Homework and Inequality:

School Responsibility and Enabling Student Achievement in the School

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Resumé

Dans cette enquête conceptionelle, j'argumente comment et pourquoi les devoirs scolaires contribuent à l'inéqualité. Les devoirs contribuent systématiquement à l'inéqualité, parce que les écoles continuent à compté lourdement sur ceux-ci. Les devoirs continuent à contribuer discursivement et psycologiquement, parce que les parents et les éducateurs continuent à encourager les devoirs sans se render compte des consequences pour les étudiants qui ont de la difficulté à complèter leurs tâches à la maison. Les inéqualités maintenues par les devoirs persistent souvent inaperçues. Cette persistence est un exemple d'une persistence plus grande de problèmes sociologiques, même comme des avances technologiques sont faites. Ce déséquilibre dans les domains de la société et de la technologie sont dues partiellement aux différences dans la nature du contenu des connaissances. Donc, les éducateurs et les décideurs doivent être vigilant contre les tendences à être aveugle aux possibilités à l'amélioration. L'une des ces ameliorations est une interdiction sur les devoirs obligatoires, ce qui implique de plus amples responsabilités sur l'école pour permettre la reussite des etudiants.

Abstract

In this conceptual inquiry, I argue how and why homework contributes to inequality. Homework contributes to inequality systemically, as schools continue to rely heavily on it. Homework continues to contribute to inequality discursively and psychologically, as parents and educators encourage homework without fully realizing the consequences of homework for those students who have difficulty completing school tasks at home. The inequalities maintained by homework often persist unnoticed. This persistence is an example of a broader persistence of sociological problems even as technological advances are made. This imbalance in the two domains of society and technology is due partly to the differences in the nature of the knowledge content. Therefore, educators and policy makers must be vigilant against tendencies to be blind to possibilities for improvement. One such improvement is a ban on mandatory homework, which implies more school responsibility to enable student achievement in the school.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This Master's thesis is a conceptual inquiry in which I focus on how and why homework contributes to inequality. Much research has been done on educational inequality and family-school involvement in general. However, a large part of the research in these areas has been done separately rather than together. In the context of education, inequality researchers and theorists have explored various advantages and disadvantages of living in different family backgrounds. Family backgrounds vary according to the socioeconomic factors of education, income and occupation (Blossfeld & Shavit, 1991; Fritzberg, 2001; Lucas, 2001). They also vary according to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), human capital and social capital (Coleman, 1988). There are various kinds and degrees of literacy in different households (McDermott, Goldman & Varenne, 1984; Varenne & McDermott, 1986; Meek, 1991). There are variations of physical aspects of home environments such as presence of books and other homework-friendly resources such as a well-lit space and stationery (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982; Teachman, 1987). And there are complex, subtle and profound differences related to the culture of the family that have implications for education (Heath, 1983; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Hilfiker, 1994; Fritzberg, 2001). It is important to note that there are likely other unforeseen yet probably relevant forms of inequality.

Defining inequality. Given the variety of ways in which inequality manifests across different family backgrounds, the definition of inequality varies depending on the focus of any given research endeavor. However, while there are always exceptions, it is generally understood that *children with family backgrounds that are disadvantaged in one or more ways often do not achieve the same levels of academic success as other children.* It is this general understanding of inequality among children that I use as my definition of inequality for the purposes of this thesis.

The definition of family-school involvement also varies depending on the focus of the research. Referring to parent-involvement at the elementary level, Lareau (2000) observes that it is usually defined as "preparing children for school (...), attending school events (...), fulfilling any requests teachers make of parents, (...) providing children a place to do homework and ensuring the completion of homework" (p. 2-3). While there

has been some academic work published on the effects of social class on family-school involvement with school (Lareau, 1987, 2000), I am unsatisfied with the amount of academic work on the implications of inequality for the one specific aspect of family-school involvement that I am interested in – mandatory homework, which is commonly understood as schoolwork that teachers ask students to do at home. Given the focus on how and why homework contributes to inequality, readers might assume that I had a problem with homework as a child. I did not; I actually *enjoyed* homework more than my peers. My passion for this research stems from my long-standing concerns about inequality and children's rights. Homework simply proves to be that one aspect of children's lives that has two relevant characteristics: it is not necessary and it contributes to inequality.

On the idea that homework contributes to inequality, there is a speculative mention in the academic literature by Harry Cooper (1989b):

> Homework could accentuate existing social inequities. Children from poorer homes will have more difficulty completing assignments than their middle-class counterparts. Poorer children are more likely to work after school or may not have a quiet, well-lit place to do their assignment. (p. 87)

More substantial works linking homework and inequality come from several publications *not* found in academic journals. However, these works are written primarily against homework *in general* and they fall under the general debate about the usefulness of homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, 2001; Kralovec, 2003; Buell, 2004; Kohn, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2007; Goodman, 2007; Cameron & Bartel, 2008). In his book titled "The Homework Myth", Kohn (2006) devotes several pages to the concept of homework as a social-justice issue. He quotes educator Deborah Meier from a personal communication with her as follows: "if we sat around and tried to come up with a way for schools to contribute to inequality, homework would be it" (p. 127). Furthermore, Kohn observes: "Some students simply don't do the homework, particularly when there's a lot of it. The reasons for this vary (...)" (p. 168). Among the reasons Kohn lists, he includes lack of resources in the home and after-school commitments. The works that most closely resemble my own position about the link between homework and inequality

are those of educators Etta Kralovec and John Buell. More than any other educational researchers, Kralovec and Buell focus on the link between homework and inequality.

Even though many of the referenced works I use to support my arguments are published books instead of academic journal articles, I find that the arguments and observations in these published works make logical sense. I discuss observations about homework in these publications along with comments from magazine and newspaper articles throughout this thesis, so that readers can decide for themselves whether these observations are trustworthy and convincing or not. During my academic career, I have tried to assess arguments based on their content and validity rather than their source. On this approach to knowledge, I find ideological support from psychological researchers Morris, Menon and Ames (2001) as they make the following observation:

> The ideas in classic texts that survive are the ones that powerful people advocate. Christianity diffused in the West because leaders from Roman emperors to American presidents have endorsed it; just as Chinese emperors and some contemporary leaders have endorsed the teachings of Confucius. (...) The ideas that vary most across cultures are likely to be those that people believe on the basis of their source rather than on the basis of their content. (p. 174).

As for the homework debate itself, Gill and Schlossman (2000) provide a substantive review of the homework debate in North America during the 20th Century (see also Buell, 2004). Research related to the pros and cons of homework is vast and it mainly encompasses issues *other* than my main concern: inequality. For example, in his earlier works, Harry Cooper (1989a, 1989b) suggests that homework contributes to school success while other authors argue that homework takes away from an enriched and wholesome life (Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Kralovec, 2003; Buell, 2004; Kohn, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2007; Goodman, 2007). Even in his more recent work, Cooper (2001) still speaks from a view-point that considers homework as something that will always exist while Kohn, Bennett, Kalish, Goodman and Kralovec go as far as to argue for banning homework completely – at least in the elementary grades. Overall, I have noticed that there seem to be more proponents of homework whose work is found in academic, peer-reviewed journal articles while those who argue against homework have a lot of

their work published in books. If this personal observation is at least somewhat representative of the actual proportions, perhaps this imbalance could be cause for future investigation. In personal communication, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mary Maguire, has suggested the possibility that many journal articles are written by mainstream scholars in privileged positions. If, in the end, readers feel that I have relied too much on unsubstantiated claims as a result of the lack of related peer-reviewed work, perhaps this is indicative of the need for precisely that: more peer-reviewed research on the link between homework and inequality.

Family-School Involvement: A Dilemma

Among family-school involvement researchers, a common plea is for more family-school involvement such as parental help with homework and teacher-parent communication (Lareau, 2000). Lareau (1987) argues that teachers believe there is a strong relationship between parental involvement and academic performance and that the ideal family-school relationship is one where family life and school life are integrated. In general, the scholarly consensus on family-school involvement is that it is beneficial to students because it leads to educational success (Lareau, 1987, 2000; Moll et al., 1992).

There are two problems with this consensus. First, the definition of educational success is problematic (Maguire & Alpine, 1996). Educational success is variably defined based on different types of test scores, grade point averages, honour role nominations and college entrances. According to Maguire (in personal communication), these measures of success generally reflect mainstream, Western traditions and values. In Chapter 3, I argue that these conventional definitions of educational success are not necessarily good indicators of learning.

The second problem with the consensus that family-involvement is beneficial, is inequality. While I certainly do not refute the benefits of family-school involvement, I realize that some families are better equipped than others to get involved with school and to help with homework. When it comes to getting involved with schools, some families are commonly known to be disadvantaged while others are advantaged. For example, a child is at a disadvantage if he has the same homework responsibilities as a classmate with more involved, concerned, educated, time-flexible and/or affluent parents. Some

parents may have a number of these qualities but with different, non-mainstream and equally viable educational agendas of their own (Moll et al.1992; Kincheloe, 2008). Even some professional families, commonly thought of as having an edge, may be too busy to help with homework. Some professional parents may be very busy with their careers and may not have time either to help with homework or attend parent-teacher interviews. Again, as various researchers have found, the disadvantages that arise from all kinds of inequality are multi-faceted and can exist in various forms in different communities.

Purpose Statement

My interest in inequality includes a curiosity as to how Canada's public education systems might be influential in either curtailing or contributing to inequality of all kinds. While I am only familiar with Canadian education, much of the literature I review is based in the United States with a few works based in Western European countries. Thus, it seems safe to assume that this thesis applies to education systems in the United States – which is why I sometimes use the term North America instead of Canada. Instead of assuming applicability worldwide, I leave it to readers to make their own inferences based on their own knowledge of other cultures.

There are numerous researchers and theorists who have come a long way in explaining how education reproduces various kinds of inequality (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982; Heath, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984; McDermott et al., 1984; Teachman, 1987; Coleman, 1988; Meek, 1991; Moll et al., 1992; Mehan, 1992, 1996; Fritzberg, 2001; Kincheloe, 2008). Except for the authors already mentioned (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, 2001; Kralovec, 2003; Buell, 2004; Kohn, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2007, Goodman, 2007; Cameron & Bartel, 2008), there is still not enough recognition among educators, policy makers, parents and students that homework is a social justice issue.

Thus, *my purpose is to present a conceptual inquiry that focuses on exposing and exploring the link between homework and inequality.* I use the term 'expose' for two reasons: First, I think the link is not obvious until it is explicitly understood. Second, while there is a good selection of publications in which authors recognize that homework is a social-justice issue, there seems to be a lack of recognition in peer-reviewed academic journal articles of this. Other authors (Kohn, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2007;

Goodman, 2007) provide arguments against homework for pedagogical and psychological reasons. While I explore the link between homework and inequality, I hope readers will find a coherent argument against homework on the grounds that it contributes to inequality. The argument that homework contributes to inequality calls for a ban on mandatory homework in all grades, because the issue of unequal family backgrounds exists at all grade levels. I do recognize that some children actually enjoy it, as I did. However, I also know that many of my schoolmates were disillusioned with school because of homework. Children are necessarily different and I will elaborate on how school systems should accommodate these differences in Chapter 3.

I am primarily motivated to argue for a ban on mandatory homework for those students who may be at a disadvantage due to socioeconomic inequalities in the form of different kinds of family income, education, occupation and cultural capital. However, I am also motivated to do this for any students who may have difficulties completing homework for whatever reasons, such as children in career-oriented families, or children who are busy with extracurricular activities such as music or athletics, or simply children who are existentially happier just hanging out and becoming friends with their parents. It is impossible to list all the possible difficulties. Kralovec and Buell (2001) also recognize that a banning of homework may benefit students and families other than the disadvantaged. They note that the amount of ink spilled on the topic indicates that homework is a problem for everyone, not just the poor.

Inherent in my plea for a ban on mandatory homework is a plea for more school responsibility. Given the fact that there are advantaged and disadvantaged children all across Canada due to various differences in family backgrounds, Canadian public education systems have the moral and social responsibility of ensuring that there are adequate resources such as time, space and social support to do schoolwork at the school, thereby giving the disadvantaged children, who may be so for various reasons, more opportunity for success than they have had to date. Thus, students may have a better chance of attaining the educational requirements that are necessary for entry into post-secondary education. Others, who may not be inclined towards post-secondary education, may simply have a better chance of graduating from high school. Alternatively, or in addition to the provision of more time to do schoolwork, the structure of the classes could

be reshaped to incorporate more time to do schoolwork during class. Given the complexity of the connections between homework, inequality and school responsibility, I cannot possibly provide a comprehensive list of recommendations herein. I look forward to elaborating on the logistics of how classes can be restructured in future endeavours.

I should acknowledge the inevitability that Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, and Walsh (2004) claim: "privileged parents will always find ways of advantaging their children in an unequal society" (p.x). Similarly, Nozick (1974/2000) makes the claim that many writers have seen how just the existence of the family prevents the full achievement of equality of opportunity for children. Naturally, parents strive to provide the best they can for their children and some families are more equipped to provide for their children than others. However, this inevitability should not grant educators and policy makers the freedom to simply stand by and do nothing about such unfairness. Yet, educators, policy makers, and even parents and students promulgate a culture of homework. I do not know how much of this promulgation is done blindly, without considering the possibility that homework contributes to inequality. Nonetheless, another purpose of this thesis is to bring this possibility to light, hopefully broadening those perspectives that are perhaps too narrow to see the bigger picture of inequalities in modern societies.

Research Focus

Does homework contribute to inequality? As I explore the link between homework and inequality, I argue that homework indeed contributes to inequality. If homework does contribute to inequality, would this be enough reason to ban mandatory homework at all grade levels? I argue Yes. Given the diversity of private school structures, I cannot give a broad, sweeping generalization about the reliance on homework in the setting of private schools. For North American public schools, however, most students, parents and teachers increasingly take for granted the fact that homework is a part of life; this is what I perceive as the growing culture of homework. And as many families simply take for granted that homework is a fact of life, different families continue to be variably advantaged and disadvantaged in various ways. Thus, I argue that homework contributes to inequality in systemic and psychological ways.

Theoretical Framework

In a general sense, my academic background shapes my theoretical framework. I hold a B.A. in Environmental studies that was conferred in 2002 and a B.Sc. specializing in Psychology with a minor in Sociology, conferred in 2006. I have also thoroughly enjoyed undergraduate courses in Philosophy, Anthropology and Linguistics. If I had more time and money, I would have a minor in these three disciplines as well. Given my varied interests, I have always had inclinations towards interdisciplinary approaches to thinking and writing about any given topic. Therefore, I find it very hard to ignore and deny connections across disciplines when I see them, especially when such connections are crucial to understanding any given topic more fully. Therefore, I refuse to name or favour any one theory of a topic as ubiquitous, important and complex as inequality. Instead, as earlier, I simply offer the following operational definition of inequality for the purpose of this thesis: *children with family backgrounds that are disadvantaged in one or more ways often do not achieve the same levels of academic success as other children.*

My theoretical framework is more specifically shaped by a concern for the vulnerability of children in all cultures. I firmly believe that a healthy childhood in which children are enabled to reach their fullest possible potential without harming the environment is one of the most fundamental human rights – perhaps the most fundamental of them all. This belief aligns with the declaration of the rights of the child published by UNESCO (2008) This belief also illustrates the necessity for interdisciplinary effort. The need for the health of all children demands knowledge of various disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Environmental Studies and Pedagogy. Given my concerns for the vulnerability of all children, my motivation to continue research is fuelled by a specific interest in the responsibility of parents and schools. Unfortunately, because of the various ways in which inequality manifests in families, some parents are not as able as others to enable optimal child-development. Thus, I look to a more systemic site for more responsibility and action - schools. Schools are systems in which policies are widely implemented with greater ease than are families.

One theme that does resurface in my academic writing is the theme of discourse. In defining discourse, I often use Johannesson's (1998) definition, which is guided by the works of the late discourse-philosopher and post-structuralist Foucault: "discursive

practices are not limited to words; rather, discourse refers to the way in which discursive practices are social practices with material effects" (p. 304). Thus, in addition to the interests in a systemic responsibility of schools, my theoretical framework is shaped by an awareness of the discursive and psychological ways homework and inequality are perpetuated. I elaborate on how Foucault's work has helped me with this kind of awareness in Chapter 4.

In their book on worldwide inequality, Baker et al. (2004) provide a lengthy discussion on "the role of educational institutions in promoting social class inequality" (p. 144-154). Their conclusion encourages me to focus on the onus of schools to be more actively responsible in allowing students to do schoolwork at school. These researchers define social class on the basis of the extent to which different social classes have different resources such as income, public status, power, working conditions and access to education. These researchers elaborate on three major processes in education systems that promote social class inequalities: selection and admission procedures, grouping procedures used within schools and curriculum designs with a bias towards mainstream language. Baker et al. conclude their discussion as follows:

> There is no easy answer to the issues we have raised about class-based inequalities of educational resources, because they are rooted in wider economically generated inequalities. (...) Education does occupy a contradictory location in relation to class reproduction: while it is an agent of class inequality it is also a potential site for developing resistance to inequality. (p. 154)

Within elementary and secondary schools, one such *'potential site for developing resistance to inequality'* is in the provision of more time, space and resources for students to do schoolwork at the school. The extent to which schools rely on schoolwork that is completed outside of school constitutes an extent to which the culture of homework is a process in the education system that perpetuates various types of inequalities, particularly socioeconomic inequality. As far as I can see, banning mandatory homework happens to be a very feasible way of resisting inequality. Schools can feasibly take more systemic responsibility in ensuring that all students have a chance to complete all schoolwork at the school in the presence of trained educators.

Organization

In Chapter 2, I review some of the philosophical and sociological literature on inequality that has relevance for school responsibility and homework. In this chapter, I also argue that in the literature on inequality, not enough attention is given to the possibility that homework itself contributes to inequality. This review of the literature is not meant to represent an exhaustive account of inequality in the context of education.

In Chapter 3, I present a small exploratory inquiry, which I completed this past year and that was inspired by personal experiences. In this mini inquiry, I explored the research question "how much schoolwork is done at school and how much is done elsewhere?" In this chapter, I show that for five Canadian students, on average, 70% of schoolwork is done at home and 30% of schoolwork is done at school. In Chapter 3 I also include a necessary digression to provide my position on the ongoing, broader homework debate.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I elaborate on my main arguments. In Chapter 4, I explore the link between homework and inequality as I perceive it, based on relevant literature, the small exploratory inquiry, personal experiences and an academic background in Psychology. Given my background in Psychology, readers are warned that in Chapter 4, I explore the link between homework and inequality with concepts of Psychology – such as epistemology. The concept of epistemology has implications for the perpetuation of the culture of homework, the discourses of inequality and status quo in general.

In Chapter 5, I argue for more school responsibility after first acknowledging the importance of student and parent responsibility in ensuring educational success. Thus it would be a mistake for readers to assume that I suggest schools take all the responsibility for educational achievement. I also make an important distinction between teacher and school responsibility – highlighting the fact that I am *not* arguing for more teacher responsibility as most teachers have enough responsibilities already and some have too many responsibilities. Instead, I argue for a more systemic type of responsibility in the form of a ban on mandatory homework. Lastly, I end with a brief overview of this thesis and concluding remarks about my exploration and arguments, including recognition of compatible research endeavours such as critical pedagogy. Except for the concluding

chapter, each chapter ends with a paragraph such as the one below to recap the major take-home messages.

In summary, this is a thesis in which I define inequality as broadly as possible. I focus on one aspect of family-school involvement: mandatory homework, because I cannot help but see how it contributes to inequality and because it is very feasible to ban it (and certainly not because of any anecdotal experiences; remember, as a student, I actually enjoyed homework). A ban of mandatory homework inherently implies more school responsibility. The foundation of my theoretical framework lies in an academic background of Psychology, a Foucaultian awareness of discourse and my long-standing concerns about inequality and the vulnerability of children. In the context of inequality, this foundation paves the way for a framework that is shaped by the motivation for more school responsibility. Given the systemic and profound psychological factors involved in perpetuating the culture of homework as well as in the various types of inequality, I argue that homework and inequality are inextricably linked. The link I argue, is this: homework contributes to inequality in systemic, discursive and psychological ways.

Chapter 2: Inequality in the Context of Education and Homework

In this chapter I review several aspects of inequality pertaining to educational inequality in general and homework specifically. I begin this literature review with a philosophical discussion of inequality and sociological discussion of the various educational theories of inequality as a concept. I then look at various aspects of family background that researchers investigated in the context of inequality. As for the various theories of inequality, it is not my purpose to choose one theory over another. I surmise that one particular theory may explain the situation for a number of students while a different theory may explain the situation for others. As all individuals are different, so too are their particular histories, environments and learning styles. If I endeavor to find an all encompassing theory to explain inequality in general or even educational inequality, I am not sure I would find one. For now, I will simply argue that many types of inequality are exacerbated by the assignment of homework. Any one of the theories or ideas reviewed here approach an aspect of inequality that has implications for the fact that some schoolwork is done outside of the school.

Inequality: A Philosophical Discussion

Johnston (2000) makes the important distinction between equal opportunities and equal outcomes. He makes a second distinction between advocates of moral, legal, political and social equality. Given these two types of categorizations, I would state my interests for the purpose of this thesis as follows: 'equal social opportunity' for children. This is because the equal opportunity to attain educational requirements to attend post-secondary education seems logically related to how Johnston defines social equality: "equal access to the things that enable people to lead good lives, such as income, wealth, medical care, education and jobs" (p. viii). While I agree with the economic historian Tawney (1952/2000) that "what is possible for each is not possible for all" (p. 98), I am also aware of the persisting unfairness that is obvious in the income, wealth, education and job inequalities within Canada. To date, 'equal social opportunity' does not exist because for many children, their educational success depends on getting homework done. If educators and privileged parents realize more honestly the consequences of children

doing schoolwork in vastly varying circumstances, perhaps there would be more motivation to equalize the situations in which schoolwork is done.

Admittedly, equal opportunity does not necessarily lead to equal outcomes. Given the hypothetical world in which every child has an equal opportunity in all aspects of life, the natural contextual variabilities with which each child is born would result in unequal outcomes. Some children are indeed smarter than others; some are indeed more conscientious, and so on. Von Hayek (1960/2000) makes the following interesting point:

> No more credit belongs to him for having been born with desirable qualities than for having grown up under favourable circumstances. The distinction between the two is important only because the former advantages are due to circumstances clearly beyond human control, while the latter are due to factors which we might be able to alter. (p. 111)

So, the "circumstances" I am interested in altering are specifically the ones in which children do their schoolwork. Some children complete their schoolwork under very favourable circumstances while others do not.

Unfortunately, many children may develop under the false belief that they have inherently lesser academic abilities than their more wealthy counterparts when in fact, the capacities they were born with are more equal than they realize. Given the complex interactions between natural and environmental inequalities, it is indeed tricky sometimes, to discern whether one is academically successful due to natural or environmental factors. For example, a student could be successful in math due to natural talents or due to the fact that he has optimal conditions at home for practicing his math problems, or due to a combination of both. Similarly, Tawney (1952/2000) argues:

> The condition of differences of individual quality finding their appropriate expression is the application of a high degree of social art. It is such a measure of communism as is needed to ensure that inequalities of personal capacity are neither concealed nor exaggerated by inequalities which have their source in social arrangements. (p.104)

Tawney takes his argument further: "it is difficult to see why the same useful quality which is welcomed when it is the result of a person's natural endowment should be less valuable when it is the product of such circumstances as intelligent parents or a good

home" (p.111-112). This is where I would depart from Tawney because to date, I believe the qualities resulting from circumstances remain far too exaggerated and the qualities resulting from people's natural endowments remain far too concealed. For example, a student who is not doing her homework could be lagging behind because of circumstance instead of lack of motivation.

I do appreciate how Tawney (1952/2000) elaborates the intricate ways merit is confused with value and hard work because, as a student, I have thought of this dilemma myself in my years of undergraduate studies. I have often considered how different I am from fellow classmates. For example, while I spend double-digit hours on reading or writing to complete assignments, some others spend only a few hours to get the same grade while others spend even more time. The A+ on my paper has no more value on student transcripts than the A+ rewarded to a more efficient, more intelligent classmate who spent half the time and effort I did. So, because of the different amounts of work each individual puts into the same end result, 'true judgment of merit', as Tawney argues, is not really possible. However, I must depart from Tawney's philosophy here too because again, to date, the problems of circumstantial inequality *far outweigh* the problems of natural inequalities. Because the problems of circumstantial inequality far outweigh the ones of natural inequalities, I am not willing to take seriously David Cooper's (1980) notion that equality is a utopist ideal. David Cooper (1980) is a self-labeled "inegalitarian" on the grounds that equality is unrealistic because it demands utopia. Until the day comes when inequality is due to things other than circumstance, I will leave Cooper's argument that equality is utopist on the back burner.

I must also depart from the philosophy of Nozick (1974/2000), who argues that the two ways to provide equality of opportunity are as follows:

> By directly worsening the situations of those more favored with opportunity, or by improving the situation of those less well-favored. The latter requires the use of resources, and so it too involves worsening the situation of some, those from whom holdings are taken in order to improve the situation of others. (p. 156)

Clearly, in the context of homework, this logic would not apply if schools took the responsibility to supply adequate resources for disadvantaged children to do their schoolwork. By providing adequate resources of time and space for disadvantaged

children, the situations of the advantaged children are certainly not worsened, as Nozick's argument implies. In fact, the situations of the advantaged children may ameliorate, just as the situations may for the disadvantaged. The advantaged children may also have the time and resources to do their schoolwork at the school instead of at home, thereby allowing some time for them to just be children after school. Alfie Kohn, author of books on parenting and education, offers a similar argument in a MacLean magazine interview:

> The assumption that kids will be up to no good unless they have their free time structured for them represents a very dark and cynical view of kids and helps to explain why so much busy-work is given to them. (...) because we don't trust children, we assume we have to force them to do stuff their every waking moment. (Whyte, 2006)

Thus far, I have outlined a philosophy about the equality of opportunity as if disadvantaged children have less opportunity than advantaged children. However, Young (1990/2000) provides an interesting adjustment to the notion of some children having fewer opportunities than others:

> Opportunity is a concept of enablement rather than possession; it refers to doing more than having. A person has opportunities if he or she is not constrained from doing things, and lives under the enabling conditions for doing them. (...) Evaluating social justice according to whether persons have opportunities, therefore, must involve evaluating not a distributive outcome but the social structures that enable or constrain the individuals in relevant situations. (p. 253)

So, when I speak of schools taking the responsibility to provide adequate resources for children to do their schoolwork, I speak of what Young calls social structures that enable individuals. The culture of homework constrains individuals who have difficulty completing it at home due to circumstances.

Inequality: A Sociological Discussion

Baker et al. (2004) point to the works of several educational researchers from 1988 to 2003: "research by what are sometimes called the 'equality empiricists' has been especially effective in documenting the persistence of social-class-related inequality in

different states" (p. 170). In contrast to empirical approaches, Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003) describe '*class as process*' approaches to the study of social class and higher education: "since the 1970s, postmodern and poststructuralist theories have provided a substantial challenge to previous, more positivistic ways of conceptualizing social class within education and sociology" (p. 11). Whatever the research approach, evidence of educational inequality is plentiful.

Archer et al. (2003) show how inequalities are continually shifting. Since class identities and structural inequalities are socially constructed and reconstructed by discourse, they are constantly changing. Archer et al. also discuss the 'fuzziness' of class boundaries due to shifting inequalities: "class identities and inequalities are shifting and changing, yet inequalities persist and endure" (p. 20). I am aware of the idea of class status as a process that is continually constructed and reconstructed by discourse. But, like Archer et al., I am also aware of the enduring persistence of social inequality.

Relevant Theories of Educational Inequality

From my research on the literature of educational inequality, the one theory that seems most relevant to homework is the theory of cultural capital, introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron in 1964 in a French literature piece titled "Les Heritiers". The theory of cultural capital contends that children from families of higher status behave and talk in ways that are rewarded by schools. Thus, in the context of educational achievement, children with a certain kind of cultural capital have a cultural advantage over other children (Bourdieu, 1984).

Marxist economists Bowles and Gintis (1976) are commonly referenced for investigating similar ideas under the name of cultural reproduction. Mehan (1996) highlights one major criticism of the theory proposed by Bowles and Gintis as economically deterministic, exaggerating the integration between capitalistic demands and schooling. Mehan also highlights a criticism of both the cultural and economic theories of educational inequality: neither actually shows how schooling reproduces inequality. However, Mehan points to the works of Lareau (1987) as successfully documenting some processes through family-school involvement, thereby supporting both theories. Lareau's work will be outlined in the next section on family background.

Blossfeld and Shavit (1991) point to Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis as major proponents of the 'reproduction hypothesis'. However, Blossfeld and Shavit give credit to Collins as well, author of "Credential Society" in 1971 (as cited in Blossfeld and Shavit). Blossfeld and Shavit include the works of Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, and Collins under the umbrella term "cultural reproduction theorists". They then point to Boudon's (1974) 'economic constraint thesis' for a more economical theory of educational inequality. According to Boudon, families with finances to pay for educational resources have fewer constraints than families without.

In their research on educational stratification in 13 industrialized countries (USA, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Israel, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Japan, Taiwan), Blossfeld and Shavit (1991) explored several theories in search of an answer to the question: "to what extent has the relationship between parental socioeconomic characteristics and educational opportunities changed over time and why?" (p. 8). Of the six theories explored, the two theories that are most relevant to the link between homework and inequality are the 'reproduction hypothesis' as already mentioned and the 'differential selection hypothesis'. The differential selection hypothesis is a theory proposed by Blossfeld and Shavit themselves. This theory aligns with the philosophical discussion of merit above. It attempts to account for confounding variables such as ability and motivation regardless of social class. Blossfeld and Shavit conclude from their research: "[despite] dramatic educational expansions during the twentieth century [in all 13 countries] the relative advantage associated with privileged origins persists in all but two of the thirteen societies" (p. 28). The two societies are the Netherlands and Sweden. Smyth (1999) suggests a broader economic explanation for the reduced educational inequality in Sweden.

More recently, Lucas (2001) proposed the theory of effectively maintained inequality (EMI) to explain the continued persistence of educational inequality amidst various societal efforts towards equality such as educational expansion:

> The stark contrast between socioeconomically disadvantaged and advantaged students (...) is a far cry from the suggestion that social background effects decline to zero when a level of education becomes universal. Instead, it suggests (...) social background may matter for qualitative dimensions of education. (p. 1678)

The EMI theory aligns with a conclusion made by De graaf and De graaf (2002) in their review of Bourdieu's works in conjunction with European data – which provides support for Bourdieu's theory nearly 40 years after it was first proposed in 1964: "privileged families increasingly use their cultural capital to transmit their economic and social advantages to their children" (p. 168).

Thus far, I have mentioned five theories of educational inequality, all of which overlap with each other in their use of cultural and economic arguments: cultural capital, cultural reproduction, economic constraint, differential selection and EMI. I propose that homework is one specific mechanism that is instrumental in the perpetuation of inequality as explained by all five theories. Parents with more economic capital and conventionally mainstream cultural capital are in a better position to help ensure that their children get homework done successfully. Schools do not adequately recognize this perpetuation of inequality if they continue to rely on homework.

I conclude this section with the help of Mehan's (1996) observations. Mehan argues from a social-interactionist perspective:

> If we are to understand the structure of inequality, then we must continue to examine the interactional mechanisms by which that structure is generated. And, if we are to find ways to defeat reproductive mechanisms, then we must institutionalize practices that increase the possibility of equality. (p. 231)

The extent to which schoolwork is done as homework, is the extent to which homework is one of those 'reproductive mechanisms'. Thus, a ban of mandatory homework is a prime example of an institutionalized, structural and systemic change that could increase the possibility of equality. Mehan (1992) also observes, "practices that are the foundation of inequality (...) operate in two important contexts: the interaction between educators and students and the interaction between the home and the school" (p. 16). Indeed, for many students, years of doing homework either successfully or unsuccessfully have an impact on self-efficacy, ability, agency, work ethic and attitudes towards school. And when students do homework outside of the school, the different environments in which schoolwork is done are not equal.

Family Background: Various Aspects have been Studied

Various aspects of family backgrounds have been studied. Often, among sociologists, the aspect studied is a combination of education, occupation and income. The inclusion of all three of these factors is commonly known as socioeconomic status. An aspect of family background that is popular among educational researchers is Bourdieu's cultural capital. Again, the theory of cultural capital contends that children from families of higher status behave in ways that are rewarded by schools (Bourdieu, 1984). The work by Annette Lareau (1987) illustrates how this happens.

Lareau (1987) exposed implications of cultural capital in a qualitative study of family-school relationships. She assigned herself the following research questions: "What do schools ask of parents in the educational experience of young children?" and: "How does social class influence the process through which parents participate in their children's schooling?" (p. 74). In her final write-up, Lareau reviews the history of family-school relationships over the past 200 years and reports three different historical stages. The first historical stage consisted of teachers as boarders in the homes of families with children. The second, being a result of the beginning of mass schooling, consisted of parents playing a minor role in their children's education. This minor role was primarily political rather than academic. Today, Lareau argues, we stand in the third stage with parents generally having a relatively larger role in their children's academic development. As Lareau's findings show, the extent of parent's involvement in their children's education varies depending on a variety of factors.

For her qualitative study, Lareau (1987) observed two grade 1 classes over six months in two California neighborhood schools. The first school was populated mostly by children of working class families. The second school was populated mostly by children of professional and semi-professional middle class families. Lareau's conclusions are based on these observations and interviews with children, family members, teachers and principals of both schools. The middle class families had more social resources than the lower class families by way of educational status and occupational status. These social resources translate into *cultural capital* by way of greater ease, comfort and familiarity in dealing with school officials and understanding school curricula. They also had more *economic* resources by way of transportation and

tutors. These advantages also included more parental time to be involved with academic development and parents were more likely to meet with teachers. Thus, Lareau's findings support cultural and economic theories of inequality. With increasing demands on parental involvement in the schooling of their children and with varied abilities among the social classes, children of lower class families were found to be at an educational disadvantage. Given these findings, Lareau states, "it is important to stress that if the schools were to promote a different type of family-school relationship, the class culture of middle-class parents might not yield a social profit" (p. 82). Here, I would suggest that schools should promote a family-school relationship that involves no mandatory homework.

Less commonly researched aspects of family background are social capital and human capital as discussed by Coleman (1988) and later studied by Teachman, Paasch and Carver (1997). Coleman defines family background using three different kinds of capital: financial, social and human capital. While a family can consist of two parents with high human capital such as professional skills attained through post-secondary education, Coleman argues that it could be possible for the children of such a family not to reap such benefits:

> Even if adults are physically present, there is a lack of social capital in the family if there are not strong relations between children and parents. The lack of strong relations can result from the child's embeddedness in a youth community, from the parents' embeddedness in relationships with other adults that do not cross generations, or from other sources. Whatever the source, it means that whatever human capital exists in the parents, the child does not profit from it because the social capital is missing. (p. S111)

Here I propose one such source is homework. After a long day at work, it is much easier for parents to tell their children to do homework than to share with them on a human–to–human basis about their tough day at work and/or other life problems. Rather than continue with schoolwork from school, I believe children's learning and lives in general should be more diverse. Much can be learned from having meaningful conversations and relationships with family, friends and community. The lack of social capital is also exacerbated as family time shrinks due to "longer workweeks" (Kralovec & Buell, 2001;

see also Buell, 2004). Following Coleman's lead, Teachman et al. (1997) looked at how social capital affects the rate of dropping out of school and found that social capital indeed interacts with other kinds of capital to influence educational attainment.

Variations in educational resources in the home. Teachman (1987) researched another aspect of family background: educational resources in the home, indicated by the presence of a place to study, reference books, daily newspapers and a dictionary or encyclopedia. Teachman found that the presence of these educational resources in the homes of American high school students had a significant effect on college attendance. Mortimore and Blackstone (1982) made the same argument five years earlier. In addition to less money to spend on crayons, books, outings and other educational resources that are rewarded by the school, Mortimore and Blackstone argue that a low income may mean more time at the job or on household tasks, which leaves less time to spend with children. They also point out that low income may mean increased stress, which means less ability and energy to show interest or encouragement.

More recently, educational researchers are pointing to the unfairness resulting from the culture of homework as it is lived in different family homes. Below are three excerpts of actual student vignettes provided by Jodie Morse (1999), Kralovec and Buell (2000) and Goodman (2007).

Excerpt from Jodie Morse (1999, p. 41):

> Her afternoons, like those of most students, are often booked solid. For Bodley, it's not debating practice or piano lessons that keep her busy but rather a $6.25-an-hour job cooking at a convention center. After her shift ends at 6p.m., she must baby-sit for her five-year-old niece, often until 10p.m. Only then does she begin to think about hitting the books. "I have too many other responsibilities, and I can't focus on my homework," says Bodley. And when she can't focus? Without a note of chagrin, she admits, "I just don't do it". (...) Her teachers say she has plenty of smarts, but the missed assignments added up to three Cs on her latest report card. More grades like those, her teachers worry, could keep her out of college.

Excerpt from Kralovec and Buell (2000, p. 66-67):

> As Alix leaves school to return home to her trailer and her two-year-old daughter, she has every intention of doing the assignment for U.S. history. She gets home at 2:30 only to discover that her daughter has a fever of 103. Alix takes her to the closest medical centre, forty miles from her home. By 5:30 she is back home nursing a sick child and getting dinner ready for her father and two brothers. By 7:15, with the baby finally asleep, Alix sits down in the room she shares with her baby to begin working. She finds that she has left her textbook at school. She calls a friend who drives her back to school, which is thirty minutes from her home. At 9:00 she gets a call from her best friend, whose father has beaten her again and who asks if she can spend the night at Alix's. Sue arrives at 10:00 and needs some comforting....
>
> David arrives home after tennis practice. His mother asks how his day was and if he has any tough homework. David tells her about the U.S. history assignment. As they eat, she talks to him about FDR and Clinton (...) they discuss an appropriate thesis for his paper. David goes to his room and turns on his computer. He discovers that he has left his textbook at school. He goes downstairs to the family room to ask his dad about books that might be helpful to him. His dad begins to pull books off the family bookshelves: an encyclopedia, a book by Howard Zinn, and a Time-Life book about the thirties. David returns to his room and begins again.

Excerpt from Goodman (2007, p.34)

> Stephanie arrives home, books in hand, and is greeted by her mother who gives her a wholesome snack. They go to a study area equipped with a personal computer, a well-stocked bookshelf and all the supplies needed to do the assigned projects. Her mother is well educated and able to help her with problems she encounters. She gives suggestions that make Stephanie's project more interesting. Then mother makes a list of things she needs to buy that will give the project a special flare.

> Roger (...) has a part-time job to help his family. His father has been laid off and is having difficulty finding a job that pays enough to support his family. By the time he gets home from work Roger is tired, but he faces his third job of the day, homework. He would love to put up his feet and read a book, dabble at the sketching that is his hobby, or just veg out in from the TV. But the choice of how he will spend the little bit of personal time at his disposal has already been made for him.

These excerpts provide illustrations of the inequality that exists in different family homes. In these three excerpts, there are signs of inequalities in income, education, occupation, cultural capital, human capital, social capital and educational resources in the home. These different inequalities combine and intertwine in ways that either constrain or enable students to do schoolwork at home.

While Harry Cooper (2001) provides advice on how to deal with homework, implying that homework is necessary, he also makes observations about the implications of variations in educational resources in different homes: "homework may increase time-on-task for better students from better homes, but at the same time, for disadvantaged children, create frustrating situations that are detrimental to learning. In such cases, homework may contribute to a social ill (...)" (p.12). Based on research of different families, Kralovec and Buell (2000) make similar observations more concretely: "many students lacked the resources at home to compete on an equal footing with those of their peers who had computers, highly educated parents, and virtually unlimited funds for school supplies" (p.1).

Moll et al. (1992, see also Kincheloe, 2008) also discuss aspects of family background in terms of the resources that different families provide for their children. These researchers explored "funds of knowledge" in different households in the American southwest: "Our analysis of funds of knowledge represents a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction" (1992, p.134). For Moll et al., funds of knowledge are those knowledge resources that are found in homes that are not traditionally utilized in classroom instruction. An example of bringing cultural resources

into the classroom actually took place in my own experience. My grade 5 teacher invited my parents to come into class one day to teach my classmates about the Inuktitut language (my mother was fluent in both Inuktitut and English). These efforts of connecting the home and school are substantially different from my efforts to decrease the effects of family background on educational attainment. I acknowledge the very important benefits of connecting home and school this way, especially if the homes that are traditionally devalued are legitimized and valued. However, this is a separate project altogether from the project of exploring the link between homework and inequality. My efforts are not incompatible with efforts of the type Moll et al. are interested in. In the interest of equality, I wish to decrease the extent to which educators rely on the home as a place to finish schoolwork. The efforts of the type Moll et al. are interested in are also geared towards equality.

In summary, as long as homework exists, equal social opportunity is not possible. Admittedly, equal opportunity does not lead to equal outcomes because of natural variabilities. But since the qualities resulting from circumstances continue to be exaggerated while the qualities resulting from nature continue to be concealed, circumstantial inequalities far outweigh natural inequalities. By asking schools to provide more time and space for students to do schoolwork in the school, I ask for a systemic change that would enable students to take advantage of opportunity to accomplish achievements in academics. No matter how researchers construct inequality, it persists. For cultural and economic theories of inequality, homework is a key mechanism that is instrumental in reproducing inequalities. Homework also interferes with social capital as students continue to do schoolwork at home instead of cultivate healthy relationships outside of the school. Lastly, homework is a problem for students if they do not have adequate resources at home.

Chapter 3: An Exploratory Inquiry and a Few Comments on Homework

In this chapter, I present and discuss the data from a small exploratory inquiry I did this past year on schoolwork in and out of school. Then, I provide a few of my thoughts on homework itself. Although the focus of this thesis is on the link between homework and inequality, I should provide some commentary that aligns with the homework debate in general, which historically includes concerns of child developmental psychology and pedagogy.

A Small Exploratory Inquiry

My father, Dan Boychuk, designed his own informal inquiry seven years ago as my brother, Napu, completed grade 8 at a public school in Toronto during the 2000-2001 school-year. It would be irresponsible of me if I did not give credit to Dan Boychuk for his inquiry because I used a similar research design for a small exploratory inquiry I did this past year. Every day during the 2000-2001 school-year, my father interviewed my brother to find out what happened in every class that day. From these semi-formal interviews, my father approximated and documented how much time each teacher spent on instruction, how much time the students spent in group work, how much time was allotted for actual schoolwork and how much homework was given. At the end of the year, based on these observations from my brother's self reports, we concluded that 80% of the schoolwork was done at home while only 20% of it was done during class time.

My father was concerned about these observations for pedagogical reasons as he has always been concerned about child psychology in general. For example, while I was attending grade school 25 years ago in the 1982-83 school-year in northern Canada, my father went to the principal of my school to ask that no homework be brought home so that I can enjoy life at home without the intrusion of pointless school exercises. Real homework, my father argued, involves learning how to cook or build a doghouse. My school principal at the time, Faith Cronk, was the first and last principal to honour my father's ideas seriously and with respect. The response that a teacher gave during my brother's grade 5 experience in 1997, exemplifies all other reactions to my father's suggestion of no homework: what about a job in the future? This response indicates more

value being placed on conventional and monetary notion of success than on a more wholesome and well-rounded notion of success.

While my father's observations are inspired by his concern for child psychology and pedagogy, I am concerned about his findings for social-justice reasons. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is inspired by my concerns about inequality in general. Inequality among children has always been and will continue to be the main source of inspiration for my research endeavours. Homework simply happens to be that one dispensable part of the education system that contributes to inequality. What follows is a review of a small exploratory inquiry I did to find out how much schoolwork is done at school and how much is done at home for five Canadian high school students. Perhaps others may be interested in using this inquiry as an idea for a larger scale empirical study.

Parameters of the Exploratory Inquiry

Since I did not know anyone of school age intimately enough to warrant an extended period of daily interviews, I endeavoured to survey a small number of student acquaintances on schoolwork for as much time as they were willing to give me. This amount of time varied among five high school acquaintances between two days and one full week. Three of these students are children of friends; one student is a friend of my brother's and one student is a friend of a young cousin. The interviews were not as detailed as the ones my father did with my brother. It took several weeks of daily interviews for my 14-year old brother Napu to fine-tune his ability to recount what exactly happened in every class each day. From this experience, I knew not to ask too much of the student participants for this small exploratory inquiry.

Very little data was collected on the issue of inequality because I choose not to repeat what others have already done better than I would have done in documenting the existence of inequality. Thus, I did not explore the ways in which the research participants are "unequal"; I simply looked at where schoolwork is done in order to find out how much is done at school and how much is not done at school - from the perspective of the participants. Since I anticipated the possibility of students doing their homework in places other than at home, such as at a library or a friend's house, I framed my study question as follows: *how much schoolwork is done at the school and how much*

of it is asked to be done elsewhere? However, the vast majority of homework done out of the school turned out to be at home.

Participants. The largest obstacle I foresaw in the data collection was the recruitment of participants who would be willing to sit with me and discuss what happened in each class everyday for a number of days. Indeed, this became a problem in which the solution involved amending the consent form. I designed a set of questions for interviews and questionnaires. I surveyed five high school students aged 15 to 17. All participants are students with whom I was previously acquainted with either directly, or through mutual acquaintances. This places my method of sampling under the label of convenience sampling (Creswell, 2003). Four of the students attend high school in southern Ontario and one student attends high school in southern B.C. All students disclosed information on where schoolwork was completed. For all students, some schoolwork was done at home. While homework is a big part of life for four of these students, one student does not do homework regularly.

I interviewed the first student, Kate (all names of all five high school students are pseudonyms), during the last week of October, 2007 every day right after school at a coffee shop on her route from school to home. On the fifth day of interviews, Kate and I were not able to meet, so we arranged for her to type out her questions via e-mail – which turned out to be just as efficient and more convenient. The second student, Brian, had difficulty meeting with me for various logistical reasons, so I suggested doing the questions via e-mail. Since Brian does not have internet access at home, we arranged to do the questions over the phone in the month of January 2008. Given the logistical problems of meeting with the first two students, I amended the consent form to accommodate the inclusion of questionnaires via e-mail. The remaining three students did the questionnaires over e-mail throughout the months of December 2007 and January 2008.

I have included the date of a sixth student, my brother Napu. What follows are descriptions of all six students and a synopsis of the data collected from each case. The five high school students are currently attending high school while the sixth case, Napu, attended junior high school in Toronto seven years ago.

Table 2 presents the questions on the surveys. These questions are the same ones I asked during the interviews with Kate and the phone interviews with Brian. Thus, while Kate and Brian and one of their parents signed the consent form in Appendix 2A, the remaining participants signed the consent form in Appendix 2B. Both forms were approved by the McGill ethics board prior to use. To recap, Kate was surveyed through a questionnaire, Brain was surveyed over the phone and the remaining three were surveyed via e-mailed questionnaires.

Table 2: Questionnaires

Main Questionnaire:
Be as honest and accurate as possible while answering the following questions in the space provided. Please note that this questionnaire is for a study that is not about you personally. Instead, it is about the nature of education systems in North America.

Question set A
At school today, did you do any schoolwork outside of regular class time?
If no, skip to Question set B.
If yes, when, where in the school and how much time per subject?

Question set B
Did you do any schoolwork outside of the school?
If no, skip to Question set C.
If yes, when, where and how much time per subject?

Question set C
Did you have enough time to complete all homework today?
If yes, skip to Question set D.
If no, why not and how much more time did you need for each subject?

Question set D
D1: Did you get any help with your schoolwork at the school? If so, from who/what?
D2: Did you get any help with your homework outside of the school? If so, from who/what?
D3: How normal was this day for you: Was it an average day in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?

Table 2 Continued: Questionnaires

Question set E
For each class today, answer the same three questions and indicate the subject and the length in hours/minutes.

First class (subject: length:)
1) Was any schoolwork assigned? If no, skip to question 3.

2) If yes, how much time was given in your class to work on the assigned schoolwork and was it enough time?

3) How was time spent in the full length of the class?
(eg. 30-minute lesson, 20-minute class discussion, 10 minutes on schoolwork).

Weekend Questionnaire:
To be completed at the end of the weekend (on a school week)

Was any schoolwork assigned to be done over the weekend?
If no, is this what usually happens on weekends?
If yes, where did you do the schoolwork and how much time did you spend doing homework?

Did you have enough time to complete all homework this weekend?
If no, why not and how much more time did you need for each subject?

Did you get any help with your homework? If so, explain.
(eg. internet help, a friend helped you over the phone/email, etc.)

How normal was this week for you: Was it an average week in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?

Results of the Exploratory Inquiry

On the next two pages, Table 3 shows the data collected through the survey of the 5 high school students this past school-year. At the end of this table, I have included the data of a sixth student, my brother Napu, who attended grade 8 seven years ago. Please keep in mind that these results are based on self-reports.

Table 3: Amount of Schoolwork Done During Class and at Home

Kate, grade 11, Bishop Allen Academy, Toronto, Toronto District Catholic School Board

	In school, during class	In School, at the library	At Home	Total
Monday	55		150	205
Tuesday	75		120	195
Wednesday	25	60 (before school)	90	175
Thursday	75	60 (after school)	240	375
Friday	60	20 (before school)	0	80
Weekday subtotal	290	140	600	1030
Weekend	na	na	180	180
Total	290	140	780	1210
	24%	12%	64%	100%
	24%	(76% done on her own time)		100%

Brian, grade 10, Northern Secondary School, Toronto, Toronto District School Board

	In school, during class	At Home	Total
Monday	75	120	195
Tuesday	60	120	180
Wednesday	85	90	175
Thursday	80	110	190
Friday	75	0	75
Weekday subtotal	375	440	815
Weekend	na	60	60
Total	375	500	875
	43%	57%	100%

Anne, grade 10, St Andrews High School, Richmond BC, Victoria Catholic Schools

	In school, during class	At Home	Total
Wednesday	38	60	97
Thursday	15	120	135
Total	53	180	233
	23%	77%	100%

Table 3 continued: Amount of Schoolwork Done During Class and at Home

Sara, grade 12, Cameron Heights, Kitchener, Waterloo Region District School Board

	In school, during class	At Home	Total
Monday	75	95 (several minutes in the car)	170
Tuesday	75	95	170
Wednesday	75	95	170
Thursday	75	95	170
Friday	75	0	170
Weekday subtotal	375	380	755
Weekend	na	500	500
Total	375	880	1255
	30%	70%	100%

Grace, grade 12, Georges Vanier, Toronto, Toronto District School Board

	In school, during class	At Home	Total
Monday	90	30	120
Tuesday	80	0	80
Wednesday	80	0	80
Thursday	65	0	65
Friday	65	0	65
Weekend	na	0	0
Total	380	30	410
	93%	7%	100%

Napu, grade 8, Deer Park, Toronto, Toronto District School Board

	In school, during class	At Home	Total
Average estimate of the 2000-2001 school-year	20%	80%	100%

Commentary on Table 3. Kate attends grade 11 at a Catholic high school in Etobicoke of the Toronto Catholic District School Board. During the term in which her data was collected, Kate was enrolled in Physics, Chemistry, History and English. Kate had four classes a day each lasting between 76-80 minutes. As indicated in Table 3, I provided two different sets of percentages for Kate because she is the only student who did schoolwork at the school outside of class. One set indicates the 12% of this schoolwork which was done in the school library outside of class time. She regularly comes in the morning before school starts at least once or twice a week when she does not have enough time to finish all her homework the night before at home. Occasionally, she stays after school. For example, she stayed one day after school to meet and work with members of a group project. The second set indicates the 76% of schoolwork that she did on her own time. As for help with schoolwork, Kate occasionally seeks help in the mornings from her teachers, before school starts. When asked "How normal was this day for you: Was it an average day in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?" Kate replied yes on some days and less than average on other days. When asked, "How normal was this week for you: Was it an average week in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?" Kate replied yes.

Brian attends grade 11 at a public high school of the Toronto District School Board. During the term in which his data was collected, Brian was enrolled in Business, Science, English, Gym, History, Resource Centre, Math and Careers. He has four classes a day each lasting 80 minutes. As indicated in Table 3, Brian does 43% of his schoolwork during class and 57% of it at home. Brian's data is based on three school days plus the weekend – all of the same school week. Take note that I filled out the remaining two days of the week with estimates based on averages of other days. These estimates are indicated in grey font while the real data are indicated in the default black font. For example, I did not interview Brian on Monday or Friday, so the figure of 75 minutes is an average of the remaining three days of the week. Brian occasionally gets help with his homework from his mom. When asked "How normal was this day for you: Was it an average day in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?" Brian replied a couple times that he had less homework than usual.

Anne attends grade 10 at a high school in Victoria B.C. of the Island Catholic Schools. During the term in which her data was collected, Anne was enrolled in Socials, Yearbook, Math, Religion and Gym. On alternating days, she has four or five classes a day. The length of each class is 75 minutes. As indicated in Table 3, Anne does 23% of her schoolwork at school and 77% of it at home. Anne's data is based on only two school days. She occasionally gets help with her homework from her step-mom.

Sara attends grade 12 at a public high school in Kitchener of the Waterloo Region District School Board. During the time of data collection, Sara was enrolled in Biology, History, Calculus, English and Spanish. Biology and History alternated so that Sara had four classes a day, 75 minutes each. As indicated in Table 3, Sara does 30% of her schoolwork in school and 70% of it at home. As I did with Brian's data, I filled in Sara's week with estimates based on her real data. I used a rounded figure of 500 minutes, which Sara and I estimated for the weekend. When initially asked how much time she spends doing homework on the weekends, Sara claimed she spends the whole two days doing it. Presuming she was exaggerating at least a little bit, I asked her again at a later date - she and I figured she does between 8 and 9 hours of homework on the weekends. Sara has a math tutor from whom she gets help with her calculus problems.

Grace is the one student who does not regularly do homework, so her figures are not included in the average estimates. Grace's circumstance can be thought of as one example in which homework is not necessary for the successful completion of high school. According to Grace, she simply does not get a lot of homework. Grace attends grade 12 at a public high school in Toronto of the Toronto District School Board in which schoolwork is rarely asked to be done at home. During the time of data collection, Grace was enrolled in Accounting, Law, Psychology and Media Studies. Grace has four classes a day, 75 minutes each. As indicated in Table 3, Grace does 97% of her schoolwork during class and 3% of it at home. She occasionally gets help with her schoolwork from friends at school. When asked "How normal was this day for you: Was it an average day in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?" Grace replied yes on some days and "a little more than average" on other days. When asked "How normal was this week for you: Was it an average week in terms of amount of schoolwork at the school and homework outside of the school?" Grace replied: "Well in-

schoolwork was different than other weeks, usually teachers really load up on work before the winter holidays and realize there is a lot to still get done in the curriculum, so proceed to give more work as exams are near."

Napu attended grade 8 at a Junior High School in Toronto during the 2000-2001 school-year. He was enrolled in Math, English, Gym and Drama. As already mentioned, 80% of his schoolwork was done at home while 20% of it was done during class time. At one point, I tried to help him with his homework after the school in the school library only to be instructed to leave by the principal who was having a meeting with some teachers at the far end of the library and wanted more privacy. In addition to the occasional help I gave him with schoolwork, Napu had a well-paid math tutor.

Except for several minutes of homework Sara completed in the car one day as her mother drove Sara to dance class, all schoolwork of all six students done outside of the school was done at home. For the four high school students who regularly do homework, more schoolwork is done at home than in the school. As for the amount of schoolwork done at the school, the percentages range from 23% to 43%, as shown in Table 3. This means that 57% to 77% of schoolwork is done at home. This range is below the estimate my father found in his own interviews with his son, Napu. Based on daily interviews during his grade 8 year in 2000-2001, Napu did 80% of his schoolwork at home and 20% of it during class time at the school. Overall, for the five students who regularly do homework, an average of 70% is done at home and 30% is done in the school.

Reflections of the Exploratory Inquiry

In a technical report published by Dr. Linda Cameron and Dr. Lee Bartel of the Ontario Institute of Education in Toronto (2008), the average time on homework calculated from categorical estimates by parents for 2072 Canadian students in grades 8 to 12 ranges from 57.5 minutes (S.D. 32.1) to 75.1 minutes (S.D. 40.3). These estimates are lower than the estimates I found. For example, on one evening, Kate spent four hours (240 minutes) doing homework. Given this wide range of estimates, future researchers interested in doing an empirical study that includes collecting data on the amount of homework should be especially vigilant pertaining to matters of data collection. Future researchers should also note the importance of recognizing that different children take

different amounts of time to do the same homework assignment. Also, researchers should consider how to deal with the fact that some schedules are more conducive to homework than others. For example, a schedule that does or does not include gym class may have an effect on the proportions of school work done in and out of school.

Based on the fact that homework is such a deeply ingrained part of our culture, no one needs to interview six Canadian students in order to claim that some schoolwork is done in the school and some of it is done at home. However, some may find it surprising that on average, 70% of schoolwork is done at home and as little as 30% of schoolwork is done during class time, at least for the participants of this small exploratory inquiry. Also, by asking where *schoolwork* gets done rather than just homework, I am providing a more comprehensive way of looking at homework because I ask how much schoolwork gets done in the school as well as out of the school – which attempts a comparison. Lareau (2000) mentions an interesting aspect of research on family involvement: "Few studies examine variations in the linkages between parents and institutions; most, as noted above, focus on the dynamic within the institution" (p.185). Rather than simply studying the schoolwork that is done at home, I look at how much schoolwork is done at school too.

While the focus of this thesis is on homework as a social-justice issue, it would be negligent not to spend some time on the broader homework debate, which historically focuses more on pedagogical issues. However, to provide a more complete presentation of my pedagogical arguments against homework would require an entire thesis by itself. Thus, the remainder of this chapter constitutes only a few of my thoughts on the issue of homework as pertains to pedagogy and overall psychological well-being of developing individuals.

A Few Comments on Homework Itself

There are many advocates who argue for the benefits of homework. One such example is provided by Keith, Diamond-Hallam and Goldenring (2004). After researching how learning is affected by homework done in and out of the school at the high school level, these researchers conclude that homework has strong positive effects on learning. Based on these findings, Keith et al. suggest the following: "high schools should focus on out-of-school rather than in-school homework as a method of improving

learning" (p. 206). However, for this study, learning was measured by grades and achievement test scores. Indeed, if a student does homework and if grades or test scores are higher because of this and if you translate grades and test scores into learning, then you could logically deduce that homework has a positive effect on learning.

I suspect that the phenomenon of equating grades and test scores with learning may be common among parents and perhaps teachers. As my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mary Maguire has pointed out in personal communication, school board administrators and policy makers thrive on grades and test scores for arguing accountability issues. These phenomena are problematic because grades and test scores are not necessarily good indicators of learning, especially when material is memorized instead of learned and as the quality of homework decreases. Those with recent school experience, or with ample memory of it, know this first-hand. As Noddings (2006) observed, a lot of what is learned is not necessarily retained: "The only justification for much of what is taught in secondary school is that it is [needed] at the next level of schooling (...) people forget so much of what is learned in high school as soon as there is no next course looming" (p. 285).

Dewey made similar observations in 1916. Too often, school exercises consist of problems that are problems "for the pupil only because he cannot get the required mark or be promoted or win the teacher's approval" (p. 155). Dewey adds that school problems are "his only as a pupil, not as a human being" (p.156). Pupils are habituated to treating subject matter "as having reality only for the purpose of recitation, lessons and examinations" (p. 161). As a friend has suggested in personal philosophical discussions, grades are replaced by money when students enter the workforce. In other words, students cultivate a desire for accumulating high grades in school. When those students reach adulthood, they continue replenishing that desire as they accumulate paychecks and consumer goods. Similarly, Dewey notes purposelessness among many workers similar to the mindless nature of student-work:

> They do what they do, not freely and intelligently, but for the sake of the wage earned. It is this fact that makes the action illiberal, and which will make any education designed simply to give skill in such undertakings illiberal and immoral. (p. 260)

Indeed, today, in a world of such consumerism and materialism, homework makes sense especially if it looks like needed practice for the day when students will become workers. Instead of making a contribution, students and young adults are preoccupied initially with getting high marks and eventually making money. Being successful, I fear, is too often equated with making money and gaining consumer power instead of making a contribution to the lives of others. And I suspect this notion of success is cultivated over many years of equating high grades with success – grades achieved based on assignments and test scores of which much of the content is forgotten.

Keith et al. (2004), along with many other proponents of homework mention the benefits of homework other than grades, such as developing initiative and independence. *If* homework truly is useful in instilling healthy habits and skills in students such as disciplined practice, studiousness, independent learning, time management and initiative, then this would be tragic for those students who are not enabled as others to do homework. Ironically then, if educators are interested in reducing educational inequality and if homework is beneficial, all the more reason to ban mandatory homework.

In any event, these same healthy habits and skills can successfully be instilled in students without schoolwork being done outside of the school. It is quite likely that for some students somewhere and some time, such skills indeed were instilled without homework, such as a time when the culture of homework did not exist. With the ups and downs in the history of homework popularity, homework only became an ever-increasing part of North American culture after the 1957 launch of the Soviet spacecraft called Sputnik and "as lawmakers scrambled to bolster math and science education in the U.S. to counter the threat of Soviet whiz kids." (Ratnesar, 1999, p. 38; see also Buell, 2004). If the habits that various researchers, parents and educational officials deem important outcomes of homework can be attained without it, should we not be more concerned about the inequality that is perpetuated by homework?

In contrast to advocates of homework, I believe that for many students, homework instills unhealthy habits of procrastination. Students cultivate tendencies to procrastinate as they experience repetitively on a daily basis over many developing years the following sentiment: *this is work to be done later*. For example, the format I remember for school projects in elementary school was to complete most of it at home over a period of several

weeks instead of at the school in a feasibly and effectively shorter amount of time. Dewey (1916) made the same observation more generally: "More than we imagine, the ways in which the tendencies of early childhood are treated fix fundamental dispositions and conditions" (p. 116). It is possible that the more students are instructed to procrastinate on a duty, the more they equate that duty with some undesirable chore that they do not want to do. For some, this effect could very well lead to disillusionment with school all together, especially if combined with factors related to disadvantaged circumstances, which may not be conducive to focusing on school assignments.

For other students, if a lot of homework is only busy-work, years of doing this kind of homework diligently could possibly lead to other undesirable characteristics such as lack of ambition and motivation. For example, I enjoyed doing homework most of the time because I was a studious child – but other than reading, much of my homework was busy-work such as practice problems and questions, which demanded answers straight from textbooks instead of from my imagination. To this day, I am a little embarrassed to admit that I feel a sense of accomplishment after neatly and precisely filling out a form. Perhaps I (and perhaps many others) would be better off today had I not spent so many of my developing years cultivating a tendency to be satisfied with accomplishing mindless tasks. For instance, writing, for me, would not be as painstakingly sluggish. And my social skills would still be lacking, but I think they would be better too if I had more time to socialize with family, friends, neighbors and the community in general.

Autobiographical digressions aside, Dewey (1916) made similar observations regarding busy-work: "the engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical" (p. 236). Thus, I would accept reading as homework *in those cases where students actually ask for it*. Reading is more than just busy-work as it demands imagining characters, settings and possibly alternative plotlines depending on whether the material is fiction or not. The other major reason why I would accept reading homework is because it is probably the one type of homework that is least affected by socioeconomic inequality, at least in developed countries. First, the book or novel to be read can be supplied by the school library rather than the family. Second, reading does not require a desk or other materials to be supplied by the family. For these same reasons, I would also encourage journal writing and sketching.

However, I would stress the importance of remembering not to ask students to read a specified amount or to prove that they have read anything. This is not what reading is for. As I am reading a novel, I thank my adulthood that I have no one asking me to read up to page 85 by Thursday, or to describe the character development in order to prove that I have read the required amount. I suspect that many teachers do not like to be in the position of taking away from the romance of reading either. In 1916, Dewey recognized the same sort of limitation in general about education in his day: "externally imposed aims [render] the work of teacher and pupil mechanical and slavish" (p. 110). This observation still applies today as teachers are required to cover certain, perhaps arbitrary amounts of material by the end of each year and students are motivated more by the grading system than by the joy of learning.

This type of motivation is evident in the five high school students described in Diane Pope's (2001) book titled "Doing School". Pope did a study on five "successful" high school students at a Californian school in a wealthy suburban neighbourhood with low drop-out rates and well above average scholastic aptitude test results and college acceptance rates. She asked various staff members to point out the most successful students. The five students she ended up with had grade point averages ranging from 3.4 to a perfect 4.0. All five students were also involved in various extra-curricular activities. She followed each student and sat with each student in his or her classes. A few of these students explained that they are busy "doing school", which involves going through the correct motions rather than learning and engaging with the curriculum material. One student deliberated on her selection of extra-curricular activities in accordance to what she thought might look impressive when applying for post-secondary education. I believe that if students are preoccupied with getting high grades and getting accepted into post-secondary institutions, they learn less than they would if they were not preoccupied as such. In a follow-up to her study, Pope reported that one student admitted to engaging in the same activities in Princeton University.

Some teachers believe the push for homework comes from parents (Kralovec & Buell 2000; Lareau, 2000; Bennett & Kalish, 2007). This push for homework likely comes from those parents who can afford the time and resources to help with it at home. If this is indeed the case, then those parents who ask for it should not have a problem

with interview type homework that promotes parent-child interaction. If parents ask for something more structured than the learning possibilities that already exist without homework -such as free reading, writing, art, music, sports, gardening, cooking- I would suggest interview type assignments which invite the child to see their parent as a fellow human being first and a parent second. For some children, parents belong to an entirely different category that is not commensurable with the category that friends belong in. These types of interviews would be designed to promote a more humane parent-child relationship. In future endeavors, I look forward to elaborating on the importance of human connection.

Addiction to Status Quo, Addiction to Homework

In the event that the topic of banning homework becomes more popular, I anticipate some students, parents or teachers to ask: what can a student do to fill in two hours in which homework is normally done? This kind of questioning would perhaps be a symptom of addiction to homework as part of a more general addiction to conformity, convention, status quo and blind allegiance to authority. If someone cannot fill in 2-4 hours with an activity, this is a sign that people need a few hours of free time to cultivate a sense of creativity, imagination and most importantly, a sense of who they are and what they are truly interested in – in other words: autonomy and agency. Thus, if some students want homework, they should get it and their classmates should not be penalized if they do not want it too. If some students truly want to work on something at home, no extra reward from the school is required because those students will value the work itself rather than an external reward. Under these conditions, I believe more students would actually seek out academic activities for pleasure.

Harry Cooper is known for recommending the somewhat arbitary10-minute rule per night: 10 minutes in the first grade, 20 minutes in the second grade, and so on, up to 120 minutes in the twelfth grade (Cooper, 1989a; Bennett & Kalish, 2007; Goodman, 2007). I have also heard of the 'reduction' suggestion from various friends and acquaintances: what about simply reducing the amount of homework instead of getting rid of it all together? The Toronto District School Board is currently considering the recommendation that holidays and weekends be free of homework (Rushowy, 2008). To

these types of recommendations, I would still insist on a complete ban of mandatory homework because even a small amount makes a difference if one student does it in an optimal environment while another student does it under stressful conditions and yet another student does not do it at all.

Another rebuttal I have heard from acquaintances is the need for stress: students need to get used to stress because they will encounter it in adulthood. With all due respect to those who suggested this, I have never heard of anything that sounded more dubious. If children experience stress, they will not be successful in coping with stress in adulthood, this is how some psychological phobias arise. If an adult has phobia of mice, heights, dentists or small spaces; this is likely due to a childhood experience (Barlow & Durand, 2002). The same idea applies to repeated exposure to less extreme forms of stress on a daily or weekly basis. Kohn (2006) makes a similar argument:

> Imposing competition or standardized tests or homework on children just because other people will do the same to them when they're older is about as sensible as saying that, because there are lots of carcinogens in the environment, we should feed kids as many cancer-causing agents as possible while they're small in order to get them ready. (p. 146)

If a child repeatedly considers schoolwork stressful over the course of several years of schooling, this logically leads to problems in adulthood pertaining to work ethic among other things. The problem with the notion of imposing stress on children is exacerbated by the common notion of practice in general: to get better at math, you need to practice it, to get better at riding a bike, you need to practice it. So it is, many falsely assume, with stress. Rather than digress further on this topic here, I look forward to elaborating on the psychology of stress in future endeavors.

As I mentioned previously, there is no scarcity among published works to which I can give credit for recognizing the link between inequality and homework. (Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Kralovec, 2003; Buell, 2004; Kohn, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2007; Goodman, 2007; Cameron & Bartel, 2008). These authors pay various amounts of attention to the link between homework and inequality. While I fully believe that homework is a problem for all the other reasons mentioned by these authors, the purpose of this thesis is to highlight one particular reason: inequality. Even if, in the hypothetical

end, the debate on homework concludes with a resounding yes - homework is good pedagogically, it works and it is needed - my point would still stand: it contributes to inequality so long as there are significant levels of inequality between the homes in which students do their homework. And if, in the end, the debate concludes with a resounding no, homework is bad, – my point would still be significant because my argument is not driven by the need for childhood freedom, more family time, more extra-curricular time, more creative play and cultivation of imagination. Instead, my argument is driven by the tragic extent to which all kinds of inequality exist, especially socioeconomic inequality.

As also mentioned previously, Kralovec and Buell's (2001) efforts are the closest I have seen that relate to my own efforts and ideas. What follows is an excerpt from the documentation of their investigation on why American students drop out of school:

> Homework reinforces the social inequities inherent in the unequal distribution of educational resources in the United States. (...) A principal once told us that he had solved the homework problem for students in poverty simply by not assigning them homework. This curious solution raises troubling questions: Either homework is of no educational value—in which case why is anyone doing it—or we are committing the worst form of educational discrimination by differentiating academic programs on the basis of economic class. (p.40)

In summary, the information gleaned from the small inquiry pertains solely to the issue of where schoolwork gets done from the perspective of six students. On average, for the five students who regularly did homework during the survey periods, 70% of schoolwork was done outside of the school, and 30% of schoolwork completed in the school. Perhaps this small exploratory inquiry could serve as an idea for a future empirical study.

A common problem among the arguments for homework is the association of learning with grades and test scores. If homework actually does any good, all the more reason to ban it in the name of equality. I believe homework cultivates procrastination and an unhealthy tolerance for mindless tasks. Two possible exceptions would be reading and keeping a journal – as these do not leave the imagination unused. On reading however, I remind educators not to ask students to prove that they have read because this

promotes a desire to get high grades instead of to get anything out of learning about the world. If parents ask for homework that is more structured than reading, writing and the other countless learning activities inherent in life itself, I suggest interview type assignments that promote a healthy connection between parents and children. Without constant assignment from authorities at the school, perhaps students would have more of a chance to develop autonomy and agency. And perhaps the creativity that children are born with would not go unused and uncultivated. In the hypothetical end, whether the homework literature culminates in a big yes or no answer to the homework debate, my arguments against homework would be significant either way because they are based on the problem of inequality.

Chapter 4: Exploring the Link Between Homework and Inequality

In Chapter 2, through a review of the literature, I documented the persistent and systemic nature of inequality. In Chapter 3, I showed that most schoolwork is done at home, illustrating the systemic nature of homework in the schools and families of five Canadian students. In Chapter 3, I also presented an abridged account of my position on the homework debate. Having documented the systemic nature of both inequality and homework, I provide in this chapter an exploration of the link between them. To reiterate my main argument, homework contributes to inequality. As I attempt to show how and why homework contributes to inequality, I draw from the concept of epistemology, as well as the related concepts of multiple perspectives and discourse. Epistemology in general has a great deal to do with the way parents, students, policy makers, teachers and educational researchers live their personal and academic lives on a daily basis, and therefore, the culture of homework. Analyses of my own epistemology is scattered throughout this discussion merely by way of a concrete and instrumental example.

Defining Epistemology

Epistemology is traditionally a philosophical topic dealing with the questions of how one can know and acquire knowledge. According to Rosenberg (2000), two common epistemological theories are empiricism and epistemic relativism. The former asserts that knowledge can be justified by experience. The latter theory denies the possibility of objective truths. Hofer and Pintrich (1997) cite the theoretical works of Piaget as the starting point for the psychological interest in epistemology: "Piaget (1950) used the term genetic epistemology to describe his theory of intellectual development, initiating the interest of developmental psychologists in this intersection of philosophy and psychology" (p. 88). Today, a common psychological moderator to the term is 'personal': personal epistemology. This indicates a distinction from the philosophical version. Personal epistemologies have implications for the methodologies that educational researchers use.

Epistemological Development is a Continuous and Never-ending Process

I firmly believe that my epistemology as a former elementary and secondary school student, current university student, big sister and tutor, all effect my epistemology as an educational researcher. This may seem a redundant statement in that epistemology can appear to be an all-encompassing construct if one uses the inherently broad definition previously suggested - the subject of how one can know and acquire knowledge. However, based on personal observations of many of my acquaintances in and out of the field of education, I have noticed that it is common for people to act as if they have different epistemologies in different contexts as well as in different periods of their lives. For an example of the latter, it is common -- at least among my own acquaintances -- to forget what it is like to think and know like a child. I often feel quite strange and left out when I see fellow adults treat children, either directly or indirectly, as less than persons. This kind of treatment reveals what seems to be a certain form of amnesia – a forgetting that when one was a child, one had just as much a sense of being a person. Perhaps, when parents treat their children as persons, their children do not eventually suffer from what seems to be amnesia in which one forgets what it is like to be a child. Perhaps the policy makers who do the policy making regarding homework do not have the memory of what it is like to be a child and/or the empathy that is required to imagine what it must be like to have homework come home from school.

To provide an example of multiple epistemologies in different contexts, consider the natural tendency for a teacher who is also a mother to have different ideas about her own biological children, her classroom children, the children in the next class, the next school, the next city, country and continent. This kind of multiplicity is evident in one educational researcher, Gary Natriello (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Natriello wrote and published arguments for homework. When Natriello's children started getting homework, he consequently suffered his own policy recommendations and changed his views on homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

Multiple epistemologies within the same person have been discovered by empirical researchers as well (Hofer, 1999; Kuhn, Cheney & Weinstock, 2000). This kind of multiplicity is different from the kind Natriello experienced. While Natriello experienced two different ways of knowing the same thing – the consequences of policy

recommendations, Kuhn et al. studied epistemologies of five different judgment domains: taste, aesthetic, value, social truth and physical truth. Their sample consisted of a total of 129 students in fifth grade, twelfth grade, community college, undergraduate and graduate studies in educational philosophy. They conclude that within one individual, varying levels of epistemology can coexist. A personal example of multiple epistemologies within one individual comes from my own experience as an undergraduate student. Due to my interdisciplinary interests, and my participation in different disciplines of Environmental Studies, Psychology, Sociology and Education, much of my writing (including this thesis) has interdisciplinary elements. The existence of multiple epistemologies explains the frustration that some researchers of epistemology might have with determining the progression of epistemological development. To add further difficulty for epistemological researchers, Schommer (2002) argues that epistemological development is a life-long process that ends only at death.

Two flip side Flaws of Multiple Perspectives

Related to personal epistemologies is perspective. If each human being constructs knowledge differently, then each human being has a different perspective. The reverse of this statement works too: if each person has a different perspective, then each person constructs knowledge differently. In personal and academic life, I often ask myself: which perspective provides the most appropriate account of what is being perceived? I often presume that the least narrow perspective is most appropriate, relevant, effective, meaningful and beneficial. Perhaps homework would not exist today if educational researchers and researchers from other disciplines such as sociology and child psychology made more of an interdisciplinary and collective effort to pool their knowledge to come to a better, more rounded understanding of what homework means for everyone, not just the "successful". What follows is a discussion of two major problems with multiple perspectives that stand in the way of a more well-rounded understanding of educational issues such as homework. These two problems of multiple perspectives form the discursive foundation that enables the systemic culture of homework to perpetuate inequality.

Abuse of Multiple Perspectives

I concur with the idea that each human being constructs knowledge differently, especially for more subjective things like taste, aesthetics and feelings like love. I can also take this same stance for more tangible things like car accidents. Loftus (1993) has shown that perceivers of the same car accident see different things. This has implications for the court cases in which blame is determined to see who is legally responsible to pay for damages. It is these implications that seem to motivate Loftus' research interests. I too am concerned with abuse of multiple perspectives. The existence of multiple perspectives can be abused, in the court of law as Loftus has shown, to the extent that incompatible truths compete. Unfortunately, I fear, the less truthful 'truth' sometimes wins and the perceiver of the less accurate truth who knows this can abuse this knowledge.

An example of abuse of perspective could very well be playing out in the culture of homework. As many parents and educators cling to what seems to be true: that homework is necessary and it works; they may not be seeing the bigger picture. Similarly, Kralovec and Buell (2000) observe that the belief of many corporate and business leaders is that the problems of poverty and joblessness can be solved if students study harder. While some business leaders may make this claim, a more honest claim accounts for all the subtle and contributing factors that make the truth more complex than those business leaders may perceive. Whether those parents, educators and business leaders *innocently* fail to broaden their perspectives or whether they *intentionally* keep their perspectives narrow is a topic that deserves an entire thesis by itself. I suspect however, that some people take advantage of multiple perspectives.

Nussbaum (1997) observes that amidst all the doubtful discussions about truth and knowledge, many philosophers have not considered enough the ways in which a postmodern attitude can be used to one's unfair advantage. For example, powerful groups have been known to "define moral norms in ways that perpetuate their own superiority" (p. 40). Kralovec and Buell (2000) provide another example when they speak of upper class parents as perpetuating the culture of homework because it helps their children attain educational achievements. One poststructuralist philosopher who has considered how knowledge can be used to one's unfair advantage is Foucault (1976/1980). Foucault asks: "what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of

discourses of truth?" (p. 31). Since the middle ages, Foucault explains, there has been a theory of 'rights' to power and the purpose of this theory, or discourse, has been to hide any overt signs of domination. Foucault assigned himself the task of analyzing and bringing out into the open these forms of domination: "to give due weight, that is, to the fact of domination, to expose both its latent nature and its brutality" (p. 33). In this chapter, I am attempting to bring out into the open the latent and psychological nature of the link between homework and inequality.

False Constructions and Faulty Perspectives

A second flaw of multiple perspectives, which has serious implications for educational research and the culture of homework, is the concept of false constructions of knowledge. Each human being constructs knowledge differently and some of those constructions of knowledge are more effective than others. A ubiquitous example of false construction of knowledge is self-deception. Generally, self-deception stands in the way of advancement at individual and sociological levels and it is important for educators to understand this if they want all students to develop in the healthiest way possible. In a way, self-deception implies the existence of an objective truth: If there is no truth to hide from, there is no need to self-deceive. This is interesting because it is complicated by the fact that each individual has a perspective from which the world is observed. For example, some advantaged children may not perceive that they have an unfair advantage if they come home to an environment that is conducive to doing homework while some classmates have no such environment. Similarly, the principal of my brother's Toronto public school took credit on behalf of her school for the good reputation it has – this is a good example of a faulty construction of reality. The lion share of the credit realistically belongs to the paid tutors of the attending students.

As many educators and researchers have observed, some children, parents and teachers, construct failure so that it is something that students do rather than something that is done to them (Varenne & McDermott, 1986; Mehan, 1992, 1996; McCarty, 2002, 2005; Moll, 2002; Goodman, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008). To this correct observation, I would add that this perspective is too narrow and therefore inappropriate. A more appropriate construction would entail the understanding that student failure is not only

about what the student is doing and not only about what is being done to them. As Mehan (1992) recognized, there is a need to shift the source of failure from characteristics of the family and children toward more general societal processes including schooling. If a successful student does not completely realize that his socioeconomic background has something to do with the facilitation of his success (Hilfiker, 1994), I suspect that this incomplete construction can lead to the false construction of stupidity in less successful peers who are actually just as capable, and perhaps in some cases even more capable, yet not as facilitated. Perhaps, if there were no homework, these equally capable peers would have a better chance at showing their abilities so that they can be duly recognized and rewarded. This plea, for a more equal enablement of students, is related to one of Noddings (2006) four suggested components of moral education, 'confirmation': "When we confirm someone, we attribute to a questionable act the best possible motive consonant with reality" (p. 113). Too many people harbor a false construction as pertains to quality of achievement. Similarly, Goodman (2007) points to an "unspoken rational behind homework that if underachievers and disadvantaged children would just work harder and do more, they could pull themselves up to compete with high achieving students" (p. 33). This rationale is misguided because it does not account for circumstantial realities involving structural and cultural constraints (Mehan, 1992, 1996).

Related to this misguided rationale is the confusion between the terms deficit and disadvantage. Edwards (1989) observes that disadvantage, which clearly involves difference, also implies deficit. According to Edwards, the middle class bias that underlies the deficit position is clear; therefore the difference view is more appropriate. However, as Edwards recognizes, whether it is called difference or deficit, it is still poor housing, overcrowding, ill health, or inadequate nutrition.

Misguided rationales, self-deception and poorly informed constructions have a basis in the biology and evolution of the brain. At a certain basic neural level, fear of change and novelty is evolutionarily adaptive (Goleman, 1989; Goldberg, Podell & Lovell, 1994; Gray, 1995; LeDoux, 1995; Ramachandran, 1996). Goleman (1989) observes that self-deception is adaptive to the extent that it eases pain and acts as a coping response to stress and danger. However, I insist there is a low threshold at which self-deception becomes maladaptive. While it may be adaptive to self-deceive innocently

at an unconscious level, it is maladaptive to self-deceive at a conscious level. It is maladaptive to actively avoid possible opportunities for change when that change means improvement. This notion of a threshold is similar to Baumeister's (1989) notion of an optimal margin of illusion: "illusions can be either adaptive or maladaptive (...) one determinant of whether they are adaptive is the degree to which they distort the truth" (p. 184). Indeed, it is maladaptive for students to develop under a false construction that they or their peers are falling behind because of stupidity when in fact, they are falling behind because of one or more aspects of circumstance.

It is also maladaptive for parents and educators to falsely assume that progress is being made when they see successful programs making a difference in their own lives. Occasionally, when discussing the prospect of banning homework with acquaintances, a mother for example, might tell me about a program at her son's school where homework was indeed banned. It is unfortunate that parents take these incidences as indications of progress and then brush their hands of the topic, forgetting about all the other schools filled with children who continue to be disillusioned with school. This example is one of a broader tendency to falsely and egocentrically assume that if all is well with one's own family, then all is well in general – never mind that other families are struggling and never mind that some children will grow up to become a liability to society.

Why Does Homework Still Exist if it Indeed Contributes to Inequality?

In many circumstances, seeing self and world as honestly as possible is necessary for self-improvement and improvement of the world. Getting to know human nature and the world as honestly as possible, makes it easier to reach the root cause of various problems ranging from the individual level to the societal level, including the problem of inequality. At the technological level, while accuracy may be a setback, it evidently does not hold things back as much as it does at the sociological level. Today, for example, we have the internet while racism still exists. We are not as able to be self-deceptive with respect to technological failures. Also, multiple perspectives are harder to maintain at technological levels of inquiry than at sociological levels. This is because when technical failures occur, the consequences are blatantly obvious in the inherent existence of physical evidence. In a plane crash, the deaths of victims and the damage at the crash site

are undeniable. In the culture of homework, the inequality that it perpetuates is not as obvious to people until I point it out to them.

This obscurity, I propose, is a major reason why humankind has been able to advance technologically. The wheel, electricity, landing on the moon and the internet are examples of technological advancement. On the sociological side of things, there has not been the same level of advancement as in technology. When "we" landed on the moon, there was still a lot of social segregation on this planet. Women and many people of visible minorities of all kinds were still very much disadvantaged and many are still so today. Why did "we" land on the moon while "we" as a human race still had far more important goals to achieve socially and individually?

Self-deception and abuse of multiple perspectives stands in the way of all levels of advancement, but especially at the individual and sociological levels. This, I believe, is a fundamental part of the answer to why we landed on the moon nearly a half century ago while homework continues to contribute to inequality. Sociological and individual failures are not as physically real and therefore easier to deny, ignore or reconstruct. There is less tangible evidence and more intangible evidence of sociological failures such as discrimination and prejudice. For every piece of tangible evidence of inequality, there is more intangible evidence such as feelings of helplessness and lack of self-worth. It is much easier for educational researchers, policy makers, teachers, parents, business leaders and students to twist the facts, innocently or intentionally, about what is happening in school then it is for physicists to twist the facts about what is happing in their laboratories. For example, when I let go of my pen, it falls due to gravity. If someone tries to twist this fact by suggesting that it floated instead, that person would have a hard time arguing his case. When a poor student is not doing his homework because he has siblings to take care of, someone can very easily twist this fact by suggesting he is not doing it because he does not have the discipline, or the intelligence, or the interest, or other feasible but false reasons. When I receive an e-mail it is because electricity and the internet work successfully. When a student gets a high mark on her biology exam, is it because she is smarter than the student sitting beside her or is it because both her parents are surgeons?

The difference in the vulnerability of the two domains, sociology and technology, to deniability, seems related to Kunda's (1990) notion that perceptions of events are malleable only to the extent that they fit with undeniable physical evidence. If memory is malleable even for physical events, as illustrated by Loftus (1993), it is no wonder that more subtle phenomena like the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, racism, ageism, sexism and many more social problems still exist in spite of the ingenuity that humans display through technological advancement. The malleable nature of memory and multiplicity of perception is a problem in the legal system as Loftus has shown, but also in many other contexts –the most important of which is education.

The consequences of homework are more intangible than the physical conditions of schools. Some people may be more alert to physical and therefore undeniable evidence of inequality such as the evidence discussed by Jonathan Kozol (2005). In his work, Kozol documents the extreme inequalities between schools, bringing attention for example, to the extremely poor shape of school buildings in poor neighborhoods. While there is a lot of physical evidence of inequality, there is also a lot of intangible evidence such as when a truly intelligent student is dismissed as merely 'average' or even less so because he does not do his homework or because of some other way in which he does not conform. In some ways, I see the more intangible inequalities surrounding the culture of homework as more of a concern than the tangible inequalities such as broken windows and hazardous school buildings because the former inequalities are not as obvious and therefore more likely to persist unnoticed. Buell (2004) has made a similar observation regarding the subtle forces behind the culture of homework:

> The decision by school administrators (...) to impose more homework is not the result of immediate threats or mandates from a small core of elite business leaders. The connections are more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous. Conventional wisdom in the realm of business and education are used to defend and reinforce wisdom in the other. (p. 61)

If less obvious inequalities actually *are* noticed, they are still easier to ignore and deny than the more physical and obvious types of inequalities seen when comparing the physical features of school buildings and neighborhoods. When the inequalities

surrounding homework persist without being properly acknowledged, harm is done when students take all the blame for their failures to accomplish homework tasks.

On the surface, it is easier for everyone involved to simply blame the student for unfinished homework. Thus, because of the less obvious nature of the inequalities surrounding homework, I presume that some educators and advantaged parents find it easy to remain in their own perspectives as they argue for the benefits of homework while failing to look more broadly to what homework means to other less advantaged parents and school children. Perhaps those in professional positions of decision making on matters of homework are suffering from a narrow, advantaged perspective, or from desires to conform to the deeply ingrained culture of homework, or from lack of empathy and understanding for what it means to live in a world where one's own characteristics and circumstances do not fit in with the mainstream status quo. If this is the case, policy makers need to be able to lessen their grip on status quo and think outside of the box.

In a deserving critique of UK policies on childrearing, which pathologizes working-class parenting, Gillies (2005) observes the following:

> The notion that the working classes are failing to raise appropriately individualized children has become a key mechanism in the reproduction of social advantage (...). While contemporary explanations of poverty and disadvantage have been re-constructed and psychologized, parenting remains an embedded, situated process, amenable to change only through social and material circumstances. (p. 849-850)

Here, I argue that inadequate parenting exists in all classes; it is simply more visible in the working class as is anything else that might be inadequate. With more financial and material resources, inadequacies of parenting among higher classes can be hidden in a world where materialism is so prevalent. It is easier for a mother to lie to herself about providing adequate emotional and psychological necessities than about providing material necessities. To friends, neighbours and passersby, tangible things are also more obvious than the intangible things. Similarly, Coles observes: "we blame the alcoholism, insanity, meanness, apathy, drug usage, despondency, and, not least, cruelty to children we see or are told exist in the ghetto (...) All those signs of psychological deterioration can be found among quite privileged families too" (1977, as cited in Edwards, 1989, p.

28). When under-privileged families consist of responsible parents who try their best, social and material circumstances may often stand in the way of an optimal educational development. Glass observed this same problem in 1967, "even in poor homes the most conscientious moms could do little" (as cited in Levitas, 1974, p.100).

The difference between families of the same social class has been documented by McDermott et al. (1984, see also Heath, 1983 for differences between black and white working class families, and Varenne & McDermott, 1986). McDermott et al. analyzed the way in which two different working class families in Brooklyn did homework. In Joe's family, homework stood out, almost like an intangible foreign presence in the home, akin to what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'foreign currency'. For Sheila's family, homework was a part of the flow of family life. Thus, the cultural capital in Sheila's family suited school life more than the cultural capital in Joe's family. McDermott et al. make the important observation that Joe and his family did have cultural capital, just not the kind that is traditionally rewarded by schools. These important observations show that no one can make sweeping generalizations about the ability of working class families to do homework. It also shows how it is the entire family, not just the student that can contribute to the successful completion of homework. Joe's mother demonstrated embarrassment at her own mistakes while helping with homework in front of research observers. According to Varenne and McDermott, many of the working-class parents they observed felt that they could be blamed for the failure of their children.

Discursive Maintenance of Homework and Inequality

In a documentation of multiple theories of inequality, Archer et al. (2003) discuss several overlapping themes, one of which is how individualism obscures social class: "working-class non-participants are often the subject of discourses that blame them, rather than social inequalities, for their inability to access higher education" (p. 16). Whether advantaged parents stay in their own perspective purposefully or naively may depend on the individual. Gillies (2005) made a similar observation about parental behaviour that could be innocently done or not: "discursive constructions of the deserving self become a resource for middle-class parents to consolidate their advantages and ensure the reproduction of privilege through the generations" (p. 836). The constructions

that privileged parents maintain are the ones that are heard the most, even if they are not the most accurate constructions. Kralovec and Buell (2000) make the same observation that the upper and middle class voice has more political power. If privileged parents see homework as a means for their children to raise their level of academic achievement, argue Kralovec and Buell, then this may explain why there has been no organized revolt against homework. Indeed, it is quite tragic that statements like those of Otto, uttered as long ago as 1941 are drowned out by less accurate statements made in the interests of the privileged: "the benefits of assigned homework are too small to counterbalance the disadvantages, especially for pupils in poor homes" (as cited in Cooper, 1989a, p. 23). Instead, judging by the extent to which our society today is shaped by materialism and consumerism, what seems to be heard and acknowledged are pleas for more homework and higher grades so that students turn into profitable workers in order to consume.

Perhaps, another reason why some perceive homework as an indispensable necessity is because they believe that those students who do it are the students who succeed. Whether this reasoning is sound or not depends partly on the definition of success. If people honour this reasoning without analyzing what success means, they may very well act upon an undefined discourse of success by encouraging homework and arguing against any proposal to ban mandatory homework. Ironically, if doing homework leads to "success" of any kind, this is all the more reason to ban it because some students simply cannot do it due to circumstances such as poor housing, preoccupied parent(s) or guardian(s), part-time job(s) or other responsibilities.

Another reason why homework is perceived as good is because it *looks* like the conventional notion of successful career persons. Lareau (2000) makes the following observation which confirms this idea:

> While working class men have little autonomy on the job, at the end of the shift, their work is over. Upper-middle class men, however, frequently carry their work into their family's life, as they travel overnight, work at home on weekends, and entertain co-workers (...). Social class differences in family involvement in schooling appear to mirror these patterns in the amount of separation between work and home in working class and upper middle class families. (p.2)

These observations pertain to an aspect of culture that deserves its own exploration. Here, let it suffice for me to mention it because it certainly does have relation to the culture of homework. The culture of homework does not exist in a vacuum; it is very interrelated with other aspects of the broader culture that exists in Canada and other countries in which homework prevails. Buell (2004) makes a similar observation for the United States: "Work and homework are part of a broad cultural matrix in U.S. society, and the work ethic is implicated in the formation and evolution of our class structure" (p.69-70). Buell also suggests that the U.S. society would benefit from a gradual reduction of the working day, providing more time for other aspects of life such as the family.

The Culture of Homework

Cultural forces lead to mass self-deception and the culture of homework is a good example. Some parents and educators, avoid – perhaps unintentionally - broadening their partial perspectives on the culture of homework. In other words, the culture of homework has much wider implications than some perceive. When I suggest a banning of homework to fellow Canadians, the usual initial reaction is surprise. As Greenwald (1980) observes, people resist change – which is easier to do than to advocate change. Why is it easy to resist change even when change might lead to improvement? In addition to that basic neural level at which fear of change is evolutionarily adaptive, I think it is also because people are comfortable with what is familiar and conventional. The familiarity with homework is clearly illustrated when an interviewer asks Alfie Kohn questions that reveal an understanding of what homework means to some families, perhaps *many* families: "But as a parent you're always looking to make things easier for yourself, aren't you? And having them do homework without question every night does make things a lot easier" (Whyte, 2006).

To date, the social structures of Canadian culture constrains disadvantaged children from fulfilling the potential to enter post-secondary education. The one aspect of social structure that I highlight here is that which entails the culture of reliance on homework: schoolwork that is done in varying and unequal circumstances. Young (1990/2000) also speaks of the American culture of education as follows:

> [Children] do not have equally enabling educational opportunities even when an equivalent amount of resources has been devoted to their education. This does not show that distribution is irrelevant to educational opportunity, only that opportunity has a wider scope than distribution. (p. 254)

So, when exploring the possibility of giving opportunity to all students to do their schoolwork at the school, I am not only looking at the more concrete distribution of time, space and tutoring, I am bringing to consciousness the less tangible notion of *what it means to have more or less time and space; and human enabling resources such as tutors*.

Polanyi (1967) also recognizes a psychological link between culture and knowledge. Polanyi uses the notions of conscious and unconscious levels of awareness for his argument that "all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowing" (p. 42). According to Polanyi, the structural function of tacit knowledge consists of three things: a knower, his focal target and the 'subsidiaries'. Polanyi uses the notion of two stereoscopic pictures as an example of what he means by subsidiaries. The two pictures are the subsidiaries and the coherent picture that results is the focal target. Focal awareness is always conscious. Subsidiary awareness can range anywhere from fully conscious to unconscious levels of awareness. Therefore, even the most objective scientists do not know on what grounds they hold their knowledge to be true: "The grounds of all tacit knowing are items – or particulars – like the stereo pictures of which we are aware in the act of focusing our attention on something else, away from them" (p. 29). And cultural frameworks, Polanyi argues, are involved when external observations result in existential choices and self-transformation.

In summary, the epistemologies of educators, parents, students, educational researchers and policy makers together form a key ingredient to the link between homework and inequality. Epistemologies are constructions of knowledge that are formed from different perspectives. The extent to which these constructions of knowledge are faulty is a cause for concern especially if ubiquitous and consequential policies on homework are made based on faulty constructions of the various aspects related to the culture of homework. The intangibility of the consequences of homework make it especially hard for educational researchers and policy makers to come to an

appropriate understanding of what homework means to all students. If interested in sociological advancement, it is important for educators to expose intangible consequences of educational practices such as homework.

I argue that the reason why sociological advancement has not kept up with technological advancement is due to the difference in ability to construct and re-construct reality about technological and sociological topics. The ability to re-construct reality as one sees fit is easier to do from advantaged positions. The culture of homework is a prime example of a discourse that perpetuates inequality. The discursive maintenance of homework is fueled by a selfish and faulty discourse of advantaged parents. This discourse is also fueled by the inadequacies of policy makers to broaden their perspectives on what homework means to everyone. The culture of homework shapes the social structure of Canada by constraining many students from successfully completing school assignments. A nation-wide ban on mandatory homework would enable all students to accomplish their school tasks and assignments in an educational environment.

Chapter 5: School Responsibility

Before I discuss school responsibility, it is *extremely* important to acknowledge that parents and students have responsibility too. Perhaps in future endeavors, I will disclose my thoughts on the responsibilities of broader members and parts of society such as politicians at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, and other community members. I should also remind readers that school responsibility does not mean teacher responsibility. By school responsibility, I refer to a systemic, institutional responsibility.

Parent Responsibility

In an increasingly complex world, it is very important to have critical parenting skills. Noddings (2006) notes the very long-standing irony that we learn math but not parenting even though few become mathematicians while most become parents. To this very important observation, I would add that we need critically informed parenting more now than we ever did before. We no longer have the built-in discipline that comes with pre-civilized life. As recently as 60 years ago, some Canadians of northern Canada, the Inuit, were still nomadically living off the land. Many Inuit today who are in their 50s or older do not know exactly where they were born because they were born in igloos and sod houses, which are non-permanent dwellings lacking permanent locations. Today, it is safe to say that all Canadian parents have more responsibility to administer appropriate amounts of discipline in their parenting practices. At one point in human history, each group of people lived a life where life itself provided built-in responsibilities and duties. At these points in human history, parents did not have to worry as much about disciplining their children and there was not as much need to ensure that children cooperated with fellow humans because life itself already had built-in mechanisms of discipline.

Today, the majority of Canadians, including northern Canadians, live a consumer lifestyle polluted by advertising, which is facilitated by the latest technologies. With every passing decade, children pay more attention to technological gadgets (Schor, 2004; Wallis, 2006). For my generation, growing up in the 80s included loyalties to television shows, which aired music videos and situation comedies. It also included the introduction

to video games like the ones provided by Nintendo. Today, in addition to more varieties of television shows and video games, children are also loyal to their computers and cell phones. Ten years ago, I remember undergraduate classes with no laptops. Over the years, more and more laptops became visible in my post-secondary experience. Today, since my Inuit cousins in Nunavut are still in their teens, they are the ones who are encouraging me, an adult at twice their age, to socialize with them through social networking websites such as Facebook and Bebo.

I agree with critical theorist Schor (2004) who suggests that consumer culture causes dysfunction and decline in children's well-being. Given the lack of research and evidence to show how consumerism has a negative psychological effect, Schor suggests two possibilities. First, it causes "feelings of dissatisfaction, unfulfilled longing, and a keen sense of social comparison (...). The more they buy into the commercial and materialist messages, the worse they feel about themselves (...) (p. 172-173)". Second, it "detracts from other beneficial activities and behaviours" (p. 172-173) such as reading and socializing with other humans face to face. Similarly, Wallis (2006) argues, "it's up to grownups to show them what [technology] can't do, and that there's life beyond the screen" (p. 41). Interestingly, however, I fear that many 'grownups' are also caught up in the lures of technology and advertising, as Schor's work suggests and as Buell (2004) observes as well. Thus, many parents do not have the ability to be critical enough of the increasing influences of media and the increasingly complex nature of society.

One hypothetical example of a lack of critical parenting arises from an example mentioned in Chapter 3. Imagine a student who wants to do homework and does it successfully. Next, imagine the parent's reaction when they find out that the completed homework is not "rewarded" by the school through some means of accreditation. What do you suppose would be a typical parental reaction? I would anticipate something in the nature of the following words 'My child should be rewarded for his initiative, his effort, his hard work and\or his productivity', etc. Given the nature of our world today, I could not blame a parent for having this reaction. I would deem this a natural and normal reaction. However, what is normal is not necessarily healthy. A critical parent may realize that the best possible reward may be inherent in the child's own interest and enjoyment of participating in the work itself. Any external rewards beyond the child's

own inner satisfaction need not be anything beyond ongoing encouragement and recognition. That is, recognition not in the form of grades, but in the general form of verbal appraisal.

In addition to this lack of critical parenting, there is the problem of the *increasing need* for critical parenting in an increasingly complex world. This is why the subject of critical parenting is needed in the curriculum. As Nussbaum (1997) laments, we lost the ability to think critically and this is a problem alongside the growing ability to be technically competent. However, lamenting the loss of critical thinking implies that we had it to begin with. Perhaps, if humans evolved in the context of no requirements for critical parenting, there was no critical parenting to begin with. It would be interesting to find out if there is any way we could study the evolution of parenting. Certainly, the world is full of evidence of ingenuity on technical matters and about how to make money, but this sort of creativity does not necessarily translate to critical thinking about human nature and child-development.

Goodman (2007) also makes some observations about the need for parents to be critical. She notes when parents accept homework, they teach kids to accept traditions without examining them. If the subject of critical parenting becomes a core subject today, this might be beneficial for families of the future, when the students today grow up and eventually have children of their own. What to do about those who are already parents today, who are delinquent themselves due to materialistic and consumerist values that are incompatible with the health and prosperity of the planet on which we all live and depend upon? Not all parents are going to read and follow the helpful guidelines provided by Bennett and Kalish (2007) on how to approach school officials about too much homework. In addition to the bottom-up approach offered by Bennet and Kalish, I encourage a top-down, systemic approach towards the reduction of homework.

Parental Involvement with Homework.

Goodman (2007) relays the exasperation of one parent who found out that sometimes parents do the homework for their children: "I was shocked to see the beautiful projects that were obviously the result of many hours of work on the part of an adult. I am upset that my child should be graded against an adult" (p. 47). Goodman also

makes the following observation regarding parental involvement with homework: "we expect teachers to engage in years of training before they are qualified to teach children. How can parents with no training be asked to become teachers?" (p. 35). Similarly Kohn (2006) observes: "Many mothers and fathers return each evening from their paid jobs only to serve as homework monitors, a position for which they never applied." (p. 10). And finally, Harry Cooper (2001) observes that parental involvement with homework can be detrimental if "parents are uncomfortable or unable to take on the role of teacher" (p. 44). The importance of these observations increases as the amount of schoolwork done at home increases. These observations are especially salient in the context of inequality as some parents have unequal amounts of the desired qualifications that conform to the idiosyncrasies of school assignments.

Student Responsibility

In her book on school projects in Harlem, Meier (1995) quotes Joseph Priestly in 1794 as he announced the responsibilities of educators and students at college in London:

> Whatever be the qualifications of your tutors, your improvement must chiefly depend on yourselves. They cannot labour for you, they can only put you in the best way of thinking and laboring for yourselves. If therefore you get knowledge you must acquire it by your own industry. You must form all conclusions and all maxims for yourselves, from premises and data collected and considered by yourself. And it is the great object of this institution to remove every bias the mind may be under, and to give the greatest scope for true freedom of thinking and equity. (p.162)

To this quote, Debora Meier adds the importance of the responsibility of the tutors: "If their schooling chiefly depends on their industry, then we must engage their industry" (p. 163). Indeed, it is the school's responsibility to enable the opportunity for all students to achieve something everyday instead of cultivating a habit of procrastination. If all schoolwork is done in the school, children will be more likely to leave the school every day with a healthy sense of productivity and accomplishment. This is something my parents taught us when my brother and I went to school. I present an excerpt from the

mission statement my father wrote for my brother during his grade 8 year in a public school of the Toronto District School Board:

> I pledge to work hard and try my best in school. When I get up in the morning, I will look forward to another day of learning new things, at the beginning of each class while teachers teach. I will then do my best to apply the new teachings by working hard in the classroom on the related exercises. With this spirit, I ask my educators to help me accomplish the completion of schoolwork at the school. As I walk home, the satisfaction of being productive for that day will make me happy.

On the matter of achievement, Coleman (1990) argues: "The school can never go beyond joint responsibility with the child and his family for learning" (p. 65). While I certainly agree, I also ask: What family does not want the best possible educational outcome for their child? And as for the child, anyone familiar with small children knows very well that learning is a very fundamental pleasure common to all human beings. In early childhood, learning is not a responsibility, it is something the child cannot help but do automatically, with glee. Somehow, many children eventually lose the awe, wonder and desire for learning. Somewhere along the way, learning indeed becomes a responsibility rather than a natural and automatic reaction to stimuli. I do not think this is because of something inherent in the child. In her observation of elementary teachers in the American Midwest, Ladson-Billings (2005) relays evidence of the natural outcome when educators take the responsibility to enable student achievement:

> [During a teacher's meeting, a teacher named Paulette] provided a detailed explanation of the decoding, vocabulary development, and comprehension work she was doing with her students. Somewhat embarrassed, one of the other teachers said, "Well, I guess I haven't really been teaching any reading." Several of the other teachers nodded in agreement. (...) During our classroom observations of Paulette we were struck by the amount of time she spent focused on instruction. (p. 139-140)

Thus, when a student is failing, I look to the education system rather than the student or the family for more responsibility to ensure a passing grade. Perhaps this

philosophy on responsibility is common for the earlier years (McDermott et al., 1984; Varenne & McDermott, 1986; Moll, 2002; Gillies, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; McCarty 2005), but I would insist the same philosophy up to high school as well because the habits and behaviours of high school students are influenced by socialization in earlier years. I firmly believe in the idea that there is no such thing as a lazy child. If, by the teenage years, some students seem lazy, I believe this has less to do with innate qualities and more to do with environmental factors and socialization. I cannot discuss all that needs to be said about the topic of student responsibility, as it deserves much more attention than I can give here. My purpose here is not to elaborate on student responsibility, which deserves its own lengthy exploration, but rather, to argue for more school responsibility.

School Responsibility: Schools are not for Perpetuating Inequality

As Meier (2002) observes, children are "educated four-fifths of their waking lives outside of the school [so] families are, in the end, primarily responsible for the education of their children" (p. 44). To the extent that Meier is correct, not all children have an equal chance in life and schools have the responsibility to try their best not to contribute to the unequal chances. Similarly, Dewey (1916) observes that the "dangers" of an increasingly complex world in which increasingly different codes in different social environments such as the family and neighborhood lead to the potential for different standards of judgment. This 'danger', Dewey argues, "imposes upon the school a steadying and integrating office" (p. 22). Dewey also saw the need for schools to "see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group to which he is born" (p. 20). Here, I would add the importance of recognizing that advantaged children as well as disadvantaged children need to 'escape from the limitations' of their 'social group'.

Recall from Chapter 4 my suggestion that advantaged children can attribute their success to their intelligence without fully realizing the advantages they have over less advantaged peers. In an extensive account of her observations in three different town settings, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) relays with detail the various ways in which children are prepared for school. Between white working class families, black working class

families and mixed higher class 'townspeople', Heath found unfair and complex differences in the way children were prepared for school learning. Compared to the higher class townspeople children, the ways in which the working class children were prepared for school were limited. There is a case to be made for the limitations of wealthy children too however. Often, children of wealthy and privileged backgrounds do not realize how different and difficult it can be to live other lives (Hilfiker, 1994). It is a disservice to them and perhaps the lower class peers they might discriminate against if no one educates them on this point so that their limited world views can be broadened.

To discuss what might possibly be school responsibility requires a consensus on what a school actually is. What is a school for? To answer this question requires one to know the definition of true education and to know what kind of society is wanted (Dewey, 1934). As Dewey argues, a society to which social stratification is fatal must ensure that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equitable terms. If the end goal is a society with vast inequalities in which everyone is preoccupied with money, then the current school systems are very successful. Edwards (1989) argues: "school systems are ideally constructed to sort out disadvantaged underachievers from their achieving counterparts" (see also McDermott et al., 1984 and Varenne & McDermott, 1986). Similarly, Goodman (2007) observes: "no activity separates the haves and the have-nots like homework" (p.36).

I will not be as bold as Goodman (2007) to say that teachers who assign homework are "guilty of perpetuating this inequality" (p.36). Perhaps Goodman has a right to say this because she has more than 30 years of teaching experience. However, with no teaching experience, I will not say this myself because perhaps if I were a teacher, I would not be as creative as some teachers in their successful attempts to simultaneously cover the required amount of material and plan their instruction so that all schoolwork gets done in the class. The systemic inadequacy of the public education system is one of the reasons why I myself have not endeavored to become a teacher. I do not have the courage - which perhaps many do - to work against a large institution on a daily basis so that I can refrain from separating the "haves and have-nots". Fair and humane teaching should not consist of a personal struggle against such a deeply ingrained and institutionalized phenomenon as a culture of homework which perpetuates inequality.

If there are advantaged and disadvantaged children all across Canada, due to difference in family backgrounds, the Canadian public education systems have the responsibility to ensure that there are adequate resources such as time, space and social support to do schoolwork at the school, thereby giving the disadvantaged children more of a chance than they have to date. Since I have no teaching experience, I can only imagine how busy teachers already are with the duties that they are responsible for. Perhaps some teachers are burdened with too much responsibility. This is why I speak of the need for more school responsibility, not teacher responsibility. I would place more responsibility on people in my position rather than any individual teacher. If I can see how lives can be improved, it is my responsibility as a human being to do what I can. For example, in future endeavors, I may approach the issue of banning mandatory homework by finding out how to appeal to policy makers and politicians.

While families are certainly responsible for the education of their children, some parents are not as capable as others to ensure this. It is teachers that have become capable through teacher education to ensure adequate learning experiences. The education system as we know it today does not take advantage of this fact. Similarly, Kralovec and Buell (2001) argue that students "need time to make new learning their own. Professional educators need to design rigorous academic work, scaffold new knowledge, and coach new study habits. *The place for such work is in the school.* [italics added]" (p. 41). In an interview with People magazine, (Duffy, 2000), Kralovec argues: "Work should be done in school so a kid can go up to the teacher and say, "What did you mean by this question?" Later in the interview, Kralovec argues that work be done in the presence of professionals, "where students have equal access to educational resources". Indeed, some teachers may be better than others, which would constitute inequalities across classrooms, but the inequalities outside of the school are the focus here because they are far more unequal and far less manageable. It is neither practical nor ethical to enter the homes of all Canadian school children to make sure that homework is completed in certain standard and equal environments; a miracle is required for this to happen. Educators and policy makers may find a revelation in the fact that this miracle could be realized by proxy – if mandatory homework is banned. If mandatory homework is banned, then schoolwork could be done in more equal environments.

Dewey (1916) argues: "It is the aim of progressive education to *take part* [italics added] in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them" (p. 119). I do not mean to put the responsibility of solving the enormous problem of inequality all on schools, however, schools should "take part" in working against inequality. Kralovec and Buell (2000; see also Buell, 2004) have the same understanding as they admit that it is problematic to assume that "schools by themselves can correct for damages done by a highly inequitable class structure" (p. 65). While I agree and I realize that much can be done outside of the education system, I also believe that schools are in the most advantageous position to do such change. Schools are in a unique position of power because of the vulnerability of children, which the likes of terrorist groups and large corporations seem to take advantage of through child soldier training and media advertising respectively. I encourage schools to be more responsible by recognizing more fully the vulnerability of children and therefore doing what they can to enable children to learn and grow appropriately, without false constructions of failure. The banning of mandatory homework is a very feasible step, as one principal has shown (Kralovec & Buell, 2001). Again, however, it should not be up to individual teachers, principals and parents to work against such a deeply ingrained part of status quo. Instead, a nationwide ban on mandatory homework needs to occur.

While Bennett and Kalish (2007) offer empowering advice on how to approach school officials, I would prefer to approach the problem as close to the source as possible – whether this is at the level of policy makers or Ministers of Education. Rather than work from the bottom up, I would prefer to work from the top down. An environmental analogy to the bottom up solution is what environmentalists call the 'end-of-pipe' solution. Cleaning up the pollution after the pollution has already been made is a solution after the fact, at the end of the problem. While clean up is undoubtedly a necessary occupation for some environmentalists, others are trying to attack the source of pollution before it has a chance to start. Likewise, while Bennett and Kalish guide parents to work from the bottom up, I would like to work from the top down by banning mandatory homework. I should remind the reader that this would be an endeavor in the name of equality but also in the name of all the other legitimate and very good reasons to ban homework brought up by Kralovec and Buell (2000, 2001), Kohn (2006), Bennett and

Kalish, and Goodman (2007). I should also remind the reader that I recognize that some children enjoy homework as I did in my childhood. This is why, when I mention the banning of homework, I always refer to banning *mandatory* homework. This leaves room for individual children to have the option of doing academic work on their own terms if they so choose, without external rewards. Perhaps these conditions might actually lead more students to seek out academic activities on their own.

In summary, while I acknowledge the importance of parent and student responsibility, I ask for more school responsibility. School responsibility is more feasible to implement than parent or student responsibility because schools are inherently more institutional and systemic than individual families and students. A ban on mandatory homework is a prime example of an institutional and systemic change that could affect a great number of individuals.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Reflections Arising

Summary of Thesis

In this conceptual inquiry, I argue that homework contributes to inequality in systemic, discursive and psychological ways. For numerous theories of inequality, I propose homework as a key mechanism that is instrumental in reproducing inequalities. As long as homework exists, equal social opportunity is not possible.

In a small exploratory inquiry I did this past year, I found that on average, 70% of schoolwork is done at home and only 30% of it is done at school. At least from the perspective of 5 students in 5 Canadian schools, this shows the extent to which schools rely on the home environment for schoolwork to get done. The intangible consequences of homework make it especially hard to come to an appropriate understanding of what homework means to everyone.

Some proponents of homework base their position on the argument that homework helps students to learn. However, these arguments are problematic because they equate learning with grades and test scores – which are not necessarily good indicators of learning. Whether or not the homework debate comes to a hypothetical end in a 'yes' or 'no' position, my argument against homework would remain significant either way because my focus is on inequality and how homework contributes to it. If a consensus is reached based on the argument that homework is good for things like learning and cultivating good study skills, this would be yet another reason to ban it because some students simply do not do their homework due to circumstantial reasons.

Questions and Possibilities for Further Endeavors

The culture of homework is maintained by a discourse that is fueled by selfish, faulty and narrow constructions of knowledge. It is not my place here to determine how much of this re-construction is done innocently or intentionally – I simply wish to propose that these constructions need to be questioned and analyzed in order for sociological problems to be addressed. Given the vulnerability of social issues to re-constructions, denials and malleable natures of memory – it is especially important for researchers in the social sciences to be on guard for intentional attempts or innocent

tendencies to construct knowledge in inappropriate ways. One example in which homework is inappropriately understood is in advantaged parents who cannot help but want their children to succeed and have the mainstream means to enable their children to do so. Meanwhile, some peers of their children become disillusioned with school, drop out of school, and then become a liability to society. Other peers drop out and remain harmless throughout lives in which great potentials for contributing to society are never reached. How many potential innovators has the culture of homework and other inadequacies discarded?

Another example in which homework is inappropriately understood is manifest in those who are in the position of making decisions and rules about how much homework should be allowed. Those in the position of making decisions about homework are likely in those positions because they did homework when they were students, in homes with enough educational resources. Rather than ask for more teacher responsibility, I ask for more school responsibility. In order for schools to stop relying on the homes of their students, a ban on mandatory homework is necessary. A ban on mandatory homework forces schools to take the responsibility to ensure that schoolwork can get done in the school. If a ban on mandatory homework means more school responsibility, then I am essentially asking for more responsibility on the part of those in the position to make such a ban. Finding the best way to ban mandatory homework 'from the top' is the one major 'future endeavor' I propose for myself and/or others who are interested. Perhaps, as I have mentioned already, I could approach policy makers and politicians with my arguments. Before I take this step, other questions should be asked: Who makes the decisions about how much homework is allowed? How closely do individual schools and teachers follow the policy guidelines? How can we structure the school day so that all the schoolwork can be done in the school? Are there any areas in Canada where many families would not welcome a ban on mandatory homework?

As for other future endeavors, I could investigate other aspects of school that contribute to inequality. There are many factors influencing inequality and the quality of education, therefore, changes other than the banning of mandatory homework are required. What other ways can education improve so that it does not contribute to inequality? Here are just a few of many possible areas of research that might apply: Less

emphasis on tests and grades (see http://www.alfiekohn.org/stdtest.htm for a sampling of the already existing debate on standardized testing), more emphasis on learning, less emphasis on the need for teachers to cover certain amounts of material in certain amounts of time, more coherent curriculum material, less emphasis on the need for all students to achieve a passing grade at the same age, more flexibility for different developing rates and learning styles. Lee Bartel (who co-authored with Linda Cameron the technical report on homework in Canada) is said to suggest: "if there's simply too much work to cover that teachers are sending home in order to get it done, maybe the school day or the school year should be longer." (Rushowy, 2008). Instead of lengthening school time, I suggest looking at how to cut down the material teachers need to cover – especially the kind that children forget as soon as there is no next course looming.

Implications for Researchers, Parents and Teachers

I would hope to have time and effort of those interested and concerned geared not towards proving that too much schoolwork is done at home and developing convincing arguments that no schoolwork should be done at home – but rather, finding out how to go about banning mandatory homework. I did think of organizing at the national level a boycott of homework – where parents would collectively start banning the completion of schoolwork in the homes. But this was only a fleeting thought because I know that some parents of current school students are addicted to the culture of homework and do not fully realize the broader consequences of homework such as procrastination, overvaluing of external rewards such as grades and the perpetuation of inequality.

Compatibility with Other Research

My pleas for a ban on mandatory homework have nothing to do with other pleas for more parental involvement in general. I have not said anything about parental involvement in general such as reading programs, reading to and with kids and more parent-teacher communication. The efforts of educational researchers to increase the need for more parental involvement in general are not incompatible with my efforts to decrease our culture's reliance on homework. Homework is more than just parental involvement; it requires the efforts of the student, the material resources of a flat surface

such as a table in an environment conducive to concentrating on even busy-work type homework and sometimes the help of an adult is indeed required. Schools are in an optimal position to enable students to complete all of their schoolwork because the infrastructure and human resource is already there. Schools are also in an optimal position to instill values that are compatible with humanity and the one planet all of humanity shares. Therefore, schools should place less value on work for the sake of external rewards such as grades, which later on in life is replaced by money, material, and other superficial rewards. These superficial rewards impede the health of individuals, society and the planet itself.

My plea for a ban on mandatory homework is fueled by a concern for social-justice and an awareness of the politics of education. This concern is compatible with the concerns of critical theorists. In his book on critical pedagogy, Joe Kincheloe (2008) includes equality, educational politics and the practice of blaming students for failure among the concerns of critical pedagogy. It was only after I had written a first draft of this thesis that I became familiar with the movement of critical pedagogy, and this is why it would be a dishonest political act for me to include critical pedagogy as part of my theoretical framework as outlined in my introduction. However, now that I am familiar with this movement, I am very happy to acknowledge it and to be cognizant of this movement going forward.

Interrelatedness: The Factors Contributing to Inequality in Canada are many and varied

It is of utmost importance to acknowledge and be constantly aware of the complexity of inequality, and it would be irresponsible of me not to admit the complex intertwining of important factors in schooling and family background relating to inequalities. Similarly, with experience in both roles of mother and teacher, Meier (2002) makes the following observation: "the privileges that power carries with it are hard to unravel. As an actively involved parent myself, I realized how much more likely my children were to get special treatment" (p. 177). Edwards (1989) also observes the complexity of social topics: "it is difficult to mount studies which investigate all aspects of a culture simultaneously" (p. 155). I am not sure if it would be desirable to investigate all aspects of a culture simultaneously even if it were possible, but it certainly is worth

mentioning that for the culture of homework specifically, there are many intertwining aspects that work together towards the perpetuation of inequality. For these reasons, it would be a mistake for the reader to assume that I present this thesis as a comprehensive study of the link between homework and inequality. Much more needs to be explored and rigorously researched.

Marks, Creswell and Ainley (2006) explored four different ways of explaining the processes by which socioeconomic background influences educational inequality: material resources, cultural resources, social resources and school systems. Their conclusions are analogous to my own. According to Marks et al., highly differentiated aspects of school best explain socioeconomic background influences. Thus, one of their policy suggestions is to minimize the difference in learning environments between different learning programs. Analogously and more broadly, my policy suggestion is: minimize the difference in schoolwork environments overall by banning mandatory homework.

The complexity of inequality demands other changes: changes at the level of curriculum, teaching methods, structure of the day, availability of tutors, curriculum content, curriculum delivery, curriculum structure organization, flow, applied, every day material. To digress on these very important additional required changes (as well as other unforeseen requirements) would not do them justice here. Let it suffice for me to say that upon ensuring that enough schoolwork gets done during the school day so that no schoolwork is necessary after school, it would be a mistake to expect inequality to simply disappear. I cannot stress this enough. Marks et al. for example, point to inequalities between different learning programs. But ensuring that students can do their schoolwork in the school would certainly be a good step to take because it is a step that shows recognition of the fact that to date, inequality in educational outcomes is caused by differences in circumstance, not merit. While there are indeed individual differences, inequality is still primarily structural, cultural and systemic. A ban on mandatory homework is a change at the structural, cultural and institutional level that would have positive implications at the individual level. It is a change that recognizes that not all parents can help with homework for a variety of reasons.

Concluding Thoughts

My passion stems from the problems of inequality. I am also motivated by the idea that children, especially younger children, have fundamental rights to a stress free life in which an actual period of childhood is allowed. Given my plea for a nation-wide ban of mandatory homework, Gaskell (1996) might caution against the difficulty of arguing for national goals. Towards the end of her account of the experiences of a nation-wide study in Canada on exemplary schools, Gaskell states: "this national study ends up arguing to protect and enhance local jurisdiction of schools rather than arguing for national curriculum or nationals goals" (p. 206). Perhaps Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1994) would also accuse me of failing to devise solutions that have local meanings and of being preoccupied with finding a universal solution. However, I find that I am also guided by Nussbaum's (1997) plea for cultivating humanity. Similarly, Meier (2002) observes: "variety needs to be balanced by the acknowledgement that there exists a larger community – one we all have a stake in - a shared public" (p. 176).

Until a year ago, I always held the view that differences should be celebrated and not merely "tolerated" as if it were a painful sensation and not merely "respected" out of deliberate politeness. However, my stance was enhanced when I listened to photographer and author Helene Tremblay's presentation on her work with families around the world at the 2006 annual convention for the Quebec Provincial Association of teachers. Tremblay suggested that we cultivate a *desire* for difference. This approach to differences is one that I have adopted as my own. While authorities can impose celebration on people, authorities cannot force desire. National Aboriginal day and the Gay Pride Parade for example, are imposed on people whether they tend to these events or not. These types of celebratory events do not guarantee sincerity. Desire on the other hand, is inherently sincere because it comes from within.

While I value and appreciate the beauty that comes out of efforts of those who promote diversity, I also value the basic facts that I share with all human beings: We all live on one planet, we are a social and communicative animal with the ability to imagine and therefore think in new and creative ways, children are very vulnerable and children have a right to learn how to live their lives based on the understanding that humans live on just one planet and that humans are a social animal. As a person of inter-racial

background, I have had the dual privilege of growing up learning the values of the Inuit in the context of the broader, mainstream Canadian culture. My Inuit cousins of Nunavut and my Caucasian cousins of southern Ontario are far more similar in nature than they are different. As children, both sets of cousins enjoyed playing outside, learning about the world beyond Canada, listening to or watching adults, watching cartoons and laughing with friends and family.

It is surprising that there are so many systemic aspects of the world that stand in contrast to the basic facts that all humans share. One such systemic aspect is this: the continued reliance of educational institutions on homework, while students suffer from false constructions of failure. Progress has been made however, and I have hope in the ability of those in the position of decision making about homework and other aspects of education that contribute to inequality to make further progress towards equality.

I have long realized that if education is a product of society, it cannot possibly change society. Tappan and Brown (1996) have made a similar observation. Yet, Dewey (1934) argued that a world of materialism and prejudice could only be corrected by the "forces which education alone can evoke and fortify" (p. 89). Therefore, I believe that since schools cannot immediately escape from ideals set by social conditions, *leadership* is necessary. Leadership and progress involves thinking beyond the status quo. There has been increasing attention towards the deleterious effects of homework for pedagogical and psychological reasons. As part of this increasing attention, there has also been some recognition of homework as a social-justice issue. Because of my passion for the rights of all children to equal opportunities for education, I have endeavored here to bring the notion of homework as a social-justice issue to centre stage.

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Student Assent / Parental Consent Form

-for-

Volunteering to participate in research done by: Tuutalik Boychuk, Master's student
McGill University, Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies in Education
Supervisor: Dr. Mary Maguire, Co-Supervisor: Dr. Ronald Morris

Information about the research:

I am doing a Master's degree in Educational Studies at McGill. To complete my Master's thesis on inequality and school responsibility, I am researching the extent to which school work is done in the school and outside of the school. To collect data for my research, I will be interviewing 4-6 high school students in the Toronto area. I will interview each student 4-6 times during the course of one week. I expect each interview to last 20-25 minutes each, but the first interview may take a little longer in order to get accustomed to the interview format. The information obtained during these interviews will be analyzed and presented in my thesis. I would like to have all interviews completed by the end of January, 2008.

The information obtained in the interviews will mainly be about the efficiency and effectiveness of current schooling systems. Even though the information obtained in the interviews will not be about the students directly, real names will not be used. I will be the only person to have access to the interview materials. The students can withdraw from the interviews at any time during the interview without consequence. If there are any questions the students do not want to answer, the question(s) can be skipped. The students can ask me to refrain from using any or all of the interview data during or after the interviews.

I will be contacting the students for 3-4 brief follow-ups after the interviews have been completed. These follow-ups will be done over the phone or via e-mail and will not take anymore than five minutes each. These follow-ups will occur up to five weeks after the last interview.

If there are any questions about this consent form, students and/or parents can contact the McGill Research Ethics Office at 514-398-6831. If there are any questions about the research, students and/or parents can contact me or my supervisor by e-mail:
Tuutalik Boychuk: tuutalik.boychuk@mail.mcgill.ca
Dr. Mary Maguire: mary.maguire@mcgill.ca

Student Assent to Participate:

Please sign below to indicate that you have read the information above and that you would like to volunteer your time:

_____ Date: _____
Signature of research subject

Parental Consent:

Please sign below to indicate your consent to have your son/daughter participate in my research as explained above:

_____ Date: _____
Signature of parent or legal guardian

Student Assent / Parental Consent Form

-for-

Volunteering to participate in research done by: Tuutalik Boychuk, Master's student
McGill University, Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies in Education
Supervisor: Dr. Mary Maguire, Co-Supervisor: Dr. Ronald Morris

Information about the research:

I am doing a Master's degree in Educational Studies at McGill. To complete my Master's thesis on inequality and school responsibility, I am researching the extent to which school work is done in the school and outside of the school. To collect data for my research, I will be surveying several high school students in North America. I will survey each student 2-6 times during the course of one week (depending on availability of the student). I expect each survey to last roughly 10 minutes each. The information obtained through these surveys will be analyzed and presented in my thesis. I would like to have all surveys completed by the end of January, 2008. The surveys may be done through interviews or through e-mailed questionnaires, depending on convenience.

The information obtained in the surveys will mainly be about the efficiency and effectiveness of current schooling systems. Even though the information obtained in the surveys will not be about the students directly, real names will not be used. I will be the only person to have access to the survey materials. The students can withdraw from my research at any time without consequence. If there are any questions the students do not want to answer, the question(s) can be skipped. The students can ask me to refrain from using any or all of the survey data during or after the data collection.

I will be contacting the students for 2-3 brief follow-ups after the first week. These follow-ups will be done over the phone or via e-mail and will not take any more than ten minutes each. These follow-ups will occur up to five weeks after the first week.

If there are any questions about this consent form, students and/or parents can contact the McGill Research Ethics Office at 514-398-6831. If there are any questions about the research, students and/or parents can contact me or my supervisor by e-mail:
Tuutalik Boychuk: tuutalik.boychuk@mail.mcgill.ca
Dr. Mary Maguire: mary.maguire@mcgill.ca

Student Assent to Participate:

Please sign below to indicate that you have read the information above and that you would like to volunteer your time:

_____Date:_____
Signature of research subject

Parental Consent:

Please sign below to indicate your consent to have your son/daughter participate in my research as explained above:

_____Date:_____
Signature of parent or legal guardian