat myself on the back
- Mom makes my favourite meal
- Go for a horsy ride
- [say] “Yippee!”

With these chart papers hanging around the classroom, students often discussed them informally during non-instructional time. Ian avoided these conversations. While Ian successfully achieved high marks on his assignments, he remained insecure about his abilities as a student and believed that he had revealed too much about himself in his assignments. On his final Process Exam which received high marks, Ian wrote in the margin “My favourite part of my essay is the subtitles because as strange as it may seem, I think that my essay is horrible and the subtitles are the only things that reflected upon me and my writing.”

Ian's identity work illustrates the fluidity in discourses that students used in authentic assessment. For example, Ian preferred to read books at home rather than socialize with his peers (according to his mom) and his mom wished that he was more like an authentic worker and had more "real" experiences such as playing with other people his own age. For Ian, bringing in discourses from out-of-school meant tapping into his reading interest in history and psychology which were respectively brought into his assignment about the Rebellion of 1837 and his short story about father-son relationships. The discourses of history and psychology that were from Ian's life outside of school lined up well with traditional school discourses. In addition, Ian included policy and school discourses in his written assignments ("copying answers for an upcoming test") as well as the discourse of adolescence ("I was an unruly child, yes, but I was also at a rebellious age). Unlike Peter and Laura, he did not involve what his mother may have considered more "real" interests (e.g., non-book like experiences) and chose traditional paper and pencil assignments (a short story and a diary) as well as computer assignment that responded to a film.

Ian was able to take up the ideal of the authentic worker by using fictional writing to imagine historical characters in "real" events, by presenting his ideas in the form of a personal diary to create the sense of being "real," and by responding to a film from outside of class using new technological literacies. What Ian did not do, however, was choose assignments that involved his peers in the creation of the assessment event. On my direction, he presented his diary to a group of his friends at lunch so that I could assess his speaking skills. Without my insistence, Ian's work in the Third Term Contract might (at least in part) be considered traditional in that he worked independently, silently, and favoured using a paper and pencil format to present his work. Once again, I note how authentic assessment was not disconnected with traditional ways of assessing young people. For those students who preferred to work alone and focus on more traditional paper and pencil work, they could still be successful in authentic assessment. It should be noted that choosing to work alone could not be entirely attributed to the range of choices that students had due to the authentic assessment practices in my classroom. For example, it was possible that working alone was something that was familiar to Ian's family history (he lived with his mother, with no other siblings) or something that was influenced by his geographic location (he lived in relative isolation, twenty kilometres outside of the town). Offering Ian "choices" to work with his peers in assignments outside of school may not have been a feasible or pragmatic option for him.

Just as with my analysis of Peter and Laura's identity work, I did not understand that Ian constituted an identity that was "real"; I understood that authentic assessment required him to demonstrate fluidity among discourses and the ability to discern which discourses would be rewarded in school and, in efforts to be successful, minimize those discourses that would not be rewarded. Ian was highly selective as to which discourses to bring into the classroom and chose those that traditionally have been valued in school. As he explained, he chose assignment that he'd be "comfortable in doing" and would "get a good mark on." As Ian's comment indicates, authentic assessment does not avoid the traditional gate-keeping work of schooling and "getting a good mark" was what was important to Ian, his mom, and the school.

8.2.4 Brent, the dropout student

Not all students were able to pursue or ensure academic success. In such cases, the authorized subject positions of the self-developer and the authentic worker were resisted and sometimes ignored. Brent was the only student of the 27 in my homeroom class who was not successful in his Grade 8 year. Brent lived in an apartment within walking distance to the school and he usually arrived alone. He lived in poverty with his unemployed mother who had not finished high school and his younger sister who was in elementary school. He passed the second term of English Language Arts with 58%, but he withdrew from school early in the final term of Grade 8. Brent's life was consumed with looking after his terminally ill mother and his seven year old sister with a paper route and dog walking jobs to provide more financial support for his family. He also had a violent temper and irritability, and could not focus on specific tasks in school situations. School proved to be less important to him than it was to many of the other students in the class and the identities on offer in my classroom program seemed to be less significant in his world than other versions of himself such as "the family caretaker."

I worked so that Brent might understand me as an ally, although because I was in a position of authority as his teacher, I felt that this was confusing and difficult for Brent. Perhaps the role of a teacher was too closely associated with other authority figures in his life beyond school (such as the police and welfare workers) that teachers were resisted: Brent consistently challenged teachers who called him to task or created situations with ultimatums. My way of working with Brent was to ask open-ended questions (e.g., "How can I help you?") and provide options for Brent about where he worked in the classroom (e.g., sitting close to the door seemed to be more comfortable for him than isolated behind a partition or sitting with a group of students). Despite my educational aim of

making school relevant for students' lives outside of school, I found it discouraging to watch Brent's responsibilities outside of school overshadow his interest in schooling. Because of this, I came to understand that authentic assessment valorises only particular kinds of family life and particular kinds of community and culture. Schools are not good at working with students such as Brent and authentic assessment is very much a part of school discourses in this regard. The only interest that Brent discussed with me from his life beyond school was his dog-walking interest as a part-time job, bringing in the discourses of work and pets into the classroom. However, once he found out that I did not have a dog, this was not discussed again and he did not use this interest in any of his assessment artefacts.

Brent's resistance to schooling in general was noted by his peers, my colleagues, and the community: while he attended school, he was often in disciplinary trouble which resulted in out-of-school suspensions. Brent resisted policy and school discourses and this made it challenging to find ways of working with him where he could produce something to be assessed. He presented teachers with a series of challenges that made it difficult for Brent to be successful at school:

- Brent systematically did not complete homework, making it difficult to find ways to assess his abilities to demonstrate the outcomes. I, and other teachers, worked with Brent to help him produce artefacts for the English curriculum, but this took effort. Producing any assessment artefact (print or otherwise) was time consuming for teachers because Brent was easily distracted and used his verbal fluency to subvert teachers' efforts.
- Brent did not keep any of his school work – his school work went “missing,” binders were lost, etc. When I made photocopies and kept a copy of his work, he was generally uninterested in what he had previously produced. This resulted in limited and superficial reflection.
- Brent refused to bring any of his interests from outside of school into the classroom and he used this practice to reduce his involvement in the authentic assessment practices. When prompted about what he enjoyed doing he would respond with, “Nothing.”
- Brent categorically refused to set any personal learning goals at school. He considered this practice as futile: “What's the point? I won't do it anyways” (quote from my teaching journal). Other researchers have also noted that disadvantaged students may resist setting goals in school (Jones, 2004; Sellar & Cormack, 2007).
- In English class Brent saw little point in making connections between texts and his life. He was more interested in stories that emphasized characters' actions which made him impatient to discuss other aspects of the texts used in class such as character development, stylistic and

mechanical use of language, moral messages of a text, etc. Like Jones (2004), I considered that Brent’s life connections to literature may not have been valued and his experiences not validated in our school.

- Brent was interested in relating with me in “non-school” ways, such as asking where I lived or about my personal life. He was not interested in relating with me, or most other teachers, to discuss curricular matters.
- One teacher on staff claimed that Brent deliberately tried to irritate teachers so that he would be sent out of the classroom (to an administrator’s office) and therefore would also not be faced with school work. I understood this behaviour to be consistent with how Jones (2004) describes the daily lives of young people living in poverty to be surrounded with fighting and bullying. In deed, Brent’s discipline records illustrated a long history of school fights and incidents of him bullying other students.

Beyond such acts of resistance to schooling in general, it may have been more difficult for Brent to constitute an identity at school that was informed by discourses that were readily accepted at school. Table 8.2.4 demonstrates how the discourses that were commonly used by other students to take up the authorized identities were incongruent with Brent’s experiences beyond school. Perhaps because the discourses commonly used to take up the ideal subject positions on offer in my classroom were not readily available to Brent outside of school, or in the case of family discourse, his version was not readily accepted at school, they were resisted and other identities were constituted. Therefore, authentic assessment in my classroom, like schooling in general, privileged certain students and not others. Thus, in my classroom the results of implementing authentic assessment were similar to more traditional models of schooling and assessment; authentic assessment failed to connect with

<i>Common discourses</i>	<i>Examples of how Brent resisted or dismissed these discourses</i>
Discourses of rural life	Brent lived in the town where Nova Middle School was located and was within walking distance to the school. Little interest was expressed about the world beyond the town limits.
Discourses of families	While I knew of his home-life from the guidance counsellor on our staff, Brent never mentioned his mother. He mentioned his “little sister” once in reference to how a text would be better suited for her than him.
Discourses of friendship	Brent maintained no close friendships that were observed at school. His social interactions were limited with his peers and he preferred to converse/argue with adults in the building.
Discourses of romance	Brent did not make any of his romantic interests known. He was frequently not permitted to attend school dances due to either his poor attendance or behaviour.

this socially and economically disadvantaged student. The claims of authentic assessment to motivate students, involve their interests from outside of school, connect assessment to learning, promote higher-order thinking, and develop positive interaction between the teacher and the student were not fulfilled in this case.

Brent's behaviour at school can be compared to Apple's (1995, p. 87) description of students who "work the system," and

...creatively adapt their environments so that they can smoke, get out of class, inject humour into the routines, informally control the pacing of classroom life, and generally try to make it through the day...[M]any students go even further. They simply reject the overt and hidden curricula of the school. The teacher who is teaching about mathematics, science, history, careers, etc. is ignored as much as possible.

Brent's resistance to schooling (and teachers' efforts to engage him) continued somewhat infamously in his later years at school, making it difficult for him to complete his high school years. While attending school, Brent constituted an identity that was relatively stable and this may have provided Brent with some consistency in his schooling experiences and interactions with authority figures. His ways of being at school were generally thought of as "the defiant student" where he resisted dominant discourses of schooling and didn't engage in the assessment economy of rewards and punishment via marks. Instead of submitting work to be assessed, Brent did not complete assignments and when this became problematic (that is, impossible for him to pass), he dropped out of school.

While using school time to complete school work may have seemed like a reasonable expectation for me to have of Brent, I also understood that Brent, because of his life outside of school may not have had the same expectation of his time at school. Jones (2004, p. 466) suggests that "People living in poverty may act in ways that seem irresponsible to mainstream society - survival is top priority." Brent's behaviour at school seemed irresponsible to me because his teachers spent a great deal of time and energy to help him complete his school work and Brent spent his time either ignoring or defying this "support." Like other writers, (Biddle, 2001; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Fine, 1991), I understood that dropping out of school was partially a reflection that schools are not suited for particular young people who are disadvantaged and often come from low-income families. While authentic assessment claims to increase student involvement and tap into their desires, in practice, these assessment events may silence the very students they claim to support. For Brent, this may have been because his discourses from outside of school were not compatible with school

discourses. Clearly the identity offers of the self-developer and the authentic worker in my classroom authentic assessment practices were not attractive or useful for him, or he did not have sufficient opportunities to utilise the resources and knowledges that he had (such as caring for the ill or creating part-time work). The failure of authentic assessment to create connections with Brent's life outside of school cannot be entirely attributed to Brent's failures at school. Other factors in Brent's life outside of school influenced his ability to attend school, feel connected with school, and succeed in school, regardless of the assessment practices used in the classroom. However, this does not mean that authentic assessment is somehow exempt from doing exactly what traditional approaches can do – that is silencing particular students or at least failing to connect to their social realities beyond school.

All four of the students presented in this chapter (Peter, Laura, Ian, and Brent) constituted their identities with and against discursive practices. The subject positions on offer in my classroom program, the self-developer and the authentic worker, were adopted and resisted. For example, Laura demonstrated that she was interested in exploring her moral responsibilities and ethical stances about sexual abuse and similarly Ian wrote about alcoholism, families, and parental abandonment. In these events, Laura and Ian adopted the subject position of the self-developer and illustrated that they were interested in their own self-development, including their moral obligations and values. Peter adopted the subject position of the self-developer by being calculating about how he believed he would be successful in English class by creating a computer game about a romantic relationship. This is not to suggest that Peter, Laura and Ian did not take up aspects of the authentic worker. They used new literacies to present their knowledge such as via computer games, a digital cartoon, videos, and board games. This is also not to suggest that students consistently took up these subject positions or necessarily took them up in their entirety. For example, Peter took up aspects of the self-developer in his assignment “The great adventure” concerning dating relationships but did not in his digital cartoon “Dragon Ball M” which was intended to be humorous and satirized the extremes in which friends will make sacrifices for each other. Brent, however, resisted the ideals of the self-developer and the authentic worker and was unsuccessful at school.

The analysis represented by the four mini-cases shows that identity work in the authentic assessment practices was complex and fluid, and played out differently for different students. The analysis shows that in the authentic assessment events in my classroom both school and non-school discourses were important to students' identities and that being able to negotiate these discourses

was important to being a successful student. It is important to note that while my analysis focused on how young people used authentic assessment practices to constitute identities, other factors such as the school environment, teacher practices, geographic restrictions, and families' economic living conditions contributed in large ways to both *what* identities and *how* identities were constituted. Therefore, it would be remiss to attribute to authentic assessment all of the identity work that students conducted in my classroom. The identity work was complex and a number of interconnected processes were at work:

- through authentic assessment, identities were constituted in both school and non-school discourses.
- young people were placed in a position of working among these discourses to find ways of constituting an identity that would be rewarded in the classroom through the authentic assessment practices in my classroom.
- authentic assessment practices privileged young people who were familiar or comfortable with school or school-like discourses and had access to them outside of school (such as adolescence, psychology, history, technology, school counselling).
- authentic assessment allowed young people to bring discourses into the classroom that were important to them beyond those valued by the school. However, the practices privileged young people who brought values and practices that were compatible with the teacher or school's views of what is appropriate for adolescents to engage with (such as the discourses of rural life, families, friendship, or romance). Some discourses that were important in students' lives were not welcome and if these discourses were significant for students' identities, that had an impact on how the student could be in the classroom.
- sometimes young people resisted the ideal subject positions on offer in authentic assessment if they were inconsistent with traditional ways of being. Students did not necessarily want to take up 'real-life' work or display certain identities. I pressured young people to work in new ways in the classroom when students were not familiar or comfortable with the often performance-based expectations of authentic assessment (see the case of Ian).

While Peter, Laura, Ian, and Brent helped to exemplify how particular identities were constituted in my classroom, I now conclude the chapter by considering the key insights that came out of the analysis of the students' responses across the class.

8.3 Authentic assessment – constraints and possibilities

While my classroom program emphasized authentic assessment practices, the end result involved assigning marks, promoting students, and sorting them according to their supposed merits; my classroom program was very much a part of traditional schooling and operated within the discourses of assessment. Generally, the students in my English class wanted to succeed and were successful in the classroom program. For example, of the 27 students in my homeroom class, four received marks of 90% or higher, five between 80%-89%, seventeen between 50%-79%, and one student was “placed”⁷⁶ (Brent). Students expressed a general happiness about the transparency of the way their marks were generated and reported that they were knowledgeable about how their marks were determined as made evident by their comments on April 17th in a reflection about the Third Term Contract:

- I thought the whole process was interesting. I had never been able to have that much control over my marks before.
- [I] could see how marks were distributed.
- I put a lot of effort into each assignment and projects because I knew how it affected my mark. I liked the contract and knowing.
- [I liked] how you knew in advance how each project made up your mark and could manage your time wisely for assignments throughout the term.
- The fact that we got to decide our own marks was really reassuring because it made me feel as though I was getting full value for my assignment. You also knew the assignments beforehand to know what the term was going to be like.
- It was great that we got to choose our own marks. I’m sure it gave some of us freedom in a way. It also helps us organize and get ready for the assignments.
- We could get better marks and know how hard you have to work for your marks.

Students repeatedly spoke with excitement about their involvement in the assessment practices during the focus group of May 18th. I add emphasis below to illustrate the words that represent students’ enthusiasm:

Aleta – Most of me was *excited* about [the contract] because you could decide what you *wanted* to do, make your own rubric, and do it at your own level. Usually teachers would say, “Do this” – but what if you’re not really capable of that? So this kind of made me feel like I could pick anything that I felt that I could do and do in my own time. I was worried at first at how I would decide what to do. I was really *happy* with what I chose.

Ian: I’m *excited* about doing my own thing. Independent, you know.

⁷⁶ “Placement” of a student was introduced in Chapter 6: when the student has not “passed” all of the required courses, but teachers have decided that the student should continue to the next grade level. Brent was the only student who was not successful in the classroom program. He failed the majority of his classes (earning less than a 50% mark) and was “placed” in Grade 9 at the end of the year. He dropped out of school in the spring of 2001.

Colin: I'd know I'd *have fun* with it. I *enjoyed* doing it.

Van Zoost: Are your assessments living up to your expectations?

Colin: I think they did because I don't like to pass in assignments that I knew I could have done better. That way I always *feel good* about what I'm passing in. So yah, I think they are living up to my expectations.

Similarly, data produced in a class activity Four-Two-One (see Chapter 4.6.2) on April 27th, illustrated how students enjoyed the authentic assessment practices in the classroom program. Students responded to the prompt, "What is one thing that I should know about your assessment experience?" and I add emphasis below to illustrate the words that represent students' enthusiasm:

- That I'm *excited* about the ZZT⁷⁷ game that me and [my friend] are making
- I *like* my choices of projects because I can pick how many I want to do
- I found it easy to do. This *was more fun* than the assignments and rubrics that you just gave to us. You should know this was a *great experience*
- I *like* how this is done. It's *fun*. I choose my own thing
- I would much *rather do this* because it allows me *to enjoy my work more* and learn more about things I want to learn about
- That it is *a fun thing*
- I think this system encourages students to *want* to learn

Thus, there was strong evidence that the students were enthusiastic about the authentic assessment experiences because they were able to link their desires and interests with the assessment events.

Often, this was because authentic assessment in my classroom allowed the curriculum to be connected to life beyond the school; students created assignments that were relevant for their lives outside of school (see Appendix 8.3 for examples that were presented in this and the previous chapter of how students made school relevant for their lives through authentic assessment events).

Authentic assessment practices allowed some students to bring non-school resources into the classroom and have them count. Engaging in identity work that was meaningful for students' lives outside of school allowed some students (such as Tim) to be more successful than they normally would be. However, some students (such as Brent) could not or were not willing to bring non-school resources into the classroom and have them count. The result was that students whose lives outside of school were more aligned with school were more successful; those with "proper" lives could bring non-school resources into the classroom, and those with "improper" lives could not.

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the criticisms of my classroom program was that young people could avoid critical and social issues and instead focus on technical aspects of the English

⁷⁷ ZZT is a MS-DOS computer game creation system that Peter used to create a game called "The Great Adventure" as one of the assignments in his third term contract. This assessment event was described in the previous chapter.

curriculum. In this chapter the mini-case studies illustrated that some of the young people in my classroom did address critical and social issues (such as Ian's deconstruction of how difference is represented in a specific video or Laura's look at how family violence might be addressed) but this does not suggest that all young people were interested or willing to engage in such deliberations. This is one of the absences of authentic assessment in my classroom program data. Because the identity work that students conducted in my classroom through authentic assessment focused on individual choices young people could avoid critical and social issues in their English assignments. Authentic assessment in my classroom may even, because of its associations with traditional discourses of assessment and the assigning of marks to individual competing students, have discouraged young people from engaging in critical and social issues.

Not all students expressed unequivocal support for the authentic assessment practices. While I was aware of the support⁷⁸ that many students needed to be successful in the authentic assessment events, the class data from the Four-Two-One exercise suggested that one student in particular was not pleased with the amount of responsibility and expectations that came with the Third Term Contract: "I don't like having to do these things. I like the teachers to tell us what we're doing, like it's supposed to be." How it was "supposed to be," or rather "should be" according to this student, was that the teacher was to be an authority in the classroom that controlled the students' learning. What this student's comment helped me to realize was that the authentic assessment practices signalled a change in the ways in which this student would be constituted in the classroom and that not all students may have been aware of the educational reasons for this change. However, data produced in the Research Literature Circle illustrated that some students at least understood that assessment discourses were linked with the power to judge:

Colin: school is pretty much all based around the teachers. And that's pretty much all our life except in the summer.... And we want to live up to the expectations that the teacher has, for some reason. Because they are marking us. They have the power.

According to Colin, because I was marking students, I "had" the power. This vernacular use of the word "power" suggests that power could be transferred from one person to another and is vested in my position as the teacher. In the second focus group of May 18th, students explored how "power" operated in the assessment practices. Students understood power to be something that could be conferred by a person; sovereign or external power.

⁷⁸ Most often, this support involved personal communication with the student. I would "check-in" with a struggling student to monitor progress and discuss the "next steps" that would be needed to complete the assignments.

Laura: Yah, the only power I have on this [gesturing to the contract] is the percent maybe [of the assignments]. What we pick, what we choose to do is, I feel, the only power I have on this. My rubric is for you, for what you want.

Peter: [jumping in quickly] I had no power making my rubric. I know I made it myself with my hand, but in my own mind I made it for you. I know that I didn't make it for myself. And these [assignments], even the choices that I made I wasn't thinking of them when I made the choices – I sort of chose the ones I think I'm weak on, like writing. I don't think I'm good at that or acting I want to improve on them.

Laura: Yah, but those are the only things that you feel you have power over.

Peter: I know.

Interpreting Laura and Peter's dialogue in terms of Foucauldian disciplinary power allowed me an alternative way of seeing this process. Laura and Peter were the *sites* of power where they governed themselves; they aligned themselves with the ideals of the teacher. Power, therefore, was not something that was done *to* students, but rather was made visible *through* them. Peter stated that, "I know that I didn't make it for myself." He acknowledged that he did not "have" power, although he was "entrusted" with it. Instead, he was the site of self-disciplinary power where he governed himself by working with the subject positions on offer in my classroom and taking up others to work in compliance with the teacher's agenda in the classroom. This was something that many students did in my classroom. While Brent outright resisted the authorized subject positions that were on offer in my classroom, most students adopted these same subject positions by using discourses of schooling and traditional ways of being a student to constitute an identity.

This pattern was of interest to me because the authentic assessment literature claims to allow different ways of working with compared to traditional assessment practices. What is not sufficiently addressed in the literature is how authentic assessment practices also involve traditional ways of working with students but with the effects of power less visible. Interestingly, while the literature, policies, and my classroom program stress students' self-direction in authentic assessment practices, students reported in the focus groups that they understood the assessment events in my classroom to be teacher-directed. This is to suggest that while students were involved in making decisions in the assessment events in my classroom they worked to ensure that what they were doing would be approved by the teacher.

Peter: A lot of people that are important to me are people I know personally, that I have a relationship with. The first expectation is from the teacher. I think that the first expectation should be from me but I can't do that. It has to be from the teacher first. Then for all the people that are around me, before me.

Van Zoost: What makes you think that it has to be for the teacher and for other people before you?

Lisa: Because the teacher is marking you - that's what I think.

...

Peter: What they think of you shapes what your life is going to be.

Laura: And maybe as you mature more you realize that yes, it is your view of you that starts to be more important (second focus group, May 18th).

To ensure that students made decisions that would be approved by me, the young people in my classroom attempted to internalize my expectations (and those of others) as they participated in the assessment events. Peter expressed that what adults “think of you” as a young person would influence your future (“shapes what your life is going to be”). Another way of thinking about this is that the young person is understood to be in a “stage” or “phase” of life that required the self to be supervised and validated by adults and confirmed by peer relations. There was something unsettling for me in these acknowledgements. I had set out, as suggested by the authentic assessment literature and policy documents, to have students make choices “independently.” Instead, the data suggested that these choices were not made independently, but rather in consultation with what the students believed adults might have expected of them. In this way, work was done on students and students did work on themselves to align the expectations that they carried of themselves with those of the significant adults in their education: the teacher and/or parents. This is akin to the common practices of traditional assessment where the student is requested to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in ways that are determined by the teacher (e.g., a test).

In sum, I argue that the students in my classroom worked with the ideal subject positions on offer in the classroom program to constitute themselves through discourses of traditional assessment that could not be ignored or escaped via authentic assessment events. I make this claim based on my argument in previous chapters that the assessment practices worked as technologies that required my approval in order to complete them. Students spoke openly during the data productions of the focus groups and Research Literature Circles about how they understood themselves to be engaged in assessment practices that asked them to consider what I would have valued as their teacher. The effects of this way of constituting an identity meant that young people spent time considering what I would be thinking and tried to internalize my thinking processes. I also considered that students

sensibly understood my classroom as an aberration: in their other experiences of schooling, more traditional forms of assessment abounded, and therefore students held onto discourses they knew counted in school. Understood in this way, the students' authentic assessment work could be understood as a statement about their willingness to take risks in an aberrant space because of the rapport or trust that they have with their teacher. When constituting an identity in authentic assessment practices there is a sense of manufacturing an identity using the authorized discourses and some students (such as Brent) could not, or would not do this. Furthermore, this sense of identity manufacturing raises questions about the "authenticity" of authentic assessment.

While authentic assessment promoted the outcomes of traditional assessment, it did allow for other possibilities. The students' identity work was not only about taking up the ideal subject positions and shaping an identity for school. Authentic assessment provided a space for young people to bring in discourses that were important to them (such as families) and they enjoyed this and were able to do this with great agility. This allowed young people to enjoy their school work and take up the invitation of authentic assessment and use multiple discourses. Authentic assessment has a strong potential for picking up the work of connecting school with students lives - to make school relevant for their lives. It allows the possibility for young people to bring their "virtual schoolbag" (Thomson, 2002) or their "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) about what they have learned at home and in their communities into the classroom. This is especially important to me as a practitioner working in a rural school with young people who come from relatively poor homes. As noted in this chapter, in my classroom this meant that students could bring, for example, their knowledge of rural life, families, friendships, and romance into the classroom and make school engaging for young people.

CHAPTER 9

MARKING STUDENT IDENTITIES

My research problem was to explore how students' identities were constituted in authentic assessment and this drew attention to the kind of student selves that were produced by authentic assessment practices as well as the processes that were involved in the constitution of students' identities. My research problem led to three key findings that are presented in this chapter. I also present the limitations of these findings for application in other contexts as well as the implications of these findings for my own practice. I conclude this chapter by offering possible further research directions for authentic assessment practices.

9.1 Three findings

Broadly speaking, my research has shown that authentic assessment in my classroom provided opportunities for young people to constitute identities. Speaking more specifically, my research about the process of identity constitution in my classroom through authentic assessment practices led to three related key findings. These findings have important implications for the field of authentic assessment and for working with young people in New Times.

9.1.1 School work as identity work

The first finding was that authentic assessment in my classroom shaped school work as identity work. My analysis of the authentic assessment practices in my program shows how authentic assessment brought identity projects that involved the wider lives of young people to the forefront of my classroom program. Identity projects were inherent in the authentic assessment events in my classroom because students were expected to present a "real" self in the classroom. Students were required to scrutinize their self so that they could constitute an identity that was assessed.

One of the effects of stressing identity projects is that authentic assessment in my classroom marked the whole person and not just particular skills and knowledges in English. If a student had a poor mark in authentic assessment, then this mark was also understood to be a judgement of the student's self which sometimes led the adolescents in my class to worry if they were a good student or not (e.g., see the mini-case studies of Peter - the stressed-out student, Laura - the striving students, and Ian - the uncertain student). As Hunter (1996) claims, teaching English has always been more than about skills and knowledges and therefore, authentic assessment fitted particularly well with my English classroom program for this reason. For example, the authentic assessment events in my classroom brought students' wider lives into school to be scrutinized: their family pictures and histories; their individual interests; and their romantic and peer relationships. Furthermore, the authentic assessment events sometimes put students' wider lives on display in the classroom (such as Heather's "Family Scrapbook"), in students' homes (such as Brenda's song to her grandmother), and in the community (such as Tim's song to his grandfather in the hospital). Therefore my classroom program, through the authentic assessment events, made students' identity projects visible to audiences beyond myself as the teacher and simultaneously involved these identity projects in determining students' marks in English. In these ways, authentic assessment brought identity projects to the forefront of my classroom program and shaped school work as identity work. At issue was which identities were "on offer" because of authentic assessment. My research has shown that these identities were not, as suggested by the authentic assessment literature, "real" or "authentic," but for the most part, adopted the ideal subject positions made available in my classroom through authentic assessment practices - the self-developer and the authentic worker.

In regards to how authentic assessment shaped school work as identity work, my research also points out that authentic assessment provided technologies for shaping identities. That is, authentic assessment in my classroom encouraged young people to engage in self-shaping. As pointed out in Chapter 7, these technologies were made available through specific assessment events such as the Process Exam, the Children's Literature Portfolio, the Literature Circle Group Reflection, the Third Term Contracts, the Identity Museum, the Literature Circle Observational Assessment, and Reading Big Books. The technologies engaged in these authentic assessment events included: self-reflection, involving the ideas of others in determining self-direction, making connections to immediate and current lives, and imagining their self into the future. These technologies were used in specific authentic assessment events where students' were required to make individual choices.

This finding is important because it points out a gap in the field of authentic assessment; the authentic assessment literature and policies reviewed in this study did not acknowledge the connections of authentic assessment to the formation of students' identities. There are ethical dangers when teachers are unaware of how authentic assessment invests in students' identity projects and the effects of such work in classrooms. For example, teachers need to know that issues of power do not disappear by providing students with choice during authentic assessment events: in the authentic assessment practices in my classroom I worried that students may have been misled about the amount of "control" that they had in making choices in my classroom because students understood power as something that could be conferred from the teacher to the student while I, on the other hand, understood that power was made visible as students governed themselves with the ideals of the classroom in mind. Furthermore, teachers need to know that students' identities are constituted through authentic assessment events and are not, as assumed in the literature and policies, relatively fixed and readily available for measurement.

9.1.2 Lining up the self

The second finding was that one way that identities were constituted was by students lining up the self with teacher and curricular expectations. This process meant that authentic assessment in my classroom was powerful in persuading young people about the kind of person that they needed to be and in general, young people aligned themselves with these expectations. In my study there was evidence that young people shaped their identities to be successful in my classroom program and for the purposes of authentic assessment. As noted in Chapter 8, some students, in efforts to be successful, were willing to shape their self through the authentic assessment by taking up the ideal subject positions on offer (the self-developer and the authentic worker) and shaping an identity for school. Furthermore, some students deliberated what parts of their lives they believed would count in school and what parts would not and made decisions based on this premise. This process privileged young people who brought in resources that were compatible with the teacher's or school's views of what was appropriate for adolescents' engagement. As described in Chapter 8, Laura and Peter essentially stated that they constructed rubrics and assignments by trying to guess what I, as their teacher, wanted. This revelation illustrates that while authentic assessment claims to be about the involvement of students' interests and abilities, the influence of the teacher's expectations cannot be ignored. This finding shows how authentic assessment in my classroom was a powerful tool for shaping identities and how authentic assessment provided little escape for students to constitute identities other than those my classroom program valued. Furthermore, this point stresses how students' identities were not, as assumed in the authentic assessment literature,

“authentic.” In fact, even students “real” lives were constructed for particular purposes by authentic assessment.

This finding is important because it shows how authentic assessment stresses the responsibility of the teacher to think about their classroom ideals for young people because these ideals have effects. My study showed how young people were not found to be rebels or a threat to society and themselves (Wyn & White, 1997), but instead most wanted to do what I wanted them to do. My research has shown that authentic assessment was a primary site for developing particular kinds of workers because my program largely picked up the policy ideals of the self-developer and the new worker and then the students, for the most part, took up the ideal subject positions in my classroom program, the self-developer and the authentic worker. This highlights the need for teachers to be thoughtful about what they want from and for students in their classrooms. As discussed in previous chapters, what I wanted, like the authentic assessment literature and policies, was lacking in social and critical aspects of working with young people. My classroom program presented ideals that focussed more on the individual and less on larger social concerns as well as avoiding critical issues such as the effects of power in students’ school work.

It should also be noted that authentic assessment in my classroom ended up assigning students with marks and employed external pressures such as teacher, curricular, and parent expectations to do so. The literature concerning authentic assessment as well as the policies do not discuss how students’ marks are determined in the classroom and with what effects. My research has shown that in my classroom the young people and I had to address students’ marks and determine whether their identities in school were successful or not. Authentic assessment in my classroom helped students to become “insiders” about how their marks were generated and this made authentic assessment a more ethical project than other forms of assessment where students do not know the basis of their assessment. For example, this happened when we created rubrics collectively as a class (e.g., for writing a short story, the Process Exam, and Reading Your Big Book), in groups (e.g., Laura’s group rubric for “Cooking for Love”), or when individual students met with me to discuss their individualized rubrics in the Third Term Contract (e.g., Peter’s rubric for “The Great Adventure” and Nicholas’ rubric for “The Love Diary”). This was one of the benefits of using authentic assessment as the rubrics helped to minimize any of the students’ “guess work” of what was expected from them in their school work and provided ways for young people to line up their self with the teacher and curricular expectations and be successful in the classroom program. Like

traditional approaches to assessment, in the authentic assessment experiences in my classroom, young people lined up their identities with teacher and curricular expectations in order to produce marks.

9.1.3 Making school engaging

The third finding in my study was that authentic assessment made schooling engaging for most of the students in my classroom because it connected school work with their interests. In a time when some young people are resisting schooling (see Chapter 2.2) my study has shown how students in a relatively poor and rural educational setting were engaged and successful in school. One of the key differences from other forms of assessment is that authentic assessment in my classroom engaged young people with their school work and this meant that they enjoyed their school work and connected it with their lives in a broad fashion. Through authentic assessment, the students in my classroom lined up their school work with their interests and this generated a lot of work and commitment from young people. I can also anecdotally report that this work and commitment has had continued effects beyond the 2000-2001 school year: previous students from my class have gravitated to my high school classroom door. While some simply like to come and visit, others have re-arranged their course schedules to coincide with my comings and goings between high school and university teaching. At the time of writing this, I am teaching three students in Grade 12 who I not only taught in Grade 8, but who have already graduated from high school and are returning to attend my classes (exclusively) that involve the same kind of authentic assessment practices that they experienced in earlier years. Authentic assessment has been a powerful means of making school relevant for young people's wider lives.

That being said, while authentic assessment has great potential for working with young people, not all students in my classroom in 2000-2001 were engaged. Brent, for example, was unable or unwilling to bring his "real-life" into the classroom and this made it more difficult for him to participate in authentic assessment events than some of the other students who were more willing and/or able to do so. Because authentic assessment in my classroom did not escape the "gate-keeping" function of assessment in schools, some students were advantaged while others were disadvantaged, depending on whether or not the student was able to bring his or her interests into the classroom.

It should also be noted that connecting school with students' interest through authentic assessment also meant that authentic assessment in my classroom allowed some students to engage with "real-world" problems and issues. However, authentic assessment in my classroom program left social and critical aspects as optional and to be determined by individual students. The authentic assessment literature and policies do not emphasize social and critical aspects of working with young people and this was also a gap in my application of authentic assessment because the inclusion or exclusion of social and critical aspects in their assignments was determined by individual students according to their interests. There are dangers that authentic assessment may unknowingly promote the formation of uncritical and flexible subjects ideally suited to neo-liberal discourses. That is, authentic assessment can easily be picked up by neo-liberal discourses that characterize the self as highly individualistic, calculative, and a somewhat apolitical consumer; authentic assessment in my classroom fits with broader discourses that ask people to keep designing and redesigning their lives. Therefore, authentic assessment may foreground a neo-liberal subjectivity that is characterized by individual choice and allows young people to choose not to address critical issues in their lives or think beyond their own individual interests.

Collectively, the three key findings point out that the constitution of students' identities through authentic assessment in my classroom is a complex process that demands careful considerations for those working with young people. While authentic assessment literature and policies have largely assumed students' identities to be readily measurable and on a developmental continuum, this study has challenged such assumptions and illustrated how authentic assessment was a powerful tool in shaping young people's identities in my classroom. The field of authentic assessment needs to acknowledge its connections with the formation of students' identities and especially address the social and political challenges of making such connections. My study of authentic assessment in my classroom has been a risky journey for me because I have come to see how there is no guarantee with authentic assessment; the key findings in my research point out how authentic assessment, while creating some possibilities for working with young people, also carries as many dangers. These findings have implications for how I now think about and work with young people in my classroom as well as limitations concerning their application to other classroom settings.

9.2 Limitations of the findings

The findings of this research cannot be generalized to other related fields or to all classrooms, grade levels, or teaching assignments. Instead, following Somekh (2006) I suggest that educators working in similar settings may be able to use this research to explore and review their own authentic assessment practices and thinking about young people and their identities in classrooms. This includes, for example, other teachers and teacher educators who are using the same policies to teach English in Atlantic Canada, writers of future assessment policies for English classes, and other teachers who are working in schools of similar size and structure or rural school settings.

Speaking more specifically, each of the three findings in my study has a different set of limitations. The first finding – that authentic assessment in my classroom shaped school work as identity work – is relevant to teachers and researchers who are working with similar classroom programs where authentic assessment is emphasized and where young people have a great deal of involvement in making decisions within the curriculum. That being said, this finding is also useful for those interested in a much smaller investigation into one particular authentic assessment event where students' identities are called into question. What is significant about this finding is that it signals to practitioners in diverse settings to consider how their authentic assessment practices involve identity work in their classroom. The second finding concerning the constitution of young people's identities in classrooms by lining up the self with teacher and curricular expectations is applicable to a wide range of settings where the outcome of authentic assessment is the issuance of external rewards to students such as marks. In such similar settings the finding from this research may offer insight into how students' identities are connected to teacher and curricular expectations. The third finding of my study is more limited in its applicability to other settings because it requires settings where young people are asked to bring their interests from outside of school into the classroom. The finding was that authentic assessment made schooling engaging for most of the students in my classroom because it connected school work with their interests. It is possible, however, to conduct authentic assessment practices without asking students to bring their interests into the classroom and instead for the teacher to determine what "real-life" experiences are worthwhile (such as a mock job interview). Therefore, this finding in my research is limited in its relevance to other settings where young people are asked to bring their interests into the classroom.

While the three findings in this research have different limitations for other educational contexts, above all, as a practitioner researcher my intention was to improve practice. The quality of my

research is asserted in terms of the applicability of the findings to practice (Jacobson, 1998). It is in this spirit that I offer implications for the findings in this research.

9.3 Implications of the findings

The findings in this research moved me to re-evaluate my understandings about authentic assessment and shaped my current practices in my classroom. This perspective is consistent with Tripp (1998, p. 40) who explains that, “My investigation of my own action (whether praxis or action inquiry) is reflexive in that they are very much determined by what I know about a situation and how I am seeing it, and as these change all the time, I consciously have to check them out; in fact, as one has to move in response to a moving target, it is important also to monitor one’s movement.” This research monitors my own movements in my thinking about authentic assessment and the findings in this research helped me to re-evaluate issues surrounding authentic assessment in my classroom. As a political project, my research disrupted common assumptions about authentic assessment and adolescents and as a producer of authentic assessment I aim to be more “honest” (Blacker, 1998) about its dangers and effects. Below, I explore the findings of this research in terms of this political project. Collectively, the findings have implications for how I work with students’ identity projects, policies, and students’ interests in my classroom. Furthermore, as someone who is involved in local and school-level policy writing, I can see how the findings of my research could be taken up by other policy writers.

9.3.1 Working with identity projects

I have, when curricular outcomes permit, incorporated more student investigations of the “self” in my classroom programming because the findings of my research show how authentic assessment shapes school work as identity work. This is not more of the same processes of self-formation that I have critiqued. Instead, my intention has moved to a more direct focus about *how* the self is constituted and examining the range of possibilities that exist for constituting a self. As such, the self in my classroom program is, from the outset, understood to be temporary, shaped up, and full of possibilities. This is different from understanding the self as being on a predetermined trajectory that will, eventually but not now, be someone of significance in and to the world. This way of teaching is consistent with the work of Bronwyn Davies (1992, p. 65) who describes the importance of teaching students that “language is constitutive rather than descriptive [to] aid their movement from one discourse to another, and their capacity for refusing discourses that constituted them in

inequitable ways.” In such efforts, I have developed thematic units in English classes that have helped young people discuss, openly resist, and offer other alternatives about the self (see Table 9.3.1a).

Table 9.3.1a
Thematic units about student identity

- “Historical Identity”: In this unit, students explore how different cultural histories have shaped the way people think of themselves and how the self has been represented in literature. Drawing from the work of Foucault, I suggest to students that they might, for example, find characters that used different dominant discourses to understand themselves, such as religion in one time, law, or science in other time.
- “Media Influences”: In this unit, students explore how the media shapes people and events into icons to represent a particular stance which may or may not be congruent with the people or events being represented. This has been particularly effective when a local person or event is widely depicted in a range of media such as the “Pink T-shirt” campaign in Nova Scotia (see, for example, Keller, 2007) and people directly involved in the event can interact with my students.
- “Truth, Beauty, Freedom, and Love”: In this unit, students choose one of these four themes to explore through several literary periods and bring their findings to class. What students have realized is that these concepts are socially constructed and articulated through changing political and social discourses.
- “Laughter and Stereotyping”: In this unit, students explore the complexities of how humour uses social and political discourses and how humour relates to issues of power. This has been most effective by using political cartoons, commercial parodies, and anti-advertising campaigns (for example, see Haiven, 2007).
- “The individual and society”: In this unit, students articulate what they believe is the role of the individual in our local society in these times and how this is different from other times or places.
- “What is Humanity?”: In this unit, students explore their own understanding of humanity by using evidence from a range of texts.
- “The horror, the horror”: In this unit, students explore an idea or social practice that was once considered horrific to a society and is now understood to be common practice.
- “Returning Home”: In this unit, starting with the parable of the “Prodigal Son,” students explore what is meant by “home,” what it means to move away from home, and what it means to return home.

What these units emphasize are the processes and practices that humans use to constitute a self. This is not to suggest I have moved away from the curriculum outcomes of a course, but that my approach to the outcomes has changed and I have layered other concepts and vocabularies onto my classroom program. For example, besides the vocabulary of literary elements (e.g., dramatic irony, litotes, onomatopoeia, paradox, etc.), I now expect my Grade 12 English students to know other terms as well such as poststructuralism, contextualize, marginalize, and heterosexism because such vocabulary is helpful in pointing out how language is constitutive rather than only descriptive. This new vocabulary in my classroom reflects my interest as an educator to help students disrupt their

own understandings of the world and to produce students who are reflexive and consider how they may be shaped by discourses. Because authentic assessment in my classroom insisted on a particular kind of subjectivity – one where young people decided who they were – I have since structured some of my curricular units to “denaturalize” this issue.

To address the work of identity projects in my classroom in a practical way, I have become more interested in resisting, or at least identifying and making available for inspection and discussion, dominant discourses within my classroom. Much like the efforts of feminist practitioners to re-think calling the group of students in our classes “guys,” I too, have worked at re-thinking how language shapes our thinking about young people. I now avoid the words “adolescent” and “teenager” intentionally except for their use in deconstructing what it means to “be” such a label.⁷⁹ I have become more conscious of how our words embody cultural beliefs and dominant discourses. Table 9.3.1b offers a list of ideas that I have used in my classroom to help students identify or resist dominant discourses and have also included in my writing of local policy (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, in press) as suggestions for teaching and learning in other classrooms.

9.3.2 Working with policies

Authentic assessment, because of its ability to engage young people with their school work, should continue to be promoted in policy. However, the findings from this research point to several gaps in the literature about authentic assessment that have relevance for future policy writing. First, policies need to address how authentic assessment shapes school work to be identity work. Policies are silent about the connections between authentic assessment and student identity and this creates ethical dangers for teachers: teachers using such policies may be unaware that they are assessing the whole student and not simply a specific knowledge or skill; teachers may not understand the hidden effects of power, especially when students are offered choice in the classroom; and teachers may not acknowledge that the formation of ideal identities in schools may be easier for some students and more difficult for others. In regard to this, policies need to help teachers think about the importance of their ideals for young people that underpin classroom identity work conducted through authentic assessment. Without considering how authentic assessment involves identity work, authentic assessment may unthinkingly promote neo-liberal subjectivities and make critical and social elements optional for students.

⁷⁹ See, for example Chapter 2 (specifically 2.1.1) for descriptions of my use critical literacy practices with magazine articles, such as Leland (1999) and Oh (2000).

Table 9.3.1b
Identifying and resisting dominant discourses

- “Identifying primary and secondary discourses”: Becoming aware of one’s primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 1996) provides students with an understanding of how language constitutes understandings of the world in particular ways. In the classroom, students could imagine how young people behave at school gatherings and then stage a conversation that might occur among friends in the cafeteria, on-line, and in a classroom. In this activity, students become aware of how word choices and tone are used to convey meaning.
- “The power of language”: Teachers might choose a series of student readings (see Delpit, 2006) or viewings (see J. Katz & Earp, 1999) about the power of language and the evolution of language. These readings could be used to generate student discussion about the power of formal and informal language as it relates to primary and secondary discourses. Students could recognize the power of formal and informal language as it relates to race, gender, culture, and class. Students could also: describe the impact of subtle differences in word choices and tone; identify when a speaker is claiming to speak on behalf of other people, or groups of people (e.g. all Women, all environmental activists, or all rural people); become aware of how dominant and/or homogenous populations within classrooms or schools construct a particular way of representing the world; and become aware of culturally-based vocabulary, specifically cognates.
- “Banned words and politically correct words”: Students could discuss how these words are determined and who gets to determine the categorization of these words.
- “Whose news is it?”: Students could present two different versions of the news, one being formal and the other informal. Formal and informal speech could also be noted in the style of being a DJ on contrasting radio stations.
- “Cash Words”: Students should be able to understand how specific words are valued in dominant cultures. Students should be able to address the following questions in their reflections:
 - What are the “cash words” in the text?
 - For whom is the text intended?
 - What words were spoken that reflect the intended audience?
 - How do these words reflect power?
 - Whose interests are being served?
 - Who is positioned as being “bad”?
 - How do the words create tone?
 - What words would you use to shift a bias to another perspective?
 - How are specific words located within a culture?
 - Do you commonly use “cash words” in your writing?
 - Which “cash words” should be adopted, adapted, or resisted?
 - Who “owns” a “cash word”?

The findings of my research also imply a need for policies that protect teachers when using authentic assessment and simultaneously there is a need for policies to be current and relevant for young people’s immediate lives. Schools are currently in danger of becoming strangely separated from

society in which young people live and increasingly work. Working with students' non-school resources continues to be an interest and concern in my classroom program and I am in need of policies that support my decisions about using students' non-school resources in my classroom. For example, in a high school course called Film and Video Productions 12, I ask students to create a "How to..." instructional video that documents and explains a process that they know well. Typically, young people are not interested in making a video concerning school skills such as how to write a research essay and are more interested in exploring their interests outside of school such as cooking, woodworking, or mastering a video game. When I introduce this assignment, I am careful to provide guidelines about what would be acceptable topics to explore according to school policies and my teaching preferences. That being said, young people find ways of bringing their interests into the assignment in ways that cannot be predicted. Recently (2007), a student asked me if he could make his "How to..." video about "How to shoot and skin a deer." Hunting was one of his strong interests outside of school and he would tell me accounts of his weekends hunting with his father during non-instructional time. The proposed video involved the use of guns and knives and therefore it was deemed inappropriate for school consumption by school policy because guns and knives were understood to be weapons. I am careful to be explicit with students when these distinctions are made and use school policies to explain my decisions. In this case, the student was not surprised by my decision to uphold the policy, but was disappointed that his primary interest outside of school was not valued in the school.

While the discussion of guns and safety is arguably of concern for young people in schools (Arman, 2000), schools remain places that privilege the knowledge and values of only some populations, and thereby marginalize others such as this rural student's knowledge of hunting and gun safety. This has made schooling a contradictory space where in the face of having to conduct "lock-down" drills with students in the case of a violent intruder (see Draaisma, 2007), we cannot address issues of weapons with students. It is understandable how young people are deciding that schools have nothing to do with their world: while middle class students are willing to put up with schooling because they can see the financial rewards of education, they do not see school as a place of learning; and from my experience, students from low-income households such as Brent, respond to school differently and want out of school. I have come to value policies that support me conducting work with students' non-school resources because of the on-going negotiation between the students and me during authentic assessment events.

I have come to understand my role as a practitioner differently in regard to the policies that I am required to use in my classroom. I now understand my role not only as one who implements policy, but also as one who must contest and be involved with the writing of policies. I have become interested in writing visions for young people in my province and elsewhere and understand how, as a teacher, my voice is important in shaping the key techniques of the state (Stevens, 2006) to direct what is done in classrooms. Policies in my context are intended to operate (in theory) as a hierarchy (e.g., provincial, school board, and school levels of policy) and therefore I am attentive to the provincial policies that define the broad parameters of working with young people in our classrooms and understand school board and school level policies to be opportunities to discuss what local possibilities (such as “How to shoot and skin a deer”) are permissible in my classroom. Frequently, the interpretation of policies is made by school administrators thereby necessitating that administration is knowledgeable about my classroom program, authentic assessment practices, and the importance and complexity of connecting school work with young people’s lives outside of school. Now I turn to policies not to learn about how to implement authentic assessment but to determine how I can help students to complete assignments that are connected to the curriculum and that they (and I) believe to be relevant to their lives beyond school. The findings in this research imply that policy writing that helps teachers facilitate the process of bringing young people’s lives into school is needed in order to help and protect teachers in the work of authentic assessment.

9.3.3 Working with students’ interests

When there are gaps in the policies as identified above, teachers are left to discern which of their students’ interests are appropriate for school consumption and which interests are not. I remain attentive to the ways in which I ask young people to bring their interests from their lives into the classroom through authentic assessment because one of the findings in this research was that authentic assessment made schooling engaging for most of the students. I do this because making school relevant for young people expands the range of people for which school serves and privileges; that is, school can be useful for students other than those who come from a particular social status such as middle class homes (see Cormack, 2005; Giroux, 1996; McIntosh, 1990; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1996; Yon, 2000). Tim, for example, who lived in poverty found a way to use his knowledge about his family to write a song for his dying grandfather. In this way, authentic assessment provides opportunities for young people to unpack their “virtual school bag” (Thomson, 2002) and can bring young people of difference (in Tim’s case a difference of poverty) away from the margins of schools.

That being said, a practitioner issue about encouraging students to bring their interests into the classroom is that young people can also bring, for example, sexism, heterosexism, or racism into the classroom through the authentic assessment events. This demands that the teacher be willing and capable of addressing a host of unpredictable issues. Furthermore, because of the emphasis on public performance and display of authentic assessment artefacts, what students bring into the classroom is readily made visible to all class members and not only the teacher (as opposed to a paper and pencil assessment that is submitted to the teacher privately). Recently a female student asked me an unexpected question about the “Utopia Project” in Advanced English 11 class, a project that asks students to present their version of an ideal society to the class. The student asked what would happen if someone’s ideal society was misogynistic? This question reminded me of the complexities of inviting (and excluding) students’ interests into the classroom and the need for policies to guide and protect teachers as they work with authentic assessment in classrooms. In this case, I was able to refer to broad school policy statements to explain the unsuitability of misogyny in a hypothetical school project but this action simply silenced the issue rather than explored the reasoning behind the policy – a regretful decision that was made in the interest of class time that day under the careful watch of the students. In the classroom, a complex and rapidly changing social environment is created because of the variety of resources that young people bring into the classroom. In sum, while authentic assessment may connect school with the lives of young people, we do not yet know how to do this well.

Working with authentic assessment as described in my classroom program involved students making choices about which interests to bring into the classroom and which to leave out. One ethical concern that arose in this research was the hidden effect of power that students experienced during the authentic assessment events when they were asked to make choices. Young people, when offered “choice” may have been cynical about the amount of “control” they were “offered” by me, their teacher. A practical example about how I have changed my teaching practices because of this research involves the use of the word “choice.” Since this research, I have explained to students that their choice in the assessment events is always limited; limited by the curriculum outcomes, by the possibilities put on offer by me as their teacher, and by their interest and abilities to take up these offers. I discuss this openly in the classroom because young people continue to feel “empowered” by their choices and conversely disempowered when they are not successful. I am interested in helping young people to think about how their choices are shaped up by discourses and to reflect on

the nature of their choices, including the inclusion (or avoidance) of social and critical aspects in their school work.

9.4 Further research directions

In the field of authentic assessment, possible further directions in research include investigating what conditions are required for implementing authentic assessment in high schools and what conditions are required for implementing authentic assessment regardless of the level of schooling? These research directions are beyond the scope of this study and were derived from my practitioner experiences during the course of this research.

Previous research has allowed me to follow concerns that I had about student transitions from middle schools to high schools (Van Zoost, 1999). Specifically, I investigated students' concerns about school climate, social concerns, and academic concerns. As a teacher in the middle school, I was concerned about the educational problems of placing students in-between diverse pedagogical approaches (among middle school and high school teaching methodologies and structures) and asking young people not only to succeed in these opposing pedagogies, but also accept this opposition as a necessary "transition" in their schooling. My research in authentic assessment practices has flagged similar pedagogical concerns: If the middle years are a fruitful site for authentic assessment practices, why are they dropped at the high school level? A research agenda might include investigating how we can build authentic assessment into the ordinary business of high school as well as middle school.

Another direction for authentic assessment research is to investigate the conditions that make authentic assessment possible regardless of the level of schooling. What educational structures need to be in place? Where is authentic assessment successful? Under what conditions? What makes the implementation of authentic assessment successful or difficult? Authentic assessment in my classroom program (as described in this study) involved a group of students that I got to know well because I taught them several subjects (students also knew each other well) and I also had sufficient physical space in the classroom to manage their assessment artefacts. However, during this research I have witnessed a wide variety of teaching settings (local and international) that are significantly different from my rural middle school classroom and I have come to question how authentic assessment and identity constitution would work in other teaching contexts. Advocating for

authentic assessment in New Times is difficult work, especially for educators who are working in educational structures that may not endorse the identities that authentic assessment practices offer students (such as those in my classroom program of the self-developer or the authentic worker). Furthermore, students work with, against, and around these identities to constitute a self in ways that teachers cannot always predict. Some teachers may find this unpredictability daunting to manage in terms of assessing students and assigning marks consistently. Informal conversations about these sorts of concerns with educators in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere suggest that these implementation considerations for authentic assessment include resources and the assessment environment.

In terms of resources, my experiences with implementing authentic assessment suggest to me that there needs to be sufficient staff in a school to lower class sizes – an issue that may be difficult for high schools to address. Due to the frequency of student presentations, exhibitions, and products involved in authentic assessment, it would be difficult to implement in large classes. Related to this implementation issue is the issue of the necessary physical space in the classroom to manage the products that students are creating and the space required for students to interact and perform (see Kamen, 1996; Orchard, 2000). This may be particularly difficult for high school teachers who typically have several classes of students' work to maintain in a classroom. Finally, materials for creating alternative forms of assessment such as costumes, video recorders, and cardboard are needed in order to implement authentic assessment. These details might be investigated in a research agenda interested in the implementation of authentic assessment.

A similar or companion research project could explore the assessment environment that is required for authentic assessment in high schools. Some of this work has been started by Alphonso and Harding (2004) who point out that an assessment environment that supports students' construction of knowledge is more valuable than an assessment environment that supports students' encountering of knowledge. Research about the assessment environment could also explore the professional knowledge in the school and school system about authentic assessment. Richard Stiggins has pointed out that teacher pre-service training and subsequent professional development about assessment is minimal (Stiggins, 1998, 2007) and recommends that that teacher "learning teams" are needed to create a quality assessment environment (Stiggins, 1995, 2000). Another environmental factor concerning the implementation of authentic assessment is parental knowledge of these practices. This research direction became evident to me when a parent organization in the Atlantic Provinces requested that I address their members in a keynote entitled, "Classroom Assessment:

What parents should know” (November 2005). While I have worked to communicate my assessment intentions with the parents of students in my classroom, I remain largely unaware about parental knowledge of student assessment practices in general, and even less aware about parents’ knowledge of authentic assessment from both a local and more general perspective.

9.5 So here I am... mark me

So here I am, arriving home from school with two grocery bags of marking. The bags are filled with diverse assignments – “thematic anthologies” - created by my students. I am excited because students have told me that they are proud of these assignments. I have already “peeked” at a few of them as I was packaging them at the end of the school day. One of the projects involves a CD and I have put it in my laptop to play. The song “I wanna be like you” is not on the compilation – I checked. These are Grade 12 Advanced English Language Arts assignments; similar in nature to the types of authentic assessment artefacts created by the Grade 8 students in this research although I understand them in new ways.

My research has demonstrated that the field of authentic assessment needs to acknowledge its connections with the formation of student identity and address itself to the social and political challenges of that work. My research has shown that authentic assessment, at least as it played out in my classroom, is not the revolution it is touted to be – in many ways it is still business as usual in the classroom when it comes to assessment. Authentic assessment did create new possibilities in my classroom and some were worrying such as the social and critical issues were avoided, the danger that authentic assessment may unknowingly promote the formation of uncritical and flexible subjects ideally suited to neo-liberal discourses, and that authentic assessment privileged some students and disadvantaged others. However, there are also positive possibilities for using authentic assessment such as connecting school to young people’s lives and making schoolwork more engaging. That being said, while authentic assessment provides opportunities for young people to bring additional discourses into the classroom, we still do not know how to handle some of these discourses in schools besides banning them.

What has changed in my classroom has been a new way of thinking about authentic assessment. I understand that authentic assessment in my classroom shapes students’ school work as identity work. Authentic assessment practices made the self a visible and contested site in my classroom.

This is not to suggest that a student's self is automatic or readily visible: invisible processes are also involved in authentic assessment, such as the internalization of the teacher's expectations. Once the self is made visible, our schooling practices require us, as teachers, to determine how this self compares to the ideal ways in which we envision the future citizens of our local and global communities. The rewards and punishments of how this self compares to the ideals we imagine and hope young people to be, are ultimately communicated through marks. Even now, as I sit here writing this, across the table are two piles of my students' work waiting to be marked. My research has helped me to see students' school work as identity work and therefore these assignments on the table are an offer to judge students' identities. These assignments remind me that students' identities are constituted within discourses and can be manufactured for particular purposes. There are no "authentic" identities in authentic assessment and therefore I need to be careful about how I respond to the request to "mark me."

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APPENDIX 4.4.1A

CORRESPONDENCE WITH NOVA SCHOOL BOARD

Dear Dr. Olsen, Superintendent of Nova School Board [pseudo-name]:

I am writing to seek your approval to conduct research with my Grade 8 students. I am a part-time PhD student at the University of South Australia and my thesis research involves assessment practices, student identity, and voice. The University of South Australia has approved my research proposal and is now reviewing my ethics proposal.

Student participants would be invited to share their insights about the assessment practices they have experienced this year in my courses. Students have developed assessment tools as a whole class, in small groups, and independently. They have made rubrics, suggested criteria for assignments, signed contracts for grades, and developed their own individualized assessment plans. In this research, students will be invited to share their ideas through a focus group session, and individual interviews. Students will also be encouraged to generate data in methods that are meaningful to them (e.g. a role play, a tabloid paper). An information letter and a letter of consent will be sent to all of my homeroom students and their parents and participants may withdraw at any time.

I have included a copy of the ethics proposal for this research in this package in the event that you would like to read more about my academic studies. I have spoken with the principal of my school and have been given his support in this research. As the superintendent, please respond to my request to conduct this research at the school where I am teaching in the Nova School Board. If you have any questions, concerns, or if you would like more details about my research I am more than happy to discuss them with you.

Sincerely,

Steven Van Zoost
Nova Middle School

APPENDIX 4.4.1B

INFORMATION LETTERS TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS

April 25, 2001

Dear Student:

As you know, I'm a student myself. As part of my studies, **I will be conducting research** [original emphasis] with those of you who volunteer. My research questions are about your assessment choices in English Language Arts. Throughout this year, you have been developing assessment tools as a whole class, in small groups, and independently. You have made rubrics, suggested criteria for assignments, signed contracts for your marks, and developed your own individualized assessment plan. I am interested in students' involvement in their assessment, and I'm inviting you to share your thoughts, ideas, concerns, and questions about **your assessment experiences this year** in our class. You can share your ideas in class meetings, in a small focus group of students, or in individual interviews. **Most of the research will involve discussions with a small group of students.** You can also create your own way of telling me what you think – a role-play? A video? A tabloid newspaper? Of course you can decide not to participate at any time (just like you can do in our class meeting “check in with Riley,” and you say, “pass”).

This research may have no direct benefit to you, but will help me improve my teaching and help other educators make decisions about assessment practices. Other things that you should know:

- No marks can be given for your participation in the research
- You can ask me questions about the research at any time
- You can withdraw from the research at any time
- You can read the research when it's done
- Your name will be changed in the reporting of the research (a pseudo-name will be used)
- Your comments may be audio-taped
- I appreciate and look forward to your involvement

If you are interested in volunteering for this research, you will need to return the signed consent form to me as soon as possible. If you have any ethical concerns about the research project, please contact the Chair of UniSA's Human Research Ethics Committee, Ms. Linley Hartmann at 8302 0327; fax 8302 0512; email: linley.hartmann@unisa.edu.au

Sincerely,

Mr. S. Van Zoost

April 25, 2001

Dear Parent(s) / Guardian(s):

I am studying part-time at the University of South Australia and I'm working in a PhD program. I am interested in **researching** my own classroom practices with my students – specifically **assessment practices**. My students have been involved with developing their own assessment tools, contracting for grades, and choosing many of their own assignments this year. I want to learn more about what my students think about these practices, and discuss how their experiences in my classroom have made them feel about themselves, and their place in my classroom. I hope to be able to further improve my assessment practices from this research and assessment policy within and beyond our region.

The research asks for **student volunteers to discuss their ideas** about assessment and themselves. This will be done in a variety of ways: **small group discussions**, full class discussions, assignments, or interviews. The student participants will be encouraged to develop their own way to best tell their ideas about our classroom (e.g. a role play? a video? a tabloid?). I will also be looking for **parent volunteers** to interview about the assessment practices used in our classroom.

I hope that the students involved in this research will be active participants. It should also be noted that any student may decide not to participate at any point. I am sending home a consent form to participate in this research project. If you have any questions, please contact me at school.

If you have any ethical concerns about the research project, please contact the Chair of UniSA's Human Research Ethics Committee, Ms. Linley Hartmann at 8302 0327; fax 8302 0512; email: linley.hartmann@unisa.edu.au

Sincerely,

Steven Van Zoost

[Nova Middle School phone number]

APPENDIX 4.4.1C

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Student voice and identity in assessment practices

Researcher's name: Steven Van Zoost

Supervisor's name: Phil Cormack

- I have received information about this research project.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped / videotaped during the interview

Name of student participant:

Signed: **Date:**

Parent/Guardian's Signature:

I have provided information about the research to the research participant and believe that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date:

APPENDIX 4.4.1D

PARENT CONSENT FORM

PARENT CONSENT FORM (for identified parents of the students participating in the focus group)

Dear Parent / Guardian:

As a follow-up to the information letter about my research, I am seeking parent volunteers to interview about the assessment practices experienced by your son or daughter this year in English Language Arts. I am inviting parents of the students who have participated in the student focus group to be interviewed. If you are interested in participating in this research please sign the consent form below and have your child deliver it to me at school. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Steven Van Zoost

[Nova Middle School phone number]

Project Title: Student voice and identity in assessment practices

Researcher's name: Steven Van Zoost

Supervisor's name: Phil Cormack

- I have received information about this research project.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped / videotaped during the interview

Name of parent participant:

Signed: **Date:**

I have provided information about the research to the research participant and believe that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date:

APPENDIX 4.7.4

NOTES ABOUT FOCUS GROUPS

A few days before the first focus groups, I reviewed journal articles and books that I had marked with 3M Post-it notes, identifying what I thought would be good reminders just before conducting the session. Most helpful in these notes were checklists for the preparation of a focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2000), which included issues to consider in the following categories: advance notice, questions, logistics, moderator skills, and immediately after the session. A second resource (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 62) was also helpful in its discussion of common mistakes in focus group sessions including methodological, procedural, and analytical mistakes. Of these, the procedural mistakes were of particular significance as I prepared for the focus group meeting, especially a tip to ensure that not all of the participants “have only positive feelings.” I reconsidered the particular students who had been identified to participate in the focus groups, and the grouping of these students.

I grouped the students into two focus group meetings. I chose groups that separated close friends as much as possible because the self-identified “Brain” boys pressured each other academically. I considered this a problem because I did not want the participants to feel undue pressure during the research. For example, one of these boys was Peter who disclosed in the focus group how he believed that some of his friends would laugh at him if they were part of the focus group. Peter refers to one of his close friends, who was placed in a different focus group:

Van Zoost: Have you ever had an open conversation with your friends about marks and their impact on how you feel?

Peter: Nicholas.... I mean, he'd laugh at me. That's the kind of friends that we are.

Later, in another session where Nicholas and Peter are together, this conversation echoes Peter's concerns:

Peter: My friends just want me to get high marks.

Nicholas: And if you don't get a high mark, what happens?

Peter: You'll laugh at me [forced laughter].

Nicholas: Damn right!

Peter: Darn right, Nicholas.

For Peter, the composition of the focus group influenced the tone of how he expressed his concerns. While it was impossible to predict all of the dynamics that students would negotiate in a focus group, I attempted to provide a variety of student combinations throughout the research process. Later, in a student-led Research Literature Circle meeting (discussed in 4.7.5), Peter refers to the transcript of a focus group session. He is curious about how the grouping of students has influenced conversations, within and beyond the research settings:

Peter: ...Okay, here's another quote about Laura and Nicole and how they were really open about discussing their relationships in our focus group even though neither one of them is in our homeroom and I didn't know them all that well. And yet, in the focus group, they said that they weren't comfortable talking about their marks with their friends. Why do you think this was?

Peter notices how people who were not close friends were “open” in the focus group conversation about marks and not comfortable discussing marks with their friends. It seemed apparent to the students that their responses were made in complex and influential social contexts; students came from different classes, diverse backgrounds, and shared ideas in an unfamiliar setting.

We began the focus group with scones and individualized reflection, spread around the school's kitchen. When we came together as a group, each student presented their emotional pie graph on camera to the group. On the table in front of the camera, I placed two pieces of paper with questions: What do your colours represent? What made you feel that way? After each student presented to the group, there was an opportunity for other participants to ask questions of the presenter. What intrigued me at the time was how the students' diagrams reflected changing emotions through the process of contracting and designing rubrics. Notable patterns in the emotions that were expressed included stress, excitement, feeling overwhelmed, having a focused energy, relief, and fear. They seemed comfortable with the familiar exercise, and it provided an easier start to addressing the focus group direct questions.

At the conclusion of our discussions, I wanted the students to reflect about their conversations independently. Adapting Whitin's (1996) classroom technique to be a research method, I asked students to write their thoughts in a “thought cloud,” dividing the cloud into proportions that reflected the weighting of the ideas. Students were familiar with this concept from our English class character analysis, and a simple written prompt got them started on the activity: “Make a thought cloud, divided like a pie, to represent what you are thinking about your assessment experiences *after* our conversations. Thank you!”

The original time length of the focus group was insufficient, especially given that I had added two additional individualized reflective activities (the “pie graph” at the beginning of the session, and the “thought cloud” at the end). I had scheduled two focus groups with different students for thirty-five minutes each (a class period at school). At one point during the time, both groups were in the same room, but they were conducting different parts of our session. The second group worked on their pie graph reflection as I finished the discussion with the first group, and then the first group completed thought clouds as I met with the second group. Students were excused from additional classes with permission from their teachers. For more than half of the participants, I was the teacher they needed to see and I had a substitute working in my classroom during the student focus group sessions. All participants wanted to stay longer and discuss ideas in more detail. The second group was very articulate about the need to continue the conversation immediately to avoid interruptions in ideas flowing through our conversations. Peter said that, “We’re already that deep now – it would be hard to get back into it [the conversation].” Students volunteered to remain, even when another teacher informed them that they would have to make up the work that they were missing in her class. The focus groups continued throughout the morning and concluded not from a lack of enthusiasm, but of time commitments.

Critical reflections occurred as I reviewed the focus group data and read my reflection notes that contained ideas for generating further data with students (students had helped to create this list of data production ideas). I noticed during the focus group that the students demonstrated “active listening skills”: eye contact with each other, and body language that expressed interest in each other’s ideas. These skills were identified in class and had been assessed in small groups throughout the year. What seemed “atypical” to me and of the group’s communication in the focus group was my presence. The students relied heavily on me to draw out ideas and ask for further clarification. The reaction that they offered to each other was limited to general agreements of an idea or specific agree or disagree statements to clarify one’s own perspective. Student interchange of ideas seemed somehow more of a dialogue with me, rather than each other. I realized that students might have been more reserved because of my involvement and agenda of questions, producing conversations unlike those typical in the classroom or those among friends. This reflection led me to reconsider the structure of further data production. Having witnessed these students’ social skills in class, I knew that they could discuss issues without my direct involvement and agenda in this research. One instructional method that my students were familiar with was

Daniels' (1994) Literature Circles based on his book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice the Student-Centered Classroom*. In this format, students respond to a text assuming different roles in preparing their reflections for a group meeting. I adapted this activity to be a method of producing data that I called Research Literature Circles and describe in section 4.7.5 and Appendix 4.7.5.

APPENDIX 4.7.5

NOTES ABOUT RESEARCH LITERATURE CIRCLES

I adapted the roles for Research Literature Circles from the work of Daniels (1994) for classroom use as described below:

Discussion Director: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this text. Don't worry about the small details: your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can list, during or after your reading. (Min 5 questions)

Literary Luminary: Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that your group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. You decide which passages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss. (Minimum 4)

Illustrator: Your job is to draw some kind of picture related to the text. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or stick figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that's discussed specifically in the text, or something that the text reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the text. Any kind of drawing or graphic is ok – you can even label things with words if that helps. *Presentation Plan:* show your picture without comment to the others in the group. One at a time, they get to speculate what your picture depicts, to connect the drawing to their own ideas about the text. After everyone has had a say, you get the last word: tell them what your picture means, where it came from, or what it represents to you.

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the text and the world beyond the text. This means connecting the reading to your own life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, or to other people or problems that you are reminded of. You might also see connections between this text and other texts on the same topic, or by the same author. There are no right answers here – whatever the reading connects *you* with is worth sharing! (Minimum 4)

The students prepared for their roles in advance and held their meeting around a video recorder (taping the audio only) without my direct intervention in their conversation during the Research Literature Circle.

The students enjoyed these meetings, and the audio track contains a lot of laughter and an increased level of slang than the first focus group (“that sucks,” “gotta,” “Yah”). At one point, I approached the group in session (to check on their progress for time management purposes) and the students responded:

Van Zoost: [having moved closer to the group and listening for two minutes] Does it matter if I'm here or not? Does it change your conversation? Oops. I can see that Nicole is giving me "the eye." [Gentle cue from Nicole that the tone *is* different with my presence. I exit.]

I followed this inquiry about my presence in a private interview with Peter. He cites specific examples from the transcripts to prove his point:

Peter: The teacher has so much power, like over what people say. If there's a teacher in the room then they're going to say different things than if there was just four people. Like four students are going to say totally different things probably with a teacher.

Van Zoost: What sort of things don't get said when a teacher is in the room?

Peter: Um, some things that might be inappropriate or something. Or they don't laugh, or laugh constantly. You don't laugh in front of a teacher. Sometimes, like what people really think. If they're with their friends - because they've known their friends for like years, and they've only known their teacher for a short period of time - they might say what they really think. In the Research Literature Circle [research method without a teacher] there are things that would have been said in the focus group [research method with a teacher] but in a different way. Like here, [referring to the transcripts] he might not have said that - Mark, when he says, "You're putting me in a corner!" to Laura Olsen, he might have been more uptight, or more formal. The stuff about the pseudo-name, or whatever, that wouldn't have happened [if the researcher was there] because it's sort of off-topic. You wouldn't be off-topic if there was a teacher there.⁸⁰ (Student Interview, June 15th)

The students were diligent to discuss the transcripts and their advance preparation for the meetings demonstrated their commitment to the research. These students enjoyed exploring many of the issues raised in the research as well as transferring the "active listening" skills they had practiced in class into their conversations. Students were attentive to paraphrasing techniques and encouraging each other into the conversation as noted in the following extracts from the transcript of the Research Literature Circles:

Peter: Thank you for your answer, Nicholas.

Nicholas: Thank you for thanking me, Peter.

Tinia: What do you think, Nicole?

⁸⁰ I noted how Peter's comments could be aligned with the notions of power and governmentality, where the subject does work to constitute a self that will be rewarded (or not punished) by the teacher, such as not saying "You're putting me in a corner!" Even without my physical presence, students were aware of the expectations from the "teacher." Without becoming involved in analysis at this point, I wish to signal that I was cognizant of how Foucauldian theory was useful in thinking about student data *during* the time of data production and that analysis was not something that was done strictly *after* the data had been produced.

Nicole: I am going to answer this question as I interpret it. It may not be right, but anyways... [Nicole responds to the question]

Peter: I like the way you expressed your thoughts, Nicole.

Sometimes these efforts, as in class, were made in an exaggerated form. This reflects the tone that was set in class to develop these communication skills. These Research Literature Circle meetings were later transcribed and re-distributed to the participants to check for errors, omissions, or clarification from the students. Five of the eight students made notes in the margins and brought their transcripts to discuss with me later, during private interviews.

APPENDIX 4.7.6

NOTES ABOUT PARENT INTERVIEWS

The parent interviews process allowed for a great deal of conversation between parent and student to occur. These conversations were also designed into the assessment practices in my classroom: parents were requested to assess one of the student's assignments using the student-created rubric. I acted as second marker of the student work. Tinia and her mother both reported that they enjoyed talking not only about her schoolwork, but also about the research at home. Tinia's mother made a comment on her transcript review about the interview question, "Does the subject matter of the assignments that Tinia chose surprise you?" She noted in pen, "[This question] stimulated interesting conversation on the home front." Several parents shared that they felt their son/daughter's thoughts were "deep;" much deeper than they had assumed common for their children. It was evident from the parent interviews that conversations at home were prompted by this research.

In two cases, students reported unexpected communication with their parents. Colin and I had a conversation about his parents' interview in which we discuss the near mythological stories of his toddler years. He seems to enjoy hearing a new story from his parents that was told during the interview and that he later read as a transcript:

Van Zoost: There were a couple of stories that your dad told about you when you were a toddler...

Colin: I do not remember that [incident].

Van Zoost: The story about the *Maclean's* magazine - you had never heard it before?

Matt: [quickly, and cheerfully] No, never!

Van Zoost: That must have been neat to hear.

Colin: Yah, it was. I had heard the one about lo-lo before.

In another case, the parent interview process was used to ameliorate communication between mother and son where communication was typically limited. The research operated as a communicative tool between Ian and his mom. Ian was aware of how his comments in this research would be typed, reviewed by him, and forwarded to his mother to read. He knew that I would be meeting with his mom to discuss what he had said, with prior approval from him. This process gave Ian a great deal of control over what he would share with his mom through the research. In this case, the research took on a more immediate communicative role for Ian than I had imagined.

APPENDIX 5.2

ASSESSMENT TERMS

Paper and pencil assessments

- a. **Journals** – written in narrative form, are more subjective, and deal more with feelings, opinions, or personal experiences. Journal entries are usually more descriptive, longer, and free-flowing than learning logs. They are often used to respond to pieces of literature, describe events, comment on reactions to events, reflect on personal experiences and feelings, and connect what is being studied in one class with another class or with life outside the classroom (Burke, 1994, p. 84).
- b. **Learning logs** – consist of short, more objective entries that contain mathematics problem-solving entries, observations of science experiments, questions about the lecture or readings, lists of outside readings, homework assignments, or anything that lends itself to keeping record. The responses are usually brief, factual, and impersonal (Burke, 1994, p. 84).
- c. **Process examinations** – allow students time to apply a range of skills and strategies for prewriting, drafting, conferencing, revising, editing, and proofreading. The examination might comprise a single comprehensive question requiring the production, through the stages of the writing process, of a polished essay making reference to several of the texts studied during the year.... Some process-based examinations involve class periods over several days (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 160).
- d. **Questionnaires / surveys** – information gathered through well-designed surveys can help teachers to: tap students' habits, interests and attitudes; build on students' strengths and expand their interests; and elicit students' perceptions about their learning (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 51).
- e. **Self-assessment** – students examine their own progress and analyse their own strengths and weaknesses guided by criteria and outlines provided by the teacher. This promotes students' responsibility and independence (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 35). The teacher's role is to foster reflection by helping students learn to identify the characteristics of high quality work (what excellence looks like) and then recognize it in their own work as well as in the work of others (Ronis, 2000, p. 71).
- f. **Tests** – a test measures achievement at a specific point in time. Tests play a minor role in the total assessment program and should be used in appropriate balance with other assessment practices to ensure that students have frequent and varied opportunities to demonstrate their level of performance in relation to curriculum outcomes (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 53). Traditional tests and examinations are by themselves inadequate instruments with which to measure the learning required by this curriculum (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 160).

Authentic assessments

- g. **Anecdotal records** – the teacher may record comments, questions, and observations about students in a log or notebook, or index cards or post-it notes while students are engaged in authentic learning experiences (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 48).
- h. **Contract** – a means of establishing the intent of the students to complete the work and form the basis for assessment. The contract formalizes the work to be done, the work that has been completed and it can be referred to in checking students' progress and setting new goals (Lythgo, 1987, p. 29).
- i. **Demonstrations** – a student shows others how to do a process.... Demonstrations challenge students to take factual material and turn it into a presentation that they must organize and explain. In preparing to teach, students delve more deeply into the topic. Audiences for the demonstrations may be other classes, teachers, parents, peers, or community members (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997, p. 18).
- j. **Exhibitions** – students demonstrate their mastery of desired outcomes through active, multi-tasked activities (Burke, 1994, p. 56). A clearly defined final exhibition, delineating exactly what is required of students must be presented before any work is assigned or begun. This would carefully explain to students the content to be covered, the skills that must be learned, applied, and mastered, and the behaviours students would be expected to exhibit publicly by a specific deadline (Johnson, as cited in Burke, 1994, p. 39).
- k. **Literature Circle** – small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to help perform that job. The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session (Daniels, 1994, p. 13).
- l. **Observational checklists** – clarifies precisely what behaviours are indicative of successful learning in a given context and records whether or not a characteristic is present. The checklist provides consistency from one observation of a student to the next, documenting changes over time (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 48).
- m. **Performance tasks** (skits/speeches/videos/plays) – applications of learning; any performance or product students create that allows them to apply and demonstrate what they have learned (Burke, 1994, p. 56). Performance-based assessment involves direct observation of students as they perform classroom tasks often demonstrated in practical ways such as speaking, listening, presenting, organizing, participating, and leading (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 33). Performance assessment allows teachers to observe directly students' application of what they know and are able to do (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 50).
- n. **Products** – students make objects that are the end result of product outcome connected to a learning unit.... Products are especially helpful in challenging students to make cross-curricular connections when studying in a particular discipline (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997, p. 19). Examples: sculptures, artefacts, audiotapes, videotapes, work samples, written assignments.

- o. **Projects** – a formal assessment given to an individual student or a group of students on a topic related to the curriculum. The project may involve both in-class and out-of-class research and development.... The project should be a learning activity, not primarily an evaluation activity.... Projects help students develop and enhance communication, technical, interpersonal, problem-solving, and decision-making skills – significant learner outcomes (Burke, 1994, p. 72).
- p. **Rubric (scoring guides)** – a rubric identifies and describes the criteria used to assess student performance (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 50). A rubric is a guideline that outlines the criteria and indicators of success. The indicators are observable measurable behaviours that show to what degree the student is using knowledge and skill (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997, p. 2).
- q. **Student-created/involved assessment tools** – students become full partners in assessment development. Students are invited to learn about the criteria by which their work will be judged. Students devise sample assessment exercises and scoring criteria (Stiggins, 2001, p. 47). For learners to take control of, and responsibility for, their own learning, external manipulation must give way to internal motivation.... The aim is that each student would be able to set up and assess his or her own rubrics and that each candidate for graduation would conduct a self-directed study based on a rubric for excellence that he or she constructed (Bellanca, Chapman, & Swartz, 1997, p. 2).

Personal communication

- r. **Peer-assessments** – students learn from each other’s work and make suggestions for improvement (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 35). Students need to be taught how to serve as critical evaluators because it helps them to be not only better peer evaluators but also better analysts of their own work as well (Forte & Schurr, 1997, p. 41).
- s. **Portfolios / folders** – a representative selection of student work that provides evidence of a wide range of achievements (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1997, p. 34). A portfolio is a collection of a student’s work that connects separate items to form a clearer, more complete picture of the student as a lifelong learner (Burke, Forgarty, & Belgrad, 1994, p. 44).
- t. **Student-teacher conferencing** – one-on-one discussions for gathering information about the learner’s skills about reading, writing, content, or editing/proofreading (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 141, pp. 146-147). Conferences and interviews also provide students with immediate and personal feedback and give teachers an opportunity to recommend new directions, shifts of emphasis, particular activities, materials, and also to give reasons for those recommendations (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1996b, p. 49). In interviews, conferences, and conversations, students get the opportunity to refine and clarify their thinking and respond to others (Burke, 1994, p. 130).

APPENDIX 5.2.1A

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions were asked of students on the first day of school in English class.

1. Describe your personal history of learning English. (1/2 page max)
2. List the personal benefits you have gained from previous English classes:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
3. List some of your accomplishments in English classes:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. What are the strengths and limitations of your English skills?

Strengths	Limitations
a.	a.
b.	b.
c.	c.

5. List the goals will you strive for in this English class:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
6. What actions will you take to achieve these goals?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
7. What else should a reader of your work know about you?
8. What else should I, as your teacher, know about you?
9. What local museums and places of interest have you visited in the surrounding area?
10. Name three people in the classroom with whom you work well.

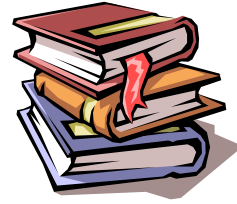
APPENDIX 5.2.1B

COURSE OUTLINE

Welcome to Grade 8 English

Mr. Steven Van Zoost

Nova Middle School: [school phone number]
[work email]



My belief about teaching English is that it should be thought provoking, creative, and practical. The issues that are discussed in class are relevant to our society, community, and students' personal lives. I think that learning should be self-directed and individualized as much as possible and so you will be required to make many choices that best suit your own learning in our class. This course is arranged thematically to explore: 1) Identity; 2) Survival; 3) Quest, and 4) Relationships. You will be working hard!



Inclusive Language

I expect an environment where communication is free of sexist language and sex stereotyping. I do not accept or tolerate lifestyle choices or beliefs to be denigrated within the classroom, as it becomes a way of legitimizing such attitudes. I am asking you to make a conscious choice to learn and use inclusive terms and become more aware of how your language affects others around you.



Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of others' ideas and words without acknowledging the source of that information. Students who plagiarize will be given a mark of zero on their work and will not be allowed to resubmit the assignment. To avoid plagiarism, you should cite your source when you use:

- another person's idea, words, theory, or opinion
- facts that are not common knowledge
- direct quotations OR paraphrasing another person's spoken or written words



Materials

Students will need a **3-ring binder** divided into **3 sections**: "Notes and Handouts," "Writing and Responses," and "Assessments." I use gel pens, and love them, but they are too hard on my eyes after hours of marking. Written work must be done in **black or blue ink**, or in dark **pencil**. You should also have access to a **dictionary and thesaurus** at home.



Teacher Expectations

There are a few things you should know about my personality. I am very organized and will expect this of you too. Your binder should be in order. You will need to organize your time for this course. Secondly, I have high expectations about everything in life. I will have expectations of you that may, at times, feel overwhelming. Assignments that reflect a lack of effort will not be marked. I expect you to take pride in your work. I have two classroom aggravations: interruptions and negative comments. These two annoyances tend to consume a lot of energy from everyone in the class and distract from the focus of learning. Finally, you will probably notice that I love my job. I have a passion for literature and a joy of teaching.



Student Outcomes

Nova Scotia's Department of Education and Culture has chosen to use the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum. This curriculum demands that students are to achieve specific outcomes in the course. The Department of Education provides the complete curriculum guide to instruct this course on the Internet: ftp://ftp.ednet.ns.ca/pub/educ/curriculum/ela10_12web.pdf In relation to English Language Arts, the guide offers the **general curriculum outcomes** listed below:

Speaking and Listening

Students will be expected to

1. speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences
2. communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically
3. interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose

Reading and Viewing

Students will be expected to

4. select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts
5. interpret, select, and combine information using a variety of strategies, resources, and technologies
6. respond personally to a range of texts
7. respond critically to a range of texts, applying their understanding of language, form, and genre

Writing and Other Ways of Representing

Students will be expected to

8. use writing and other forms of representation to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and learning; and to use their imagination
9. create texts collaboratively and independently, using a variety of forms for a range of audiences and purposes
10. use a range of strategies to develop effective writing and other ways of representing and to enhance their clarity, precision, and effectiveness.



Teacher Support

I am pleased to offer extra help with the course work outside of class time. It will be important for you to set up an appointment with me in advance. You may also use my web page as a resource: www.stevenvanzoost.com



Course Evaluation (First Term)

15%	Journal
30%	Assignments
20%	Projects
15%	Literature Circles
20%	Process Exam
100%	Total

APPENDIX 5.2.3

PARENT LETTER FOR THIRD TERM CONTRACT

May, 2001

Dear Parent / Guardian:

As part of the English Language Arts course this term, my homeroom students are required to design their own evaluation system for their individual assignments. My role has been to guide and approve their ideas. **I would like to involve you, as a parent / guardian, by asking you evaluate one of your student's assignments.** They will have prepared a **rubric** for you, and they are very familiar with how they work if you need any assistance.

The students will choose which assignment they would prefer to have marked by their parent(s). Please sign their rubric sheet when you have finished your evaluation and have your student return it to school to keep on file. **If you have ANY questions, concerns, or suggestions please feel free to contact me at school** [school phone number]. Thank you in advance for showing interest and support in your student's work.

Sincerely,

Steven Van Zoost
[Nova Middle School phone number]

APPENDIX 7.3.1.1

DAWSON'S PROCESS EXAM ABOUT IDENTITY

Dawson's essay about "How is an identity formed?" written for the Process Exam reads as follows:

To comprehend how someone's identity is formed, you have to understand the whole concept of identity – what is identity? Identity is the part of any living thing that makes it unique and unlike anything else. Identity describes you, interprets you, and determines your attitudes, opinions and your decision-making in everyday life; identity is "you." How do you form your identity? You can't just say, "I want to be like think so this is who I am."

Obviously, a part of your identity is predetermined and presents itself at birth. Most of your physical appearance, religion, and parts of your beliefs are given to you as you bare your elder's name. In the movie *Pleasantville*, a family is brought into a world with no colour and they are very content with the way things are. When change is brought to this world, an important member is influenced drastically. Colour and pigmentation enter her body and she becomes "in colour." When she can't handle the change, she paints herself to hide the colour of her skin. "Will anyone notice?" she nervously asks. She doesn't want her appearance to change because to her that was part of her identity. However, your birth doesn't just affect the way you look – it also affects the way you act and who you are. In the novel and movie *The Outsiders*, a group of children are born into a not-so-wealthy community. As the kids grow into teens, they take on the reputation of "Greasers." "Do you know what Greasers are?" continues a "Soc," "white trash with too much grease in their hair." The Greasers and Socs' were born to "hate" each other. Socs' are rich and snobby; the Greasers are poor and cause quite a bit of trouble. Sometimes people are expected to be someone or something they don't really want to be. That may be part of their identity for the rest of their life.

The likes and dislike, interests and annoyances of a person also contribute to the development of you identity. If you dislike or oppose something then you may act differently or even change part of their identity. In the story, "Family Affair," a man is considered by the country that he calls home as a criminal because he chooses and maybe even enjoys participating in criminal activities. A similar thing happened in the novel, *A Question of Loyalty*. A man is considered a rebel and wrong in being one just because he believes in something different from common opinion. What a person represents and supports determines a large part of his identity.

In the short story, "The Sniper," two brothers are forced to face-off against each other; roof top to rooftop. At the point in the story when one of the snipers kills the other, there is a sense of regret and remorse. The sniper realizes he may have killed someone he knows; he does not yet realize that it was his brother: "Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face." If that had not happened to that soldier that day, he may have been a different person than he turned out to be. Also in another short story titled "Skipper," a boy moulds his identity to be unlike someone else. Some parts of your identity come from the experiences with other people and their identities.

Has anyone ever told you or have you ever read anywhere that attitude is a small thing that makes a big difference? It's true, it's true. Attitude is your mood, your personality and you guessed it, attitude plays a huge roll in your identity. An attitude whether it is positive, negative, annoyed, or easily confused – there can be no identity without an attitude. In a short story called "U is part of Us" a family has a bad attitude towards their own mother. "If the dog spilled his water let mom

clean it up.” That’s how everyone in the whole family thought. When the mother of the family comes down with a stress caused sickness, she begins to cry and continues to cry for days. Better late than never, and the family realizes that changes are needed - not only for their mother’s sake, but also for the family’s. They made a huge change in their attitudes by just a slight adjustment to their identity.

You may say to yourself that other people’s opinions and preferences don’t matter to you, but let’s face the music; it does. Peer pressure and fashion makes the world go around and they are very influential to your identity. If you like the way someone acts, you may try to act similar. There may also be an opposite effect on people. For instance, in the short story “On the sidewalk, bleeding,” a young man is fatally wounded and no one will help him because of who he is. He is part of a gang who is looked upon negatively by the community. When various people see this character “on the sidewalk, bleeding,” they just pass by because he was wearing a jacket with his gang’s name on the back. This goes to show that because of someone’s beliefs, which are part of their identity, they can be treated unfairly and even discriminated against. In the short story “The Nest,” a mother and father want their son to be different from what he wants to be. Would what you really wanted matter to you in this situation? Are you a leader or a follower? How much does your opinion mean to you, and how do you present it? These were all questions that this character was faced with. The answer to these questions most likely determined a huge turning point in his life and in the development of his identity.

Identity in my opinion is a way to describe yourself and show who “you” are to the rest of the world. If you put all of the pieces of criteria in this essay together, I think you have formed a sensational identity. The only thing left to do now is to live life to the utmost.

APPENDIX 8.3

MAKING SCHOOL RELEVANT THROUGH AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

The following are examples that were presented in Chapters 7 and 8 of how students made school relevant for their lives through authentic assessment events:

- David used the sculpture from the Identity Museum to connect with his estranged father.
- At lunch students used overt paraphrasing that was learned from the Literature Circles to solve an argument about who was “right” about a hockey game score.
- Reading Big Books could be understood as training to help students baby-sit, relate with younger siblings, and develop effective parenting skills.
- Peter recognized that his interest in computer programming could be included in his English contract and constructed a game that would address the curriculum.
- In the Third Term Contract, students used authentic assessment events to work with their friends outside of class such as during the creation of computer games, video productions, and plays (e.g., “Dragon Ball M” created by Nicholas and Peter, or the video “Cooking for Love” created by four friends).
- Colin created a mandala to tap into his interest in environmental issues.
- Many of the students’ assessment artefacts signalled students’ rural life in that they reflected a sense of place that was of importance to them (e.g., local culinary recipes, maps of off-road biking trails, pictorial representations of place, and descriptions of students’ rural experiences in various types of texts).
- In the Process Exam, students connected their ideas with common sayings from their family members.
- Colin used an assignment in the Children’s Literature Portfolio to reflect about his father’s work.
- Brenda and Heather made “Family Scrapbooks” about their families.
- Heather made “Greeting Cards” that were intended to be used in circumstances outside of school.
- Colin used an assignment in the Children’s Literature Portfolio to reflect about people who were in need of friends and how people are interdependent.

- Through the discourses of romance, students wrote about their own experiences and imagined experiences in their English assignments (e.g., Tina's magazine article, "Love Q&A", or Phil's learning log entry, "My worst relationship ever").
- Students discussed moral dilemmas that were related to their experiences outside of school (e.g., Laura's fictional diary about a character who experienced sexual abuse).
- Ian's interests in technology and studying history (outside of his required school work) were integrated into his English assignments.
- Brenda wrote and performed a song for her sick grandmother and Tim a song for his dying grandfather.