2004

Gringo and teacher: a study of professional self-formation through cross-cultural research

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GRINGO AND TEACHER: A STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-FORMATION THROUGH CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

John Shock
B.A., Saint John's College, 1984
December 2004
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my wife Kelli and my daughter Katherine, both of whom I love very much, I offer my heartfelt thanks. My thanks go also to my co-workers David and Chip; to my friends Miguel, Arturo, and Alejandro; and to my students past and present. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the members of my advisory committee, especially my chairperson Nancy Nelson, for their guidance.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is, in large part, the story of the author’s transformation from a teacher/researcher who studies others to one who studies himself. It is a story that unfolds against the backdrop of his experiences as a teacher, student, and researcher conducting qualitative research into issues of education in Louisiana and Mexico during the three-year period from the spring of 2001 to the spring of 2004—a tumultuous time in American history by any measure.

At the heart of this thesis lies the decision to adopt a research approach that is more personal and open-ended than purposeful and intentional. It is an approach that employs narrative as a means of identifying issues for further exploration. The end result is that the researcher himself, as much as anything or anyone else, is the subject of the research.

Each of the five chapters of the thesis is divided into two parts: the first narrative, the second critical. The critical portion of each chapter addresses an issue that has arisen, directly or indirectly, in the accompanying narrative. The following issues are considered: relations between the United States and Mexico, the paradoxes of non-traditional research of the type presented by the thesis, current trends in education reform, public political discourse in the aftermath of 9/11, and the role of the teacher in loco parentis. Pertinent issues from post-colonial studies, including neo-colonialism, binarism, the Other/other, and othering, are addressed throughout. The paper closes with a discussion of professional self-formation wherein insights from all of the preceding chapters are brought to bear on a consideration of the teacher as a figure that has been marginalized, or othered.
INTRODUCTION

Thesis/Antithesis

Almost from the moment I arrived in Mexico I was as much subject as researcher, my services as a speaker much in demand at the university where I worked. The topic was always the same: the American education system and my experiences with it. Thus did my time as a researcher begin to develop into a time for self-reflection.

For me, the writing process for my master's thesis ended as it began, with a consideration of the teacher as the figure located at the site where education policy meets the public. My original proposal, submitted at Louisiana State University in 2001, opens with reference to this very figure in Vaughan's (1997), book Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico 1930-1940, just as this thesis ends with reflections on my own work as this same figure, although in another time and place. The story of my transformation from an American researcher looking at others in Mexico to one who studies himself is in large part the story I tell here.

It is a story that unfolds against the backdrop of my experiences as a teacher, student, and researcher in Louisiana and Mexico during the three years from the spring of 2001 to the spring of 2004. It was a tumultuous time politically, personally, and professionally. The fall of 2001 saw the terrible events of September the eleventh and, in their aftermath, the commencement of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. During the same time period I turned forty, became a father for the first time, moved once, and visited Mexico twice. It was a remarkable time for my profession also. The year 2002 saw the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (The White House, 2003b), and 2003 saw the passage of the Louisiana State Management of Failed Schools Act
(Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, 2003), as well as the creation of a sub-district for failing schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, where I am a teacher (Wilcox, 2003). This Louisiana school system, which serves the Greater Baton Rouge area, is made up of 92 schools and has an enrollment of approximately 45,000 students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade (East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, 2004).

At the heart of this thesis lies my decision, made in the summer of 2003, to alter my theoretical perspective, jettison my original research approach, and begin again. It was a decision that led me to adopt an approach that some researchers might describe as *antithetical* to social scientific research, a charge that I take care to rebut. It was at this point, described below and in Chapter Two, that I decided to employ narratives in portions of the thesis, and it was at this point that the thesis began to take shape.

**Relevant Concepts**

**Professional Self-Formation**

The professional self-formation of this thesis’s title is, as I employ the term, closely related to self-discovery. Only through self-discovery can I hope to begin the process of becoming the professional educator I aspire to be. Self-discovery (self-understanding, if you will) is thus a crucial first step in professional self-formation. I refer here to a self-discovery that is more than purely personal. It is a self-discovery wherein I seek, following Peter McLaren (1997), to understand how various historical, academic, educational, and political forces have been written “on me, in me, and through me” (p. 96) as a teacher. Thus, the professional self-formation of this thesis’s title is not the product of a single insight, nor is it the product of a single experience. It is the product of a number of insights gained as the result of a number of experiences. At the end of this work, all of these insights converge in a new, a deep, and an
informed understanding of the teacher as a figure who has been marginalized, or othered, as Spivak (1985) uses that term. Only by understanding myself as an educator in this light can I hope, following bell hooks (1990), to locate sites of creativity and power where I might intervene and recover myself as a professional educator.

Othering

Given that mine is a cross-cultural project, given the nature of the relationship that exists between the United States and Mexico, and given that this is in part a piece of travel writing, I consider throughout all five of the chapters of this thesis pertinent issues from post-colonial studies. These issues include: neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965), binarism (Ashcroft, 1998), the Other/other (Lacan, 1968), and othering (Spivak, 1985). While it would be misleading to characterize this as a thesis steeped in concepts from post-colonial studies, it would be accurate to characterize it as one in which such concepts play an important role. Spivak’s (1985) concept of othering, for example, is one that proves indispensable to my understanding of many of the issues brought before me in the course of writing this work. This same concept is, by extension, essential to the professional self-formation of this thesis’s title.

The Role of Mexico in the Thesis

Let me reiterate that this is a story that unfolds against the backdrop of my experiences as a teacher, student, and researcher in Louisiana and Mexico during a recent three-year period. This is not, therefore, a thesis about Mexico per se. Rather it is a thesis that addresses the issue of professional self-formation, a process that unfolds as I seek to conduct research into issues of education in Mexico. The thesis is full of insights gained while staying in, while traveling to, and while returning from Mexico. Many of these insights are a direct result of my experiences in
Mexico; others are somewhat tangentially connected. All are directly connected, however, to the process of professional self-formation.

**A Timeline of Events Referred to in This Paper**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 1998</td>
<td>I begin teaching ninth grade English at a high school in East Baton Rouge Parish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1999</td>
<td>I enroll as a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University and participate in the LSU Summer Writing Institute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2000</td>
<td>I enroll in the course, Understanding and Applying Research in Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2000</td>
<td>I enroll in the course, Curriculum Theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2001</td>
<td>I apply for a one-semester sabbatical leave from my teaching position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2001</td>
<td>My application for sabbatical leave is granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2001</td>
<td>I submit a proposal for the master's thesis entitled <em>Teachers and Textbooks in Mexico</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2001</td>
<td>I arrive in Tuxtla Gutierrez, capital of the state of Chiapas, Mexico, where I have secured a position as a teacher of English at the Autonomous University of Chiapas. I remain there as a teacher and researcher for five months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1, 2001</td>
<td>I turn forty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 6, 2001</td>
<td>I move in with my co-worker Miguel to his house on Privada Once de Septiembre, where I am introduced to, and befriend, Arturo and Alejandro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2001</td>
<td>The war in Afghanistan begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8, 2001</td>
<td>I return home and begin work on my thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 2002</td>
<td>I return to my job as a high school English teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
January 8, 2002	President Bush signs into law the *No Child Left Behind Act.*

February 2002	My wife Kelli gives birth to our daughter Katherine.

March 2002	The War in Iraq begins.

June 2003	I move with my family to a new apartment.

July 2003	I return for one week to Tuxtla Gutierrez, where I reunite with my friends Miguel, Arturo, and Alejandro. (This trip, my second to Chiapas, furnishes the material for much of this thesis's narrative.)

August 2003	I return to my job as a high school English teacher and resume work on my thesis.

October 2003	Louisiana voters approve the *State Management of Failed Schools Act.*

November 2003	The East Baton Parish School System announces the formation of a new sub-district for failing schools.

March 2004	The meeting with my adviser described in Chapter One occurs.

**The Structure of the Paper**

Each of the following five chapters is divided into two parts: the first narrative, the second critical. The critical part of each chapter addresses an issue that has arisen, directly or indirectly, in the course of the accompanying narrative.

**Chapter 1. Experiencing Cima and Sima, or Researching Mexico**

The first chapter represents my final attempt to come to terms with my original research project. In the first part of the chapter I recount my experiences with Mexican attitudes regarding that country's indigenous population, and I convey my thoughts and feelings on returning to Mexico for a second time to conduct research. In the latter part of the chapter I formally justify Mexico as a site for research into issues of education and consider a number of issues from post-
colonial studies as they bear on the relationship that currently exists between the United States and Mexico.

Chapter 2. Rooming With a Butterfly, or Encountering Paradoxes and “Posts”

The first part of Chapter Two recounts an experience I enjoyed while in Mexico during the summer of 2003—an experience that led me to question a number of the hitherto unexamined assumptions on which I had based my research. I was at this point moved to question the efficacy of the research question as the reason-for-being for research, just as, as a teacher, I am at times inclined to question the efficacy of the instructional objective as the reason-for-being for teaching. I proposed, therefore, to attempt something more personal and open-ended than purposeful and intentional.

While this is by no means as radical a step as it might once have been, I am well aware that it is one that may leave the reader feeling uneasy. I take care therefore, in the second part of the chapter, to firmly ground my new approach in the work of a number of established and respected theorists including Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), Doll (1993), and Freire (2003). I also identify attacks from within the academy on non-traditional research as an example of othering, as Spivak (1985) uses that term, and I discuss some of the pitfalls and paradoxes of non-traditional research. I close by sharing my reasons for selecting the three theorists mentioned above.

Chapter 3. Being the Other, or Comparing and Contrasting

In a sense, I start over again in Chapter Three. In the first part of the chapter I begin a narrative account of my second trip to Mexico in 2003. I reflect on luggage as both metaphor and material culture, and I engage in the inevitable comparing and contrasting that comes with writing about another culture. A consideration of comparing and contrasting in travel writing as
expressions of what Willinsky (1998) characterizes as the “imperial gaze,” and thoughts of comparing and contrasting as examples of the kinds of skills I as an English teacher am expected to teach, lead me, in the second half of the chapter, to a critique, following Ritzer (2000), of current trends in education reform in the United States.

Chapter 4. Living on September the Eleventh Street, or Being Un-Self-Critical

In the first part of Chapter Four I situate myself as an American in Mexico, and relate experiences I shared with Miguel, Arturo, and Alejandro—three men who had befriended me during my first trip to Chiapas and with whom I was reunited when I returned. I also recount the events of my first day back, from my arrival at the airport to the close of the first evening. Miguel, with whom I was staying, lived on September the Eleventh Street. This fact leads me, in the second part of the chapter, to reflect, following McLaren (1991, 1993, 2003, 2004), on the United States as an imperialist power, as well as on the current political climate in the United States and its implications for education.

Chapter 5. Returning Home, or Considering Changes and Self-Formation

In the first part of Chapter Five I dwell only briefly on my stay in Mexico, focusing instead on an afternoon spent in a bus terminal in Houston upon my return to the United States. Here I reflect on the end of youth, and on parenthood as a condition in which one lives for another. I also reflect again on luggage as metaphor and material culture. Thoughts of home, work, and family lead me, in the second part of the chapter, to reflect on adulthood vis a vis Erikson's (1986) psychosocial theory and on returning home vis a vis a poem by Czeslaw Milosz (1981). I follow, citing DeMitchell (2003), with a consideration of my role as a teacher operating in loco parentis. The paper closes with a discussion of professional self-formation wherein
insights from all of the preceding chapters are brought to bear on a consideration of the teacher as a figure that has been marginalized, or othered.
CHAPTER 1
EXPERIENCING CIMA AND SIMA, OR RESEARCHING MEXICO

In this first chapter, I set out to do two things but end up accomplishing considerably more. The first, which I do in part one, is to give the reader a sense of the direction in which my original research was headed at the time that I decided (as referred to in the Introduction) to alter my original research perspective and begin again. The second, which I address in the chapter’s second part, is to offer some answers to the question, “Why Mexico as a site for research into issues of education?”

I begin with a narrative account of some of my experiences with Mexican *mestizos* (Mexicans of Indian and European blood) from the middle class regarding their attitudes towards indigenous Mexicans. These attitudes, complex and contradictory as they are, seemed to me a potentially meaningful avenue of exploration for my research, and it was in this direction that my research was headed at the time in question. Observing that indigenous Mexicans are simultaneously admired and marginalized, I suggest a pair of Spanish terms (*cima*, meaning summit; and *simá*, meaning chasm) which are both homophones and antonyms as metaphors for these attitudes. These two terms, suggesting as they do both ascent and descent, lead me to reflect on the ways in which flying into a foreign country is like swimming. I close the first part of the chapter with a discussion of the ways in which I, as a United States citizen entering Mexico, represent a neo-colonial power. This last item ends up being a matter of great importance to me with reference to the thesis as a whole.

In the second part I offer several reasons why Mexico itself is a subject worthy of study. Included here is description of the neo-colonial relationship that currently exists between the United States and Mexico. There follows a brief section regarding education in which I argue
that, as citizens of a nation that looms large for Mexico, we have an obligation to attempt to understand Mexico on its own terms. This in turn leads me to a consideration othering, as Spivak (1985) uses that term; it is a concept which emerges as central to the insights gained from this thesis.

**Part One**

*Cima/Sima*

\[
\text{Hasta la cima del cielo con tu amor.} \\
\text{To the heights of heaven with your love} \\
\text{Solido, "Hasta la Cima del Cielo"}
\]

*Sima de las Cotorras* is a calcareous chasm with an almost perfectly round opening that allows us to see the jungle within inhabited by parrots.

Best Western Hotel Areca, Sima de las Cotorras

(The Spanish words *cima* and *sima* are both homophones and antonyms. They rhyme with Lima, and begin with an "s" sound. According to Castillo (1977), *cima*—the more common of the two terms—refers to a peak or summit, while *sima* refers to a chasm or abyss.)

I am speaking to my advisor in her office late one Friday afternoon in the early spring of 2004. We are discussing my nascent, or evanescent (I cannot decide which) thesis, a thesis whose ostensible subject is education in Mexico. "*Cima* and *sima* are interesting words," I say. "They mean summit and chasm." I then tell her about my visit to *Sima de las Cotorras* in Mexico, a magical place where emerald green parrots fly up from out of dense woods at the bottom of a naturally occurring crater. In order to leave the crater, these parrots, which inhabit the woods below by the hundreds, must ascend in a spiral; the crater is too deep and too narrow to allow for direct upwards flight.

My advisor suggests I consider employing the terms *cima* and *sima* as metaphors for the contradictory ways in which Mexico's indigenous populations are regarded by others, a subject we have been discussing. I am intrigued by the idea.

Referring early on to the proverbial taxi driver as he proudly boasts of his Indian ancestry and denounces the Spaniards and their crimes and misdeeds, she wryly remarks, "The substance of the polemic is slightly surprising to the foreigner, because the speaker is unlikely to be a pure Indian," as indeed today less than 10 percent of Mexico's inhabitants are. (p. 9)

Contrast that with the following observation by Mr. Castañeda later in the same review:

One of the more intractable forms of racism in Mexico is the discrimination against the darker *mestizos* (Mexicans of mixed European and Indian blood) by the whiter ones, and, perhaps more important, the silent but significant "whitening" of Mexican elites over the past three decades. (p. 9)

Nicely contradictory I think, and reminiscent of attitudes I encountered during my time in Mexico. Elevated in myth and memory, denigrated in fact, the indigenous Mexican is a complex figure, and views of him vary widely especially in those places where he predominates.

The state of Chiapas (where the initial research for this thesis was conducted) in southeastern Mexico is second only to the state of Oaxaca in the size of its indigenous population. This population is itself made up of nine distinct indigenous groups. According to the Comision Nacional Para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas (1992), they are Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques, Tojolabales, Mames, Mochos, Cakchiqueles, and Lacandones in order, from largest to smallest. Taken together these groups constitute approximately 28 percent of Chiapas's total population of 3.9 million people (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Geografia e Informacion Estados Unidos Mexicanos).

Poverty and illiteracy run high in Chiapas due in large part to the marginal socio-economic status of these indigenous groups, a situation brought to the world's attention in 1994. On New Year's Day of that year, the Zapatista National Liberation Army under the command of the charismatic Subcomandante Marcos occupied Chiapas's colonial capitols of San Cristobal de las Casas. There they condemned the injustices suffered by Mexico's indigenous populations and
announced that they were going to march on Mexico City. The latter they finally did in 2001 via a highly publicized bus caravan. The result was the passage in April of that year of a law increasing the rights of the Indigenous, a law which Subcomandante Marcos rejected saying it left the Indigenous worse off than before (BBC, 2004).

An uneasy peace has existed since that time neither side having, so it seems, the will to wage a sustained military or guerilla campaign. Although violent clashes have occurred, they have tended to pit small groups of Zapatista rebels against either local paramilitary groups or municipal police forces. On a national level the uprising has played out via the press of which Subcomandante Marcos has proven to be a master manipulator (e.g., DePalma, 2001).

I did not have occasion to get to know any of the Indigenous while in Chiapas. I did interview two Tzotzile (an indigenous group) shoeshine boys, but that for only an hour or so, and I once struck up a conversation with a young adult Tzotzile street vendor, but again for only half an hour. (I conversed easily, if somewhat slowly, with these young men, Spanish being a second language for all of us.) My students, co-workers, and friends were almost exclusively mestizos and members of the middle class. Among these, opinions about the Indigenous varied widely from pride to pity, from admiration to disdain, with a single person often holding contradictory views. Consider the following concerning my three closest friends in Chiapas: my roommate and co-worker Miguel, and the friends to whom he introduced me, Arturo and Alejandro.

Miguel often displayed a touching sympathy for the younger of the Indigenous with whom we would come into contact. I recall in particular his reaction to a poor, young, single mother who we met working in a restaurant in the countryside near the Guatemalan border. Watching as her infant child played on the restaurant's dirt floor or swung from a hammock fashioned from her rebozo, Miguel inquired about her age, her child's age, and the whereabouts
of the child's father. He mentioned this girl to me several times in the months that followed, urging me to reflect on how bleak her child's future was. At the same time, Miguel appeared to have little if any sympathy for the Indigenous as a whole, regarding the Zapatistas and Subcomandante Marcos in particular as political opportunists. Of Marcos (who is himself a *mestizo*) Miguel once said, "He's got light skin and green eyes. Why should he vouch for the Indians?" Miguel found it hard to believe that anyone should be taken in by what he considered an obvious scam.

Not nearly as sensitive as Miguel, my friend Arturo was nevertheless capable, on occasion, of an act of generosity where poor indigenous youth were concerned. One afternoon, as we sat at a red light, a young boy approached us to beg for what remained of the soda Arturo was drinking—a request that he granted resignedly, sadly. I was moved when I considered that Arturo had a daughter about the same age as the boy and that encounters like this one were probably a daily occurrence for him. On another occasion as we purchased cheese at an outdoor market in a small country town, Arturo commented on the cleanliness and politeness of the local indigenous population, praising them for having the good sense to assimilate to a greater degree than most other indigenous groups. Arturo, it is worth noting, is both a lawyer and a ranch owner, exactly the kind of person who would lose the most if the Zapatista vision for Chiapas were to prevail.

Alejandro claimed to have been a government employee whose job it was to help track the movements of the Indigenous in Chiapas. He would speak freely about what he considered the government's objectionable policies where those groups were concerned while as the same time attempting to regale me with politically incorrect proverbs and rhymed couplets whose subject was "*los Indios.*"
I sensed in all three of these gentlemen, to a greater or lesser degree, resentment that so much attention had been lavished on the Indigenous at a time when so much of the rest of the population was struggling to hold on. I also sensed in these three, again to a greater or lesser degree, a desire to distance themselves from their own "Indian blood." Miguel took pride in his Asian ancestry. (His maternal grandfather emigrated from China.) Alejandro, light skinned and unusually tall for a Mexican, spoke often of his family's ties to academia and to Mexico City as though to distance himself as much as possible from Chiapas and its Indians. Arturo, referring incredulously to a man who had spoken to him in what he considered too preemptory a fashion, once said to me, "and he's a little brown guy!"

Consider also the European tourists for whom the Indigenous, clad in their traditional costumes, are a source of both comfort and curiosity; and for whom the Indigenous, residing in their picturesque mountain villages, serve as mascots in the ultimate theme park. Consider these tourists as their desire to "purchase" the Indigenous experience comes into conflict with the very Indigenous from whom that experience springs. These tourists and those who accommodate them are now both friends and enemies, both fascinated observers and unwelcome interlopers.

Recent government efforts to halt the destruction of what remains of Chiapas's Lacandon Rain Forrest have met with stiff resistance from Zapatista rebels who criticize (among others) those "shop-keepers trying to develop eco-tourism" (Weiner, 2002, p. 2), whom they characterize as "fools trying to change our lives so we will cease being what we are: indigenous peasants with our own ideas and culture" (p. 2). Among these shopkeepers are, or were, two Americans: Glen Wersch and Ellen Jones. Until recently these two operated Rancho Esmerelda, listed in a popular tourist guide as "one of the best places to stay in Mexico" (Jordan, 2003, p. 3). This ranch sits near the Zapatista stronghold of Nuevo Jerusalen. In February of 2003, Wersch and Jones were
forced to abandon their property after the government—fearing widespread violence—refused to protect them from Zapatista rebels intent on reclaiming what they consider their ancestral land (Jordan, 2003).

This brief catalog of conflicts, both internal and external, leads me to believe that *cima*, (summit) and *sima* (chasm) would serve nicely as metaphors for conflicting views of Chiapas's indigenous populations. Consider their status as a marginalized minority in Chiapas versus the high regard in which they are held by those European tourists who travel thousands of miles to be near them. Consider the ways in which all three of my acquaintances, as described in this section, both admire and denigrate them. My sense of the indigenous Mexican as a complex figure, one who is both admired and marginalized, is nicely captured in these two antonyms/homophones, *cima* and *sima.*

I however, have another idea in mind. Insofar as these two words suggest, simultaneously, both ascent and descent, they remind me very much of sensations I experienced during my last flight into Mexico, at which time it occurred to me that flying is like swimming.

**Flying and Swimming**

Let me take the reader to a time in the summer of 2003 when my daughter and I were spending a lot of time at the pool. She, attired in something called a swimming diaper, a T-shirt bearing the legend *Daddy thinks I'm a keeper*, and a ridiculously large sun hat, would spend her time floating about in a gaudily decorated inner-tube outfitted with its own sun visor. I meanwhile took to experimenting with some snorkeling gear that belongs to my wife. One afternoon while deep under water near the bottom of the pool, it occurred to me to turn over and look up. The results were astounding, magical. Why had it never occurred to me before? Looking up at the trees and the sky through the water imbued them with a wonderfully surreal quality.
Viewed from the depths of the pool through the medium of the water, the familiar was suddenly, as in a dream, both familiar and unfamiliar. In the moments that followed a number of other features of swimming, features that had until then escaped my notice, suddenly became clear. I realized that whenever one submerges oneself in water, one enters another world. It is a world where one defies gravity and where one looks slightly different, often younger. It is a world where one cannot speak and where one must, however much against one's will, engage in slow, repetitive almost dance-like motions.

Many of these same feelings struck me again during the aforementioned flight, a flight from Houston to Mexico City taken during a trip in July of 2003. As the plane, ascending, emerged from light cloud cover, and as I looked down on those clouds, I experienced sensations similar to those I had experienced at the bottom of the pool. Looking down on the sky through the clouds just as I had looked up at the sky through the water, I was struck by the ways in which ascending by plane to leave the United State for Mexico was like submerging myself in water. I was defying gravity, and although my appearance had not changed, my height and my blue eyes were suddenly somewhat unusual. Nor could I communicate with the same ease and fluency, since English was not widely spoken. I was short of sleep also, and this, along with the vague disorientation one often experiences when traveling, leant to the proceedings a dream-like quality. Behind it all I could feel myself, even as I ascended, being submerged in another country, another culture.

In retrospect it occurs to me that part of what I experienced on that flight was my emergence, for the duration of my trip, as something approaching an agent of a neo-colonial power. My good intentions, my efforts at self-deprecation—witness my use of the term *gringo* to refer to myself in the title of this work—my efforts at self-effacement not withstanding, I was a
citizen of the world’s one remaining superpower traveling to a country with whom we enjoy what Nkrumah (1965) terms a neo-colonial relationship. One might argue that I was preparing to act, however unwittingly, as an agent of a neo-colonial power in three distinct capacities: as a tourist, with the tourist’s concomitant colonial gaze (Willinsky, 1998); as a researcher, or one who seeks, in Said’s (1978) formulation of Orientalism, to make statements about, to describe, to settle, and to rule over the subject of his research; and as a teacher of English, the language of a neo-colonial power—the language of Empire.

It was during this flight and at about this time that I again took up a question to which I here suggest some possible answers; namely, “Why Mexico as a site for research into issues of education?” In the section that follows, I offer, and elaborate on, three reasons why Mexico itself is a subject worthy of study by any United States citizen; namely, because we share a history, because we share a population, and because we share a culture. There follows a brief section regarding education in which I argue that, as citizens of a nation that looms large for Mexico, we have an obligation to attempt to understand Mexico and its education system on its own terms, and not merely for prescriptive purposes. This leads in turn to a discussion of the dialectic of othering, an issue to which I return elsewhere in this thesis.

**Part Two**

**History**

Why Mexico? Because we are Mexico. If this was not true prior to 1848, it certainly has been true since then, for it was on February second of that year that Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, thereby ending what Americans refer to as the Mexican War.
It has been said of one U.S. President that "neither at college nor at a later date did [he] deceive himself or attempt to deceive others by assuming native brilliance" (McCormac quoted in Chidsey, 1968, p. 173). He won office by the narrowest of margins (thanks in part to a third-party candidate), took advantage of another nation's internal instability and, on the least provocation, invaded it. This he did unapologetically on behalf of those Americans who believed, with him, that the United States had a "divine mission to spread liberty" (Cayton, Perry, Reed, and Winkler, 2000, p. 302). The year was 1846, the President James K. Polk, and the ensuing conflict the Mexican War, a war which Ocatavio Paz (1961) has characterized as "one of the most unjust wars in the history of imperialist expansion" (p. 124).

If, as one might argue, a nation's self-image is formed at least in part by its image on the map (Was not Polk's manifest destiny an expression of just such a tendency?), what might a Mexican see when looking at one of the same? Might he or she not see the nation that was as opposed to the nation that is? Might he or she not see a nation larger by far than present-day Mexico, one that encompasses Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona? The United States, having annexed Texas and having secured California and most of New Mexico via war, purchased Arizona and part of southern New Mexico in 1853. What must Mexican immigrants feel as they live and work, often as a vilified outsiders, in cities and states which once belonged to their native country, cities and states still studded with Spanish place names?

Two things occurred to me as I looked over the pages given over to this conflict in the history text currently in use at the high school where I teach, Prentice Hall’s America: Pathways to the Present (Cayton et al., 2000). The first was that the pages devoted to it were so few—three in fact. The second was that even here all that could be said of the cause of the conflict was the following:
President Polk and other Southern Democrats wanted much more from Mexico than just Texas. Polk had dreams of acquiring the entire territory stretching from Texas to the Pacific. In a final attempt to avoid war, he sent ambassador John Slidell to Mexico City in November 1845 with an offer to buy New Mexico and California for $30 million. But the Mexican government refused even to receive Slidell, let alone consider his offer. (p. 302)

It reads as though the only two options for the United States were to acquire the longed-for territory by purchase or to acquire it by war. Why do the authors not point out that the surest way to have avoided avoid war would have been for the United States to abandon dreams of acquiring the territory altogether? Perhaps to point this out would be unpatriotic.

I myself, I am ashamed to say, strolled for days the streets of both Monterrey and Saltillo in northeastern Mexico blissfully ignorant of the roles those cities played in that war, indeed blissfully ignorant of that conflict as a whole. Such was not the case in San Antonio, Texas, where I lived for a time in the nineties. One cannot visit that fair city without learning (if by some miracle one did not know already) about the Alamo, the mission where, ten years before the Mexican War, more than 200 Texans fighting for that state's independence from Mexico were defeated and brutally killed by a force of over 3,000 Mexicans troops under the command of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Santa Anna, of whom George F. Ruxton, quoted in Chidsey's (1968) anachronistic, embarrassing, and telling history from the dusty shelves of my school's library, said, "Oily duplicity, treachery, avarice and sensuality are depicted in every feature, and his well-known character bears out the truth of the impress his vices have stamped upon his face" (p. 170).

As I write this, a Disney version of the film *The Alamo* is in theaters where it is disappointing viewers, critics, and investors alike. According to Waxman's (2004) newspaper account, Disney CEO Michael Eisner, who was involved in the making of the film, "pushed hard for it to be made, believing that post-9/11 America would identify with the patriotic struggle"
Mr. Eisner's miscalculations regarding the box office appeal of the film notwithstanding, the message is clear: "Remember the Alamo! Forget the Mexican War!"

**Immigration and Migration**

Why Mexico? Because we share a population. Even if the United States and Mexico did not share a political history, the economic ties that bind them would be no less strong. In the area of economics, we vitally influence Mexico just by being. Nowhere is this clearer than in the areas of immigration and migration.

The U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service's (2004) *Estimate of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: 1990 to 2000* put the number of Mexican citizens living and working illegally in the United States at 4.8 million; this was up from just over two million in 1990. It is estimated that these workers send home over $10 billion annually, a figure which represents between one and two percent of Mexico's gross domestic product (e. g., Orozco, 2004).

In this election season, President Bush (The White House, 2004) has proposed a guest worker program that would grant temporary legal status to many of these illegal Mexican immigrants (Bush, 2004). Embraced enthusiastically by Mexican President, Vincente Fox, the program is nevertheless opposed both by those who fear Mexican immigration and by those who benefit from cheap, illegal, immigrant labor. While the former fear that the program will encourage additional immigration, the latter (although not at liberty to say so publicly) do not relish the idea of having to conform to a host of labor regulations that they have heretofore been free to disregard where immigrant labor is concerned.

Not only does the United States draw large numbers of Mexican citizens over the border, it is also responsible for the movement of large numbers of people within Mexico itself.
*Maquiladoras*, foreign owned manufacturing plants (many of which have been opened by U. S. corporations since the passage of NAFTA ten years ago) in border cities like Juarez and Acuña, have, in recent years, attracted over one million people seeking employment. These newly arrived workers have placed tremendous stresses on the cities to which they have relocated. Thousands of people are living on subsistence wages along unpaved roads in ad-hoc shelters without water or electricity in both Juarez and Acuña (Dillon, 2001). Quinones (2001) reports that at the height of this influx a Mexican politician from Juarez "suggested lowering *maquiladora* salaries and building a wall fifty kilometers out of town to staunch the flow of Mexico into Juarez"(p. 140). Staunch the flow of Mexico into Juarez? What a remarkable idea. It is as if Juarez had either seceded from Mexico or been annexed by the United States.

In *Mexico: A Revolution by Education*, author George Sanchez (1936) commented on Mexico's history as a Spanish colony and spoke optimistically of the possibilities of the then-current Socialist School Movement. "It is well to remember" he tells us "that new Spain existed not as a field of Spanish settlement but rather as a mandate of the Crown of Spain, to be managed and exploited" (p. 45). Bidding farewell, so he thinks, to this dark past, Sanchez refers to the Socialist School Movement as "the blossoming of tendencies that have been in the process of growth for centuries" (p. 96). Imagine the author's despair were he to learn that his description of Mexico under Spanish rule also describes her relationship with the U.S. at the end of the 20th century. For what are Acuña and Juarez, with their makeshift housing, lack of basic services, and factories manned with cheap labor, if not mandates to be managed and exploited by U.S. corporations? (Exploited indeed. Lindquist [2004] reports that in the last two years twenty percent of these *maquiladoras* have closed and moved to countries where labor is even cheaper.)
When asked for her views on the relationship between the United States and Mexico, Esparanza, the subject of Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1994), says that she has been told that Mexico has been sold to the United States. It would seem that she is not far wrong, for parts of Mexico do appear to belong to the United States.

Here we see, in sharp relief, the neo-colonial (as Nkrumah [1965] uses that term) nature of the relationship between the United States and Mexico. It is a relationship wherein a superpower (in this case the United States) plays a decisive role in the affairs of a nominally independent ex-colony (in this case Mexico) through “the fixing of prices on world markets, multinational corporations and cartels and a variety of educational and cultural institutions” (Ashcroft, 1998, pp. 162-163). As we shall see, it is a relationship in which each party influences the other.

Culture

Why Mexico? Because we share a common culture. Historical and economic considerations notwithstanding, I am drawn to the Mexican, and American, and finally, Mexican-American popular music of the border. It was through this music that I first came to appreciate the complex nature of the relationship between these two countries. In what follows I refer to an event that occurred in 1992 as described by Sam Quinones (2001) in his book *True Tales From Another Mexico*. That event was the death of Rosalino Sanchez, a popular Mexican-American musician. I relate this story in some detail here, for it is an important and telling example of one of the many ways in which the United States and Mexico share a culture.

On May 16, 1992 two men discovered the body of 31-year old Rosalino Sanchez by the side of an irrigation canal north of the city of Culiacan in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. He had been murdered. His cousin, who had been with him the night before, later reported that late on
the evening of the 15th Sanchez had been taken from his car in downtown Culiacan by several armed men. It was the last time anyone reported seeing him alive. Sanchez had served time in a prison in Tijuana and was rumored to have killed a man in his hometown. He worked for a time smuggling illegal aliens into the United States and was known to have associated with drug dealers. His murder remains unsolved.

Sanchez's death was big news not only in Sinaloa but also in the United States, especially in Los Angeles, where he had lived. A native of a small village in Sinaloa, Sanchez had lived in Los Angeles from the age of 15. There, performing as Chalino Sanchez, he almost single-handedly transformed the corrido from an anachronistic folk music into an immensely popular musical form. The Mexican corrido, or ballad, is descended from the Spanish romance corrido, "a narrative form of ballad in eight-syllable verse... brought to Mexico and thence to the Southwest toward the end of the eighteenth century" (Campa, 1979, pp. 240-241). Its subjects are usually "love, crime, tragedy, flood, catastrophe, and particularly deeds, heroic and unheroic, of men... mounted on spirited sorrel-colored horses" (p. 241). The corrido is usually sung by one or two vocalists accompanied by an accordion and guitar. While this form was by no means forgotten, it was definitely not, at the time of Sanchez's emergence, the music of Mexican and Mexican-American youth.

Sanchez's styles, musical and sartorial, were imitated by a generation of young Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and his narcocorridos displaced rap as the pop music of choice. These narcocorridos were tales of the drug smuggling valientes, or toughs, of the Sinaloan drug cartel, many of whom Sanchez knew personally.

Sanchez's popularity was such that it reached from Los Angeles back into Mexico and Culiacan and as far south as the city of Mazatlan. From Los Angeles to Mazatlan is well over
1000 miles, and Sanchez's music and popularity spanned this distance without the benefit of any major media. He was neither broadcast nor promoted by any organization of note. Too unpolished for Mexican radio, too regional for the United States, and too violent for either, Sanchez's reputation spread through word of mouth. His music, on self-produced cassette tapes, poured from the cars of throngs of teens as they cruised the streets of Los Angeles and points south in the early 1990s. These tapes were bought and sold at local swap meets and flea markets; none were sold in stores, and none were played on the radio.

Sanchez is still popular today. The narcocorridos that he made famous as well as his styles of singing and dressing are very much in evidence among the Mexican-American youth of Los Angeles and the Mexican youth of Sinaloa today (Quinones, 2001, p. 326). In the months following his death, close to 150 corridos were written and recorded about him. This makes Chalino Sanchez, according to ethnomusicologists, probably the most celebrated subject in the century old history of the corrido, eclipsing even Pancho Villa.

I can imagine inhabitants of Los Angeles being disturbed by the narcocorrido as a form of popular music, just as I am sometimes disturbed by the violent, misogynistic lyrics of the gangsta rap that some of my students listen to. “Why,” these Los Angelinos might ask, “are violent drug smugglers heroes to these young people?” In a sense this is troubling, but in another sense it is understandable. Quinones (2001) explains:

Mexican Essayist Carlos Monsivias once said that during economic crisis of the kind Mexico has suffered for twenty-five years, a hero is anyone who provides a job. Chalino’s corridos are about the only two figures in Mexican popular culture during that time who can consistently claim economic success: the drug smuggler and the immigrant; usually, in his songs the same person. (p. 29)

While I agree with this assessment, I do not think it goes far enough. It fails to point out that these valientes, in providing much needed money, were doing battle with a corrupt and indifferent Mexican government. Furthermore, I would suggest that in celebrating and
memorializing these smugglers, the listener rescues the *valiente*, and thereby himself, from anonymity - the anonymity of countless Mexicans who have died as members of an enormous foreign, or foreign born, labor force that either produces goods for U.S. markets or works in its service industries. I am reminded of hooks's (1990) reference to this very space: "that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power" (p. 342); a site where marginalized subjects intervene that they might "recover" themselves.

More than statistics, more than strident calls for limits on immigration, Sanchez's story brings home for me the complex nature of the relationship between the United States and Mexico. Consider what Quinones's account tells us: more *corridos* have been written about an American entertainer, albeit a Mexican-American one, than have been written about any Mexican folk hero. Recent trends in popular music and fashions in Sinaloa have come not from Sinaloa, but from Sinaloa by way of Los Angeles. Sanchez's life span itself mirrors this phenomenon. He died at age 31 having spent the first 15 years of his life in Mexico. "His creation was literally Mexican and American" (Quinones, 2001, p. 29).

**Education**

I found it interesting that in searching various databases for information on the Mexican education system, for every book or article I encountered dealing with the Mexican education system as such, there were many more that dealt with issues such as bilingual education or the vagaries of placing recent Mexican immigrant students in American schools. Of those titles that did deal the Mexican education system in depth, several (Alexander-Kasparik, 1994; Herrara, 1996; Villa, 1982) contained disclaimers such as the following translator's preamble to Herrara's (1996) *Education in Mexico*. "To meet the challenge of educating children who have recently arrived from Mexico or who are involved in a seasonal rotation between the United States and
Mexico, it is important for U.S. educators to have a current and historical perspective on the education system of Mexico" (p. 3).

It is as if the field is saying that the only issues worth considering are those that directly affect us: how to provide an American education in Spanish, for instance, or how to assess an immigrant student's Mexican education vis a vis American schools. I would argue otherwise. I would argue that research into Mexico's education system need not be done solely for predictive or prescriptive purposes. I would argue that qualitative research into issues of education in Mexico has intrinsic value. I would argue that as a nation that looms large in the Mexican consciousness, as a nation that shares a history, a population, and a culture with Mexico, the United States has an obligation to attempt to understand Mexico on its own terms. (I would be remiss if I failed to mention here the good work that scholars such as Jiménez, Smith, and Martínez-León [2003], are doing by studying actual classes in Mexican schools, and learning about the literary practices of teachers and students there.

The Dialectic of Othering

Given, as described earlier, the neo-colonial nature of the relationship that exists between the United States and Mexico, it is important to note that this relationship runs in both directions; that is, that just as the United States looms large in the Mexican conscious, so too does Mexico loom large for the United States. One cannot exist without the other. The two-way nature of this relationship is nicely elucidated in post-colonial studies via the concepts of binarism (Ashcroft, 1998), and othering (Spivak 1985a).

Ashcroft (1998) uses the phrase “binary logic of imperialism” (p. 24) to refer to “that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance” (p. 24). In colonial discourses, these oppositions, which may
take a variety of forms, serve to underscore the essential binary of colonizer/colonized. These forms, which might, he tells us, include “white/black, civilized/primitive, advanced/retarded, good/evil, beautiful/ugly, human/bestial, teacher/student, doctor/patient” (p. 24), serve to separate the colonized subject from the colonizer and establish the “naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (p. 169).

Spivak (1985) suggests othering as the name for the playing out of this process, that is, the process whereby colonial powers create their subjects. Following Lacan (1968), she distinguishes between the Other, that figure in whose gaze the individual exists; and the other, that figure (equally important in establishing the individual’s identity) over whom the individual anticipates gaining mastery. What for Lacan is a psychological phenomenon is for Spivak an issue of cultural relations. Thus, for Spivak the Other is Empire, while the other is the marginalized subject. Of particular interest is Spivak’s contention that othering is a dialectical process with the colonizing Other emerging even as colonized others emerge as subjects. It is to this dialectical process that I refer when I say that the complex, neo-colonial relationship that exists between the United States and Mexico runs in both directions. I see this dialectical process at work in any number of issues in U.S./Mexico relations. Let me here share two of them.

Consider current and ongoing debates about whether or not English should be declared the official language of the United States (an issue of particular interest to me as an educator). Are not those proponents of English only policies, for whom reaffirming the preeminence of English means “reaffirming a unifying force in American life” (Crawford, 1992, p. 2) engaged in the dialectic of othering? With unity posited as the privileged element in the binary opposition unity/multiplicity, these English speaking, culturally literate Americans emerge only in reaction
to an influx of non-English speaking immigrants, the majority of whom are Spanish speaking
Mexicans.

I am reminded also of our current President’s fondness for adopting, on occasion, the
garb and attitude of the cowboy, that “mythic figure for processing cultural problems” (Hughes,
n.d., para. 1) so closely associated with the President’s home state of Texas. This figure, whose
mythology the President has been accused of utilizing in constructing foreign policy (e.g.,
Marinucci, 2002), emerged—not in a vacuum—but along with, against, and in reaction to
Spivak’s (1985) others, including the generations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who
have inhabited the American Southwest.

Having, I trust, given sufficient answer to questions about my reasons for wanting to
conduct qualitative research into education in Mexico, it only remains for me to say that in what
follows Mexico plays a much smaller part than I had anticipated. How did this happen?

Conclusion

Mexico itself, as a subject for study, serves as the theme of this chapter. In the chapter’s
first part I describe Mexican mestizo attitudes, as I encountered them, regarding indigenous
Mexicans. At the time in question, these attitudes were emerging as a possible subject for my
research. In the chapter’s second part, I offer some reasons why Mexico might be considered as a
site for research into issues of education. There follows a brief section in which I argue that, as
United States citizens, we have an obligation to attempt to understand Mexico on its own terms.
The chapter closes with a discussion of the concept of dialectic of othering.

Given the nature of the relationship that currently exists between the United States and
Mexico, it should come as no surprise that issues from post-colonial studies emerge in this
chapter, namely, neo-colonialism, the so-called “binary logic of imperialism” (Ashcroft, 1998),
and othering, as Spivak (1985) uses that term. These insights from post-colonial studies prove essential to my understanding of a number of the issues raised later in the thesis, and as such are important elements of the professional self-formation referred to in this thesis’s title.
CHAPTER 2
ROOMING WITH A BUTTERFLY, OR ENCOUNTERING PARADOXES AND “POSTS”

In the first part of this chapter, I provide a narrative account of the circumstances surrounding the genesis of the form of this thesis. I begin with an account of the problems I encountered in attempting to produce the thesis I had originally proposed. I close with an account of an experience I enjoyed while in Mexico during the summer of 2003—an experience that led me to question a number of the hitherto unexamined assumptions on which I had based my research. As my narrative makes clear, I was at this point moved to question the efficacy of the research question as the reason-for-being for research, just as, as a teacher, I am at times inclined to question the efficacy of the instructional objective as the reason-for-being for teaching. I proposed, therefore, to attempt something more personal and open-ended than purposeful and intentional. I close the first half of this chapter by identifying, following Bateman (1974) and Spivak (1985), attacks on non-traditional research by conservatives within the academy as an example of othering.

In the second half of the chapter, I seek permission to embark on the non-traditional research proposed in the chapter’s first half. It is, I argue, an endeavor fraught with paradoxes, three of which I identify explicitly. I then go on to justify my attempts at non-traditional research by citing precedent; that is, by referring to established theorists whose work validates attempts at research that is open-ended and personal as opposed to purposeful and intentional. The three theorists cited are Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), William E. Doll (1993), and Paulo Freire (2003/1973). I close the chapter with a discussion of the implications for my research of the work cited as well as a discussion of my reasons for selecting these three theorists for consideration.
I offer, as the figure that unifies the elements of this chapter, the butterfly. It was the sight of a butterfly on the wall in my room in Mexico (reminding as it did of the butterfly on the cover of William E. Doll’s [1993] *A Post-modern Perspective on Curriculum*) that initiated the reveries which in turn led me to propose the non-traditional research in which I am engaged.

**Part One**

**Dark Days**

My comments at the beginning of this thesis regarding my time spent in Mexico as a time for self-reflection are nicely mirrored in the comments from Ocatavio Paz (1961) which follow.

I should confess that many of the reflections in this essay occurred to me outside of Mexico, during a two-year stay in the United States. I remember that whenever I attempted to examine North American life, anxious to discover its meaning, I encountered my own questioning image. That image, seen against the glittering background of the United States, was the first and perhaps the profoundest answer which that country gave to my questions. (p.12)

Sometime during the first semester of the 2000/2001 school year I, a high school English teacher in Louisiana in the employ of the East Baton Rouge Parish school system, became aware that I would soon be eligible for a one-semester sabbatical for purposes of professional and cultural improvement at a salary equal to 65 per cent of my salary at the time that the sabbatical would begin. The prospect was enticing. I was at the time enrolled as a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at Louisiana State University. I had re-entered the academy in order to participate in the university's Summer Writing Institute in 1998 and had been attending classes part-time since then. "This is well," I thought as I considered my chances for the longed-for sabbatical. " Might I not propose to conduct thesis research into issues in education in Mexico?"

Mexico, where my dreams lived or, as it appeared to me then, where my dreams had gone to die—dreams of making a formal study of the music of the border, dreams of playing and singing that music, dreams of speaking Spanish, dreams of living, if only for a while, far from
the hubbub of the United States. (I thought these things as I sat at my desk—a cheap, metal, and fake-wood construction strategically placed before my classroom's only window. This window itself was a sad affair—tucked into a corner; paned in scratched, discolored plexiglass; letting in but a bit of natural light to do battle with a bevy of blinking, buzzing fluorescent bulbs. These bulbs in turn were set into the uneven, water-stained tiles of a decaying drop ceiling.)

Recently I had turned 39 and was in the midst of my fourth year of teaching. The first of these I had spent at a Catholic middle school in New Orleans and the remainder in my present position as an English teacher at a Title One high school in Baton Rouge. I had come to teaching late, and the move to a career in education (my first, second, or third career depending on whether or not one recognizes bar-band musician and bookstore clerk under that heading) had proven difficult. I probably would have quit during my first year if I had not needed the money so badly. I almost certainly would have quit during my second if I had not needed the money even worse. Only after my third year—one in which I enjoyed limited success—did I begin to believe that I would remain in the classroom beyond the end of any given day.

With forty looming, with fatherhood on the horizon (my wife Kelli and I had resolved to have a child within that coming year), wanting to reward myself in some way for having survived my transition to the classroom, I contemplated with pleasure the prospect of an extended stay in Mexico.

The topic for my would-be research dealt with a subject that I had been thinking about off and on since becoming a teacher. In formulating a proposal I attempted to marry my abiding interest in the distinction between high and low culture to an interest in similar issues surrounding my work as a teacher of literature. I proposed to ask questions about literary canons. My research question as finally formulated was this: "Given that teachers are the sites at which
educational policy meets the student, in what ways do teachers of literature at the ninth grade level in Mexico make use of federally approved textbooks?" (Shock, 2001).

I noted in my proposal that, while the United States has no formal national curriculum, it does have a *de facto* one, largely as a result of the way that textbook publishers do business. (e.g., Stille, 2002). I do not think that this is entirely bad. I recently visited a friend in New Mexico, where I had an enjoyable conversation with his son, a ninth grader, about two short stories that we had both recently read: James Hurst's (2000), "The Scarlet Ibis," and Toni Cade Bambara's (2000) "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird." It seems we were both using the same textbook. I think the second of these is by far the better story, although I discovered untapped potential in the Hurst story this year by pairing it with the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Laemmle, 1930), based on the novel of that name (Remarque, 1995/1929). Both of these stories take place in locales very much like Louisiana, and I wonder if some of their impact isn't lost on a high school student in a city like Albuquerque.

Late that next July (July of 2001), my thesis proposal completed, my request for sabbatical granted, a one-semester assignment as a teacher of English at a state university in Chiapas secured, I bid my now expecting wife farewell and boarded a plane for Mexico. About my stay I will have much more to say later, but for the moment let me jump forward.

In due course I returned to the United States. I returned to a wife whose due date was fast approaching. (Our daughter Katherine was born just two months after I arrived home.) I returned to the aftermath of 9/11—to the U.S. at war in Afghanistan and to hints of more wars to come. I returned to students who had run off more than one teacher in my absence. Tales of lights turned off and dictionaries thrown abounded. And I returned with a wealth of experiences, memories, stories, tapes of interviews, transcripts of interviews, journal entries, notes on journal entries,
periodicals, classroom observations, books—and some apprehension as to how I was going to make sense of them.

This was the beginning of what proved to be a dark initial chapter in the thesis writing process. I had made, I see now, a serious mistake, one which did not become clear to me for some time; namely, I had erred at the outset of the project by deciding to operate from within a theoretical framework in which I did not believe.

With reference to this mistake let me here quote from the 2003-2004 LSU General Catalog (2003) on the subject of the dissertation: "The dissertation must add to the sum total of existing knowledge and give evidence of considerable literary skill" (p. 202). Granted I am writing a thesis here, and according to this same catalog the thesis need only "demonstrate capacity for research, originality of thought, and facility in organizing materials" (p. 201). But insofar as it is a dry run for the dissertation, and insofar as it operates from within the same institutional confines, I would argue that the goal of thesis research is the same as that of dissertation research.

It was the first half of this sentence that very nearly proved my undoing. "What," I wondered, as I considered the aforementioned tapes, transcripts, notes, books, and periodicals, "am I to make of all of these raw data? What gem, what pearl, what possible addition to the sum total of existing knowledge lay hidden therein?" No answer to this question was forthcoming.

My original research proposal had foundered, so to speak, after a number of attempts—dashed on the rocks of the indifference and suspicion of my many would-be subjects. I had not anticipated the mistrust and polite reserve with which my attempts to meet and engage a teacher would be met, but I was not discouraged.
My position at the university and my burgeoning friendship with a fellow instructor afforded me numerous opportunities to meet and interact with a wide variety of people in a host of circumstances, and I took advantage of most of them. While I was aware that my original research question was falling by the wayside, I was also aware that I still had before me an opportunity to conduct meaningful research into some aspect of education in Mexico, and so I remained hopeful.

Adopting, following Agar (1986), an "improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making" (p. 12), but keeping in mind Merriam's (1998) ethical research considerations as enumerated in my proposal, I set about trying to identify other avenues for my research. There were, as I saw it, three possible directions in which I might profitably go.

First, I had, as it turned out, three high school students and one university student from the Latin American literature program in one of the English classes that I taught at the university. It occurred to me that I might, with their cooperation, explore their formal, educational experiences with literature.

Second, I discovered that the university where I was teaching had, within the College of Humanities, a very popular undergraduate program in pedagogy. This program struck me as a possible subject for research.

Third, I considered my co-worker and soon-to-be good friend Miguel as a possible research subject. While he was an English teacher at the university level, not the teacher of literature at the secondary level that I had anticipated meeting, he did have a wealth of experiences and opinions, and he was happy to share them with me.

And so I began to collect data. Wary of a second false start, I began to move on all three fronts more or less simultaneously. I interviewed professors of pedagogy, university students,
high school students, and language instructors; I met with, and spoke to, groups of educators and
students of education; I observed high school classes; I secured (with no small effort) curriculum
guides for undergraduate programs in literature and pedagogy, and I took notes on all of it. I
even took notes on my notes, forever on the prowl for that insight, that new research question,
which might emerge and right my research.

As stated in my research proposal, I employed Glaser and Strauss's (1968) Constant
Comparative Method, as amended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). It is an inductive approach
to the analysis of qualitative data which involves the coding of data for analysis, the discovery of
emergent themes, the creation and refinement of categories, the exploration of relationships
across categories, the integration of data, and the writing up of a report, in that order.

Just as I had not anticipated the suspicion with which my attempts to meet and engage a
teacher would be met, I also underestimated the amount of time it would take to establish context
for the research I hoped to conduct. Indeed, as a researcher from another country, one could
argue that I might never have established a meaningful context. This, in conjunction with my
false start and the demands of my teaching position, prevented me from enjoying the
breakthrough I had hoped for while in Mexico.

Things did not, as I have intimated, improve with my return to the United States; in fact,
they got worse. For a time I attempted—chiefly via Octavio Paz—to read my way out off my
quandary, taking copious notes all the while. These notes in turn were combed for some hint as
to what I might profitably say of my experiences in Mexico—all of this to no avail.

Memories of my journey began to fade as I fretted over the Gordian knot that is
qualitative research. Not that I had much time for such fretting after the birth of my daughter.
Her first six months brought with them untold joy and anxiety; her second six months brought
more of the same. Meanwhile I watched as my thesis, like a train I had barely missed, shrank in the distance. In the spring of 2003 my wife and I discovered lead paint in the picturesque but poorly maintained bungalow that we rented, and as a result we were forced to move. Needless to say, none of this was conducive to work on a thesis which now appeared as but a speck on the horizon.

An Epiphany

That summer, despondent, contemplating abandoning the thesis altogether, I returned to Mexico and to the site of my original research to see if being there would help me make sense of the work I had done and the work I had yet to do. It did help me, although certainly not in a way I had imagined, for it was during this second trip that I became aware of my profound mistake with reference to my research and the theoretical framework from within which I was operating.

Late one afternoon, midway through my visit, as I lay on my bed waiting for my friends so that we could run some errand together, I was struck as if by lightning by a thought. I could hear a radio playing from within the large warehouse which stood next door, the music drifting up through my window as if from an echo chamber; bottle rockets exploded in the distance marking the feast day of some saint (an almost daily occurrence at the nearby church); and I watched a blue butterfly as it flew and rested, flew and rested, along my room's high walls. "It looks as though I'll be rooming with a butterfly this time around." I said to myself. Here and in what follows I am of course re-imagining my thoughts; however, the story itself is not apocryphal. The butterfly had been in my room for some days despite the door being open, and it showed no signs that it would give out before the end of my brief visit.

A small lizard had been my companion during my previous stay. A larger version of the same had lived downstairs spending most of its time behind a painting of a flower-filled
wheelbarrow. They would call to one another in the evening in a series of high-pitched chirps, mine from high up on the wall near the ceiling or else secreted behind the cheap floral patterned sheets that served as my curtains.

"It looks as though I'll be rooming with a butterfly this time around," I said to myself again. It was here that a thought struck me. "Did I not," I asked myself, "as part of a graduate course in curriculum theory at LSU write a paper entitled Doll's Butterfly? (Shock, 2000). Did I not reflect therein on 'remembering'—as Plato uses that term—as a metaphor for the reconceptualization of the field of curriculum theory? Did I not write something about social scientific projects in that piece?"

My actual phrasing was as follows:

The curriculum field, you will recall, came into this world as curriculum development. The field, as such, was not born pure, subsequently defiled, and ultimately reclaimed in the reconceptualization. It was not, as fashioned by Bobbit, "a highly symbolic concept," or an "extraordinarily complex conversation." Rather, as the offspring of experimental psychology and social efficiency, the curriculum field was, from its genesis to the reconceptualization, a social scientific project and an institutional text. In "taking back" the field therefore, the reconceptualists were, like the slave boy in Plato's Meno, remembering what had been forgotten at birth. (p. 4)

Indeed I did write that, and in my own way, as I lay there on my bed in Mexico that same afternoon, I began that same process; I began to "take back" my thesis.

From the outset, cowed by the form and parameters of the traditional thesis, I had conceived of my own as a social scientific endeavor. I had proposed to conduct qualitative research into the subject of literary canons, and up until the afternoon in question I had understood research as a process of discovery; specifically, discovery in the sense in which scientists use that term: as a process wherein one seeks to be the first to obtain knowledge of something. After all, how else than by being the first to obtain knowledge of something can one hope to add to the sum total of existing knowledge?
I had prepared myself for just such a project, both with course work (Understanding and Applying Research in Education) and with the reading I had done in preparing the *Research Plan* and *Methods of Data Analysis* sections of my thesis proposal, but it was work which left me untouched and unmoved.

Where, I wondered, was the work I had done in my curriculum theory course? Where was my work from the Summer Writing Institute of the LSU Writing Project? In the first of these classes I had discovered a taste for matters theoretical; in the latter I had discovered a talent, however meager, for writing memoir. How had they—courses that I had enjoyed and from which I had learned a lot—prepared me to complete my current project? Where was either of them in my current research? Where, for that matter, was I?

Why not put myself back in my thesis? Why not write from a position that problematizes the distinction between theory and practice, social scientific projects, and the form and parameters of the thesis itself? Why not listen to myself? Why not write a memoir? Why trudge on, blind and deaf to the untold possibilities for *self-discovery* that time spent in a foreign country affords, slavishly searching for that insight that I might be the first to uncover—a jewel that I might then take home with me to add to the academy's treasure trove of the sum total of existing knowledge?

Like someone whose baptism has not "taken" I—despite my exposure to its methods and procedures—had stopped *believing* in educational research. In the days that followed, I resolved that I would not conduct "a systematic study of an educational problem or issue in order to establish facts or principles" (Fraenkel, 2000, p. 8). I decided instead that I would write something more personal and open-ended than purposeful and intentional.
It occurs to me that if, with Bateman (1974), one sees the academy as implicated in imperialism, or in domination as the “central and primary theme of our age” (p. 58), then one might also characterize attacks by conservatives from within the academy on non-traditional research as an instance of Spivak’s (1985) othering. Take for example Pinar’s account (1996) of attacks on his and Grumet’s work with autobiography and biography. In characterizing this work as “‘mystical alchemy’ and ‘emanicipation from research’ and more recently as ‘solipsistic and purely personal’” (Pinar, 1996, p. 516) are not conservative critics engaging in Spivak’s (1985) othering? Are they not engaged in an attempt to confirm the reality and validity of their own research (and by extension the imperialist project) by denigrating what they identify as undesirable—as other?

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the butterfly of the chapter’s title is in part an allusion to the figure on the cover of William E. Doll's *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum* (1993), a figure which itself resembles a butterfly. I have argued elsewhere (Shock, 2000) that it is a figure which suggests, among other things, the transformational possibilities of the post-modern curriculum which Doll elucidates. It is to Doll, as well as to Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), and Paulo Freire's (2003/1973) that I now turn for permission to conduct non-traditional research of the type I have here proposed.

**Part Two**

**Paradoxes**

The thesis which emerged from the events of that afternoon is, of course, this thesis. It is a thesis whose form and content I am at this point obliged to defend—a job, as I see it, fraught with paradoxes. Let me here discuss three of those paradoxes, but first let me say a word about what will follow.
A discussion of the third of the paradoxes alluded to will lead me directly into a discussion of the work of Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), a theorist whose work I cite in order to justify, in part, the nontraditional form of this thesis. I will follow with a discussion William E. Doll's (1993) *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*, a work with implications for my undertaking. Finally, I will consider Paulo Freire's (2003/1973) "banking concept of education" with an emphasis on its implications for research. I close with a brief section outlining the implications for my research of the work to which I have referred.

Owing to the manner in which I have chosen to relate the events surrounding the writing of this thesis, only now do I find myself, well into the work, in a position to justify its form and content. This, as I see it, is the first paradox. Usually such a defense would come very near the beginning. In the interest of giving the reader a sense of how I at first lost, and then found, my way, I have decided to present that defense here, where it serves to justify not only what will follow, but also what has come before. Imagine it as the source from which this thesis issues, both forward and backward.

The second paradox to which I refer is summed up in the following sentence: In this section, I ask for permission to break the rules. In the first part of this chapter I expressed a determination to reject a positivist, social scientific research model in favor of something that owes as much to the humanities as it does to the social sciences. The questions that arose for me at that point were: Can I do that? Can I break the rules? To which came the answer from the academy (and here I see a second paradox): Not without permission (e.g., Best, 1991). I will therefore argue for permission to be granted via the time honored practice of citing the work of established academics; by showing, in other words, that precedents for what I want to do exist. In so doing I acquiesce to one of what are for Foucault (1977) the many "hidden mechanisms
through which a society conveys its knowledge and ensures its survival under the mask of knowledge" (p.225).

The third paradox to which I refer revolves around what might be termed logical inconsistencies in the justification for nontraditional research that I am fashioning. In the sections that follow I turn for support to three educational theorists—Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), William E. Doll (1993), and Paulo Freire (2003/1973)—each one of whom disagrees with the other two on some important issue. Doll, for example, is correctly characterized by Pinar (1996) as a theorist free of political allegiances, while Freire is an avowed Marxist. Furthermore, Freire's work, based as it is in Marxism, is clearly at odds (e.g., McLaren, 1993) with the ludic, or playful, postmodernism of which Daignault is a prime exemplar. Daignault, in turn, has unquestionably broken with modernism, a move which Doll characterizes as counterproductive.

In turning to these three educational theorists for support, do I act inconsistently? Perhaps, but does this present a problem? I think not—not when one considers the one essential respect in which these three are alike. In the field of educational theory, each one of these theorists—Doll as a postmodern scholar, Freire as a critical theorist, and Daignault as a poststructuralist—represents an important discourse within a broad and ongoing critique of the cumulative and absolute knowledge with which I wrestled in the first part of this chapter. As such, each of them, through his work, lends credibility to my efforts in nontraditional research. That they might disagree with one another on certain points is not as important as it would be otherwise, especially when we consider, for example, Doll's (1993) call for a curriculum "wherein no one owns the truth" (p. 151). Let me turn now for a closer look at the work of these three individuals.
Lessons from Jacques Daignault

Of the theorists discussed in this section, none has come so close to completely abandoning the modern as Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), a man whose language is so unusual as to compel me to cite, here at the outset, the following words from Daignault himself (1992): "I do write. I teach too" (p. 213). Fearlessly (or foolishly) following Derrida, Deluze, and Serres, Daignault eschews traditional logic in an attempt to enter a postmodern space.

With Serres, Daignault (1992) likens reason to a wolf, that authority beyond which claims to truth have no recourse. For Daignault, to know is to kill. This knowing, this killing is terrorism. Nihilism, on the other hand, is the forsaking of any effort to know; it is a position marked by a complete loss of hope.

Daignault cleverly frames this discourse with reference to two terms, both of which have negative connotations. In so doing, he side steps the "trap" of preferring one in a pair of binary opposites. At the same time he points us, not towards some safe third position, but rather away from these two negative ones; he points us towards a middle. It is a middle, however, which "has nothing to do with an average; it is not a centrism or a form of moderation" (Daignault, 1987, p. 27). Rather, this center is "a matter of absolute speed" (p. 27).

Thinking, for Daignault (1983), is both a passage and a performance—the staging of knowledge through a passageway. It is a performance staged in "the passages between the variable and the invariable, between both: not from one to the other" (Daignault, 1992, p. 201). It is a playful performance, one that involves paradox and experimentation.

Interesting to be sure, but I feel compelled to ask: Has he got it right? Is his work (to use terms popular in postmodern critiques of the postmodern) sufficiently rigorous? Is it adequately theorized? These questions have no meaning for Daignault, at least not the meaning intended. To
ask such questions is to identify oneself as one of those "new people committed to reducing it [the middle] to a matter of knowledge, to a new epistemological stake: the wolf's place" (Daignault, 1992, p. 199). Questions about rigor and adequate theorization are, for Daignault, nothing more than Serres's wolf in sheep's clothing.

Reading about Daignault, it is as though I am being told that, contrary to what I have always believed, I can breathe under water. Having been told as much, how many of us would immediately submerge ourselves in water and inhale? Indeed how many of us, wanting to, would be able to force ourselves to do so?

Nevertheless, I am intrigued by the idea of research as performance. I believe that the use of narrative in this thesis and my forays into creative writing constitute performances. They are, following Daignault, performances which I stage in order to avoid coming to rest in positions marked by either terrorism or nihilism, as he uses those terms. They are performances intended, at least in part, to keep both the reader and me in the middle as Daignault understands it. Let me give an example of what I mean by that.

Given my tastes and my disposition, in writing about Mexico it would have been very easy for me to lionize the Indigenous, denigrate foreigners and the powerful Mexican elite, and ignore the Mexican middle class. Furthermore, I am confident that I would have found an appreciative audience for just such an analysis among many like-minded readers. But in so doing I would, in Daignault's terms, have succumbed to nihilism. In writing about Mexico as I experienced it I have attempted both to keep my prejudices at bay and to allow my thoughts to take me where they will. My use of narrative, while not as radical an undertaking as Daignault himself might attempt, is, I think, compatible with the spirit of his work.
Lessons from William E. Doll

The objection has been raised by Tony Whitson (1991) that, if all of the possibilities within postmodernism are merely insights gained from other discourses, what is postmodernism's contribution? In *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*, William E. Doll (1993) offers important insights with reference to this issue, but at the same time he does not answer the question Whitson poses. Insofar as Whitson's question is premised on the idea that the postmodern represents a rupture with the modern, it is not for Doll a question about postmodernism at all. Rather it is a question of "ultra high, late, or arch modernism" (p. 7). Questions about the dependence or interdependence of various so-called postmodern discourses, insofar as they assume such a rupture, are not a primary concern for Doll. Following Jencks (1987), he maintains: "This 'confusion' is not a mere semantic difference; it represents 'a difference of values and philosophy' " (pp.7-8). For Doll, only those projects which "continue the tradition of the modern while at the same time transcending it" (p. 8) are postmodern projects. Others, concerned as they are with foundations, are not postmodern at all, but modern (albeit in a very particular way). What Doll proposes might more easily be understood as a transformational-modernism.

Having made this crucial distinction between the true and the supposed postmodern, Doll is not obliged to weigh in on contentious issues such as the efficacy of rearticulated figures, provisional or otherwise (e.g., Martusewicz, 1992; Taubman, 1979). He is free, in fashioning a postmodern curriculum, to turn to sources, individuals, and ideas that would otherwise have been anathema. He bears no grudges and points no fingers as he searches the curriculum field's history—indeed, the world's history—in search, not of models, but "possibilities" (Doll, 1993, p.16). He
turns unapologetically to mathematics and science for several such possibilities; specifically, to the "new science" of Ilya Prigogine (1980) and to modern biology.

In Prigogine's chaos theory, and in Piaget's (1977) biological constructivism Doll discovers just such possibilities, or metaphors, for meaningful curriculum development. He envisions a postmodern curriculum that is a "collaborative effort and a transformative process" (p. 16)—one that invites perturbation and open-endedness.

While I by no means plumb the profound depths of Doll's work in writing this thesis, I find myself drawn to his call for theorists not only to welcome perturbation and open-endedness, but to invite them. This, I think, is very much like what I did in jettisoning my original theoretical framework in favor of I knew not what. Once I had resolved to reject a positivist, social scientific research framework, I immediately began writing the narrative portions of this thesis. At the time, I had only a vague idea of where they would lead me, but it was out of that chaos, that perturbation, and that open-endedness that this thesis emerged.

Lessons from Paulo Freire

On the subject of the banking concept of education in his famous work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (2003/1973) begins by observing that the teacher-student relationship at all levels displays a "fundamentally narrative character" (p. 71). It is a relationship that involves the teacher as narrator, or subject; and the student as listener, or object. The substance of such teaching, "whether values or empirical dimensions of reality" (p. 71), is inclined to become, in the process of being thus narrated, "lifeless and petrified" (p. 71). The teacher's job, in this scenario, is "to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (p. 71). Freire continues:
Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the student extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (p. 72)

This misdirected approach to education fails the student profoundly, dehumanizing him and, in essence, filing him away just as the dead facts he receives from the teacher are filed away. "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72).

In order to justify his own existence, the teacher in the banking concept of education must stand before his students as their opposite, attributing absolute ignorance to them. Thus are knowledge and education as inquiry both denied. "The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance...but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher" (p. 73).

Freire maintains that education liberated form the banking concept "must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 72).

Why do I believe that the banking concept of education has implications for research? Before answering that I must reiterate that I am talking about a research whose goal is to add to the sum total of existing knowledge as the academy understands and adjudges knowledge.

In order to allow for additions to the sum total of existing knowledge, one must accept that knowledge is discreet and quantifiable. One must also acknowledge the academy as the final arbiter of what constitutes knowledge. Deny either of these and additions to the sum total of existing knowledge are not possible, certainly not in the orderly and predictable way to which we
have become accustomed. Following Freire, one might call this the banking concept of knowledge.

If we see, as Freire suggests, the teacher as a depositor of just such bits of discreet, quantifiable knowledge; and if we see the student as a receptacle for that same knowledge; then the researcher is a miner—that person whose job it is to locate and retrieve the valuables with which the teacher then fills the student.

Research thus becomes an act of retrieving. Instead of inquiring, the researcher engages in a hunt for new pieces of knowledge—pieces of knowledge which are "detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (p. 71). This misdirected approach to research fails the researcher, dehumanizes him and reduces him to someone who mines the dead "values and empirical dimensions of reality" (p. 71) with which students are then filled.

Just as Freire says that libertarian education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, so too might research liberated from the banking concept of knowledge begin with the solution of the researcher-research subject contradiction. By reconciling the poles of this contradiction so that both are simultaneously researcher and the subject of research, research might reemerge as "invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72).

By rejecting a positivist, social scientific research model, (a model which I believe is complicit in the banking concept of education), and by making myself the subject of my own research, I have attempted, in this work, to resolve this contradiction and to engage in what Freire might call libertarian research.
Implications for My Research

In this section I have sought permission to engage in nontraditional qualitative research into issues of education. Citing Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), I have sought to establish that research as performance (in this case as narrative) is not unprecedented and that it can prevent research from becoming an exercise in reaffirming preconceived ideas and prejudices. Citing William E. Doll (1993), I have sought to establish that open-ended research is not only permissible but desirable; and following Paulo Freire (2003/1973), I have attempted to establish that the researcher who serves as the subject of his own research has taken a fruitful first step toward research liberated from the banking concept of education.

Let me offer a word here regarding my reasons for selecting these three theorists for consideration in this section. As noted earlier, I selected these three in part because each one of them—Doll as a post-modern scholar, Freire as a critical theorist, and Daignault as a poststructuralist—represents an important discourse within the broader postmodern critique of traditional, or Western, ways of knowing. Furthermore, each one in his way has made a strong impression on me. I am struck by Doll’s eclecticism, Daignault’s intrepidity, and Freire’s concern with social justice. Finally, I find it interesting that each one of these three theorists, disagree though he may with the other two, uses similar language in critiquing traditional, or Western, ways of knowing. Doll (1993) writes of freezing the “game-space” (p. 33) of knowing “in a single pattern of order and hierarchy” (p. 33). (I am reminded that in the inner most circles of Dante’s Inferno (2003/c. 1320), one is not engulfed by flames, but suspended in ice.) Daignault (1992) maintains that to know is to kill; and Freire (2003), in his banking concept of education, speaks of the substance of teaching as “lifeless and petrified” (p. 71).
And so, given their prominence, given the diverse but important discourses each one represents, and given the fact that each in his own way spoke to me, I thought it appropriate to reference the work of these three theorists in attempting to justify the non-traditional research in which I am here engaged.

Conclusion

This chapter serves as the thesis’s linchpin, for in this chapter I propose and defend the thesis’s form and content. Beginning with an account of my initial attempts at what I have elected to call traditional research, I segue into an account of an experience I had in Mexico in the summer of 2003, an experience that led me to question the means and ends of just such traditional research. I propose instead to attempt research that I characterize as personal and open ended as opposed to purposeful and intentional. I justify this non-traditional research in the second half of the chapter by citing the work of three influential theorists, Jacques Daignault (1983, 1987, 1992), William E. Doll (1993), and Paulo Freire (2003/1973). I offer as the figure which unifies the elements of the chapter, the butterfly, a figure which appears both in reality and in an illustration at two different points in the chapter. The concept of othering (Spivak, 1985), a concept first explored in Chapter One, here begins to emerge as a heuristically useful concept for understanding (in this instance) disagreements within the academy regarding non-traditional research. Finally, the experiences described in this chapter, and the research conducted in the course of writing about them, constitute an important step towards the professional self-formation of this thesis’s title.
CHAPTER 3
BEING THE OTHER, OR
COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

In the first part of this chapter I provide a narrative account of my return trip to Chiapas, Mexico, in the summer of 2003. In an effort to illustrate some of the issues facing a researcher traveling in another country, I focus on luggage as both material culture and metaphor. I follow with a brief section wherein I compare and contrast travel by bus in the United States and travel by bus in Mexico. I close the first part of the chapter with a discussion of travel writing, of the type in which I have engaged, as an exercise in othering as Spivak (1985) uses that term.

Extending this theme, I identify comparing and contrasting as habits of the Western mind highly prized and actively encouraged in education as I have experienced it. (As I note in the first part of this chapter, they are a large part of what I do as an English teacher.) I continue this theme in the second part of the chapter by identify comparing and contrasting as strategies that I, as a teacher, am currently being encouraged to emphasize in my classes. This observation leads to a much broader discussion of contemporary accountability programs in public education and their effect on my work as an educator. While I am well aware that current accountability programs are the result of trends that predate my entry into the profession, I chose to examine them in light of what sociologist George Ritzer’s (2000) terms the McDonaldization of society. An analysis of the work of Ritzer leads me, following Freire (2003/1973) to an understanding of the teacher, as currently configured in the public education hierarchy, as figure that has been marginalized, or othered. I close with a brief discussion of accountability programs in public education as they are currently unfolding at the federal, state, and local levels.
Part One

"You with the Purse"

It occurs to me that a piece of luggage might serve as a metaphor for the values, prejudices, and normative behaviors we take with us when we travel to another culture. I would also point out that a piece of luggage devoid of any metaphorical associations is itself a potent bit of material culture. So it was with a shopping bag on my first trip to Mexico, and so it was with a shoulder bag as I embarked on my return.

"You with the purse, your bus is leaving!"

So began, in the summer of 2003, my return trip to Tuxtla Gutierrez, capital of the state of Chiapas in southeastern Mexico. The bus in question, a Greyhound out of Miami bound, by way of Baton Rouge, for Houston where I would catch a plane for Mexico City; my tormentor, the ticket clerk on the graveyard shift; the purse at issue, a multi-colored, striped, plastic, shoulder bag of a type favored by day-laborers in Chiapas—men with cowboy hats, machetes and huaraches. Would that I had had a machete that early morning that I might have brandished at the pack of sleepy, sullen travelers and would-be-travelers enjoying a chuckle at my expense. (The machete, when not being used in causes political or vigilante, is a wonderful tool, employed in a host of jobs both large and small from clearing fields to pruning hedges, from felling trees to paring pineapples. This machete, in congress with the broom, frees the average Mexican from the infernal, and to my ears quintessentially American, din of the weed whacker and the leaf blower.)

This was not the first time that I had suffered abuse as a result of my taste in bags from Mexico. During my first stay in Chiapas I had experienced similar taunts from the locals because
of the large, colorful, plastic shopping bag (much larger than the one described above) I used for carrying my groceries from the market and for taking my laundry to and from the laundromat.

It was not a laundromat really, so much as a place where one had one's laundry done, since, although the shop was equipped with a few coin-operated machines, the use of these was, so far as I could tell, discouraged. I had occasion to use them once or twice, but the experience made me uneasy—furtive looks from the clerk leaving me with the impression that by doing my own laundry I was threatening her with unemployment. Never mind that, as a fastidious American, I was a little squeamish about having her wash my socks and underwear; never mind that, as an American liberal, I felt guilty at having her do so. (This same clerk later found and returned to me my wedding ring which I had carelessly left in the pocket of a pair of pants to be washed. I acknowledged this kindness with gifts of both chocolate and cash. My friend Miguel later told me that the money was inappropriate, but this criticism did not sting, the giving of gifts being a matter of some delicacy even between two people of the same culture.)

I remember getting similarly disapproving looks one afternoon from a uniformed woman wielding a broom and dustpan when I made so bold as to bend over to pick up a piece of trash at a shopping mall. My long experience with American anti-littering propaganda not withstanding (I am old enough to remember television images of a lachrymose Native American brave standing in a field strewn with garbage), I left the trash untouched rather than have her think I was threatening her livelihood.

Nor were these the only times that I was thus discomfited while in Mexico, a country where menial tasks, tasks that might be done more easily by machine, and tasks which one doubts need doing at all, constitute the life's work of no small part of the population. (In this third category, I recall those individuals whose job it is to stand in the doorways of buses for the
sole purpose of making sure that no one should miss the bus because the driver did not see him.)
But the frequency with which these misunderstandings occurred diminished in time, and I found
myself doing business with a variety of clerks, with the country's ubiquitous shoe-shines, with its
street vendors and its supra-polite waiters without feeling too self-conscious, although
throughout my stay I continued to tip a bit too much in most transactions. (Needless to say, I
never approached anything like the dismissive style of some native Mexicans like my friend
Arturo. I will always remember him at an outdoor cafe one evening as he took time out from
admonishing a hapless shoeshine to call to a waiter, "Yes, but now!" with reference to his desire
for some condiment or other. He referred to every waiter as" joven," or young man, regardless of
his age and never, so far as I could tell, deigned to make eye contact.)

This habit of mine annoyed my friend Miguel, who insisted that paying people too much
encouraged them to ask for too much, thereby driving up the cost of living. (In his defense I
should report that, according to recently published study by the Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace [Audley, 2003], real wages for many Mexican citizens are at present below
what they were when NAFTA took effect just over ten years ago.) He kept a particularly sharp
eye on my tips to taxi drivers, for taxis were a service on which he depended. He had an amusing
habit of out-waiting me from the front seat of the taxi (he always took the front seat) whenever it
came time to pay for a ride. The driver, having brought us to our destination, would usually
mumble the amount of the fare to Miguel, a sum which Miguel would then repeat over his
shoulder. There would follow an uncomfortable silence broken only by a proffer of cash from
me. Miguel, who at this point was usually concluding a feint toward his wallet, would then
graciously allow me to pay but not without noting the amount of my tip lest I, being too liberal,
should drive up fares. In my experience such tourisite largesse was generally blamed for having
"ruined" the Indigenous of San Cristobal. I remember well, for example, the afternoon when I bought a *rebozo* from an indigenous woman on the streets of that city. She claimed to have made it herself, whereupon I asked to have my picture taken with her. She agreed, but only if I would pay substantially more for the *rebozo*. At this Miguel and Alejandro, who were with me, shook their heads in mild disgust as if to say, "This is what comes of giving *los indios* too much money."

I sometimes resented Miguel for forcing me to choose between assuaging my conscience and protecting the Mexican economy from runaway inflation, but I had my revenge. I had it on those occasions when he accompanied me to the laundry. He never accompanied me to the market, preferring the giant antiseptic supermarket in the local shopping mall. A veteran of American malls, those cathedrals of simulacra, I preferred the city's main market where vendors operated from every available space; where merchandise was sold not only from stalls but also from atop overturned buckets and boxes in the aisles and in the doorways; where merchandise was sold on outspread blankets and even from atop automobiles where vendors sold pineapples and oranges, flowers for altars, and banana leaves for tamales; where strong smells emanated from the stalls selling meat and cheese; where temporary awnings took up permanent residence; and where women with young children asleep at their breasts absentmindedly fanned the flies off of piles of fruits whose names I did not know.

I discovered that on these trips to the laundry Miguel was embarrassed to be seen with me as I carried my large, colorful shopping bag. He indicated his initial embarrassment subtly enough with wry smiles and slow shakes of his head. What registered more immediately were the double takes and smiles of men I would pass in the street. Next came requests from Miguel, made in a joking way, that I not walk too close to him in public whenever I was carrying the bag.
As it turns out, this request was made in earnest, for I noticed (sometime after the issue had ceased to interest me) that he did indeed keep his distance whenever I carried the bag, especially if there were any young women about.

Miguel later explained to me that these shopping bags are carried only by women above a certain age and below a certain social standing. They suggest poverty and simplicity. They suggest women very much like Esparanza in *Translated Woman* (Behar, 1994), whom the author describes as too much an Indian to be a *mestizo*, and too much a *mestizo* to be an Indian. I would add that any teasing I experienced in this matter was good natured and benign; at no time was I made to feel ridiculous or unwelcome.

**Comparing and Contrasting**

My passage to Houston was uneventful and hardly worth mentioning but for the fact that it reminded me of the difference between travel by bus in the United States and travel by bus in Mexico. Comparing and contrasting being a large part of what I do as an English teacher, I beg the reader leave to engage in a bit of it here.

I have read, both on the internet and in chic travel guides, a number of articles on this very subject, but none of them have hit upon what is for me the salient point. Far from introducing the unsuspecting traveler to the "real" Mexico, these guidebooks, with names like *The Rough Guide* (Fisher, 1998) and *The Lonely Planet* (Noble, 2000), direct him instead to intersections, buildings, and restaurants where others like himself congregate peering into the same book at roughly the same page. These travelers are usually couples—a man and a woman—or a man alone. Never have I seen a solitary woman thus engaged. My favorite pose has a man and a woman standing at a busy intersection obstructing pedestrian traffic as he looks up at a street sign and she reads aloud from a guidebook.
Yes, travel by bus in Mexico is a pleasant surprise. Yes, the tickets are cheap, the buses are clean and spacious, and the seats are assigned (thus sparing the last to board the embarrassment of having to stare down the churlish traveler who has attempted to claim the empty seat next to him by placing some piece of either his luggage or himself thereon). Yes, the windows are curtained and movies are shown. But what is most striking, and what all of the articles I have read have failed to mention, is that the conduct of the average bus passenger in Mexico is a great improvement over that of his American counterpart.

Passengers on Mexican buses do not, as a rule, carry with them pillows and blankets enough to outfit a suite. They do not attempt, the size of the seat notwithstanding, to stretch out to their full lengths with their legs invading the aisle. They do not, generally speaking, bring fried food onto the bus. Their infants are quiet, their toddlers, for the most part, well behaved. It is as though, regularly forced to travel long distances by bus, the Mexican polis has come to an unspoken agreement with itself to make the inevitable bearable by observing more than the American modicum of courtesy.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the absence of the lone traveler (in my experience usually a European American male in his thirties or forties) who spends the entire journey boasting to the person seated next to him about his many successes. Oh the jobs he has held! The cars he has owned! The women he has married! Never mind that for a Caucasian male over the age of thirty to travel alone by bus in these United States is to confess publicly to a life of criminality, substance abuse, mental instability, monumental stupidity, devotion to socialist causes, or some combination of these. There he sits bending the ear of his newfound acquaintance (and of every traveler within ten seats of him) with his catalog of lies. The coming
together of these two, the prolix braggart and his complaisant interlocutor, in adjacent seats must be a display of some vestigial homing instinct.

Harmless though I attempt to make it appear here—and benign though I may believe it to be—this desire to compare and contrast one’s culture with another is itself an expression of othering as Spivak (1968) uses that term. Ashcroft (1998) refers to it as an “almost inevitable” (p. 173) part of travel writing, while education theorist John Willinsky (1998) describes it as an attitude of the tourist characteristic of the of the Westerner’s colonial gaze. Spurr (1993) characterizes the travel writer as one who “is placed either above or at the center of things, yet apart from them so that the organization and classification of things takes place according to [his] own system of value” (p. 16).

Be that as it may, let me here say that Mexican buses outdo Americans ones in the matter of schedules also; they run much more often. The Greyhound I took from Baton Rouge to Houston, the only one available on the morning I was traveling, left me in the latter city a full four hours before my flight departed, which time I passed trying unsuccessfully to sleep in an upright position.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, comparing and contrasting are habits of the Western mind highly prized and actively encouraged in education as I have experienced it. Witness my assertion that they are a large part of what I do as an English teacher. In what follows, I consider comparing and contrasting as examples of the kinds of strategies that I am currently being encouraged to emphasize in my classes. This, in turn leads me to a much broader discussion of contemporary accountability programs in public education and their effect on my work as an educator. (I would note here that the accountability programs under consideration are
themselves in large part based on the comparing and contrasting of students, schools, teachers, communities, states, and even nations.)

Regarding my critique of contemporary accountability programs, while I am well aware that current accountability programs are the result of trends which predate my entry into the profession in 1998, I have chosen to examine them in light of what sociologist George Ritzer (2000) terms the *McDonaldization* of society. As Mathison and Ross (2004) and McNeil (2000), make clear, contemporary school accountability programs are the product of studies and legislation dating back to the 1980’s. “A Nation at Risk,” published in the 1983; Ross Perot’s influential Texas school reform legislation, passed in the mid-1980’s; and “Goals 2000,” a program initiated under President George H. Bush in 1989, and passed as federal legislation under President Clinton in 1993; all served as antecedents to Presidents George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation. I, however, have chosen to consider contemporary school accountability programs, not in terms of their legislative antecedents, but in terms of the broader societal forces that have shaped them. This sociological approach allows me to utilize very specific language in critiquing the educational publications and computer programs discussed later in this chapter.

**Part Two**

*Ever More Specific Suggestions*

Increasingly, much of what I do as a teacher I do, not because I want to, but because I have been encouraged to do so. Comparing and contrasting, for example, are processes I now encourage my students to engage in not only because I think they are valuable exercises, but also because I myself have been encouraged to do so; encouraged via publications such as *Thinking Maps: Tools for Learning* (Hyerle, 1995). This publication, issued to all teachers at my school
this past fall, is but one of what has proven to be a long line of books, directives, and computer programs containing ever more specific suggestions regarding what to teach and how to teach it. With each passing month I am asked to make room on my shelves for likes of *Contextual Teaching Works: Increasing Student Achievement* (Parnell, 2001); *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano, 2001); Read 180 (Hasselbring, 2002), a computerized reading intervention program; *Compass Learning* (Machen, n.d.), a computerized learning program; and the Louisiana Department of Education's (2004) recently unveiled *Grade- Level Expectations*. These last take the existing *Louisiana Content Standards* (2004) one step further by stating exactly what each student should know by the end of each grade. The arrival of all of these has been punctuated by the appearance of memos on such subjects as *Lesson Design and Performance Models* (August, 2004) which reminds me that most effective lessons contain the same eight elements, elements which enhance and maximize learning. Nor does this flood shows no sign of abating; the coming school year promises much more of the same.

Taken together, I fear that these publications, directives, and computer programs might soon come to function like the infamous operations manuals favored by many corporate franchises. (Author Neal Stephenson [1991] describes these three ring binders as the "DNA" of franchises.) Were this to occur, (and given recent developments it seems to me entirely possible) I would be expected not to make decisions but to follow scripts. Less and less would my opinions and experiences matter. More technician than teacher, more customer service representatives than educator, I might well be left adrift, cut off from my work itself.

Do I have cause for concern? For help in answering that question I turn to noted sociologist George Ritzer (2000), whose work *The McDonaldization of Society* gives a clear and
measured account of the trend to which I refer as that trend is unfolding across contemporary society. In the section that follows I provide a brief overview Ritzer's work and consider its implications for life in the secondary school classroom. I then briefly consider this trend with reference to recent developments in school accountability. (Much of what I find so attractive about parts of Mexico is the near absence—for the time being at least—of corporate franchises. It seems fitting then that I should here consider a critique of the corporate franchise as it impinges on my work as an educator.)

**Ritzer's McDonaldization of Society**

By *McDonaldization*, Ritzer means "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (p. 1). In the first chapter he lays out its five basic principles, or dimensions, which are efficiency, calculability, predictability, control through nonhuman technology, and paradoxically, the irrationality of rationality (pp. 12 -16). By efficiency, Ritzer means the best way of getting from one point to another under specified conditions; by calculability, the stress placed on the quantitative nature of the goods and services sold; by predictability, a guarantee that products and services will be uniform over time and in a variety of locations; and by control through nonhuman technology, the manipulation of options and amenities in order to elicit desired behavior, and the use of machines to supplant labor.

About the irrationality of rationality, I will say more in a moment, but first I think it important to point out that with reference to these first four dimensions, McDonaldization does have distinct advantages. Of the advantages Ritzer lists, those pertinent to a discussion of education are the following: goods and services are of a consistent nature; customers can more easily bear the cost of the product; customers can more easily see similarities and differences in
rival goods; customers are more likely to be dealt with in the same way regardless of ethnic background, gender, or social rank; and new ideas and methods are easily extended.

But these advantages are almost always, perhaps inevitably, offset by the fifth dimension of McDonaldization; namely, the irrationality of rationality. "The basic idea here is that rational systems inevitably spawn irrational consequences. Another way of saying this is that rational systems serve to deny human reason; rational systems are often unreasonable" (p. 16).

Of course, McDonaldization did not rise up from out of nowhere, a point on which Ritzer dwells in the book's second chapter. With reference to the succession of economic and social processes which gave rise to McDonaldization, he emphasizes Max Weber's (1978) *Economy and Society*, Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management, Henry Ford's assembly line, Levitt & Son's prefabricated houses, the advent of the shopping mall, and Ray Croc's innovations in franchising as those which engendered its conditions and foundations.

Particularly worthy of note here is the work of Weber (1978) whose concept of the bureaucracy is an outgrowth of his work on rationalization. Weber recounted how the West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contrived to become ever more rational, and he posited *formal rationality* as that unique type of rationality which the West brought about. By *formal rationality* Weber meant that workers in the Western world, in seeking the most efficient means to a given end, were guided not solely by reason, but also by regulations, laws, and social structures. Weber commended the bureaucracy as the outstanding example of formal rationality—that arrangement which surpassed all others in helping people uncover and put into practice the best means to a given end. The bureaucracy's most valuable benefits, as enumerated by Weber, were *efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control through nonhuman technology*. Its most salient disadvantages were its irrational and potentially dehumanizing byproducts: red
tape, for example, or indignation with nonhuman technology. According to Ritzer, what most concerned Weber was the so-called "iron cage" of rationality, a situation wherein a populace might find itself confined solely to rational structures, whether at home, work, school or leisure.

Ritzer says, "McDonaldization is an amplification and extension of Weber's theory of rationalization. For Weber, the model of rationalization was the bureaucracy; for me, the fast food restaurant is the paradigm of McDonaldization" (p. 23). McDonaldization then, represents an attempt to both correct some of the bureaucracy's shortcomings while at the same time extending its fundamental principles to a host of processes that had previously resisted bureaucratization. In the five chapters that follow, Ritzer supplies ample testimony to the presence of the five dimensions of McDonaldization in society at large. With reference to education, many of his examples come not from the world of high school, but from the university, from the Kinder-Care chain of childcare centers, and from Sylvan Learning Centers. Let us look at some of these examples.

Regarding efficiency, Ritzer mentions the familiar automated processes for grading multiple-choice examinations as well as more recent developments such as computer disks containing sets of prewritten examination questions from which instructors can choose. Instructors are now free to have as much or as little do with the examination process as they like. He also reports that students on many U.S. university campuses can now purchase lecture notes with their administration's blessings. They need not even go to class.

Among the many expressions of calculability in evidence in the contemporary university, Ritzer mentions the familiar acronyms GPA, SAT, and GRE as well as the rankings given by various magazines to the universities themselves. He also dwells on the various ways in which an academic's work is quantified including credentials, student ratings, the "publish or perish"
dictum and more arcane methods such as calculations of the frequency with which an academic's work is cited by others.

Ritzer maintains that many universities have welcomed predictability by presenting analogous courses, especially at the freshman level, across the country. This he attributes to nationally distributed, "cookie-cutter" textbooks.

With reference to control through the use of nonhuman technology, Ritzer's observations on the Kinder-Care child-care corporate franchise so nearly echo my own concerns as expressed above that I feel compelled to quote them at length.

Kinder-Care tends to hire short-term employees with little or no training in childcare. What those employees do in the classroom is largely determined by an instruction book with a ready-made curriculum. Staff members open the manual to find activities spelled out in detail for each day. Clearly a skilled, experienced, creative teacher is not the kind of person that such "McChild" care centers seek to hire. Rather, relatively untrained employees are more easily controlled by the nonhuman technology of the omnipresent "instruction book." (p. 108)

The author follows this with similar comments about Sylvan Learning Centers. Later still he makes reference to the all-too-familiar tyranny of the lesson plan, the clock, and rules for behavior as expressions of control through nonhuman technology.

On the subject of the irrationality of rationality, the dehumanization of those facets of society which have been subjected to Mcdonaldization troubles Ritzer more than any other aspect. Himself an educator at the university level, he maintains that "we may soon see the ultimate step in the dehumanization of education; the elimination of a human teacher and of human interaction between teacher and student" (p. 143). Given this brief overview of Ritzer's work, it seems to me that as an educator I do have cause for concern. I return now to the list of books, directives, and computer programs mentioned at the beginning of this section to look at them in light of what Ritzer has written.
Let us consider for a moment *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano et al., 2001), a book which has served as the subject of a number of staff development meetings at the school where I work over the past two years. At the close of the first chapter of that book, the authors say, "We again affirm our belief that we are at the beginning of a new era in education—one in which research will provide strong, explicit guidance for the classroom teacher" (p. 8). It should be noted that the authors' sole criterion for assessing the increased student achievement, referred to in the title, is the test score. Such "explicit guidance" is clearly an example of control through nonhuman technology, as well as an attempt to guarantee efficiency through the use of only those instructional methods that increase student achievement. The authors' dependency on test scores as the sole measure of learning is, of course, an example of calculability.

Much the same can be said of *Thinking Maps: Tools for Learning* (Hyerle, 1995). These "Thinking Maps," which are essentially a set of eight "visual tools for learning" (p. 4), have been proven effective in research which has spanned the last forty years. The criteria for confirming that effectiveness? Higher test scores. Again, we see an example of control through nonhuman technology as well as an example of efficiency through the use of only those eight "Thinking Maps" which have proven effective. The author's use of test scores as a measure of effectiveness is, again, an example of calculability.

The book *Contextual Teaching Works: Increasing Student Achievement* (Parnell, 2001) is maddening in a way the previous two are not. The author appears sensitive to both the realities and absurdities of life in the classroom and encourages teachers to act in a principled fashion. Nevertheless, he falls back on test scores as the one sure way to verify that student achievement
has increased. This is an expression of the author's awareness of the irrationality of rationality as well as a third example of calculability.

*Read 180* (Hasselbring, 2002), a computerized reading intervention program, and *Compass Learning* (Machen, n.d.), a computerized learning program, are unvarnished expressions of control through the use of nonhuman technology. Students in my English classes are required to spend one class period per week in *Compass Learning*. Those who are deemed in need of help with reading are assigned to the *Read 180* classroom five days a week. These two programs, unveiled within the last year, indicate that the McDonaldization of education might be moving more quickly at the high school than the university level.

The Louisiana Department of Education's *Grade-Level Expectations (2004)*, which unambiguously state what each student should know by the end of each school year, are an example of predictability—an attempt to guarantee that education across the state is uniform.

One manifestation of the irrationality of rationality on which Ritzer does not dwell, but which fascinates me, is the preposterous positions which managers of rationalized organizations are at times forced to defend publicly. Take for example the sworn testimony of a McDonalds executive in the infamous so-called McLibel case in Great Britain in the mid-nineties. This was the court case that pitted McDonald's against activists Helen Steel and Dave Morris over their leaflet, "What's Wrong With McDonald's?" (McSpotlight, 2004).

David Green, Senior Vice-President of Marketing (USA), stated "McDonalds' food is nutritious" and "healthy." When asked what the company meant by "nutritious" he said: "provides nutrients and can be a part of a healthy balanced diet." He admitted this could also apply to a packet of sweets. When asked if Coca Cola is "nutritious" he replied that it is "providing water, and I think that is part of a balanced diet." He agreed that by his definition Coke is nutritious. (McSpotlight, 2004)
Just as the process of McDonaldization forces this restaurant executive to publicly defend preposterous positions, so too might it one day lead education policy makers to do the same.

Consider the language of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) with reference to teachers:

As a cornerstone of education reform, the historic *No Child Left Behind Act* that President Bush signed into law in January 2002 requires that by the end of the 2005-2006 school year there be a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. (The White House, 2003a)

Who would dare to take issue with such a provision? But you will recall that in an education system that has been McDonaldized the teacher is viewed somewhat differently than in the traditional classroom. Remember Ritzer's (2000) words on the Kinder-Care chain of child care centers.

What those employees do in the classroom is largely determined by an instruction book with a ready-made curriculum. Staff members open the manual to find activities spelled out in detail for each day. Clearly a skilled, experienced, creative teacher is not the kind of person that such "McChild" care centers seek to hire. (p.108)

This is hardly a description of what I would call a highly qualified teacher, but such might one day be the case. Indeed, such is the case already in those elementary schools across the country which have adopted instructional programs such as *Success For All*, a program which features, among other things, scripted lessons (Wordsworth, 2000).

All six of the titles discussed above have come to me within the course of just the last two years. During that time, new school accountability programs at the federal, state, and local levels have been unveiled. These accountability programs are driving businesses to develop, and public school administrators to adopt, programs like *Compass Learning* (Machen, 2004) and titles such as *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, 2001). It is a trend that disturbs me.

While I do not doubt the good intentions or the integrity of the educators and administrators involved in these accountability programs, I do take issue with the idea that these programs constitute meaningful reforms in education. Keeping in mind Ritzer's (2000) analysis,
these accountability programs strike me as reforms only insofar as they are accelerating public education's move from a bureaucratic model to a corporate franchise model; that is, they are (as noted earlier) attempts to correct some of the bureaucracy's shortcomings while at the same time (and this is particularly troubling to me) extending its fundamental principles to processes which have previously resisted bureaucratization. Among these processes are personal interactions between students and teachers. As such, accountability programs strike me as programs which run the risk of glossing over the difficult questions and issues which are themselves the stuff of a life of learning. As Pinar (1996) makes clear, meaningful reform in public education would require a prolonged, profound, and complex debate on issues such as history, politics, race, gender, aesthetics, and theology, to name but a few. I fear that it is a debate for which many educators and policy makers have neither the time nor the appetite.

The Marginalization/Othering of the Teacher

Taken together, I believe that what these publications (and the school accountability programs that spawn them) really represent are attempts to formally realign the role of the teacher within the education hierarchy. The term align is chosen with care here, for it is a term much in evidence in official communications regarding contemporary school accountability programs. One thing accountability programs do is encourage teachers to “teach to the test” (Bushweller, 1997, para. 1), but this practice has been largely discredited (e.g., Posner, 2004). The solution has been to reintroduce the concept in new language—the language of curriculum alignment. Teachers no longer teach to the test; instead, they teach a curriculum which has been aligned with mandated assessments. Thus is an old practice reintroduced in new language. The space between those who develop education policies and those who implement them is widening, and I see current school accountability programs as efforts to formalize this separation. Let us
return to Freire’s (2003/1970) critique of the banking concept of education in order to understand how this is happening.

In the banking concept of education teachers, in order to justify their existence, must stand before their students as their opposite, attributing absolute ignorance to them. You will notice that in this analysis Freire makes no distinction between the teacher and the education hierarchy; they are one. I would argue that contemporary education policymakers and administrators, operating within ever more stringent accountability programs (and obliged to explain away the failure of certain segments of the population to perform as expected) are realigning the teacher in this scheme. Occupying the role formerly held by the teacher, and identifying the teacher as something very much like the student in Freire’s analysis, contemporary education policy makers and administrators—in order to justify their existence—now stand before teachers as their opposites, attributing absolute ignorance to them. Teachers are increasingly identified, not as figures on whom policy makers and administrators can depend, but rather as parts of a problem to be solved. Thus do we see the marginalization of the teacher, a figure now equipped with what amount to scripts—ever more specific instructions regarding what to teach and how to teach it. In this way the role of the teacher within the education hierarchy is realigned. It is well worth noting, as the title of this section suggests, that Friere’s language and analysis anticipate both critiques of binarism and Spivak’s (1985) othering, and that what I am describing here is the othering of the figure of the teacher.

Springtime for Accountability

I had originally intended to write a tale of causes and effects. In it I was to have traced the path taken by President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act as it wended its way from the federal to the state and finally to the local level where, last November, the East Baton Rouge Parish School
System announced the creation of "a district within a district" (Lussier, 2003) for low-performing schools. This sub-district, to be in place by the coming school year, will feature (among other things) more scripted lessons and increased testing.

The creation of this district was, so I thought, a response to the recently passed State Management of Failed Schools Act. This act, which provides the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education with the authority to manage academically unacceptable schools (Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, 2004), had just been passed when the above announcement was made. Furthermore, I had thought that this State Management of Failed Schools Act was itself a response to the No Child Left Behind Act, a law renowned for its emphasis on accountability. I had intended to remark with wonder at the alacrity with which this federal legislation had made its way into my classroom. I was wrong.

While it seems clear that the East Baton Rouge Parish School System had the State Management of Failed Schools Act in mind when it created the sub-district late last year, that announcement was not framed with reference to the new Louisiana law. Furthermore, I learned that Louisiana's State Management of Failed Schools Act is but the most recent addition to the existing Louisiana Accountability Program, a program which predates the No Child Left Behind Act by several years. A recent fact sheet (Wang, 2003) prepared for Louisiana State legislators boasts:

Louisiana’s Accountability Program meets or exceeds the fundamental goals of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB.) Because Louisiana’s Program was implemented prior to NCLB, Louisiana’s Program differs from the federal law in some of its approach but not in the intents and purposes of the law. In fact, Louisiana’s Program is tougher than NCLB in several ways. (p. 1)

What we are seeing then, is not a series of causes and effects from federal, to state, to local levels, but rather the more or less simultaneous unfolding of various accountability
programs at each of these levels. Imagine the same variety of flower blossoming in three
different fields at roughly the same time.

Conclusion

I offer this chapter as a good indication that the personal and open-ended approach to
research that I proposed in Chapter Two can indeed bear fruit. Beginning with a traditional piece
of travel writing, I manage, in the course of the chapter, to critique contemporary accountability
programs in public education and to locate the teacher as a figure that has been marginalized, or
othered, in the public education heirarchy. This I do by using comparing and contrasting (much
in evidence in both Western travel writing and in my own classroom) as a segue into a critique,
following Ritzer (2000), of the so-called McDonaldization of education; and by examining,
following Freire (2003/1973) and Spivak (1985), the teacher as a figure identified as a problem,
or obstacle, in current education reforms. Again, the concept of othering (Spivak, 1985)
continues to emerge as an essential tool for understanding (in this instance) the teacher as a
marginalized, or othered, figure in the contemporary public education hierarchy. This last insight
is an essential step towards the professional self-formation of this thesis’s title.
CHAPTER 4
LIVING ON SEPTEMBER THE ELEVENTH STREET, OR BEING UN-SELF-CRITICAL

The specter of September the Eleventh and the work of George Orwell serve as the themes uniting the two parts of this chapter. In the summer of 2003 I returned to Mexico in an attempt to jump-start my thesis, but I returned to see friends also. Much of my time with these friends was spent at a house on a street named Privada Once de Septiembre, or September the Eleventh Street. I was living on this street at the time of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D. C. in 2001, and was also reading George Orwell’s (1949) novel 1984 for the first time.

In the first part of the chapter I provide accounts of some of my experiences with my three closest friends, Miguel, Arturo, and Alejandro. These three men (two of whom I have already mentioned elsewhere in this thesis) had befriended me during my first trip to Chiapas, and I was reunited with them when I returned. I also recount the events of my first day back, from my arrival at the airport to the close of the first evening. In the course of recounting these events, I am led to locate myself an American; that is, to consider the implications of my use of the term American as synonymous with “of U. S. origin.”

In the second part of the chapter, I expand on the themes of living on September the Eleventh Street and reading George Orwell by considering post-9/11 public political discourse in light of some of the issues raised in 1984. This leads me to a broader critique, following McLaren (1991, 1993, 2003, 2004), of contemporary public political discourse as a discourse marked by un-self-critical attitudes. These attitudes I in turn identify as examples of othering as Spivak (1985) uses that term.
Part One

Miguel

One of my fondest memories of Miguel (among many fond memories) is of a dinner we shared with our friend Arturo at a restaurant we frequented for a time. It was a chain restaurant as it turns out, a plus for Miguel for he could use his credit card there. (I never knew Arturo to use credit.) Well into the meal Miguel commented, apropos of what I cannot remember, that I was, in his opinion, a decent person especially when compared to some other Americans he had known; "a good man" I think is how he put it. All of this he told me in English. There followed what I hoped was a gracious acknowledgment of the compliment and then a brief silence after which Miguel, referring to Arturo (who spoke no English), said, "There's no need for him to know what I just said to you."

Writing in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* on the subject of "Mexican Masks," Octavio Paz (1961) says:

> The speech of our people reflects the extent to which we protect ourselves from the outside world; the ideal of manliness is never to "crack," never to back down. Those who "open themselves up" are cowards. Unlike other people, we believe that opening oneself up is a weakness or a betrayal. (pp. 29-30)

I think there was something of this observation at work in Miguel's unwillingness to have Arturo know what he had said to me; nor was this at all unusual. In my experience this prohibition against "cracking" seemed to extend even to comments about one's own physical condition; to being hung over for example, or tired. It seemed to me that my Mexican friends would rather fall asleep in public than admit to being fatigued.

I treasure Miguel's comments from that night not only because they were complimentary but also because they offer a glimpse of that Americanized part of him that resides within his Mexican self. He has visited the United States on many occasions and lived here for a time. They
also hint at my sense of him as a person in, but not of, Tuxtla Gutierrez; a person not quite at home, not quite himself.

Miguel's familiarity with the United States, his proficiency in English, his age (roughly my own), his profession (again, my own), and his immense generosity all paved the way to our becoming great friends. We met at the university where we both taught English, and he took an immediate interest in me as an American.

By using the term American as a synonym for “of U. S. origin,” I here inadvertently reveal an insensitivity to the legacy of imperialism in my everyday language. As the Harvard Graduate School of Education (1998) has it: “excluding other people from being American and reserving the term for those of U. S. origin reminds us that the imperialist hold is strong and alive, and that it permeates our language” (para. 9).

Our first conversation, as I recall it, concerned the tenuous nature of some Mexican plumbing. I was at that time without a bathroom while a clogged drain in my apartment was repaired. This repair involved nothing less than the tearing up of all of the approximately fifty feet of concrete walk in front of my building, which job had been entrusted to an older but very fit gentleman. Grey haired, bearded, and shirtless, he worked at a steady pace but so slowly that I despaired of ever getting my bathroom back.

After learning where I lived, Miguel visited me once or twice. He then informed me that the apartments, aside from having lousy plumbing, were in his opinion unsafe. Many of them, he said, were inhabited by prostitutes and by policemen from Mexico City. (He'd recognized the policemen's license plates.) These men he said, more so than the prostitutes, made for bad neighbors. Miguel maintained that at the age of seventeen, while in preparatory school in Mexico City, he was robbed at gunpoint by members of this same police force.
I had not noticed anything amiss prior to these comments, but in the week that followed I began to believe what Miguel had told me. A drunken (by the sound of it) group of youngsters stopped by one night to taunt another tenant, and one of them threw a rock through the window of his front door. I discovered the complex's superintendent exceedingly drunk when I went to conduct some business with him a day or two afterwards. I also began hearing the noises of late night parties coming from the same crowded apartment several nights running. And so I moved, piling my few belongings into a taxi whose driver (echoing Miguel) told me that I had made a wise decision, the apartments being well known for—and here he lightly hit the thumb end of his right fist with the palm of his left hand in a gesture which signified *prostitute.* (I noticed that hand signs have a potency in Mexico that they do not have in the United States. For example, I observed that wagging one's index finger at another person to indicate the negative has a force unknown here.)

I moved in with Miguel, whose concern for the safety of this naive American overrode his dislike of roommates and led him to graciously offer me one of the spare bedrooms in the large house that he rented near the university. It was an offer that I was happy to accept. In the months that followed he introduced me to people and places I would never have met or encountered without him.

Miguel was born in Mexico City in 1960 and raised in his father's hometown of Pijijiapan, a small prosperous town on Chiapas's Pacific coast. Miguel's father, the son of a Chinese immigrant and his Mexican wife, lived for a time in Mexico City as a young man. This he did against the wishes of Miguel's grandfather, a storeowner who intended to have his son take over the family business. Miguel's father worked as a cab driver while in Mexico City, and it was there that he met his wife, Miguel's mother. As a child, she had been taken to Mexico City
by a family friend in order that she might avoid the effects of a violent feud in which her family
was involved in their home state of Michoacan.

Mexicans carry two last names: their father's and their mother's, in that order. Manuel
explained to me that neither one of his is his "real" last name. His maternal grandfather's was
bestowed upon him when he first landed in North America. His mother's was changed by her
 guardian when they arrived in Mexico City.

In 1963 Miguel's family relocated to Pijijiapan where his father, acceding to his father's
wishes, took over the family business. At that time Pijijiapan had only recently been wired for
electricity, and that electricity was on for only a few hours a day. Miguel remembers the large,
German-made, diesel powered refrigerator that was a feature of the family store. He also
remembers the few bare electric bulbs visible on the town's main street in the first hours after
dark.

Miguel's mother, raised in Mexico City, did not adjust well to Pijijiapan; or as Miguel
would have it, she never recovered from having to move there. At the age of 32, three years after
arriving in Pijijiapan, she died of what Miguel describes as a brain hemorrhage brought on by
stress; specifically, the stress of moving to a "jungle town" full of "bugs and guns." (Miguel
showed me a photograph of his mother; she appears both beautiful and delicate.)

"She was afraid," Miguel told me. He holds his father partially responsible for his
mother's untimely death, and a rift has developed between them which has yet to be bridged. The
family business, a large store on the town's main square, was recently sold. Miguel would have
no part of it, blaming it as much as his father for his mother's demise.

This sad event aside, Miguel seems to have been happy in Pijijiapan where he grew up
hunting, fishing, swimming, and enjoying the company of a large, extended family as well as a
community of Mexicans of Asian descent. At the age of twelve he began spending only summers at home, for it was at this age that he returned to Mexico City to attend secondary school. He remained there through three years of secondary school, four years (off and on) of preparatory school, and three years (off and on) of university.

I was interested to learn that while in Mexico City Miguel lived without direct adult supervision even in his early teens. He stayed in a house belonging to his father's family where an ever-changing population of aunts, uncles, cousins, and maids watched him, but no one too closely. He was somewhat rebellious and for a time stopped attending preparatory school classes altogether. Miguel maintains that the private school he was supposed to be attending at the time, fearing the loss of a client, did not report his absences to his family.

At the age of twenty-two, with four unsatisfying semesters of university behind him, Miguel was ready for a change. In 1982, his father arranged for him to enter a computer science program at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, California, just south of San Francisco. Miguel remained in the United States for four years. He attended classes and worked at the college for two-and-a-half of those, although he did not earn his associate's degree. It was both an exciting and a stressful time: exciting in that he mastered English and saw a lot of San Francisco, stressful in that his finances and visa were problematic. Regarding money, Miguel's annual expenses were covered by his father until, as he puts it, "the '82 peso devaluation caught up with him, and he couldn't afford it anymore." (In 1982, the Mexican Peso lost 43% of its value in a financial crisis.) At that point (1984) Miguel, no longer able to pay tuition, was forced to drop out of college, a move which in turn cost him his student visa. There followed a period of eighteen months during which he worked illegally, first in a computer retail store and later in a restaurant.
In 1986 Miguel returned to Mexico and Pijijiapan where, over the course of the next ten years, he opened and closed a number of small businesses including a small restaurant and an automobile maintenance shop. He married in 1992, and in 1996 relocated with his wife and newborn son to Tuxtla Gutierrez. He and his wife separated soon thereafter. She returned to the coast with their son, and Miguel remained in Tuxtla Gutierrez in the same house into which I moved some four years later.

While Tuxtla Gutierrez goes a long way towards meeting many of Miguel's requirements for a place to live, it does so without completely satisfying any of them. Devoid of the charms of a small town like Pijijiapan; nowhere near as cosmopolitan as either Mexico City or San Francisco; close to his son, but not quite close enough; home to a university which employs him, but devoid of other meaningful opportunities; Tuxtla Gutierrez alternately pleases and maddens Miguel.

Reflecting on the population of his adopted hometown, Miguel says that it is, for the most part, conceited and standoffish despite being neither wealthy nor powerful. Interestingly, he traces these attitudes to the city's genesis as a ranching town. Originally, he says, Tuxtla Gutierrez was a place where Indians, or the Indigenous, were killed often and easily. As the town grew it became important for new arrivals to appear as unlike Indians as possible—thus what he sees as the population's haughtiness and reserve.

Arturo

I met Arturo through Miguel, who introduced him to me as his lawyer. This was true enough as far as it went, although in reality he was something more in the line of a fishing buddy who served on occasion as legal counsel. It was through fishing that these two met, and it was through fishing that I came to appreciate some of the differences between them. Miguel, born
and raised on the Pacific coast, was a natural fisherman whereas Arturo, born and raised in the city, was more of a hobbyist. Like many a hobbyist he had a firm belief in the efficacy of expensive gear. He was a great peruser of American fishing catalogs and a connoisseur of bass lures, whose outlandish names (*laser eye, rattlin' chug bug, bitsy pond minnow*) he would pronounce emphatically in heavily accented English, checking with me after each one to see if he had said it correctly.

Arturo was, as I have mentioned, both a lawyer and a ranch owner, the kind of person whose acquaintance I would never have made on my own. Had he been born in a more affluent country, I think he would have been a political conservative. As it was, he claimed to support the left-leaning *Party of the Democratic Revolution*, or PRD, although politics seemed not to interest him overly much.

My friendship with him, much more so than my friendship with Miguel, was one of foreigner with foreigner. A cultural gap existed between us, and our friendship grew as we bridged that gap. Arturo is younger than I am by eight years, he has never traveled outside of Mexico, and he speaks no English. Direct conversation was at first impossible (Miguel served as an interpreter), but as I began to learn Spanish he, sensing my limitations, tailored his conversation to my abilities. In time I was conversing freely with him, traveling with him and, on one occasion, translating for him in conversation with some other English speakers.

He had a life-long resident's knowledge of the shops, restaurants, and hotels of Chiapas. Many were the times we took quick detours to buy lunch, cheese, sweets, or fruit at out of the way shops where he was known or recognized. He retained a taste for the literature he had read in school. He expressed an abiding fondness for Cervantes, gave me presents of titles by Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Marquez, and introduced me to the work of the Uruguayan poet and
author Mario Benedetti. He doted on his young daughter, showering her with terms of affection via his cell phone as he drove with me across the city and throughout the state. (I was forever amazed at how little time he spent at home with his family.)

I saw Arturo angry only once, and that over an issue of law and order. As we returned one afternoon from a day trip in the truck which he owned—a clear indication of his elevated economic status—we found ourselves stuck in traffic for well over an hour as students from a nearby normal school blocked a major thoroughfare to protest proposed changes in state laws pertaining to teacher training. (These protests, which were very tense on the day in question, turned violent the following afternoon.) As we inched forward in traffic, Arturo looked to a police helicopter circling above and, upset at the lack of police intervention, said aloud to himself in exasperation, "It's a crime." I find it ironic that this remark was directed at the police. As this remark and Miguel's warning to me about the police from Mexico City illustrate, distrust of the authorities runs high in Mexico.

I made him blush twice, the first time when I declined an invitation to dine at his expense with a flat, "No thanks." I finally surmised that Mexicans consider it impolite to offer an unequivocal no in answer to any polite request. This was a source of a lot of confusion for me early on as I attempted to recruit individuals for my original project. On the second occasion he blushed when I unselfconsciously acknowledged that I helped my wife with the housework, even to the point of manning the vacuum cleaner. He seemed particularly embarrassed by this final detail. Like Miguel, Arturo was generous to a fault, and with him I enjoyed experiences I would never have had otherwise.
Of the three individuals profiled here, I knew Alejandro the least well, and have the least to say about him. He was much more of a mystery to me than were either Miguel or Arturo. His comings and goings were a mystery for one thing. He lived directly across the street from Miguel, but did not appear until a week or two after I had moved in. He had been, so he said, in Mexico City taking care of business. What that business was he did not say, nor could Miguel or Arturo tell me.

You did not look Alejandro up; he looked you up. Throughout my stay he would disappear periodically, leaving town sometimes, at other times holing up in his house and not answering the door. Days later he would reappear unannounced, usually late in the evening, eager to talk, smoke, and drink instant coffee.

He was a divorced father of three young adult girls, all of whom lived in Mexico City with their mother. He owned rental property in that city, although he was himself a renter in Tuxtla Gutierrez. He was a former small business owner and had worked at one time for the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI (the political party which ruled Mexico for much of the twentieth century), in Chiapas. He was thin and tall, unusually tall for a Mexican (over six feet). He was always nicely groomed, and was possessed of a constant, almost imperceptible tremor.

What struck me most about him (aside from his height and his enigmatic comings and goings) were his chain smoking (I never saw him without a cigarette), his prolixity, and his low opinion of the nacos, or hicks, of Tuxtla Gutierrez. His appetite for conversation was almost as great as his appetite for cigarettes. Indeed, he was so verbose (on almost any topic) as to often drive both Miguel and Arturo from the room. Left alone I would sit and listen to whatever he had to say. On such occasions Miguel would check in periodically to ask what Alejandro was talking
about, and I would hazard a guess based on my limited Spanish. As often as not Miguel would then remark, "Not even close."

But in time I improved, and I came to understand that much of what Alejandro talked about was the sorriness of Tuxtla Gutierrez and its population. I once spent an afternoon with him and Miguel at the local bullfights, an afternoon which he spent remarking on the ugliness of the arena, the seediness of the crowd, the tunelessness of the band, the feebleness of the bulls, and the clumsiness of the bull fighters—especially when compared to what one could see in Mexico City. Such was the usual tenor of his conversation. Alejandro, like Miguel and Arturo, was nothing but kind to me.

**The Return of the Gringo**

As I stood atop the stairs to the airplane ready to ascend to the tarmac in Tuxtla Gutierrez, I thought I saw Miguel on the observation deck. I am near sighted, however, and I was not sure, so I withheld judgment. Looking up at the observation deck from the tarmac a moment later, I thought, "Yes, that could be Miguel." He was standing with a boy who looked young enough to be his son and a woman who could have been his wife.

I was not expecting to see him at the airport. He had e-mailed me shortly before I left the United States to say that he would meet me at his house and that he had some news for me regarding his family. Recalling this last bit of news and imagining that he had reconciled with his wife, I put any misgivings aside and waved to the trio looking down on the runway. No one waved back.

Miguel as it turns out, was at that moment racing toward the airport with Alejandro, who had reappeared only a week before after having been away almost as long as I had. Far from having reconciled with his wife, Miguel told me that she had filed a complaint against him
concerning financial matters and that consequently, he had recently been held in police custody. He and Alejandro missed me at the airport. My flight was a few minutes early, and I had already taken a taxi by the time they arrived.

I negotiated a taxi to Miguel's rather easily, relieved to learn that what Spanish I knew had not deserted me. After the taxi driver had asked me where I wanted to go, and before I answered, there was a funny moment when our eyes met and we both waited, neither one of us knowing if I was capable of responding appropriately. Initially, speaking Spanish was for me something of a performance. The greatest obstacle to my speaking it intelligibly was a timidity born of a fear of giving a poor performance. This timidity tended to make my listeners nervous and, as often as not, communication failed. Once I began speaking with confidence I was usually able to work around my limitations. Having once overcome this timidity, I was glad to see that it had not returned.

The taxi deposited me at Miguel's. I tipped the driver liberally, and, no one responding to my knocks on the door, I sat on the curb, smoked, and did what I so often found myself doing in Mexico. I waited.

*Privada Once de Septiembre*

As I think back on it now, the street where Miguel lived had an almost magical quality. A partially paved, pitted, rocky cul-de-sac ending at a gutted roofless cement warehouse, it ran for but a block. It was located midway up a hill, nestled behind a bakery warehouse on one side and bordered by woods on the other. In addition to the echoes of the radio in the warehouse, the bottle rockets exploding in the distance, the singing lizards and the epiphanic butterfly mentioned earlier, there were also: the three foot long iguana that regularly sunned himself on a garden
wall; the enormous flamboyant-trees whose many large seed pods littered the sidewalks; and the name of the street itself, September the Eleventh Street.

On September the eleventh of 2001, as terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City, I was living on September the Eleventh Street in Tuxtla Gutierrez. In Latin America it is not uncommon to name streets, parks and even markets for important dates. The street where I lived with Miguel, Privada Once de Septiembre to be exact, was named for the day in 1973 when General Augusto Pinochet, with covert support from the United States, mounted a military coup in Chile and ousted president Salvador Allende.

Long before the events of our 9/11, imagine what that date meant to the Mexican citizen who named Privada Once de Septiembre. For him it would have been the date when the United States, a country which had already appropriated a large part of Mexico, assisted in the overthrow of a democratically-elected leader in another Latin American country. How long would one have to search before finding an American high school student who knew as much?

My reaction to the attacks of 9/11 surprised me almost as much as the attacks themselves. The feelings I experienced as I watched the events of that day unfold were very much like the feelings I experienced when my father passed away. My father died at home in Baltimore while I was living in Louisiana, and that fact left me feeling both sad and angry.

A friend of mine, a doctor, tells me that it is not at all uncommon for people who live far from their loved ones to be angry when those loved ones die. There is nothing I could have done for my father had I been at home when he suffered the stroke that killed him, but when news of his stroke came I was angry; angry with myself for being so far away, and angry at the sense of helplessness that overtook me. So it was, much to my surprise, with the events of 9/11. I would never have guessed it; I had no idea I was so attached to my country.
A Reunion

Miguel and Alejandro arrived shortly after I did. We greeted one another warmly, talked for a while on the street, and then went into Miguel's house. I immediately noticed that Miguel seemed to be preparing to move. The furniture was in disarray, and all of his books (many of them in English, and many of which I had read) were piled high on a table in the center of the room. There was the copy of War and Peace that I had finished reading in Mexico and left behind. There were all of the Dashiell Hammett and Elmore Leonard novels that I had read. There was the copy of Animal Farm that I had given him, and there was his tattered copy of 1984, a book that I read for the first time while in Mexico.

It turned out that Miguel and Alejandro were being evicted. The property owner had plans to renovate and sell most of the houses on the street, including theirs. With help from Arturo they had forestalled the inevitable for almost a year, but time was running out. Eviction notices were due to be served at any time, at which point they would have but thirty days to move out. Their only hope now lay in thwarting all attempts to serve those notices.

Because of this and because of his ongoing marital difficulties, Miguel instructed me that on no account was I to answer the door during my brief visit. Furthermore, if someone was to accost me on the street in front of the house, I was to speak nothing but English. Like Miguel, Alejandro had an additional reason for not answering his door; a witch was stalking him. She was, so he said, a small, dark, very ugly woman to whom he had given some cast off clothing some days before. She worked at a nearby hamburger stand and had taken to coming to his house daily where she would stand for as long as 45 minutes at a time waiting for him to answer the door. He claimed that she prepared meals for him into which she mixed things with which to
charm him. She had also drawn a demonic symbol in his driveway. He seemed genuinely alarmed.

As for Arturo, Miguel told me that he didn't come around anymore. It seems that these two were on bad terms, the result of a misunderstanding over payments for the legal work that Arturo had done for Miguel in the matter of his landlord. I insisted that we call him right away, which we did. He was happy to hear from me and, though nothing was said about it directly, seemed willing to put aside his differences with Miguel for as long as I was in town. I also insisted on sending out for pizza, a meal which the four of us had often enjoyed together.

Arturo and the pizza arrived in due course, and we ate, smoked, and chatted into the night. Later still, reclining on the sofa in a pizza-induced torpor, wreathed in a cloud of cigarette smoke, I looked on with both pleasure and melancholy as my friends, strangers to one another since I had left, were reunited once more.

**Part Two**

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, at the time of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. in 2001, I was living on September the Eleventh Street in Chiapas, Mexico, where I was reading George Orwell’s (1949) novel *1984* for the first time. I here expand on that experience by considering post-9/11 public political discourse in light of some of the issues raised by Orwell in that novel. This in turn leads me to a broader critique of contemporary public political discourse and a consideration of its implications from me as an educator.

**Orwell and 9/11**

I do not deceive myself, nor do I intend to deceive the reader into believing, that we live in the world of *1984* as described by George Orwell (1949). At the same time, I have noticed, especially since returning to the United States in the aftermath of 9/11, certain unsettling parallels which I discuss below. Before doing that, let me address the notion that to point out
shortcomings in our political leaders and would-be political leaders is somehow unpatriotic. As Peter McLaren (2004)—to whose work I am drawn in part because of its overtly political content—points out with reference to the War on Terror generally, and the war in Iraq in particular:

We occupy a turning point in world history. Most historians would agree that it is arguably the most difficult moment that United States democracy has faced in recent decades. But democracy is not something static. Democracy is something fought for and its meaning and practice struggled over by each successive generation of Americans. Each generation is necessarily implicated both in preserving and re-fashioning democracy in its own unique way by the very fact of our inheritance and history as citizens of a democratic state. (p. 1)

To turn a blind eye, then, would be unpatriotic and an abrogation of my responsibilities as a citizen and an educator. Furthermore, what most concerns me in what follows—and it is one of the central themes to emerge in this thesis—is the prevalence of un-self-critical attitudes in the United States today, on both the left and the right, both inside and outside of politics. Finally, I think it appropriate that I consider some of these issues through the lens of Orwell's work given that two of his titles—1984 and Animal Farm—are perennial favorites on high school syllabi across the United States.

Residing on September the Eleventh Street and reading George Orwell's 1984 for the first time while the events of 9/11 unfolded at home—in retrospect this seems too perfect, too obvious a literary construct, a ham-handed attempt at foreshadowing with characters, events, and attitudes in that novel prefiguring characters, events, and attitudes in the post 9/11 United States to which I would return. It is a United States in which I at times hear distinct echoes of the three slogans of the Party which are emblazoned on the Ministry of Truth (Orwell, 1949):

War is peace.
Freedom is slavery.
Ignorance is strength. (p. 4)
With reference to the first of these slogans, consider the following from President Bush (2002) himself: "I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace" (para. 8). With reference to the second, consider the words of U. S. Attorney General John Ashcroft (CNN, 2001):

To those who scare peace loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies and pause to America's friends. They encourage people of will to remain silent in the face of evil. (para. 2)


On March 21, the day after US and British troops began their...invasion and occupation of Iraq, an "embedded" CNN correspondent interviewed a US soldier. "I wanna get in there and get my nose dirty," Private AJ said. "I wanna take revenge for 9/11."

To be fair, the correspondent did suggest...that so far there was no evidence linking the Iraqi government to the September 11 attacks. Private AJ stuck his tongue out..."Yeah, well, that stuff's way over my head" (para. 2 and 3).

Even if one were to deny these analogies, he or she would nevertheless be hard pressed to deny that the United States, like Oceania in 1984, has entered into a state of extended, if not permanent, war (White House, 2002). One of the implications of this state of affairs for our young has already surfaced in the United States much as it does in the novel. I am referring to questions about the propriety or impropriety of having children view images of wartime violence.

Near the beginning of 1984 (Orwell, 1949), Winston Smith, the novel's protagonist, writes in his journal about a night spent viewing war films in a movie theater. He recounts seeing footage of a lifeboat full of children being hit with a bomb launched from a helicopter. Images of a child's arm rising into the air follow and are met with applause. But a woman with a child objects, shouting "they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of kids they didnt it aint right not in front of kids" [sic] (p. 10). Compare this with recent news accounts of how teachers around
the nation have had to face disciplinary action for showing video footage in class of the beheading of an American hostage in Iraq (Sanchez, 2004).

Of concern to me also is Orwell's (1949) account, as related by the state's arch-enemy Goldstein in *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, his book within the book, of the state of research in a nation forever at war: "Progress only happens when its products can in some way be used for the diminution of human liberty. In all the useful arts the world is either standing still or going backwards" (p. 194). While by no means at that sad state of affairs, we nonetheless live in a society wherein "the language of efficiency...has brutally and insidiously colonized the disciplinary domain of education" serving to "strip schooling of any substantial concern with justice, equality, or democracy" (McLaren, 2001, p. 17).

As with the inhabitants of Oceania in *1984*, our hatred is intense. The speed with which a good part of the population of the United States responded favorably to recent calls to begin hating the French (many never having held an opinion about the French beforehand) would have been funny had it not been so alarming. In a striking scene from *1984* (Orwell, 1949), the speaker at a rally being held at the height of Hate Week is quietly informed in the midst of his speech that Oceania has just switched sides; its former enemy is now an ally and its former ally an enemy. Winston Smith marvels both at how the speaker begins to upbraid the new enemy mid-speech without missing a beat, and at how the audience's response undergoes no perceptible change. If only, instead of "liberty-fries" we had renamed french fries "victory-fries" the parallels would have been complete. (In *1984*, Winston Smith smokes *Victory Cigarettes* and drinks *Victory Gin.*

Indeed, one might argue that in the matter of hatred we have out-Orwelled Orwell. While Winston Smith and his fellow party members participate in a daily Two Minutes Hate and an
annual nationwide Hate Week, we here in the United States are enjoined twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to hate. Our hatred is stoked, kneaded, and nourished without surcease on television, on radio, and in the books that regularly top the nation's best sellers lists. It is a hatred born, I believe, both of fear and of an unwillingness to look at ourselves.

**Illusory Balms and the Happy-Face Icon**

This unwillingness to look at ourselves is a topic on which Peter McLaren (1991, 1993, 2003, 2004) has much to say. McLaren (2004) maintains that it is not easy to be self-critical. Consider his prognosis for those who would try to understand the war in Iraq critically (e.g., in light of the interconnectedness of history, religion, politics, and religion). 

One reason that it is so difficult is that the result might lead to a major shift in one's moral, political, or philosophical position. At the very least, reading the current war critically can be a shattering experience, and in many instances may result in personal suffering, anger and a complete unhinging of one's previous identity as an American citizen. (p. 2)

How much easier, then, to remain un-self-critical? How much easier to accept the facile answers and the one-dimensional world view which, as McLaren (1993) would have it, the political right, ludic postmodern theory, and postmodern culture conspire, however unwittingly, to give us?

I say "unwittingly" because in McLaren's view ludic (or playful) postmodern theory (I am reminded of Daignault here) in conjunction with a fractured postmodern culture, unwittingly opens the door wide for the political right to offer easy answers to difficult questions. Pinar (1996) puts it nicely:

For McLaren... "ludic postmodernism" surrenders any possibility of political transformation because it reflects "an epistemological relativism that calls for a tolerance of a range of meaning without advocating any one of them. McLaren argues that a "ludic postmodern theory" coupled with postmodern culture provides a space for the political right to advance. With the right's claims to truth, morality and a unified culture, as well as its appeal to nostalgia, it can offer an illusory balm to those struggling through the postmodern moment. (p. 512)
McLaren (1991) sees "the production of specific modes of electronically produced meaning" (p. 23) as another important factor in our nation's un-self-critical attitude:

It appears that Americans don't want to wander too far from the mindset of cheerful ideological subordination. The happy face icon emblazoned on T-shirts and buttons and other cultural artifacts that greet you with the exclamation "Have A Nice Day!" is, of course, sending you the concurrent message beneath the threshold of the obvious which are equally emblematic of the American national consciousness: Don't think too much, it might make you sad; don't waste your time analyzing or worrying about something that can't be changed. (p. 23)

This, however, is a mindset that in no way prepares us for events as horrific as those of 9/11. I recently came across an article on treating the shared psychological trauma brought on by the events of that terrible day, and in reading it I was struck by the reappearance of the happy face icon to which McLaren refers. This icon, as it appears in the passage below from that article, asks the only questions it is fit to ask, and its expression is forever changed:

On September the 11, 2001, we were all one child spinning, but not with a lightness of heart. We were spinning from terror. Reeling in despair. Eyes transfixed to the destructive horror. Mouths freezing in circles of o's. The collective experience numbing the rest of our senses. The events of that day left many of us asking questions. Why this? Why us? (Serani, 2004, p.1)

Even in the face of the events of that day and its aftermath, McLaren (2004) believes that most Americans are not up to the challenge of reading current events from a critical perspective. What have these Americans done instead? He maintains that they have retreated into positions marked by un-self-critical attitudes, anger, and hatred. It is hatred for the enemy and, what is of particular concern to me as an educator, it is hatred for one another.

Faith and Hatred

While comments regarding "an illusory balm to those struggling through the postmodern moment" (Pinar, 1996, p. 512) are accurate as far as they go, what is missing in them is a sense of the fear, the anger, and the confusion brought on by events of the last several years.
Frightened as never before by the events of 9/11, in addition to being buffeted by the waves of a long-emerging postmodern culture, many Americans recently stood in need of more than a balm; they stood in need of something approaching a faith—a political faith—a faith which those in power stood ready to give them, "placing the U.S. incontrovertibly on the inviolate side of virtue" (McLaren, 2004, p. 4). It is a faith rooted (echoing McLaren, 1991) in truth, morality, nostalgia, and a unified culture. It is an un-self-critical faith whose adherents find the causes of their problems outside of themselves, and it is a faith marked by suspicion and vitriol; witness New York Times number one best-selling author Michael Savage's (2004) book, *The Enemy Within: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on Our Schools, Faith, and Military*. Witness also McLaren's (2003) comments that in the current political atmosphere "it has become dangerous to think, to ask too many questions, or to look beyond the surface of whatever commentary is served up to us by politicians, the military, and the infantilizing screeds of talk-radio pundits" (p. 26).

But my purpose here is not to attack a particular political ideology; my purpose is to locate the almost Orwellian hatred which characterizes the current political climate in fearful, un-self-critical attitudes—attitudes on which neither the right nor the left has a monopoly.

**Jokes and Viruses**

Roman rhetorician, Quintilius (trans. Butler, 1920), noted long ago the dangers of using humor in a serious cause:

The chief difficulty which confronts the orator in this connection [the use of humor] lies in the fact that sayings designed to raise a laugh are generally untrue (and falsehood always involves a certain meanness), and are often deliberately distorted, and further, never complimentary: while the judgments formed by the audience on such jests will necessarily vary, since the effect of a jest depends not on the reason, but an emotion which it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe.(para. 2)
The left now finds itself in the unhappy position of having as one of its best known
spokespersons author and filmmaker Michael Moore. Moore is famous for using humor in the
service of liberal causes in works such as *Stupid White Men ... and Other Sorry Excuses for the
State of the Nation!* (Moore, 2002), an attack on the administration of George W. Bush, and
*Bowling for Columbine*, a documentary about guns and gun control (cf. Bishop, 2002). It has
been said of Moore, "Once you delve beneath the humor, it turns out his 'facts and hard-core
analysis' are frequently inaccurate, contradictory and confused" (Fritz, 2002, p. 1). In a 2002
television interview, Moore responded to comments about charges of inaccuracies in his book
*Stupid White Men* by saying "I don't respond to that sort of stuff, you know.... No, I don't. Why
should I? How can there be inaccuracy in comedy?" (CNN, 2002).

Mr. Moore's newest film, *Fahrenheit 911*, focuses on President Bush and the war in Iraq.
Shenon (2004), who calls it “a blistering documentary attack” (p. 1), predicts that it will elicit a
flood of criticism, criticism for which Mr. Moore has girded himself via the threat of law suits:

"We want the word out," says Mr. Moore, who says he should have responded more quickly to
allegations of inaccuracy in his Oscar-winning 2002 anti-gun documentary, *Bowling for
Columbine*. "Any attempts to libel me will be met by force," he said, not an ounce of humor in his
familiar voice. "The most important thing we have is truth on our side. If they persist in telling
lies, knowingly telling a lie with malice, then I'll take them to court." (p. 1)

Like his counterparts on the right, Mr. Moore places himself on the side of truth, locates
the causes of his problems outside of himself, and, in language marked by suspicion and vitriol,
threatens to sue anyone who gets in his way.

On other issues the left has lately been guilty of self censorship of the very kind George
Orwell encountered in his efforts to find a publisher for the novel *Animal Farm*, his famous
allegory of life in Russia under Stalin (a novel which I teach annually). At that time (1943) Great
Britain and the Soviet Union were allied against Hitler's Germany in World War II. In his
proposed preface to *Animal Farm*, Orwell (1995/1945) recounts meeting resistance from
publishers who feared that it would be inappropriate to criticize an ally given the monstrous nature of the common enemy they sought to defeat. Orwell observes:

At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is just not done to say it, just as in mid-Victorian times it was "not done" to mention trousers in the presence of a lady. Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or in the highbrow periodicals. (p. 163)

I would argue that the prevailing orthodoxy on the left has it that the current President must be defeated and that the person most likely to do that is the Democratic Party's nominee. Challenges to that nominee are a challenge to this orthodoxy and are subsequently denigrated. Consider reactions from the left to the candidacy of Ralph Nader. In an interview with the New York Times earlier this year (Purdum, 2004), Mr. Nader recalled receiving numerous letters, "all individually written, all stunningly similar" (p. 1) urging him not to run:

And the more I got of these, the more I realized that we are confronting a virus, a liberal virus. And the characteristic of a virus is when it takes hold of the individual, it's the same virus, individual letters all written in uncannily the same sequence. Here's another characteristic of the virus: Not one I can recall ever said, “What are your arguments for running?” (p.1)

Having established that un-self-critical attitudes predominate on both sides of the current political debate as that debate is carried on in the public sphere, let me close with a passage from 1984. Once again, it features Goldstein, archenemy of the state. Here Orwell (1949) describes the anxiety that Goldstein elicits in Winston Smith during the daily Two Minutes Hate. It is an anxiety with which our un-self-critical society is all too familiar.

Goldstein was delivering his usual venomous attack upon the doctrines of the party—an attack so exaggerated and perverse that a child should have been able to see through it, and yet just plausible enough to fill one with an alarmed feeling that other people, less level-headed than oneself, might be taken in by it. (p. 14)

The vilification of one’s political opponents, while by no means new, has recently taken on an intensity not seen in some time. This vilification—an expression of what I have chosen to call un-self-critical attitudes—is itself a form of othering. For in what are the most strident of our
public political commentators involved if not an attempt to “establish a relation dominance” (Ashcroft, 1998, p. 24) and reinforce a political ideology, not by looking into themselves, but by denigrating their opponents via binaries such as honest/dishonest, smart/stupid, fit/unfit hero/coward? Particularly maddening for McLaren (2003) is the fact that he sees this conflict as nothing more than a subterfuge intended to distract the electorate from the fact that the presidential candidates from both major parties are “cut from the same imperialist cloth” (p. 34).

Un-Self-Critical Stances

Un-self-critical attitudes emerge here as an important theme in this thesis, for they have surfaced in one form or another in all of the chapters thus far. In contemporary public political discourse, in school accountability touted as education reform, in our society's blind fealty to the means and ends of social scientific research, and in our collective ignorance of dark chapters in our nation's history—in all of these I see the effects of un-self-critical attitudes, of an unwillingness to look at ourselves. Furthermore, in each instance I have tied these un-self-critical attitudes to one or more concepts from post-colonial studies; notably, neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965), critiques of binarism (Ashcroft, 1998), the Other/other (Lacan, 1968), and othering (Spivak, 1985). It was to this that I referred in the Introduction when I noted that concepts from post-colonial studies would play an important role in the thesis. It was to this that I referred when I noted that certain of these concepts would prove indispensable to my understanding of many of the issues brought before me in the course of this work as well as to the professional self-formation of the thesis’s title.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter I situate myself as an American and relate experiences I shared with the three friends in Mexico with whom I was reunited when I returned. I also recount
the events of my first day back, closing with the events of that first evening. In the course of relating these events, I inform the reader that the house where I was staying (the same house where I had lived in 2001) was located September the Eleventh Street. This fact, in conjunction with my experiences reading George Orwell’s (1949) novel *1984* during my first trip to Mexico, lead me, in the second part of the chapter, to reflect, following McLaren (1991, 1993, 2003, 2004), on the United States as an imperialist power. I also reflect on the current political climate in the United States. I close by singling out un-self-critical attitudes (which I locate in each of the issues addressed thus far in the thesis) as expressions of Spivak’s (1985) othering (further proving the value of that concept as a tool for understanding).

Let me close by observing that the issues addressed in this chapter (particularly those addressed in the second half) bear directly on my work as an educator. Un-self-critical attitudes of the kind that I have identified in this chapter (and which I consequently identify as instances of Spivak’s [1985] othering) are central to the work I do in the second semester of each school year when I teach George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Focusing on such issues is central, as I see it, to the teacher’s role as an educator not of students, but of citizens. I would here remind the reader of the words of Peter McLaren (2004) cited earlier: “But democracy is not something static. Democracy is something fought for and its meaning and practice struggled over by each successive generation of Americans.” (p. 1) Where does this struggle take place if not in the classroom? Again, I see the insights gained in this chapter regarding un-self-critical attitudes and their relationship to both education and othering, as Spivak (1985) uses that term, as essential elements of the professional self-formation of this thesis’s title.
CHAPTER 5
RETURNING HOME, OR CONSIDERING CHANGES AND SELF-FORMATION

The figure of the parent serves to unify the two parts of this, the last chapter. In the first part of the chapter I briefly recount my stay in Mexico during the summer of 2003. An account of my return trip to the United States, focusing as it does on an afternoon spent in a bus terminal in Houston, proves to be the portion of the narrative of greater import. Here I reflect on the end of youth and on parenthood as a condition in which one lives for another. I also reflect again on luggage as metaphor and material culture.

Thoughts of home, work, family, and most importantly, parenthood, lead me to reflect, in the second part of the chapter, on adulthood vis a vis Erikson's (1986) psychosocial theory and on returning home vis a vis a poem by Czeslaw Milosz (1981). I follow, citing DeMitchell (2003), with a consideration of my role as a teacher operating in loco parentis (in place of the parent). Considerations of the teacher as a figure who no longer acts in this capacity in any but the most technical sense leads to a return to the subject of professional self-formation. In this section, I enumerate the insights gained from previous chapters that have been brought to bear on my characterization of the teacher as a figure that has been marginalized, or othered. I close with a brief section describing a possible avenue for further research.

Part One

The Tourist

On my return trip to Mexico last summer, I was in Tuxtla Gutierrez, not as a teacher and temporary resident but as a tourist, and my friends treated me accordingly. There were no workday afternoons or evenings to be spent lazily in Miguel's living room, at some park, or at a restaurant. There was no early morning coffee shared before setting off for the university, no taxi
rides to the movies, no bus rides to the grocery store. Instead, there was the constant planning,
visiting, and sightseeing associated with a vacation.

My friends, acutely aware that I was in town for but a few days, were eager to show me
as many sights as possible, whereas I would have preferred to stay in town, close to Miguel's,
visiting my old haunts, trying to reproduce, as far as possible, the rhythms of an average week
from my first stay. I had, after all, returned in an effort to remind myself of how and where I had
lived in the hope that remembering this might help me write my thesis—which it did. All it took,
as you may recall, was the sight of a butterfly to set me on my way. Once I had experienced that
insight, I was happy to do whatever my friends proposed, for I was no longer held hostage to a
project I knew not how to begin.

Consequently, I spent most of my short visit in traveling. With the exception of one
idyllic day spent waiting (most of it sitting on the bed of Arturo's truck) as Miguel and Arturo
got haircuts and attended to personal business prior to one of our trips, my time was spent either
on the road or in other towns. We attended a state fair in the colonial city of Comitan; we
shopped at the large outdoor markets run by the Indigenous in the colonial capital of San
Cristobal; and we visited the Sima de las Cotorras mentioned in Chapter One. I also managed a
reunion with three of my former students as well as a dinner of tamales at a favorite outdoor
restaurant in the small colonial town of Chiapa de Corzo. But with these my time was up, and
reluctantly I headed home.

As at my first departure, I was accompanied to the airport by Miguel, Arturo, and
Alejandro, and as with my first departure, the occasion was a sad one. But while on my first
departure I regretted leaving my newfound friends, on this, my second departure, I regretted
leaving, knowing that these three might not see one another again once I was gone. Alejandro
was due to relocate to Mexico City permanently; Miguel was looking for another house to rent; and the misunderstanding between Arturo and Miguel showed no signs of abating. And so, September the Eleventh Street and the company of these three men would be but a memory, not only for me but for them also.

The Houston Greyhound Bus Terminal

Like H. M. Tomlinsin (1964), the author of The Sea and the Jungle, who spends 282 pages getting himself from his home in a London suburb to his destination deep in the heart of the Amazon rain forest only to return home again in the course of twenty pages, so do I, having spent the better part of my narrative getting myself to Miguel's house in Tuxtla Gutierrez, hereby return to the United States in the course of a single (albeit lengthy) sentence.

Arriving at the Houston Greyhound Bus terminal, I learned that I had just missed a bus to Baton Rouge and that the next one would not leave for another five hours. Had this been Mexico I would not have minded. I would have left my luggage with the gentleman whose job it is to watch luggage (a service which costs a pittance), and I would have roamed the streets in search of pirated music, ice cream, cigarettes, and shade. As it was, I was free to do none of these. The Houston bus terminal has no gentleman whose job it is to watch your luggage for a pittance; it has expensive, automated lockers, all of which were either occupied or broken. Furthermore, the Houston bus terminal is located in an area of downtown that is dusty from ongoing construction, noisy with traffic, unshaded, and inhospitable to pedestrians. Had I had money and some knowledge of Houston I might have caught a taxi to some place more pleasant, but as it was I had neither. I passed the time by reading, smoking, taking short walks, and watching those around me.

I noted with interest the luggage people were carrying. Buses from Mexico are permitted to travel well into the United States and back again, and many of the passengers I saw were
departing for, or arriving from, Mexico. Many of these carried suitcases or duffle bags. Others had their belongings tied up smartly in cardboard boxes. Fewer still used plastic trash bags. But what really caught my eye was the occasional large, colorful, plastic shopping bag of the very type that I had owned and of which I wrote in Chapter One.

Again, these more unconventional pieces of luggage seemed to me a source of some embarrassment. Perhaps I am deceiving myself, but I thought I detected some discomfiture in those Mexican Americans who were either greeting or sending on their way Mexican relatives thus equipped.

I was also struck by the number of people haunting both the bus terminal and its environs who looked to be in need of help. Bus stations in the United States act as magnets for the needy in a way that they do not in Mexico. It is, I think, a testament to the low regard in which travel by bus is held in our prosperous, car-obsessed nation.

Fatigued as I was, left to wait for hours in unpleasant, unfamiliar surroundings, I became acutely aware of the fragility, if not of life, at least of good health. Looking on at the sad figures around me, I realized with a jolt that I had better take care of myself, if not for my own sake, at least for my daughter's. During my first trip to Mexico I had taken up cigarettes again after several years without them. I had quit on returning home, but only intermittently, and I had smoked with a vengeance during the short trip from which I was returning. These thoughts and thoughts of the family and the job to which I was returning (this had been my first trip since the birth of my daughter) also brought home to me the realization that the youth to which I had so jealously clung, the youth which I had tried to extend indefinitely, had finally come to an end.
Part Two

Although it seemed impossible at the time, that afternoon in Houston did end; my bus did arrive, and I did return home. I returned home to a loving wife and to a one and a half year old daughter who was shy around me for a few days. I returned home to a new school year, to new students and new challenges, and I returned home to the writing of the thesis which I here bring to a close, but not before reflecting on what are, for me, the important themes to have emerged.

Psychosocial Theory

What do I mean when I say, "The youth to which I had so jealously clung, the youth which I had tried to extend indefinitely, had finally come to an end"? Let me answer that question in two ways: first with reference to psychosocial theory, and second with reference to literature, but before doing either of those let me offer some background information.

In 1995, when I was in my early thirties, my wife and I (we were not married at the time) left Maryland, where I had lived all of my life, and relocated, first to Texas and then to Louisiana. Our departure from Maryland was an expression of a youthful wanderlust; it was not the carefully considered relocation for purposes of either education or career advancement that one usually associates with people of that age.

One and a half years later I enrolled in the alternative teacher certification program at the University of New Orleans. I completed that program in two years, the second of which I spent as a teacher/intern at a parochial middle school in the French Quarter. The following year, my wife enrolled as a graduate student at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, which is about 65 miles west of New Orleans. It was her graduate studies that brought us to Baton Rouge, where I had little difficulty securing my present position as a high school English teacher in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.
In 1998 my wife and I were married, and in 2002 our daughter was born. I had by that time completed four years of teaching and had come to enjoy the profession, its mysteries, and its rewards. I had seen my students graduate, had gotten to know the families of some of them, and I had become friendly with my co-workers and comfortable with my surroundings.

I felt the pleasant tug of these (family, students, and job) as I passed the unhappy afternoon in Houston described above. It is to this tugging that I refer when I say that I realized that my youth was at an end.

Erik Erikson (1985), in his life cycle theory of identity development, while primarily focused on childhood and adolescence, is nevertheless concerned with developments in later life also. Indeed it is this concern with development across the life cycle, in addition to his attention to the importance of social and historical factors in identity development, which constitute his primary contributions to the field of psychology (e.g., Gross, 1987).

Each of the eight stages of the life cycle as outlined by Erikson (1985) (infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, old age) is marked by a crisis with which the individual must come to terms. Each crisis is itself marked by an antithesis. For example, the first stage, infancy, is marked by a crisis of basic trust versus basic mistrust. From each crisis, or conflict, emerges a particular virtue. In infancy this virtue is hope. How successfully one resolves each crisis largely determines how well he or she will fare in subsequent stages. As Gross (1987) observes, "The battles of the past thus remain the supports or weaknesses of the battles of today. It is as if we carried each stage with us as we go along in life, for good or ill" (p. 18).

Three points are worth making here. The first is that the resolution of the crisis particular to each stage is not an either/or proposition but rather a continuum "along which individual
identity can vary considerably" (Atchley, 2004, p. 121). The second point has to do with the way Erikson uses the term crisis. As Gross (1987) notes, "the term 'crisis' is used not primarily to denote impending disaster, but rather in a positive sense, a necessary turning point, a crucial moment" (p. 17). The third point has to do with the age range of each of Erikson's eight stages. On this subject Erikson (1985) himself says:

As to the age range appropriate to all such stages, it stands to reason that they are circumscribed by the earliest moment at which, considering all the necessary conditions, a developmental quality can come to relative dominance and to a meaningful crisis, and the latest moment at which, for the sake of overall development, it must yield that critical dominance to the next quality. In this succession, rather wide temporal ranges are possible; but the sequence of stages remains predetermined. (pp. 66-67)

The use of italics in the passage above is Erikson's, and it intrigues me, for I believe that the must emphasized therein corresponds to the tugging to which I referred earlier. If, as Erikson (1985) suggests, the psychosocial crisis of young adulthood is marked by the antithesis of intimacy versus isolation, and if we understand, following Gross (1987), "that there is a societal dimension to every stage" (p. 51), then this correspondence should come as no surprise.

Consider the following: at the time in question I was in my early forties; I had been married for several years; I had recently become a parent, and I had established myself in a career in education. Even given the widest temporal range possible, I had, in Erikson's view, reached the moment when the psychosocial crisis of young adulthood had to yield to the next quality. For the purposes of this paper, what most interest me here are the societal implications of the resolution of this crisis; namely, intimacy versus isolation. Allow me to explain.

I am reminded of my characterization of Miguel in Chapter Four as someone in, but not of, Tuxtla Gutierrez. In the same way I, in prolonging young adulthood, remained in, but not of, society at large. My thoughts and critiques of social issues (informal and unorganized, to be sure) had something of the quality of catcalls from the cheap seats, or debris thrown from the balcony;
they were judgments passed on scenes in which I played no part and in whose outcome I took no abiding interest. Writing this thesis, reflecting on my role as a parent and an educator, encountering what I have characterized as un-self-critical attitudes in approaches to history, the social sciences, education reform, and public political discourse, have changed that for me. In a way that was not possible until recently, I have invested something of myself in what I have written here, not only in the narrative portions of this thesis, but also—and perhaps especially—in the critical portions. To return to the language of Erikson (1985), if the crisis of adulthood is generativity versus stagnation, and if the virtue emerging from this antithesis is care, then perhaps I am coming to appreciate writing as a means of "cultivating strength in the next generation" (p. 67).

The reader might wonder—Do I not worry, upon seeing myself so accurately reflected in Erikson's life cycle, about being psychosocially determined? Furthermore, given my affinity for the work of theorists such as Daignault, Doll, and Freire, am I not uncomfortable citing the work of so pronounced a modernist as Erikson? The answer to both of these questions is no. As Gross (1987) notes,

Erik Erikson is an observer and an artist more than he is a logician with a nice neat way of looking at human beings. He has no unified and encompassing theory. He has rather a keen set of observations and a series of sketches of human behavior. (p. 12)

Furthermore, I am reminded of Doll's (1993) language from A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum regarding models and vision:

Throughout my writing on the post-modern, I will speak of curricular possibilities in terms of a vision, not a model. There is no all-encompassing post-modern model; in fact such a concept violates the openness of post-modernism's emphasis on each practitioner being a curriculum creator and developer, not just an implementor. If curriculum is truly a collabor-ative effort and a transformative process, then "creator" and "developer" are far better descriptors than "implementor" for discussing what a post-modern teacher does. (p. 16)
I see Erikson's life cycle as something more akin to a vision than a model (as Doll uses those terms). Thus do I feel neither threatened nor confined by psychosocial theory. Nor do I feel the need to apologize for turning to a theorist as markedly modern as Erikson. I think it worth noting that just as Doll (1993) turns to science and mathematics for curricular possibilities, so too did Erikson (1985) turn to science—specifically epigenetic theory—in fashioning his Life Cycle theory.

"The Quality of Presence"

As I felt the tug of my work and family in Houston that afternoon, the idea of Maryland as my home began—however unconsciously—to recede. I had enjoyed living away from home (as I thought of it then) for several years, but in time, especially after the death of my father, I began to think about returning. Increasingly, I felt Maryland as a center of gravity, and my so-called home in Louisiana as a place that was somehow not quite real. Czeslaw Milosz (1981), a Polish expatriate in the United States, captures this feeling nicely in the first part of his poem "To Raja Rao":

For years I could not accept  
the place I was in.  
I felt I should be elsewhere.

A city, trees, human voices  
lacked the quality of presence.  
I would live by the hope of moving on.

There was somewhere else a city of real presence,  
of real trees and voices and friendship and love. (p. 29)

I would be lying if I said that I no longer think about returning to Maryland, but its hold on me has diminished, and my life now has a greater quality of presence. Given all that I have reflected on thus far in this chapter, I would say that, in a way in which I had not been able to before, I returned home to Louisiana in the summer of 2003.
This lack of the “quality of presence” for Miloz—a poet in exile at the time—nicely captures in poetic language what it means to live, in Lancanian (1968) terms, outside of the gaze of the great Other in whose presence one gains one’s identity.

*In Loco Parentis*

Two important themes have emerged thus far in this thesis: the advent of adulthood, and un-self-critical attitudes as an expression of othering. It now remains for me to determine their implications for my work as an educator.

I have never had a driver's license; as a result, I ride to work each day with a friend and co-worker. He is a man whose great generosity is matched only by his great ability to draw me into conversations about politics and education. As often as not, we find ourselves on opposing sides in these conversations; he generally defends positions to the right of center, while I defend positions to the left. There are occasions when our exchanges become a bit heated, but peace is always restored by the time we roll into the faculty parking lot to begin another day.

I remember the tail end of just such a conversation held early one morning in the spring of 2004. It was a conversation into which I had been drawn against my better judgment, one in which I had offered simple answers to complex questions and defended simple solutions to complex problems. As we exited my co-worker’s truck and made our way past the column of students lined up against the wall outside of the cafeteria awaiting breakfast, I was struck—not for the first time, but certainly for the first time in what seemed like a long time—by how complex they were. I was struck by their individuality and their vulnerability. In that moment it occurred to me that I do my students a disservice when I suggest—implicitly or explicitly—that life is simple, that complex issues have simple solutions, or that the sources of all of our problems lie outside of ourselves. Thoughts of school accountability programs and zero
tolerance policies crowded round me, as I said to myself (again, I am re-imagining my thoughts, but the story is not apocryphal), "These students are not nameless test takers; they are not problems to be solved, any more than my daughter is." That fleeting moment, when I first considered my role as a teacher in light of my role as a parent, has remained strong in my memory. It leads me to here consider my role as an educator operating in loco parentis.

Like so many other educators, I was first introduced to the concept of in loco parentis in a college course. It was in Introduction to Education, the first of my courses in the teacher certification program at the University of New Orleans. In my mind it will forever be coupled with the Old Deluder Satan Act, that other bit of legal arcanum guaranteed to show up on the Praxis Examination. In loco parentis and the Old Deluder Satan Act have this in common also: not since I took the Praxis have I heard of either one.

According to DeMitchell (2003), in loco parentis (in place of the parent) a legal doctrine first articulated in 1769, may currently be understood to mean that, "when parents send their children to school, in accordance with compulsory education laws, the school, through its educators, assumes some of the duties owed by the parent to the child" (p. 18). In loco parentis is, he says, "an accepted and expected role assumed by educators and their schools. This doctrine has been recognized in state statutes and court cases" (p. 19).

Reports of its demise not withstanding, DeMitchell maintains that in loco parentis remains a viable legal doctrine. It is, however, one that has come to focus almost exclusively on issues of order, discipline, and protection. These include such issues as search and seizure, limits on free speech, corporal punishment, and the duty schools have to protect children and students from harm.
But what parent thinks of him or herself primarily as a disciplinarian, an arbiter of free speech, a search and seizure expert, or a lifeguard? Most would find such a simplistic characterization of parenthood objectionable, as I do. Returning to the language of Erikson (1986) for a moment, what of care as the virtue to emerge in adulthood? What of an adult's responsibility to cultivate strength in the next generation" (p. 67)? Are these among the responsibilities of an educator operating in loco parentis?

While commenting on the role of school administrators in loco parentis, DeMitchell does make passing reference to another dimension of parenthood; namely, instruction. "The schools [administrators] while in the role of educator, act as a parent by instructing and disciplining their students" (p. 23). Here then is a reference to instruction as one of those duties owed to the student by the teacher operating in loco parentis.

This begs the question: What kind of instruction? Unfortunately, synoptic history texts which gloss over difficult issues, the re-ascendant instructional objective, school accountability programs in the guise of education reform, increased attempts at instituting control through nonhuman technology in the classroom, and the tenor of the current public political discourse—all of these taken together—leave me in little doubt as to the true nature of that instruction. It is instruction—it is a curriculum, if you will—which too often flirts with an un-self-critical, overly simplistic, and unrealistic view of the student, the teacher, and the world.

Given my earlier observations regarding the marginalization of the teacher in contemporary school accountability programs, it should come as no surprise that as an educator I now stand in place of the parent in only the most technical sense; that is, as a keeper of order and a disciplinarian. To stand in place of the parent in the fullest sense of that phrase would be, in Lacan’s (1968) terms, to stand as the Other “in whose gaze the subject gains identity” (Ashcroft,
1998, p. 170). But in the current climate of school accountability touted as education reform, the teacher has been marginalized, and now stands not as the Other, but as the other (to use Spivak’s [1985] now familiar terminology). The teacher has been identified as an obstacle and as a problem to be solved. Should current so-called reforms unfold as planned, the teacher will soon be a problem which has been solved, a figure rendered—to borrow from Susan Edgerton’s (1993) commentary on Ralph Ellison (1952)—invisible. “You’re hidden right out in the open....They wouldn’t see you because they don’t expect you to know anything, since they believe they’ve taken care of that” (quoted in Edgerton, 1993, p. 64).

And so, just as I found myself (however unwittingly or unwillingly) an agent of the neo-colonial Other as I set out from the United States to look at, to study, and to teach English in Mexico; so I now find myself, a secondary public school teacher in the age of accountability, the marginalized and invisible other. It is to this understanding that this thesis has brought me.

Conclusion: Professional Self-Formation

As I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, the professional self-formation of this work’s title is closely related to self-discovery, for only through self-discovery can I begin to become the professional educator I aspire to be. Self-discovery is therefore a crucial first step in professional self-formation, and it is with this crucial first step that I have been concerned in this work. It is a self-discovery that is more than purely personal, for it is a process wherein I seek to understand how various historical, academic, educational, and political forces have converged in me insofar as I am a teacher. The professional self-formation of the thesis’s title is not, therefore, the product of a single insight, nor is the product of a single experience. It is the product of a number of insights gained as the result of a number of experiences—experiences that I have explored and analyzed in each of this thesis’s chapters.
From the first chapter, I gained an appreciation of the neo-colonial nature of the relationship that currently exists between the United States and Mexico. In so doing, I was introduced to a number of important concepts from post-colonial studies; namely, Nkrumah’s (1965), neo-colonialism, the so-called “binary logic of imperialism” (Ashcroft, 1998), and othering, as Spivak (1985) uses that term. These insights, particularly Spivak’s othering, proved essential to my understanding of myself as both the Other (with reference to my experiences in Mexico) and as the other (with reference to my work in the classroom).

In the second chapter I sought permission to engage in the non-traditional research that I now bring to close. I characterized that chapter as this thesis’s linchpin, for without it I would not have been free (as symbolized by the butterfly, a figure which serves to unify the two parts of that chapter) to engage in this attempt to better understand myself as an educator—an essential first step in professional self-formation. Furthermore, the work of Paulo Freire (2003/1973), a theorist first discussed in Chapter Two, is referenced at length again in the third chapter.

Chapter Three stands at the center of this thesis, both literally and figuratively. In that chapter, what began as an exercise in, and a reflection on, travel writing segued into a broad critique, following Ritzer (2000), of contemporary school accountability programs. I characterized these programs (foisted upon the public in the guise of education reforms) as attempts to formalize the widening gap between teachers and education policy makers. Returning, by way of Freire (2003/1973), to Spivak’s (1985) concept of othering, I there, for the first time, identified the teacher as a figure who has been marginalized, or othered.

Insights form Chapter Four regarding what I characterized as un-self critical attitudes in contemporary public political discourse were essential to my full understanding of the teacher as a figure who has been marginalized, or othered. These un-self-critical attitudes, which were
explored in greatest depth in the fourth chapter, were located elsewhere in the thesis as well, and
were identified as a form of othering.

In the fifth chapter, the figure of the parent, considered in light of Lacan’s (1968)
Other/other distinction, and in the context of the doctrine of in loco parentis, allowed me to see,
in the starkest terms, what it means for the teacher to have been marginalized, or othered.

And so, when I say that just as I found myself a representative of the neo-colonial Other
as I set out from the United States to look at, to study, and to teach English in Mexico; so I now
find myself, a secondary public school teacher in the age of accountability, the marginalized and
invisible other; I am not speaking as a researcher who has gained a single insight as the result of
a single experience. I am speaking as a researcher who has assiduously pursued a non-traditional
approach to research in an effort to better understand himself as an educator—an essential first
step in professional self-formation.

Recommendations for Further Research

I am now left to explore, with reference to my practice as a teacher, what it means to be
invisible, to exist in the margins, to be the other. How might I begin to reclaim a space for myself
as an educator who functions as something more than a conduit for pre-existing, unimaginative
curricula? For help in addressing this question, I have lately begun reading Hugh Sackett's
to the moral conception of the teacher acting in loco parentis, a conception that he claims has
been "obliterated" (p. 139) by legal considerations. I am not, however, completely comfortable
with his use of the term moral, nor am I fully conversant with that term's myriad implications.
But a discussion of Sackett's work and its implications for my practice are beyond the purview of
this paper. I offer it here as but one of the points of departure to which this thesis has brought me.
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VITA

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