Censorship!...or... Selection?
Confronting a Curriculum of Orthodoxy through Pluralistic Models

Shaheen Shariff and Leanne Johnny
CENSORSHIP!… OR … SELECTION?
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For Hanif, seeker of truth and foundation of thoughtfulness
For Farhana, healer of pain and lantern of happiness
For my Zahir . . . ever-present companion in life
      Shaheen Shariff

For René Allard, whose love and support have been a source of great strength
and encouragement along this path. I could not have done this without you.
      Leanne Johnny
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FOREWORD

CITIZENSHIP OR CENSORSHIP IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES?

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.

Adrienne Rich

When this book was initially conceptualized in 2003, the impact of September 11th, 2001 had just begun to sink in globally. Dialogue and academic discourse on the complex political and historical conditions that resulted in the acts committed that day were beginning to emerge (Said, 2003; Giroux, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003; Chomsky, 2004). The Western media had already begun to perpetuate its overt proliferation of post-September 11th Muslim stereotypes as terrorists and barbarians. It is not as if such stereotypes did not already exist. One simply had to watch Disney’s 1992 animation, Aladdin, winner of two Golden Globe and countless other awards including best original song and best original score (Giroux, 1997; IMDB, 2006). The first verse of Aladdin’s winning opening song “Arabian Nights” charmed its often young and captive audience with the following verse:

Oh I come from a land
From a faraway place
Where the caravan camels roam
Where they cut off your ear
If they don’t like your face
It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home
(cited in Pilhofer, 2001).

The effect of September 11th was to bring to the surface deeply embedded forms of racism and subliminal political and media messages that are generally absorbed and perpetuated by cultural hegemonies (Gramsci, 1971-75; Chomsky, 2004). It sometimes takes a shocking event, violent conflict or controversy to bring to public attention the power imbalances, beliefs and assumptions that superficially serve, and are detrimental to, democratic interests. It became clear to us, that these are the very elements that play themselves out at a more personal and community level, in
school censorship controversies. School censorship controversies impact all the stakeholders involved, beginning with the students, their parents, teachers, school administration and the community at large. They significantly disrupt learning and can ruin the careers of teaching professionals involved.

The crux of our discussion in the following chapters therefore, is to demonstrate that schools are the playground where Eurocentric, imperialist and androcentric hegemonies\(^1\) perpetuate and sustain themselves. This is generally achieved through “censorship” disguised as “selection” of appropriate curriculum resources and materials; appropriate school uniforms; age-appropriate content; decisions on what constitute acceptable religious, secular and/or family values (Shariff & Manley-Casimir, 1999). At the heart of such conflicts is a disagreement in values (religious or secular). Such disputes are also grounded in fear of change and loss of privileged status (hence fear of those who bring new and different cultural and religious customs, practices, languages, clothes and artifacts that do not conform to normative frameworks). These controversies are not limited to religious considerations. As we illustrate in Chapter 2, they can involve political correctness, issues involving sexuality or homophobia, witchcraft and numerous other concerns expressed by school stakeholders who want a say in what children learn at school.

Moreover, as new technologies provide infinite and added opportunities for knowledge construction, education and mis-education, we argue in Chapter 5, that schools adopt the same mindset towards digital literacies that they use to control and construct knowledge, or prevent access to it, in the physical school context.

While the Western media, Internet sites and web-providers are not bound by the same censorship laws that are pervasive in more authoritarian nations, they nonetheless have a powerful influence in creating distorted images of certain religious groups through the under-representation of marginalized voices. For instance, post-9/11, the mass media has largely neglected to depict the everyday lives of Muslims in favour of a more sensationalized image. This is evidenced by the ubiquity of clichés that characterize Muslims and Arabs as fundamentalists and terrorists (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2002; Shaheen, 2003; Martin & Phelan, 2002). Such clichés have informed the worldviews of powerful stakeholders in public institutions such as schools. Consequently, educational decisions are often rooted in hegemonic ideologies rather than a genuine understanding of minority religions and cultures. As Joe Kincheloe (2004) explains:

> Many scholars maintain that the classroom is a central site for the legitimization of myths and silences about non-Western and often non-Christian peoples. If educators who value the power of difference were to teach about the history of Islam, they would have to rethink the canonical history of the West. Indeed, when school texts distort the history of Islam, they concurrently distort all history. Teachers and educational leaders who act on the power of difference forge such recognition into a politically

\(^{1}\) Our notion of “hegemony” is based on Antonio Gramsci’s (1971-1975) concept of hegemony, ideology and common sense.
transformative mode of education. Such a pedagogy understands Western societies as collectivities of difference where the potential exists for everyone to be edified by interaction with the other and the ways of knowing what he or she brings to an encounter (2).

Kincheloe observes that right-wing Chester Finn’s Fordham Foundation publication entitled “September 11: What Our Children Need to Know” made an attempt to dismiss (or censor) post 9/11 scholarship that drew attention to these powerful hegemonies by referring to such scholarship as “so much . . . nonsense” (Kincheloe, 2004, 3). As we argue in this book however, these forms of censorship are not sustainable. The lived realities, histories, rights and interests of citizens that are “othered” cannot be suppressed forever. We offer pedagogical suggestions towards guiding educational policy makers and teachers to address the emerging religious and value conflicts. Moreover, the proliferation of new technologies complicates issues of censorship in schools; hence we also address the practical and legal censorship challenges that confront schools in cyber-space.

Consider the context of Canadian schools for example. Kennelly (2006) observes that even though throughout the 20th Century, Canada and other Western liberal democracies have constitutionally entrenched equality, religious and free expression rights for ethnic groups, gays/lesbians/transgendered citizens, and people with special needs, overwhelming evidence suggests that images of who gains membership to privileged citizenship, are continually learned and reproduced. Canadian historian (Strong-Boag, 1996) confirms that citizenship education “tells the story of who gets to be considered the nation’s ‘real,’ ‘normal’ ‘representative’ or ‘ideal citizen’” (128). Early citizenship education was inextricably linked with imperialism. It emphasized the relationship between the Dominion of Canada and the British Empire (Walter, 2003, 43, cited in Kennelly, 2006, 542). The very notion of “citizenship” is premised on exclusion – if someone is “in,” then necessarily others must be left “out” (Bannerji, 1997; Kennelly, 2006). Traditionally, those who have not been adequately acknowledged in civics studies as being Canadian citizens are immigrants and refugees, Aboriginal (First Nations people), working class people; gay/lesbian/transgendered peoples.

The chapters that follow are presented within this larger social and political context. Our objective is to analyze school censorship controversies to illustrate their foundations in ignorance that in turn, perpetuate inequality and fail to meet democratic ideals. We argue that ultimately, censorship is not sustainable, because the more that schools attempt to sweep matters under the rug in a rapidly evolving and increasingly diverse society, the more controversial and violent resistance and reaction they tend to encounter. This is evidenced on the global scale, as imperialist powers can no longer pretend to create “democracies” in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan by ignoring the fundamental rights and interests of civilians in those countries.

We argue for educational models that challenge approaches which are deeply ingrained in orthodox perspectives, through a pluralistic and critically informed stakeholder approach that is educational, ethical and legally defensible. We
contend it is important to address the prevailing ignorance in our schools by presenting, incorporating (and indeed, by “selecting”) several, accurate versions of the ethical frameworks and histories of marginalized indigenous and immigrant communities, acknowledging their contributions to the arts, sciences, the humanities, industrial development, and technology in their countries of origin and their adopted Western homes. In doing so, it is imperative these histories and contributions do not take on an “Orientalist” or patronizing perspective as previous studies were prone to do (Said, 2003; Kharem, 2004; Abukhattala, 2004).

We suggest that if democratic ideals are to succeed, critical pedagogy and critical media literacy, and an understanding of the substantive legal principles that inform civic responsibility are crucial. We have called this Critical Legal Literacy. We recommend that it is only by engaging with the diversity of students and our school communities (instead of superficial acknowledgement through hidden curriculum) that we can regain the respect and confidence of a peaceful and pluralistic society. While it may be optimistic to suggest that future tragedies like 9/11 can be averted, it is important to acknowledge that it is not the “clash of civilizations” as some have argued, but the “clash of ignorance” that is responsible for much of the political conflict that prevails in the world today (His Highness Prince Karim, Aga Khan, 2006). Ignorance of the masses cannot be addressed without first understanding what drives the censorship that stifles our schools, and guides the public conscience of our societies. Consider for example, remarks made recently by His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, at an Evora University Symposium entitled: “Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies” (February 12, 2006). This eminent Harvard scholar and Imam of millions of Shia Ismaili Muslims worldwide, emphasized three pillars for democratic success: 1) improved civil institutions; 2) rigorous, responsible and relevant education; and 3) renewed ethical standards. On education he explained:

We must do a better job of training leaders and shaping institutions to meet more demanding tests of competence and higher standards of excellence. This means moving beyond the notion that better education simply means broader schooling — wider access to formal learning. We must accompany our concern for quantity with a heightened concern for quality. . . Are the curricula we teach relevant to the knotty problems of the future? Or are we still providing a twentieth century education for twenty-first century leaders? . . . For too long, some of our schools have taught too many subjects as subsets of dogmatic commitments. Too often, education made our students less flexible—confident to the point of arrogance that they now had all the answers—rather than more flexible—humble in their life-long openness to new questions and new responses. An important goal of quality education is to equip each generation to participate effectively in what has been called “the great conversation” of our times. This means, on one hand, being unafraid of controversy. But it also means being sensitive to the values and outlooks of others. . . . For only in such a climate will we come to see our differences as sources of enrichment rather than sources of division. And
only in such a climate can we come to see “the other” not as a curse or a threat, but as an opportunity and a blessing—whether “the other” lives across the street—or across the world.

In the upcoming chapters, we hope to shed some light on the issues of censorship in schools, and provide suggestions for educational, non-arbitrary, and legally pluralistic approaches to resolving stakeholder conflicts.

We hope this book will enlighten you to the challenges that lie ahead, as we attempt to alleviate ignorance through censorship and selection of thoughtful and relevant educational resources. Our objective is to encourage diverse manifestations of culture whether they are represented through modes of dress, cultural artifacts, language or religious beliefs. In the process of deconstructing stereotypes that impede learning, our aim is to reconstruct through informed and supportive knowledge about difference, so that future generations can arrive at decisions that are grounded in intellect, informed by pluralistic perspectives. Ultimately, it is not only school and local communities that benefit – but society as a whole.
I would like to acknowledge the support and interest of a number of colleagues whose mentorship over the years resulted in the writing of this book. Professor Michael Manley-Casimir first introduced me to the complex issues relating to censorship. As a student I was delighted with the opportunity to co-author a chapter on censorship with this eminent expert in education and law. The research and writing for that chapter (referenced at various points in this book) was the starting point for my interest in censorship. This led to completion of a Master’s degree that studied the Surrey School Board ban of three children’s books in Surrey, British Columbia, and subsequently, a Doctorate that also addressed issues of law and education. Professor Roland Case was instrumental in helping me sort through the issues relating to the competing rights and interests in school censorship controversies and applying the legal principles to my analysis. It was then that I began to develop the Stakeholder Model presented in this book. The research and publications that resulted from my work on the Surrey book ban, helped me launch an academic career that has provided me with infinite opportunities to explore issues relating to the intersection of law and education, that are timely and relevant in the contemporary school context.

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Leanne Johnny, PhD (ABD)
CHAPTER 1

WHO ARE THE CENSORS, WHAT IS CENSORED
AND WHY?

1.1 INTRODUCTION

On 16 July 2005 children throughout the world eagerly awaited the release of JK Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. As the sixth book in the acclaimed Harry Potter series, it sold over six million copies in the United States on the first day of its release and has since contributed to the overall success of the Harry Potter collection which has sold more than 300 million copies worldwide (British Council, 2006). Several teachers have been quick to exploit the success of these books using them in their classrooms to inspire reluctant readers and also encourage a generation of kids hooked on videogames and television to focus their attention on literature. However, this seemingly innocuous pedagogical strategy has resulted in a great deal of controversy, especially amongst certain Christian groups claiming that the series incites an interest in the occult and is an affront to their religious values (BBC, 2001). In response to these concerns, a number of schools in both America and the United Kingdom have removed the books and in some extreme cases, community members have even gathered to burn them alongside other popular culture items that are said to promote demonic themes (BBC, 2001). Such events have not only sparked debate about the types of learning materials that are appropriate in educational contexts but also raised concerns about censorship in schools.

While the Harry Potter controversy has garnered a great deal of media attention in recent years it is certainly not the first book that has been challenged by public interest groups. Literary classics such as The Catcher and the Rye by J.D. Salinger, Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck and The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, continue to receive criticism for their offensive language and sexual content (American Library Association, 2006). Challenges to these and other books have led some school officials to ban them from their classrooms and libraries altogether in order to avoid involving their schools in public controversy. In some cases, this has actually resulted in costly legal battles, such as in British Columbia, where the Surrey School Board spent over 4 million dollars in legal fees to defend its position that books teaching children about homosexuality were inappropriately suited for kindergarten classrooms (Bolan, 1997). In Kanawha County, West Virginia, disagreement over textbooks not only resulted in a loss of revenue for the entire community but even led to bomb threats at a local school.
Although censorship challenges can become quite acrimonious, most are actually motivated by a desire to protect children from moral, psychological and physical harm, or confusion between values taught at home and those exposed to at school. Unquestionably, the educational value of books, materials and topics selected for a young and captive audience needs careful and diligent attention. However, one of the most difficult challenges comes in determining whose values ought to inform decisions about what is taught or made accessible in schools. For instance, even though most would agree that schools should cultivate moral values in children, there is a great deal of controversy over how to achieve this end. Such questions become even more complicated in pluralistic societies where there are a range of stakeholders with varying values and beliefs that schools must accommodate.

As society diversifies, the nature of censorship is also becoming more complex. Debates over what is taught in our schools are not only focused on values but also on issues surrounding cultural representation. For instance, there is growing recognition that a number of religious and cultural groups are not adequately or accurately represented in the curriculum or school textbooks (Stonebanks, in press; Suleiman, 1999; Shaheen, 2000; Ali, Liu & Humeidan, 2004). Indigenous people, children with disabilities, women and girls, and individuals of minority religions, cultures and sexual orientation, are arguably all victims of censorship because their realities are largely excluded from the education system. Thus, we maintain that censorship is not only about what is banned from our schools but also how, and what information is presented. As Inglis (1985) observed “a curriculum is no less than the knowledge system of a society and therefore not only an ontology, but also the metaphysics and ideology which that society has agreed to recognize as legitimate and truthful; it sets the canons of truthfulness” (22).

What is generally legitimized in school curricula is not only apparent in the lack of representation in learning materials but also in school policies. For example, school administrators often place a premium on school reputation, efficiency and control of conflict (Larson, 1997; Petersen, 1999; Herzog, 1995). Thus, schools may implement hasty policies to omit potentially sensitive material or controversial behaviours. This has been seen in recent years in a number of schools internationally that have prohibited children from wearing religious symbols. Such actions (whether they occur consciously or unintentional) may perpetuate and sustain racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes (Shariff, 2003; Razack, 1999). The result is further marginalization of children whose cultural and family realities are already omitted from the educational context as irrelevant. As we will discuss in this chapter, these acts of power that work to privilege one group while simultaneously disenfranchising another, we believe, constitute a form of censorship.

Educators in contemporary schools internationally, confront significant challenges when deciding which educational resources to include or omit. They must navigate the difficult task of selecting age-appropriate and culturally sensitive resources, policies and curriculum that meet the educational demands of an increasingly diverse student body. Moreover, if schools are to act as vehicles for social progress and bastions of democracy, it is crucial that our educational
institutions respond to the demands of cultural pluralism and the changing demographics in our schools. Educators from Europe, Britain, Australia, the United States and Canada can no longer cater to homogenous student populations that are largely white, heterosexual and middle class. While we acknowledge that the realities of certain stakeholder groups in the school context may be unintentionally omitted due to a lack of resources or professional training among those who select learning materials, we believe that relevant and realistic resources, combined with improved professional development for educators, are essential in contemporary schools to address these deficiencies. The chapters that follow illustrate through case studies, the fine line between “selection” of age and culturally appropriate educational resources – and censorship, that results in the marginalization of many students. We explain how commonly accepted “selection” processes are steeped in hegemonic (and often politically motivated) perspectives that favour one worldview over others.

We commence our discussion with an overview of the range of stakeholders that may be impacted by censorship in the school context. We argue that educational decisions are not always neutral in nature but rather, that they are influenced by a variety of political and professional interests. Teachers and school administrators are not the only “censors.” Parents, community members, school board trustees elected to specific political platforms, government officials such as Ministry of Education officials, non-governmental organizations, publishers of educational resources, media, all have a role and increasingly voice an interest in what is taught in public schools. As such, we consider the potential reasons that various stakeholders censor. Through this discussion, we reveal the uses of discretion to censor (official and unofficial), that drive the selection, exclusion, or avoidance of certain topics in schools. We believe that if education officials are to reduce the cycle of censorship that continues to privilege Eurocentric and androcentric perspectives, it is crucial that they first understand the manner in which they themselves might erect barriers to student learning through systematic censorship.

1.2 WHO ARE THE CENSORS?

Any discussion of school censorship must commence with an overview of the stakeholders involved in the production of curriculum, the selection of resources and the development of educational policies. Bakan (1999) argues that how the production of curriculum is organized and whose interests are served in the process inevitably has an impact on its content. This means when we are examining why certain kinds educational resources are either used or banned in schools, it is crucial to also consider how the needs of stakeholders such as government, legislatures, school boards, administrators, teachers and parents, are advanced through these decisions. As we shall see, learning materials are not always selected for educational purposes, but rather to fulfill the political or professional interests of individuals. We believe that when the selection process is motivated for reasons
other than the educational value of a learning resource, the fine line at which selection becomes censorship is often crossed.

A) Government

In the Canadian context, education is a provincial responsibility. Although the structure of the education system differs somewhat across the nation, one important commonality is that each province has a ministry of education and a minister who represents the provincial cabinet. In most cases, the minister has the authority to develop the curriculum, select a list of approved textbooks, set requirements for school diplomas and decide upon guiding policies for school trustees and education officials (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Given that education ministers hold political appointments, it is not only their responsibility to make prudent decisions regarding the education of children but also to represent the interests of their political party.

It is possible for politicians to promote their political agendas through the types of learning materials they approve. For example, Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) remind us that educational resources, such as textbooks, are not simply ‘delivery systems’ that convey a set of objective ‘facts’. Instead, they are creations that are designed and selected by people with a particular set of interests. When government officials approve learning materials that favour one worldview over another, it is arguable that they engage in a type of censorship by failing to represent multiple perspectives. This point is exemplified in a number of conservative states in America where official textbooks omit any discussion of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. The United States, of course, is not the only nation where the education system is vulnerable to the interests of politicians. In many countries the government is one of the primary institutions through which education is offered to the public and therefore, the selection of educational materials and policies has close links to the ideological interests of those who govern the nation.

B) School Boards

Along with ministries of education, school boards also have a great deal of discretionary powers. For example, in British Columbia, Canada, Section 85 of the School Act states that school boards have the power to both “determine local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools” and “approve educational resource materials and other supplies and services.” On the one hand, this provides board members with the autonomy needed to select resources and policies suited to the needs of their school community. On the other, it is arguable that even the decisions of board members are susceptible to political pressures and outside influences. For instance, as elected officials, school trustees are accountable to their voters and vulnerable to the demands of special interest groups. One of the ramifications of this structure is that educational decisions are
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sometimes propelled by a need to appease powerful voices rather than a genuine concern for the diverse perspectives and values of the school community. In Chapter 2, one of the cases we discuss involved a range of competing stakeholder rights and interests, these emerged as the result of a school board decision to ban three children’s books depicting same-sex parents. The controversial case proceeded to the Supreme Court of Canada, costing Canadian tax payers over 4 million dollars in legal fees that might have been avoided.

This point was also recently exemplified in Ontario when the Toronto District School Board removed the children’s book *Three Wishes* by Deborah Ellis from its school libraries. PEN Canada (2006) reports that the book had been nominated by the Ontario Library Association (OLA) for the Silver Book Award – a competition in which children in grades four to six are invited to vote for the winner. The Canadian Jewish Congress argued that the book’s discussion of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was inappropriately suited for the age level that the competition was targeting and asked both the OLA and school boards to remove the book from the competition. While it is clear that school boards have a duty to approve resources that reflect the unique character of their communities, and the values held by its parents, no school is completely homogeneous, especially in pluralistic societies such as Canada. There are a range of stakeholders in every community and therefore when educational decisions are made, competing agendas and values must be considered. Unfortunately, given the political nature of the education system, this is not always the case and as such, materials that might contribute to public discussion and greater awareness of controversial issues are removed from reading lists. We highlight a number of censored books in Chapter 2 to illustrate that it is often the work of writers that challenge the status quo; provide students with the opportunities to develop informed opinions; question or discuss sensitive issues that is silenced through censorship.

*C) Administrators and Teachers*

While government plays a vital role in the initial selection of learning resources, a great deal of censorship also occurs within the school itself. One of the primary reasons for this is that teachers and principals are the most accessible school personnel and therefore, most book challenges are first directed to them. These education officials, in an attempt to avoid conflict or potential legal suits, may acquiesce to the demands of protesters and consequently, certain topics or resources may not appear in the classroom. Moreover, educators might also engage in self-censorship. For instance, Noll (1994) argues that highly publicized book challenges have a ripple effect in the classroom because they dissuade teachers from discussing certain topics with students. This concludes in a type of self-censorship whereby education officials fail to include materials that are approved by the ministry for fear of invoking anger or dissent in their school communities. Dick (1982) in her discussion of censorship in Canadian schools explains that the chilling effect caused by censorship controversy has caused such distress amongst teachers that the Manitoba Teachers’ Society publicly stated that it would support
the use of all resources that are approved by the Department of Education. However, not all teachers are afforded this type of support and consequently, their educational decisions might be motivated by a need to protect themselves.

Increasingly, we see that what teachers discuss in the classroom is under the lens of public scrutiny and therefore, educational specialists often need to engage in a great deal of self-censorship, especially when examining political issues in the classroom. In recent years there have been countless examples of educators who have faced repercussions for expressing political dissent. For example, Giroux (2002) explains that a group of professors at the City University of New York were denounced by the university chancellor for criticizing American foreign policy. Likewise, he observes, Lynne Cheney condemned the Deputy Chancellor of New York City Schools for suggesting that in the terrorist attacks in New York have created an urgent need to teach about Muslim culture in American schools. Such examples raise questions about the extent to which education officials can exercise their right to free speech in the classroom and also demonstrate the challenges that teachers face in trying to broach difficult and sometimes sensitive issues with students. In Chapter 3, we discuss the limited rights of teachers to freedom of expression regardless of whether those rights are constitutionally entrenched.

D) Parents

When it comes to book challenges in schools the majority come from parents who feel that certain topics or novels are inappropriately suited for their children. The American Library Association (2006) estimates that in the United States, over 70% of book challenges come from parents alone. Increasingly parents have also begun to assert their parental prerogative and their rights to have a say in what their children are taught in the curriculum, as well as in the way they are socialized in public schools. Religious parents have had significant impact in having books depicting same-sex families removed from the curriculum in some school districts, while at the same time, same-sex parents assert their rights to have their children’s family backgrounds validated in the curriculum. Parents also assert their rights in the realm of special education, from requesting full integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms, to streaming of gifted students. With an increasing public distrust of the school system, parents have also expressed their rights to review student records and question teachers’ evaluation of their children’s progress. At times, parents can get carried away in their zeal to protect their children. This can result in “parental harassment.” Parental harassment has become an issue of significant concern to educators, as they attempt fulfill their professional responsibilities and cater to the demands imposed on them by parents. Chapters 2 and 3 provide examples of the power that parents can assert in censorship cases and the ramifications this has for curriculum development and the approval of learning resources for schools.
WHO ARE THE CENSORS, WHAT IS CENSORED AND WHY?

E) Special Interest Groups

Although most censorship challenges in schools come from parents, many such parents do not challenge books on their own. Rather, they are aligned with special interest groups. In United States, for instance, there have been a number of national and religious organizations, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Eagle Forum and the Pro Family Forum, that have sought to challenge school curriculum and learning materials that address controversial issues such as abortion, teenage pregnancy, drugs and witchcraft (Booth, 1992). Reichman (1993) contends that over the past decade several political and religious organizations have advocated the removal of materials. His research shows that members of these organizations are often elected to school and library boards where they attain positions of power that allow them to engage in censorship. In Chapter 2 we discuss the influence of these groups in censorship controversies and demonstrate the extent to which educational institutions have become battlegrounds for the perpetuation of group ideologies.

F) News Media

In our foreword we raised the fact that the news media has tremendous influence in shaping and constructing knowledge. We have explained that what news editors decide to “select” and what aspects of news stories they choose to highlight, can significantly impact the public psyche. Post September 11th for example, headlines have referred to “Muslim terrorist” but not “Christian bomber” (when referring to Timothy McVie who bombed a high rise building killing approximately 160 people). Dolmage (2000) in his article entitled “Lies Damned Lies!” laid out the facts clearly that the news media often publishes headlines relating to one news item (such as gang violence) next to an unrelated photograph (such as a black teen) close together so that the image and association sticks in the readers’ minds. Moreover, Dolmage provides evidence of the inaccurate and exaggerated statistics that are sometimes presented by reporters who may not be as diligent in their research as they ought to be. Thus the news media censors by making deliberate decisions on what should be presented to the public and what should be withheld. This filters into the school system and the consciousness of stakeholders who buy into the media messages, and especially the stereotypes. Consequently, the news media has a powerful influence on shaping what children learn in schools. We cover these aspects of censorship in Chapter 3.

G) Educational Publishers

As a last point, it is important to consider the publishing industry. Educational publishers play a vital role not only in what is used in our schools but also how information is presented. For instance, Booth (1992) found in his research that in order for textbooks to be approved, they must first be accepted by a number of educational committees. Textbooks publishers try to cater to the ideals of the
individuals on these committees by both presenting material in a way that appeals to dominant culture and also reflecting curricular ideologies. When a school refuses to buy a textbook that includes unwanted information, publishers will often remove such information in an attempt to gain school approval.

1.3 WHY DO STAKEHOLDERS CENSOR?

Over the past 50 years, the most commonly challenged resources have involved literature that includes fantasy, folktales, violence, occult, witchcraft, taboo words, secular humanism, sexuality, creationism versus evolution and political correctness. In recent years, in Europe and North America, religious clothing, artifacts, depictions of religious leaders, and speeches by religious leaders have also been censored in educational contexts. This has resulted in hotly debated controversies in the media. Examples include the hijab and niqab (veils worn by Muslim women and girls); the kirpan (a religious dagger carried by Khalsa Sikhs); the cartoons of Prophet Mohammed that resulted in violent protests and the loss of many innocent lives; and controversial comments of Pope Benedict relating to Islam during the Byzantine era.

As we have noted in the foreword, censorship in schools and society at large can be driven by fear of change, by ignorance of difference and feelings of vulnerability to the perceived threat of losing one’s lifestyle, culture and values. In 1995 Mary Jean Herzog conducted a study of school censorship in the rural hills of Appalachia in the United States. She categorized school censorship in terms of the nature of censorship events, the objects of censorship, the initiators of censorship, and the motivation of the protesters. She found the nature of school censorship centers on community values, school location, cultural influences, religious beliefs, and public controversies. Arons (1986) defines the motivation of the protesters as “a general struggle for meaning…one between the forces of private dissent and the agents of public orthodoxy” (8). Those who challenge school curriculum are often motivated by religious and moral differences; fundamentalist parental overprotection or modern liberal values; politics, authoritarianism, and a desire to protect administrative jobs; fear of psychological manipulation; different interpretations of the purpose of education; fear of change; and words and meanings taken out of context.

As Shariff and Manley-Casimir (1999) note elsewhere, one of the basic functions of the public school is to educate children to become socially responsible adults who will maintain established cultural norms, thereby preserving the normative order of society. The normative order here means the collection of norms or expectations concerning what people should do that exist as ideas in the minds of the members of society. In this sense, the public school becomes a ‘servant of society’ because, to accomplish its purpose, it must meet social expectations. Consequently, the school curriculum necessarily takes on a central, culturally grounded role; it becomes the vehicle through which cultural values are conveyed to the next generation.
WHO ARE THE CENSORS, WHAT IS CENSORED AND WHY?

As society diversifies, the cultural function of the curriculum becomes increasingly complicated. Disagreements arise as to whose voices should represent the ‘canons of truthfulness’ (Inglis, 1985, 22). Disputes centre on issues such as which cultural values society should endorse as legitimate and truthful or even whose historical perspectives should be included in our classrooms. Controversies are fuelled by individuals and groups who have conflicting perceptions of whose knowledge and values the school is mandated to teach, what materials it is to use and who should decide what is taught. These controversies are often turbulent and the school finds itself all too frequently in the ‘crucible of conflict’ (Shariff & Manley-Casimir, 1999). Censorship arises from this conflict. Specifically, it arises from formal legal challenges, from political pressures on school boards, and from self-censorship by classroom teachers, school principals and librarians.

In the school context, one of the greatest challenges has been in determining the difference between censorship and selection. This point is best demonstrated in a U.S. survey conducted by the National Council of Teachers of English. One school librarian in the study differentiated her responsibility to select library books from that of parents seeking the removal of books from the library in these terms: ‘When I look at my choices, I concentrate on the ones I mean to include in the library; when I look at the other person’s stack, I focus on the books he or she wants to keep out of the library. I select; they censor. Our criteria blend: the books I reject are ones I don’t think the children are ready for; the ones they censor are books they don’t think their children are ready for” (cited in Shariff & Manley-Casimir, 1999, 159). This passage demonstrates the very fine line – and intrinsically problematic distinction – between censorship and selection at the school level.

As the school community becomes increasingly susceptible to outside influences, this line becomes even more difficult to delineate. For instance, in recent scholarship there has even been a growing recognition that school censorship is influenced by economic realities. Bakan (1999) in his discussion of the increasing involvement of business in the education sector notes as schools become more dependent upon corporate subsidies, they are also more vulnerable to corporate interests. He notes:

When business sets the school agenda, it does so in accordance with its own interests. Business corporations become involved in education to make money for their investors and to foster societal conditions that facilitate making money. Corporate sponsorships in schools are a form of strategic philanthropy which ties giving to tangible financial results and, more generally, aims to instil corporate values in children (85).

To exemplify this point he discusses how a number of American schools have embraced Channel One - a broadcast program that provides young people with news. Schools agree to air this 12 minute program (two of which are devoted to advertising) in exchange for a free satellite dish, two VCRs and televisions for each classroom. Studies have shown that this program has a tendency to instil values
CHAPTER 1

associated with materialism in its viewers. This raises questions about the extent to which corporate interests might prohibit critical discussions of materialism, advertising and the mass media in schools.

Now that the information age is upon us, educators are also faced with issues related to the use of computers and the Internet. Much of the content that has been easily censored from textbooks and other learning materials is now readily available to children with the touch of a mouse. On the one hand, this offers great potential for the use of more diversified content in the classroom. On the other, there are growing concerns about how children are using the Internet and the extent to which adults need to monitor their activity. According to a Media Awareness Network Survey, parents in 2001 were not as concerned about what their children were seeing on the Internet (Steeves, 2006). By 2005, parents were very concerned — and rightfully so. The dilemmas in cyber-space include the difficulty of monitoring student discourse outside of school hours, on home computers. Our chapters on technology and media influence delve into detailed discussion on the challenges schools confront as they attempt to balance student free expression, safety and right to privacy on-line and in what Shariff (2004) defines as the “virtual school environment.”

Indeed, there are a range of interests at stake in the educational system and numerous influences that play a role in how our schools operate. Ultimately, somebody has to make selection decisions regarding areas such as policy and curriculum and inevitably these decisions are discretionary and involve value judgments. The question then arises whether all those with the discretion and authority to determine what is to be taught in schools are censors and just how far we are willing to extend the boundaries of censorship. For example, does censorship occur when bureaucrats, administrators, educators and politicians abuse their power or are influenced by others who use that power for their own interests? Does it exist in our policies that exclude the voices of religious and cultural minority groups or in curriculum that perpetuates inequalities? Is censorship merely limited to official book challenges? The answer to these questions largely depends upon how we define censorship, and how the courts interpret it.

1.4 WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL CENSORSHIP?

In this section we move towards a definition of school censorship, one that reflects the realities of contemporary education systems. In its most general sense, censorship has been defined as an attempt to control some form of expression, including various forms of speech and written work (cited in Whitaker, 1999). It is often classified as either public or private, the former relating to government initiated censorship and the latter including censorship that takes place in corporations or other privately run organizations. Whitaker (1999) contends that even though private and public censorship are somewhat different, both are dependent upon a legal framework that supports their exercise. In other words, censorship is very much the product of public policies that aim to restrict forms of expression that may, for example, exceed the boundaries of socially acceptable
discourse. While censorship is commonly understood as a method of control, there is a great deal of disagreement over its utility. For example, some scholars argue that the right to freedom of expression forms the basic foundation of a democratic society. Others note that there are limits to free expression, especially when it is harmful to others. For instance, LaSelva (1999) reminds us that radical feminists widely agree that demeaning forms of pornography should be censored because their message is potentially harmful to both women and society in general. In this sense, censorship is a means to protect individuals from the potential harm resulting from certain forms of expression and objectionable ideas. We would support this position as it relates to the censorship of child pornography, especially its proliferation over the Internet.

While it is clear that there is widespread disagreement over the utility of censorship, this debate is further complicated by the lack of a coherent definition. Traditionally, censorship has been associated with state coercion in that it is often thought that government agents mainly impose restrictions on the production and dissemination of certain materials (Peterson, 1999). However, more recently, there has been a growing recognition that censorship has the potential to occur in all forms of communication and human interaction, including the everyday conversations that take place between individuals who might, for instance, engage in a process of self-censorship for fear of reprisal in both social and professional contexts. Although some might find such notions rather extreme, the overall point is that censorship is not only exercised through formal legal processes. Instead, as Jansen points out, censorial authority “may be secured by social customs; by the practices of political, economic, religious, educational or cultural institutions; by established semantic conventions; or by prevailing rules of reason” (cited in Peterson, 1999, 4). Such definitions remind us that censorship is often the product of tacit social agreements and behaviours that occur (sometimes unwittingly) in a number of contexts.

In the school environment, censorship has generally been defined as “the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic or educational materials – of images, ideas and information - on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in the light of standards applied by the censor” (Reichman, 1993, 2). Two decades ago, Dick (1982) found in her research of North American schools that school censorship controversies manifest themselves in various forms. For instance, publishers might delete offensive materials from their textbooks in order to gain approval from the school committees responsible for approving educational materials. Likewise, principals might place restrictions on certain books so that only teachers can access them. In the most extreme cases, a book might even be banned from the school altogether or it could be withdrawn from approved reading lists that compliment curricular objectives.

School censorship that involves public book challenges or the banning of certain items from reading lists and classrooms still exists and represents an overt form of censorship that is easy to detect. However, much of what is omitted from our school system today is done either behind closed doors or in such a skilful way that it is not always obvious. For example, Apple and Christian-Smith (1991), in their
discussion of learning materials, remind us that textbooks are the product of a selective tradition—“someone’s selection, someone’s visions of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group’s cultural capital disenfranchises another’s” (4). While they concede that some modern texts have aimed to incorporate multicultural perspectives, many of these perspectives are only mentioned in passing rather than discussed in any great depth. Taylor argues that when the reality of another is not adequately represented it can lead to a sort of social oppression. He states:

Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it. The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized . . . Race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are under-girded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression (cited in McDougall & Philips Valentine, 1999, 335).

The manner in which knowledge is constructed for our school system is undoubtedly an important consideration for how we understand and define censorship. Take, for instance, the work of scholars such as Montgomery (2005). He found in his exploration of racism in schools that while Canadian history textbooks seem to acknowledge examples of racism, it is presented as isolated occurrences that take place only amongst exceptionally flawed individuals. He argues that “this depiction of Canada as a space of vanquished and managed racism . . . perpetuates mythologies of white settler benevolence while it at once obscures the banal racisms upon and through which the nation state is build and rebuilt” (439). Such examples remind us that censorship is not only about what is banned from our schools but also how information is presented. As we noted in the foreword, obscuring the reality of marginalized groups in official textbooks can certainly have significant ramifications for society because, as Inglis (1985) notes, “a curriculum is no less than the knowledge system of a society and therefore not only an ontology but also the metaphysics and ideology which that society has agreed to recognize as legitimate and truthful; it sets the canons of truthfulness” (22).

Theorists who have sought to understand the essence of censorship note that it either reinforces or changes relationships of power through the legitimization and de-legitimization of different groups (Whitaker, 1999). Certainly, this happens in schools when the curriculum, textbooks, pedagogical approaches and even school policies serve to perpetuate the notion that some worldviews are more valuable than others. We certainly realize that, in some cases, censorship might serve useful purposes such as when material that is harmful to society is restricted from use in the public education system. However, we also stress that in the public school system, it is quite possible for education officials to abuse their power of ‘selection’. We believe that a power imbalance in schools occurs when the histories, intellectual contributions and lived realities of certain groups are ignored, given insufficient attention or in some way excluded in this process. Failure to
adequately represent the needs of the diverse school population that exists in pluralistic societies is not only a means of oppression but arguably can also be characterized as censorship. This means that we need to expand the censorship debate to include not only a discussion of whose values are perpetuated in the school system but also whose privilege is sustained or produced through the entire educational structure, including curriculum design, book selection, pedagogical strategies, and school policies. As we will further discuss in the chapters of this book, school censorship can occur through acts of power in educational systems that promote ideologies and social behaviours that serve to privilege some while simultaneously disenfranchising others.

1.5 RESPONDING TO SCHOOL CENSORSHIP

As we develop this understanding of censorship, it is crucial that educators examine how the explicit and hidden curricula in schools work (through censorship and selection) to support existing dominant structures and contribute to continued exclusion and oppression of marginalized groups in schools (Apple, 1990, 2000; McLaren, 1991, 1998; Giroux, 2003). Not only is this important for schools in Europe, Britain, United States and Canada – it is equally significant for educators and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) working with schools in the majority world where educational development is a priority. In post-colonial countries many of which are currently ravaged by war, natural disasters and poverty, it is crucial to ensure that colonial perspectives and approaches do not persist.

There is much written about the health and educational benefits of introducing students to a range of opinions or sensitive and controversial issues (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Katch, 2003; Shariff, 2004; Bettelheim, 1989). For instance, when children gain exposure to more than one perspective, they garner the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their lives. Avoidance can merely perpetrate conflict as suppressed concerns fester and surface through explosive disputes. In other words, the educational growth of children and the promotion of harmony in society, benefits from a school system that includes a wide-ranging curriculum, one that adequately acknowledges the realities, values and culture of a number of different social groups. The lived realities, oral traditions, cultures and religion, and gendered perspectives ought to be at the heart of development education if the educational beneficiaries are to be empowered towards self-sufficiency, democracy, health and peace (Hage, 1998; Smith, 1999).

1.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have provided a brief overview of school censorship and discussed some of the stakeholders involved in censorship issues and their potential motivations. We have also conceptualized censorship as an act of power in the educational system that excludes certain groups. In the following chapters we seek to develop this understanding even further by considering how censorship plays a key role in cultural hegemony. To this end we draw upon scholarly perspectives on
pluralism and civil society that provide guidance on valuing and validating the histories, contributions and cultures of students from diverse backgrounds. For example, the Muslim veil is not well understood in Western societies. It is generally seen as a symbol of oppression; however, it gives many Muslim women independence in making a choice to wear the Hijab. Instead of oppression it demonstrates pride in their identity and culture. Accordingly, there is a need to deconstruct stereo-types attached to Islam and Muslims, especially post-September 11th (Sajoo, 2004; Shabbas, 1998; Mernissi, 1997; Kahf, M., 1998) through selection of resources that would provide students with informed perspectives and a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.

We also wish to alert educators to the fact that censorship is a legal issue that can have costly ramifications for school boards. Therefore, we highlight a range of school censorship issues that have, in some instances, resulted in hotly debated controversies and lawsuits among key stakeholders in the school system. With the help of legal doctrines derived primarily from Canadian and American jurisprudence, we engage in analysis of the issues towards solutions that show greater promise of being ethical, educational and legally defensible. The models we present in upcoming chapters can be extended to and applied in other liberal democracies, be they in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa or South America. Our analysis is informed by pertinent theoretical and pedagogical perspectives that are introduced in Chapter 4. The innovative approaches we introduce in this book draw from censorship jurisprudence combined with a range of multi-disciplinary theories on social justice and critical pedagogy, contemporary educational and leadership theories, post-modern feminist theory, and emerging scholarly discourse on Internet use. Our aim is to inspire readers about the importance of engaging the rights and interests of an increasingly broad range of stakeholders as school landscapes evolve to keep up with changes in society. Our book provides alternatives that are less costly than the litigation that often ensues in censorship controversies. *Censorship! . . . or . . . Selection? Confronting a Curriculum of Orthodoxy through Pluralistic Models* is not a “how to” book. Rather, it digs below the surface of school censorship conflicts and encourages readers to engage in a responsible process of analysis, rather than resorting to reactive decisions to ban potentially sensitive or controversial resources.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of book banning controversies and their impact on sustaining a curriculum of orthodoxy in schools. In the latter part of that chapter, we set the stage for consideration of a more pluralistic approach that with appropriate educational supports may over time, help educators to overcome censorship barriers.
CHAPTER 2

CENSORSHIP CONTROVERSIES: ORTHODOXY, DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the key concerns and issues relating to censorship and selection. We identified stakeholders and introduced readers to a range of influences that drive censorship and “selection” of educational resources, cultural and religious histories, norms, beliefs (religious or otherwise), artifacts and representations—ultimately, resulting in exclusion and marginalization of stakeholders perceived to threaten the status quo. As Shariff and Manley-Casimir (1999) have explained elsewhere, politicians and educators involved in selecting school curriculum and library/classroom materials have the authority to ‘select’ what will be taught in schools. The selection of appropriate materials is defensible when the dominant considerations are educational—that is, concerned with development of the child’s intellectual abilities. Selection becomes censorship when political pressures are applied by educational officials or by community groups comprising the majority or a vocal minority with the goal of eliminating the curriculum perspectives they oppose. Censorship of this type narrows the curriculum, removes diversity, and can, if accommodated, result in a curriculum of conformity and orthodoxy. Non-legal cases studies demonstrate that self-censorship is a common occurrence within educational institutions. Teachers, principals, and school librarians sometimes find it simpler to work within a curriculum of conformity and orthodoxy than to speak up in support of controversial materials and so jeopardize their employment.

This chapter begins with general examples of the kinds of pressures on school administrators, teachers and librarians by parents, school boards and community members. We provide examples of literary resources that have been censored in schools—from Shakespeare to Salinger, and studies that confirm self-censorship by school authorities and teachers (Shariff & Manley-Casimir, 1999). This is followed by a more in depth discussion and analysis of a school censorship case in British Columbia, Canada. In this case, the Surrey School Board (SSB) banned three children’s books from kindergarten classrooms. The case cost taxpayers over 4 Million dollars in legal fees and spanned approximately four years to resolve. We consider the legal, ethical and educational issues in the Surrey case, and conclude the chapter with a discussion of the socio-legal considerations that might transform a curriculum of orthodoxy to one that supports pluralistic learning in an inclusive school environment.