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**On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response**

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It is suggested, in *Towards an Archeology of Policy that Challenges Conventional Framing of the Problem of Violence in Schools* (Issue 2 of *CJEAP),* that we re-examine the issues surrounding our current preoccupation with school violence. Assuredly, the renewed urgency with which politicians and administrators are addressing the violence issues is alarming. If statistics do not point to a morality crisis, that is, if children in school are no more violent then ever, the current reactions to violence bear further scrutiny.

However, the realization that there is not an upsurge in violent behaviours in schools does not mean that we should turn a blind eye and continue to mutter under our breaths that "boys will be boys". Even though school violence is not new, not urgent, nor even unusual, it has long been in need of attention. Mawhinney has developed an argument for paying attention to the "theoretical assumptions what structure political discourse" (Hawkesworth, 1988, p. 93, as cited) in the form of 5 questions. If we were to examine the social changes which lie behind the present concern over school violence (Question 1), we could lay the problem at the feet of the economy or the ever abused single mothers. We could then look at the second question, to examine the reasons for this renewed preoccupation, and there we would find similar scapegoats. To look at intervention policies, (Question 3), and to seek further definitions of the problem would only draw references to similar external causes and an examination of the model of social justice (Question 5) would heap more of the same on individuals within the system and do nothing to remedy the real causes of school violence. For us to have real understanding of the violence in schools and the student responses to violence we have to ask Mawhinney's question four: "How are institutional structures and processes including laws and schools themselves implicated in the creation of the problem of violence?"

As a society, we are quite accepting of violence - as long as it is "necessary". Necessary violence can be very confusing. Consider our society's schizophrenic attitude to violence as built into the criminal code. As Mawhinney pointed out, the parameters of the criminal code define violence through implication of victimization using terms such as intimidation and assault. The irony of the criminal code is in the license which it affords to teachers and others acting in the place of parents, which allows them to inflict physical and implied violence on students (Section 43). This legislation legalizes, when inflicted on children, the same activities which it proscribes as illegal if inflicted on adults. The necessity of violence is decided by people in positions of power - and we wonder why our students are confused!

The overt aspect of legalized physical violence is only the tip of the iceberg. If we were to assemble a framework to seriously address the violence implicit in the way we organize and apply education we would have to examine the very essence of what has been considered "education" for the last few centuries. Consider the following example: One morning in early 1995, a young man of 16 was taking the attendance slip to the office when he saw his brother sitting at the back of a classroom. He gave him a middle fingered wave and was immediately apprehended. He was verbally abused (called ugly and stupid), humiliated, called a liar, was detained without warrant, and eventually missed most of the class he should have been attending. This young man had no previous record, had broken no law, and had indulged only in bad judgment in his freedom of expression. This is violence in school, but it is not the kind that is getting all the attention.

If we are to question school violence policies we must also question how we might be implicated in the creation of the problem of violence. This questioning would necessitate examination of all that we have traditionally accepted as schooling - everything from the overt manifestation of punishment to the lock-step conformity of the grading system and the personal violence perpetrated through a value grading of personal worth. It would require an examination of the educational assumptions which call for the confining of 30 students of the same age with one adult for five hours of every day. It would force us to rethink the assumptions implicit in our need to control students, to confine them to desks and to limit their physical activities. It would force us to question the processes and policies used to maintain order in crowded classrooms and the rationale behind turning hundreds of students lose for the same 15 minutes of each morning. We would have to look at our assumption that all students need the same things at the same time and we would be forced to examine the aspects of growth which suffer through the necessity to maintain conformity and order. Such questioning would lead us to analyze the relentless subjugation to conformity combined with the threat of physical violence which eventually forces at least some thinking children to defy authority. And it would require us to examine the product of this process and the adult attributes which are valued and inculcated through it.

I applaud Mawhinney for the groundwork that she has done in exploring possible questions that would make a suitable framework for thinking through the issue. However, her other questions are only distractions. Let us cut to question four and ask ourselves "How are institutional structures and processes including laws and schools themselves implicated in the creation of the problem of violence?" If we refuse to address the real question we will continue to wonder why schools, and society, continue to be violent.