

CHAPTER 1

Representing Race/Ethnicity in a Multiethnic School

In a university department with which I am familiar, eight figures stand silent watch over the main corridor. They look out, bold and confident, their collective gaze effectively challenging anyone who approaches. It is difficult to escape this gaze. Anyone who wishes to get to the series of offices that lie beyond must risk being seen. For many, attempts to avoid the gaze will prove futile. Those who crouch or duck to escape notice as they pass will testify that the eyes follow their every move. This is not to say that no one has mastered the technique of slipping by these silent sentinels unnoticed. Many who work in the area pass regularly with impunity. They are able to do so by simply ignoring the sentries. This comes easily with time. Those who pass by their position day in and day out come to take them for granted, and as they do so, these impressive figures fade quietly into the woodwork of their surroundings. This is a luxury that only the residents of the area enjoy, however. Most visitors cannot help but notice the figures. Their prominent position in this key area makes it difficult, if not impossible, to miss them. For some of these visitors, these figures are striking. But for others, their presence is downright intimidating.

As you have probably guessed by now, these figures are not of the flesh and blood variety. They are merely images, photographs of eight people. These eight are, or were, living and breathing human beings. As I write seven of them are no doubt going about their business. The eighth has passed on. The photographs adorn the left wall as one prepares to enter from the common area. Someone has arranged them in two rows of four. The upper four are directly above the bottom four, separated by a space of approximately four inches. A space of around the same dimensions separates photos that are in the same row. On the other hand, approximately three feet divides the bottom of lower pictures from the floor, while the top row reaches around seven feet from the floor. Each photograph measures approximately 8 by 10 inches.

Most who see these photographs would probably say that they are tastefully done. Dark mahogany-grained wood frames of slightly different shades border each of the pictures. A gold trim lines each of these frames, but it does not do so in a

consistent manner. On some the trim is nearer the outside of the frame, while on others it crowds the inner edges. Three inch borders separate the actual photographs from the frames. All are brown. Two, however, are distinctly lighter than the others. Balancing the assembly, these two pictures stand diagonally opposite one another. Inside these borders sit the actual photographs. They feature primarily the faces of these eight, although they also take in upper chests and shoulders. The photos are all in colour except for one. All display similar, obviously professionally-provided, backgrounds, except for one. Unlike the others, this picture has obviously been snapped out of doors. In all of the pictures the subjects stare directly out at the viewer, except this one. This individual is looking off to the side, and in contrast to others, is wearing a hat. The seven remaining subjects look boldly out at the viewer. All, however, have pleasant looks on their faces, although we can only see three sets of teeth. The names of each of the individuals are inscribed on a gold-trimmed plate, which sits on the brown border directly below the actual photo. Above the entire assemblage is a larger plate with the words, *Professors Emerti*.

The individuals depicted in the photographs display many differences. Because the images of the subjects are restricted primarily to faces, however, viewers have to use their imaginations as to how they differ from the neck and chest down. Nevertheless many of these differences are those one would expect to find between and among the faces of most human beings. In this regard they display a wide variety in facial features. For example they differ in terms of size and shape of noses, ears, chins, foreheads and so on. Eyes, at least those that the viewer can pick out, display different colours. Hairstyles also vary. But while the differences are many and evident to all who see these photographs, it is the similarities between and among these individuals that tend to attract people's attention.

These faces display four obvious similarities. The first is their age. The colour of their hair, its absence in a couple of the cases, and the facial lines testify to the age of these individuals. They are all at least sixty years of age. The second similarity is their affluence. Although faces take up much of the photo space, viewers can see at least part of their clothing. All are nattily attired, and with the exception of the outdoors subject, appear ready to attend a formal gathering. The third thing they have in common is their sex. A quick glance at all of the faces and glistening foreheads is enough to alert the viewer to the fact that all of these people are men. Finally, all share the same skin colour. All of these men are White. The latter two characteristics have made more of an impression on people than the first two. Apparently, as will become evident, age and affluence do not constitute as much of an issue as sex and race/ethnicity.

At one point controversy swirled around these photographs. They first became an issue as the department was gearing up to search for someone to fill a vacant faculty position. In an effort to break with a uniformly White male past, the unit had agreed to make an effort to hire someone that would diversify the current faculty complement. While the reasons for this decision no doubt varied among those concerned, most agreed that such a move seemed to make sense in a community

where the immigrant population was pushing 50% of the total. It was at this time that one faculty member raised the issue of the photographs. He believed that they did little to encourage those who could not identify with the photographs to apply for the position. He went on to relate the case of a potential candidate, who after coming across the photographs, decided that perhaps this was not the place for her. The silent sentinels, it seems, conveyed an image to her of the unit with which she was not totally comfortable.

In the weeks that followed a struggle ensued over the photographs. In the process various faculty members voiced their respective opinions about the photographs and what they felt should happen to them. The means of communication for this was electronic, and all faculty in the unit were privy to what was going on. Individuals routinely copied their latest Email message to everyone. As one would expect, positions varied. Some strongly demanded that the photographs be removed immediately. Others were equally convinced that they should stay right where they were. Still others supported positions that were more moderate. Not all chose to participate, however. The sensitive issues involved, no doubt, played a part in their decision to stay out of the fray. Being academics, however, the participants did not stop at merely declaring their wish for the photographs to come down, stay up, or be moved. Rather, these preferences were inevitably accompanied by multitudes of reasons and rationales. All who cared to voice their opinion supplied plenty of additional text to support their respective positions.

One way of understanding the clash over the photographs is by seeing it as a struggle over representation. In this situation these individuals were engaged in a clash over what images they felt were appropriate for standing in for, or representing, the department and/or particular individuals who were at one point associated with the department. Some believed that two rows of pictures of the White males founders in a prominent place was the way to go. Others, however, felt that this sort of display was inappropriate. But this issue was not just about representation generally. It also concerned issues of race/ethnicity (and gender). In particular, the situation at hand represented just one instance of a wider struggle over the representation of race/ethnicity. One group of faculty believed that the choice to display images of these particular (White) people in this unique way sent a message that was not particularly welcoming to people who were not of European heritage. They felt that such a practice was typically exclusionary. The opposition, on the other hand, preferred to treat the issue as a justice/reward rather than a race/ethnicity one. Among other things, they believed that these people deserved to be honored in this way because they had contributed so positively to the department and to their academic discipline.

What is not immediately obvious, is that this struggle over representation took place on more than one level. The first and most obvious area of conflict revolved around what to do with the photographs. One group wanted them taken down or moved, while the other felt that they should stay right where they were. The former

believed that moving them would facilitate a move toward a more inclusive department, while the latter felt leaving them where they were would rightly acknowledge the history of the department and the contributions of worthy individuals. The other level at which struggle occurred was not so obvious, however. Despite its sometimes surreptitious nature, it is nevertheless an arena where much wider and more pervasive conflict occurs. This is the level of meaning. At this more fundamental level the conflict was not so much about what to do with the images on the walls, but what they meant. In other words, this struggle over representation was importantly a struggle over meaning. What was the significance of this set of photographs? How did people make sense of them? And perhaps most important, what sense eventually prevailed? And what affect did the prevailing meanings have on what was eventually done? The lesson to be learned here is that contests over representation generally revolve around struggles over what and whose meaning or sense will prevail.

At the surface level of description, the *denotative* level (Barthes, 1972), where more specific or *literal* meanings become obvious, most would agree that the images on the wall represent human beings. Moreover, one only has to look at the caption over the photographs to realize just who these people are. The differences in meaning emerge not on this denotative level, however, but on the more diffuse, ephemeral and wider level of *connotation* where meaning is more loosely *associated* with a word or phrase. It is here that the sense the opposing parties made of the photographs parted ways, and as a consequence, clashed. While these photos meant many things to their supporters, one meaning in particular stood out. These images signified an honour. In this regard some faculty believed that the people on the wall accomplished much for the department and their discipline in their tenure, and as result, deserved to be acknowledged for this service by having their faces mounted in a prominent place. For these faculty, the photographs acquired their meaning within a sense-making scheme that recognized the practice of rewarding or honoring individuals in this way.

Their opponents, on the other hand, made sense of these photographs in a different way. For one thing, they tended not to see them on an individual basis. What was important for these people was the entire collection, and in particular, and the place and manner in which it was displayed. They believed that these eight photographs stood not so much for the individuals they were meant to represent, but for the department as a whole. For them, the fact that everyone of these individuals had white skin, gave the impression that the department was an exclusive rather than inclusive club. In this regard, they made sense of the photographs in terms of race/ethnicity and privilege. To understand the photographs, these people tapped into a sense-making framework that acknowledged the pervasive nature of White privilege. In the logic of White privilege, these photographs represented just another way of ensuring the continuity of a privileged (White) club by marginalizing those different others who are seen as a threat.

As I hint above, the construction of meaning around the photographs is neither a simple nor straightforward process. This is because the meaning of these photographs does not lie in the images themselves. Nor does it rest entirely with those individuals who interpret what they see on the wall. Rather meaning emerges in the dialogue between those who do the interpreting and the images that they perceive. This is not to say that interpretation is an individual thing. It is not. Rather constructing meaning -- making sense -- is fundamentally a social process. In this regard we require sense-making frameworks to accomplish these kinds of tasks. These sense-making frameworks are in turn always anchored in discourse, that is, in *language in social use* (Fiske, 1996). In this regard we must appeal to a "language" -- sets of statements, images, practices, metaphors, etc. that are organized in particular ways -- in order to make sense of our experience. The elements associated with these discourses provide a medium that filters the kinds of ways in which we can make meaning. While some may prefer to think of discourse as a multiinstitutional and transindividual archive of images, words and practices for constructing knowledge about an area of experience (e.g. Foucault, 1972), it is also very much an active process. In other words, discourse is both a "noun" and a "verb" (Fiske, 1996). We might just as well speak of "discourse" as "discoursing". The fact of the matter remains, however, that in order to make sense of any aspect of our experience, we must first place it into discourse. This is just what the faculty members did. One group made sense of the pictures by locating them in a kind of justice/reward discourse, while the other placed them in a discourse of White privilege. Without placing them in some discourse they would have not made any sense.

Discourse is not just a "discursive" or "linguistic" concept, however. It is an attempt to combine language and practice: what people say and what they do (Hall, 1997). A basic assumption of this perspective is that meaning depends not just on language but on the social practices with which it is associated. Making sense of something always occurs in the context of some other forms of social organization which provide a space for linguistic practice to take place. The sense that people made of the photographs, for example, depended in important ways on the fact that they were associated with a very particular form of institutional organization. Because discourse is associated closely with forms of social organization, it also conveys, and is subject to, power. Power works on and through individuals as they take up the positions offered to them in discourse and as they become objects of discourse (Foucault, 1980). But discourse is not merely a technique of power. It is also the terrain on which struggles over wider issues occur (Fiske, 1996). Men, women and children regularly contest meaning as they look to see to their interests.

What happened in the university department was first and foremost a struggle over representation. The faculty members of this department clashed over the images that they felt were the appropriate ones to stand in for their unit. At a more obvious and immediate level the struggle was over what to do with the photographs. At another more ephemeral and diffuse level, it concerned the meanings that were attributed to these photographs. The respective groups sought to promote their

respective sense of the images by placing their experience of the images into discourses that promoted their interests and confirmed their experiences, and by subsequently circulating this sense. One of the areas that this struggle over representation touched was race/ethnicity. While the supporters' discourses generally side-stepped this issue, their opponents' highlighted its central role. Employing a discourse of White privilege, for example, they contended, among other things, that displaying photographs of all White males in this way discourages different others from wanting to become part of this university community.

As I write, the photographs still stand in their original place, a testimony to the outcome of the skirmish. As it turned out, the supporters' discourse prevailed over their opponents'. In the end the sense that the former made of the photographs counted more than the latter's sense when it came time to make, or rather, not make a decision. The discourse of White privilege had obviously not made sense to enough people, or the right people, for a change to be made. This does not mean that the battle is over, however. Indeed this brief exchange represents a minor skirmish in a much wider clash not only over how race/ethnicity is to be represented, but also how people are to live their lives. While the battle over the photographs had, and still has, a local and fairly specific element to it, it also extends far beyond the walls of the department. The terrain on which it is being waged is in many important ways both a global as well as local field of representation. How members of this educational community make sense of theirs and other's lives is tied closely to what kinds of opportunities they and others will have and what kinds of lives they and others will eventually lead. In the case at hand the sense that people made of the photographs influenced in crucial ways what they eventually did about them. These decisions tie into decisions and practices being made or accomplished elsewhere that have a profound effect on the day-to-day lives of all men, women and children.

This book describes how this process works itself out in another educational setting, a multiethnic secondary school, Suburbia Secondary School (a pseudonym). In situations like this one where there is an abundance of racial/ethnic diversity the process of representation is perhaps more intense, and thus more obvious, than it is in other more monocultural settings. While this school setting provides an ideal laboratory for exploring the representation of racial/ethnic diversity, I did not go out looking for places that would provide these sort of opportunities. In fact quite the opposite occurred. In a sense it was this multiethnic setting that offered up the phenomenon of representation as a way of understanding many of the things that were happening around diversity. It became apparent at a point during the study that the various processes associated with representation were responsible for much of what happened around issues of racial/ethnic diversity. As a consequence, what initially began as an empirical study designed to explore how teachers responded to racial/ethnic diversity in their classrooms, became an examination of how the processes associated with representation shaped the ways in which students and educators understood and reacted to diversity in and around the school. As the various themes associated with representation emerged, it became evident that these

processes were also responsible for extending opportunities to some students while at the same time penalizing others.

The empirical data associated with two related studies provided the starting point for this book. The book explores particular aspects of the struggle over racial/ethnic representation. However, it does not focus exclusively on the school itself. Rather, in what follows I account for the context, including a history, in which this clash over representation occurs. In a number of the chapters the data provide a starting point for exploring the various issues that these data introduce. A central premise of this book is that the struggle over how race/ethnicity is represented is generally conducted under conditions that are not equal. I document these conditions by illustrating the ways in which race/ethnicity has been represented in the past and in the present by taking as a starting point selected cases or situations at Suburbia Secondary School. The lens I employ to explore this process of representation is discourse. In this sense the struggle over representation is a struggle over discourse. The book explores how these struggles arise in the school over (1) difference, race and racism, (2) stereotyping practices, (3) curricular images, (4) student identity and community and (5) language. My purpose in writing this book is to make plain the ways in which the representation of race/ethnicity work in a multiethnic school. My hope is that those who read it will be motivated enough to attempt in their situations to provide conditions that allow for the construction and circulation of discourses that work *for* rather than *against* groups that have traditionally not been well served by prevailing racial/ethnic discourses. Before moving on, however, I present a brief overview of the book.

Representing Race/Ethnicity

In the contemporary world, representation generally and the representation of race/ethnicity in particular, will increasingly continue to play a vital role in how people live their lives. This is so for a number of reasons. The first is that world population and immigration patterns are changing. Among the countries to notice these changes are the Anglo dominated countries of the “West”. Canada, the United States, Great Britain and Australia, for example, have all in the past two decades experienced a noticeable shift in the people who are traveling from other parts of the world to settle in their lands. At one time most immigrants emigrated to these countries from European countries. Now they come from all parts of the world. In fact fewer now travel from European countries than from Asia, Africa and South America (Statistics Canada, 1993, 1997; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995; Owen, 1994). Many of these immigrants settle in the larger cities. In Toronto, Canada, for example, immigrants constitute around 42% of the city’s population (Statistics Canada, 1997). Moreover by the year 2000 visible minorities are expected to make up 54% of the city’s population (Carey, 1998). As expected, these changes are generating many changes in school populations. In the same city, as far back as 1988, one school district reported that one-third of the total day-school population and two-thirds of the mothers of this same student population were born outside Canada (Handscombe, 1988).

The representation of race/ethnicity will play an important part in people's lives for other reasons as well. It will continue to be an ongoing concern because of ways in which processes associated with representation have changed over the years. Over time humanity has moved from a heavy reliance on oral media, to print, and most recently, to electronic media. This evolution has been, at least in part, responsible for the current proliferation of images. It is difficult for anyone living in the Western world not to encounter persistently the images associated with these media. The images that emanate from books, newspapers, magazines, advertisement posters and billboards, televisions, movie screens, computers, among many other sources, have become an integral part of our lives. Not only may we discover that these images are increasingly accessible, many of us may find that we cannot do without them. These images, or at least most of them, are however, "racialized," that is, they are necessarily filtered through a "racial" lens. Some are more obviously associated with race than others. Images of O.J. Simpson, Clarence Thomas (Fiske, 1996), or of police rousting mostly Black offenders in "real life" cop dramas (Andersen, 1995) on television speak perhaps more forcefully than the eight photographs in the university department. The bottom line here though is that all these images, and in particular the way in which people perceive or interpret them, will have a profound effect on how they think about issues of race and ethnicity and what they eventually do about these issues.

One other comparatively recent change in the contemporary world also renders issues of racial/ethnic representation increasingly important. Associated closely with changing immigration patterns and the proliferation of contemporary images, is the increasing uncertainty that many people experience today. For example, today many men and women find cause to dispute what at one time were time-honored truths (Anderson, 1990). While some may recognize the limitations of physical and social sciences, others take advantage of contemporary opportunities to question a wide variety of knowledge claims. The seemingly infinite array of perspectives and views which may come packaged in forms that range from scientific journals to talk shows continue to undermine the idea that there is one true and ultimately knowable world out there. What this has done is destabilize, to a point, a structure that has in the past provided more or less uniform, and often debilitating, ways of understanding race. This destabilization has in recent years provided more opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups to have their voices heard by allowing them some space to shape the ways in which they are represented. Given the importance of contemporary representations then, it will be crucial to find ways to construct and circulate images, and understandings of them, that work in the interests of the marginalized.

While representation processes work away steadily in and through most contemporary institutions, they are particularly apparent in schools. Indeed representation constitutes a crucial part of learning. Students learn as they are presented with images of many aspects of life through a variety of media. This is not to say that representation operates exclusively in the formal learning process

itself. It also surfaces in many other forms and situations, as is evident in the case of the photographs above. What will become apparent in this book, is that the ways in which race/ethnicity has been, and currently is, represented in schools, as it is in other areas of life, provides advantages for some and disadvantages for others. This has come about over the years as schools and the people who teach and learn in them have routinely provided, and been provided with, what are regularly interpreted as negative images of certain groups and positive images of others. Students do not encounter these representations just in the formal curriculum, however. They also circulate in and through the interactions they have with their fellow students and with teachers and administrators.

Over the past three or four decades teachers and scholars have increasingly acknowledged the disadvantages that certain racial/ethnic groups face in schools. Some of these people have gone so far as attribute causes to this phenomenon and to prescribe solutions. Some belong to an approach that has come to be known as multicultural education. Proponents of many different varieties of multicultural education promote a wide range of preferred practices. One fairly common theme revolves in important ways around representation. In this regard many multiculturalists believe that students should be presented with positive images of the “cultures” of various racial/ethnic groups. They contend that, among other things, exposing students to the life ways of previous unknown groups will lead to a greater understanding of, and tolerance for, different others, improve communication between and among groups, and enhance the self-perceptions of members of the featured groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Gibson, 1976; May, 1994). Another more recent approach, antiracist education, although taking issue with the more superficial aspects of this process of representation, nevertheless also features positive representations in the classroom. Citing approaches by Jeffcoate (1979) and Hatcher and Shallice (1983), Rattansi (1992) notes that positive images are inherent in antiracist efforts to present Black histories primarily as narratives of resistance and struggle against racism.

Both multicultural and antiracist approaches have made significant contributions to education. Their analyses of advantage and disadvantage and their suggestions for practice have, among other things, drawn attention to the injustices faced by groups of racial/ethnic students, motivated practitioners to adopt more inclusive teaching practices, and have increased the life opportunities of some students. Despite these positive achievements, most multicultural and antiracist approaches are not (as yet) equipped to analyze the process of representation in schools. While representation remains an important part of their respective approaches, it does not figure directly in to the ways in which representation works outside of curricular images through, for example, the so-called hidden curriculum and all interactions that take place in schools. Rattansi (1992) also maintains that multicultural and antiracist representations which are uniform and positive and sometimes essentialist, often gloss over the divisions and differences within groups. Finally, most multiculturalists and antiracists do not account for how the images presented in the classroom come to mean things to students. They do not take into consideration the

ways in which students make sense of curricular materials or the interactions they have with fellow students and teachers.

Understanding the process and effects of racial/ethnic representation in schools requires that we attend to the process of meaning. This is because the images that students and educators encounter in schools do not have inherent or enduring meanings. Nor does their meaning become immediately apparent or automatic to those who apprehend these images. Rather, the pictures, words and figures that take precedence in classrooms and around schools are merely signs or symbols that those who see or hear must interpret in order to make sense of them. In this regard, meaning is constructed in the dialogue between individuals and the images and symbols that they perceive. The meaning that students take from texts, classroom talk or school rules, for example, emerges out of their respective relationships with these particular symbols. This does not mean that constructing meaning, or making sense is an individual thing. It is instead a fundamentally social process. Men, women and children make sense of life by placing their experience into socially generated sense making frameworks, or discourse. They can make sense of racial/ethnic issues only by taking up positions in these historically generated, institutionally grounded discourses.

Because making sense of race/ethnicity or “discoursing” is a social process it is always enmeshed in relationships of power. Discourse revolves around power in at least two ways. The first is that it operates as a technique of power (Foucault, 1972, 1980). Racialized discourses structure or filter in important ways the possible alternatives for interpreting race/ethnicity. Individuals must take up a position in a discourse for them to make sense of the images they encounter. In this sense they are subjected to discourse. As a technique of power, discourses also “construct” or make the objects about which they concern themselves. Thus, certain groups of people are assigned certain characteristics by virtue of the prevailing discourses about them. Males of African heritage, for example, may take on various characteristics in racist discourses. But discourse does not operate exclusively as a technique of power. Discourses do not simply roll over everything in their paths. Rather they are always contested and contestable (Fiske, 1996). This is not to say that all struggles over meaning and discourse are equal, however. As I illustrate in the subsequent chapters, certain groups have had, and continue to have, distinct advantages over others in the construction and circulation of certain racial/ethnic discourses. The result of this inequality is that certain discourses that favour White/European/Anglos over other groups prevail in schools and elsewhere. But because they are contestable, it also means that they can be challenged, resisted and replaced. Thus it remains for all those interested in social justice to challenge these debilitating discourses and to find ways to construct and circulate discourses that work in the interests of the marginalized.

Suburbia Secondary School

The struggle over representation finds its way into many areas of school practice at Suburbia Secondary School. Suburbia is located in a rapidly growing and highly diverse suburb of a large Canadian city. According to school officials, the community to which the school caters has residents who are both struggling and well-off financially. Even so, many students who attend this school are from so-called middle class backgrounds. The larger metropolitan area in which this community is located, like many others across North America, has become more visibly diverse with the change in immigration patterns over the last ten to twenty years. Most immigrants no longer emigrate from Europe as they once did. In 1991, for example, most people who traveled to this country came from Hong Kong, Poland, China, India, the Philippines, Lebanon, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Guyana, to name just a few of the places of origin (Statistics Canada, 1993). Many settle in the larger cities. In 1991 immigrants constituted fully 38% of this city's population (Statistics Canada, 1993). By 1996, this number had grown to 42% (Statistics Canada, 1997).

Suburbia Secondary School reflects this diversity. Visitors to the school are immediately struck by it. One of these visitors in fact observed that the school was a "replica of the United Nations." This diversity was recently confirmed by a school administered survey which indicated that students identified with over 60 different heritages. Students of Italian (18%), Filipino (14.7%), Portuguese (9.5%), Chinese (8%) and Polish (6.3%) heritage constitute the largest groups. The school itself is only four years old, and has a student population of approximately 1700 students. Like many other schools in the area it already has experienced the need to employ portable classrooms to accommodate the burgeoning student population. The school staff is comparatively young, many of them hand picked by the principal and school administration, and almost all are of European heritage.

Suburbia looks like many of the newer schools in the rapidly expanding area in which it is located. From the outside the building appears to be long and low. Its two stories take up a considerable amount of area. The grounds that surround it, however take up even more space. Indeed one can easily imagine a small subdivision of houses fitting nicely into the entire school property which includes three parking lots, twelve portable classrooms and a football field. The building itself is inconspicuous. Its light colored brick exterior blends easily into the suburban terrain that surrounds it. This terrain continues to change, however, as houses perpetually consume the once prominent pastures. The interior of Suburbia is as pleasing as its exterior. The front doors give way to a large foyer where students regularly congregate before class in the morning, at lunch, and after school. A large cafeteria borders one side of this space. Locker-lined corridors extend in a square formation around this central foyer. These corridors lead to classrooms, a large gymnasium, auto shop, wood work shop, science labs, and computer labs, among other types of specialized rooms. Observant visitors will notice that cameras on the grounds, in the corridors and in some of the rooms follow their every move.

In many ways the school is typical of many others in the area. Before, between and after classes, there are hundreds of young people going every which way. The following passage is from field notes that I wrote during one of my first visits. It is an image that has stuck with me since that time. Over the next while I witnessed many similar scenes. Many, but not all, were as benign as this event.

I arrive just before classes begin, get directions from the office to Jennifer's class, and start toward the class. The halls are filled with kids it seems from an infinite number of backgrounds. Caucasians are definitely in the minority. The halls are filled with students going every which way, but there is little disruptive behaviour. I look over and see a teacher open the door from the inside for a group of waiting kids. When he sees them he gently smiles, and without a word, lets them in. They smile back as they enter.

Two studies provided the basis for what follows. The first, a study funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, was initially conceived as an inquiry into the ways in which teachers, students and parents were responding to student diversity in Suburbia Secondary School. During the course of the study I, as principal investigator, worked with three other people -- a research officer and two graduate students. We divided up the tasks associated with the data collection and met regularly to discuss such things as emerging themes and future strategies. The first task involved talking to teachers and observing a select few in the classroom. We chose four teachers for intensive two-day classroom observations on the basis of their differences in teaching experience, subject expertise, and gender. Although we were not able to arrange to sit in on their classrooms, we did manage to talk to the only two teachers on staff who were not of Caucasian background. These observations were accompanied by in-depth interviews that centered on their teaching practice and around incidents that occurred during the course of the observations. We also interviewed many other teachers, guidance councilors and administrators. In all we talked to twenty-five staff members.

We also talked to and observed students. First we shadowed six students for two entire school days each. Like the teachers they were selected to represent as much variation as possible. We initially looked for potential candidates to shadow in the classes where we observed teachers and made our final decisions after comparing notes on them. We gathered data both from these observations and from in-depth interviews with them. Student focus groups were also another means of gathering information. We also talked individually to students who we thought might provide us with unique insights on diversity. For example, we sought out and interviewed one student who reacted in a constructive way to one particularly ugly racist act. In all approximately forty students voiced their opinions on matters of diversity. Finally we interviewed six parents or sets of parents. Initially we attempted to talk to the parents of those students we shadowed. Where this was not possible we interviewed parents who were of similar background.

In the initial stages of the study we met regularly in order to compare notes and, among other things, to pick out promising themes to pursue. These themes including difference, race and racism, stereotyping, curriculum, student identities and communities, and language, among others. They emerged early in the study as we had our initial conversations with students. These students drew our attention to the tendency of both teachers and fellow students to hold and act on beliefs that revolved around these areas. Eventually we came to tie all these together under the larger rubric of representation. We decided at this early stage to pursue this phenomenon and we subsequently looked for it in our observations in classrooms, hallways and the cafeteria, and we asked pointed questions about it when we talked to teachers, students and parents. After all the data were collected, I isolated all descriptions and/or opinions regarding these themes, and organized them for presentation in a systematic way.

The second study was part of a larger study that was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) and designed to explore how administrators respond to racial/ethnic diversity in their school communities. The study was comprised of three parts, each of which called on different methods. The first two were qualitative in nature, while the third entailed a quantitative approach. The relevant portion here was the second part of the qualitative phase. In this phase I shadowed a school administrator for two weeks in efforts to try to understand how he approached racial/ethnic diversity on a day to day basis. The administrator worked at Suburbia Secondary School. Besides concentrating on some of the themes that had emerged in the other qualitative portion, I also took the time to pay attention to some of the representation themes that had emerged in the previous study at the school, which included among others, difference, race and racism, stereotyping, curriculum matters, student identity and community, and language.

On the days that I followed the administrator, I would arrive at the beginning of school, and shadow with this individual until he went home after the day had ended. In his company, I toured the halls, inspected the grounds, visited classrooms, attended meetings with administrators, teachers, students, sales people, central office personnel, social workers, and many others, listened to him conduct business on the phone, and watched him engage in a host of activities too numerous to mention here. Of course, there were times when he needed to meet with others in private when confidential matters were being discussed. At those times I would find something else to do. When it was possible I would ask him questions about his job, particularly as they concerned diversity issues. Many of these conversation were spontaneous in nature, but I did manage to record some of what was said between us. During the day I would keep a rough record of what I saw and heard that I felt was relevant to the study. In the evening I would sit down and reconstruct these events from the rough notes. The recorded interviews were also transcribed. Both the field notes and the interviews were eventually analyzed along with the interviews of the other administrators using the NUD*IST software package.

Exploring Representations of Race/Ethnicity at Suburbia

The struggle over representation finds its way into many areas of school practice at Suburbia Secondary School. One of these areas is the way in which teachers and students understand and react to what they see as differences. One of the most significant of these differences is race/ethnicity. For most who spend time within Suburbia's walls race/ethnicity is a category to which everyone acknowledges and responds. Some understandings and responses are positive, at least on the surface. Others are negative, that is, racist in nature. Some are blatantly so, while others are more subtle. Racist discourse of this sort has a long history. Reaching back at least 16th century Europe, it took shape as privileged groups struggled with others to protect their interests as rigid social hierarchies of the time dissolved and new forms of social organization and means of production emerged. Racist discourses functioned to help these people secure their positions in life, by among other things, providing rationales for the ways in which they subjugated and exploited others both at home and in their colonial efforts abroad. These discourses accomplished this task by drawing distinctions and establishing hierarchies between (privileged) Europeans and others. Scientific discourse also helped in the cause by attributing racial worth to biological causes. Racist discourses have survived pretty well over the years, although the ways in which they now operate may not be as straightforward as they once were. Given the increased complexity of life, contemporary racism takes many forms. Among other things, it meshes with other forms of advantage and disadvantage including class, gender, and (dis)ability, as well as a multitude of other forms of difference. These discourses do not go unchallenged, at least to the extent they once were, however. Various individuals and groups at Suburbia, for example, are actively engaged in challenging racist practice and discourse. But while the more obvious forms of racism are generally easy to identify and often provide the grounds for resistance, educators and students may not always recognize the more subtle forms.

One of the more subtle ways that racism works through representational practices at Suburbia and elsewhere is through stereotypes. People routinely accept and employ stereotypical portrayals of groups that often work to the latter's disadvantage. While traditional approaches to analyzing stereotypes have produced some positive outcomes, such as drawing attention to oppressive patterns of racism and associated forms of social control, they do have their shortcomings. Among other things, they erroneously tend to see stereotypes as self-contained negative and mistaken images. As a follow up exercise, proponents of this view routinely recommend the replacement of these depictions with good and accurate portrayals. In doing this, however, they fail to see the ways in which discourses work through these images. A more useful approach, on the other hand, sees stereotypes as forms of discourse that individuals employ to make sense of what they see about them. A number of these stereotypical discourses prevail at Suburbia. Both teachers and students commonly make sense of groups of students in ways that unjustly penalize them. For example, many believe that African students possess unique physical

capabilities, and are less able intellectually than other students, particularly Asian students whom they see as the most gifted academically. These beliefs lead both teachers and students to interact with these groups in ways that do not always promote the latter's opportunities in school. The fact that these sense making practices and not others are more generally accepted is the result of a one-sided struggle. In the case that I highlight in Chapter 5, the sense of the more powerful teachers and more numerous students prevailed over the ways in which African students saw themselves. The struggle over these discourses, however, goes beyond the school. In the media, for example, discourses that depict African males in these ways circulate freely.

Perhaps one of the more obvious ways in which race/ethnicity is represented at Suburbia is in the curriculum materials. As in other schools, teachers rely heavily on texts, novels, films and other resources to assist them in their instructional practices. The ways in which these materials touch on issues of race/ethnicity and in turn often marginalize various groups, can be traced to colonial times. Throughout this period European colonizers used curriculum resources to circulate demeaning discourses of those they colonized in order to justify their questionable treatment of these indigenous people. While discursive treatments of non-European groups have improved over the years in curriculum resources, a residue of this negativity nevertheless still persists (Pahl, 1995; Wilson, 1995; Walker, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Whately, 1988; Lewis, 1987; McDiarmard & Pratt, 1971). Even so, the struggle over what resources students should be exposed to and the meaning of these materials continues in schools. At Suburbia, for example, teachers and a group of students battled over whether or not to include a particular novel in the curriculum. The sense that these students attributed to the book differed with that of teachers and other students. The teachers believed that the book was a classic, while the students felt that it was offensive. Because students felt so strongly about it, they demanded that the book be removed from the syllabus. The teachers disagreed. In the end, however, the teachers' sense of the book prevailed and their positions of power made it possible for them to ensure that it was retained as part of the curriculum.

Struggles over representation present themselves at Suburbia in yet another way. They surface regularly as students represent themselves to others in the process of constructing their identities. These identities are reflected in the choices students make about what kind of music they listen to, the clothing they wear, the discourses they employ, the activities in which engage, and with whom they associate. In the process they shape their own little communities, communities that sometimes form along racial/ethnic lines. At Suburbia divisions among and between groups are obvious, although the boundaries between the respective groups are not as rigid as some would believe. Indeed many students count as their friends other students who are associated with different heritages. Whatever boundaries do exist between and among groups, however, originate not with the individual groups themselves, but with debilitating forms of global culture that engender efforts on the part of marginalized groups and individuals to construct identities in ways that sometimes exclude different others. Students feel perpetually pressured to "become somebody"

in an anonymous, uncaring and debilitating world. Constructing an identity, however, is rarely accomplished without a struggle. At Suburbia, for example, students constantly struggle with school authorities over the people with whom they associate, the clothing they wear, the music to which they listen, and language they employ.

The final area of struggle over representation concerns not the content of the representation but the medium -- language. Language becomes a concern in a school where many different languages are spoken. At Suburbia, for example, students speak over 60 varieties of language. The language of instruction, on the other hand is -- with the exception of a few classes where French, Canada's other official language, is spoken -- English. In class most teachers expect students to speak English, regardless of what their parent tongue is. Students, however, display a wide range of competencies in English, from those who speak it very well to those who barely understand it. But language is much more than just an instrument of communication, or a tool that facilitates through its communicative capacities the intellectual development of students. Language is also a symbol that communicates value to those who are associated with its various networks. Those who participate in language conventions assign worth to language users on the basis of the ways in which they employ these conventions both in the classroom and out. This attribution of worth, however, does not occur through natural or preordained processes. Rather it is the result of struggles between and among groups who vie to have their various conventions, styles and meanings accepted as legitimate and accorded corresponding value. The results of these struggles are evident in Suburbia where certain English language styles are favored over others. This favoritism is evident in those conventions which are generally employed in the classroom and out, and in the attitudes of students and educators towards the various conventions.

At Suburbia everyone is engaged in the practice of representing race/ethnicity. Indeed the seemingly basic act of making sense of texts, other human beings, or oneself, and/or communicating it to others, implicates them in this process. Unfortunately, here, as elsewhere, the sense that prevails does not always work in the interests of all groups. Instead it often favors those of White/Anglo/European backgrounds in the way it attributes meaning to racial/ethnic differences, constructs various stereotypes, produces selected readings of curriculum materials, and prompts young men and women to construct identities in ways that set them apart from others. The medium that students use to communicate their sense of the world also confers advantages and disadvantages on them. Indeed those students who speak English well have more advantages than those who speak English poorly or with an "accent", or choose to speak another language in certain situations. But as I have emphasized above, these sense making frames are not simply imposed and accepted. They are rather the result of struggles. In a number of instances students and others actively contest prevailing meanings. The reality here though is that many of these contests are one-sided affairs, and their efforts to resist these meanings, more often than not, fall short of their intended target. The fact that these meanings are human constructions and that they are contestable means, however,

that there is hope for those looking to challenge, resist and replace oppressive discourses.

In order for schools to help students who have been placed at a disadvantage by virtue of their perceived racial/ethnic associations, they need to challenge debilitating discourses and find ways to construct and circulate other ways of making sense that work in the interests of all. In doing so, however, they need to target both local and more global manifestations of these discourses. One place to start is to help both teachers and students understand, critique and challenge media discourse. Another obvious target is curriculum resources. In both of these areas it is important not only to develop decoding skills, but also to join together with others to pressure media outlets, publishers and the corporate interests that run them in ways that will encourage them to sponsor alternate voices in their communications. Educators interested in providing opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged students also need to attend to language and identity issues. In doing so, they must reinforce as far as possible the value associated with students' ways of expressing themselves. These and other such efforts are needed if in the future students are to be rewarded rather than penalized for their group affiliations. Challenging and replacing oppressive racialized discourses with ones that work in the interests of those not always served well by schools will be a key to improving the life chances of these students and ensuring that their life situations improve.

The chapters that follow elaborate on the themes that I have touched on here. The next chapter describes the relationships between and among education, diversity and representation.