

From Pauline and Juliet to Today: Differences in Schools and the Quest for Inclusion

By Alison Edwards

There are occasionally crimes that fascinate those who are generally non-crime people. This could be through the retelling of them, the circumstances of the crime or simply the aftershocks of it. For me, this crime is that of Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme, two New Zealand girls who murdered Honora Parker, Pauline's mother. The girls both went to jail where, amongst other things worked towards university credits. They were released after five years, a relatively short time for murder, with the stipulation that they could never again have any contact. Juliet has since been unmasked as murder mystery author Ann Perry, living in England, while Pauline lives a hermit life in a small town, also in England. A version of their story was told in 1991 in the book 'Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View' by Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie. Another version was told in 1994 through 'Heavenly Creatures', an offering by Peter Jackson and starring Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet in their first major roles. The movie was my first introduction to this story, but the book has also become a source, as well as websites, as I pile through the information and try to make some sense or understanding about the crime - why it happened, what could have been different and what the real truth is behind it all. Versions are simply versions and not actual events.

The crime itself isn't necessarily the fascinating part. Sure, two girls taking a parent to a wooded area and clocking them on the head with a brick repeatedly is different, especially for the perception and expectations of girls at the time. But what does this have to do with the assignment? How does this personal fascination connect with this academic task? The fascination is twofold - these girls were from two different backgrounds and thus, had expectations and burdens placed on them because of these backgrounds. Added to that, the use of the word lesbian in the media, even in this brutal context, opened a different learning environment for some New Zealand girls giving them not only a view of two girls that broke the rule, but also a word they were looking for to help identify themselves at a time when the Indecent Publications Act banned over 400 books from entering the households of New Zealand, including those about homosexuality. That's what the readings were about to me - subgroups needing a voice, needing a word to define themselves. Needing a way to speak the language of school, perhaps not realizing that it is not they who have to learn to speak. Added to that, they brought (or reinforced) the need for Post-modernist thinking and teaching within our classes

[Of Pauline's homosexuality]

Doctor Bennett: Chances are she'll grow out of it. If not... well, medical science is progressing in leaps and bounds. There could be a breakthrough at any time!

~ Heavenly Creatures, 1994

The fact is that these two girls did, in some versions have a lesbian affair. It was to be used as a defense in their trials - at the time; Homosexuality was in the medial books as a form of insanity. However, possibly lesser known to those hearing only the overview of the trial, was that they did not fit into their school system. There was a standard and these two girls did not try to fit it. Even in the first concerns about their relationship, class standards were applied that did not fit. Juliet was from a wealthy family; Pauline was from a lower-middle class family. Juliet had been in Britain; Pauline was trying to attain the accent and mannerisms of the British. Juliet's father held an important position in the University; Pauline was a Fish Shop Manager. Pauline reportedly enjoyed spending her time at Ilam, the Hulmes house because it offered a nicer lifestyle. Pauline was trying to fit into another standard of living, yet did not. Juliet was a free spirit that did not seem to take her social class as anything but a normal background. Juliet was and had everything that the girls in their school were encouraged to reach for, on the surface, yet she lived a great deal in a fantasy life. Thus, there was one girl trying to become something she wasn't and another rejecting it, both meeting in the middle in a fantasy fourth world.

Within their school life, the girls sat out together during their Gym class - both had been ill as children and did not participate. In 'Heavenly Creatures' they were seen in other classes, circumventing the assignments and making them their own - when asked to present on the Royal Family, Juliet presents on the one in their fantasy world, not the required British one. She is reprimanded. They were creative, both in drawing and in music, writing books and operas and designing clay figures. They just didn't fit.

'it didn't surprise her to learn shortly after her departure that two girls from her old school... had taken one of their mothers... and bettered her to death.. Weldon [recalled] post-war New Zealand as "repressive and repressed"'

~ Fay Weldon quoted in ' Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View'

Would they have fit with a different school life? Or, would their home life overwhelmed support they found at school and set them on the same path? Obviously something was lacking from both to have them so unhappy and seeking a fantasy. The schools were breeding the society that they wanted to occur, the goal being an Upper-Middle class society that spoke with a British accent and didn't murder their mothers. McLaren discusses his observations in schools of the sub-culture formed by girls who rejected the "patriarchy inscribed by the stereotypical feminine clothes" (p. 213). In this, he discusses the conflicts that broke out in his class when students rebelled against the role society had for them. Of course there will be conflicts - they are rejecting what others are accepting as a way of life, trying to attain as a way of life or do not have the nerve to rebel against. Much like those in the classes of Parker and Hulme. The hidden curriculum was just as much a factor for Parker and Hulme as it was for those in his chapter, with the middle-upper class values being reinforced as correct and the way to live their lives. McLaren discusses the dropping out of students who feared cultural suicide, the giving up of students who felt they could

not attain the middle class value of book-learning and the "boot camp for bureaucracy" that school is to so many who don't fit. Why, when school does not speak your language are you forced to learn another one? Why students fail indeed. The outcome of this linguistic challenge can be tragic.

Students don't always fit. I didn't fit. Pauline and Juliet didn't fit. The students focus on in McLaren's 'Race, Class and Gender' didn't fit. Michelle's students in 'Representing (self and) others; discourses of inclusion and exclusion' by Gale and Densmore didn't fit. Yet our schools teach with the same thinking as they always have, a curriculum set by men (and occasionally women) in suits, hoping to make the business people of the future. Yet, if that is not my frame of reference - if I do not strive for that ideal, where does that place me? I either need to be able to answer the questions whilst rejecting them, or I need to find something else. If you are not the dominant group, you are receiving an education intended for someone else.

Kat: Romantic? Hemingway? He was an abusive, alcoholic misogynist who squandered half of his life hanging around Picasso trying to nail his leftovers. I guess because you're a male and an asshole, you're worthy of our time. What about Colette? Charlotte Bronte? Simone de Beauvoir? Sylvia Plath?

Mr. Morgan: I know how difficult it must be to overcome all those years of upper middle-class suburban oppression. Must be tough. But the next time you storm the PTA crusading for better... lunch meat, or whatever you white girls complain about, ask them WHY they can't buy a book written by a black man!

~ '10 Things I hate about You'

Our schools are changing. Somewhat. However, they are also staying the same. Perhaps it could be phrased, philosophies are changing to some degree, but we still have teachers not changing their own philosophy. And thus, we have a society that has been educated in the exclusive and inclusive schools, reinforcing the points they learned there. We work in a system that is modernist. We follow the traditional canon, we praise formal language and writing skills, we have traditional classrooms and follow set outcomes to prepare our students for common exams that often we don't make up, and then we expect them to be able to think! As McLaren states in 'New and Old Myths in education', we are "left with an emphasis on *practical* and *technical* forms of knowledge as opposed to *productive or transformative* knowledge". How much can be applied to the students life? How much can be applied to the students self? How prepared are they if they know the six causes of the First World War but can't think of how such an event came about? We need to teach them in a way that appeals to them, but also **speaks** to them.

Not all of our students come from the same social background - nor should we expect them all to in order for them to learn in school! The comment was made in

class at one point that teaching at a school has stayed the same but the students have changed - so the scores are down. The scores don't need to be down if that is the concern. Instead, the teaching has to change. It has to speak to the students in a way that they understand. Linguistically they need to be reached so they can be taught. (taught? J)

"All girls, from the most servile to the haughtiest, learn in time that to please they must abdicate."

■ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

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We need to be post modernist in our teaching. We need to understand that different types of students just means a more varied school, not a bad school. We need to open our teaching to our students, letting who they are help us realize what we have to be. This does not mean we relax standards at all. Instead we create newer ones. Inclusive ones that allow for different ideas, interpretations and ideas. We need to open up to more than the canon in our writing and our reading and allow different types of literature. Do we relax at all? No. Is it more work? Yes. But shouldn't a teacher want to get to know their students better and put in the effort? Of course. If a class is 75% girls, shouldn't something speak to the female psyche? Teach them that girls can be writers, or have adventures or both? If 50% of the class is from a different background, shouldn't the work represent that background to some degree? We need to include our students so that they are able to feel included in the world. If we don't show that they are respected as a group or as a person, won't they learn that along with the FOIL method, the six causes of WWI and Hemingway?

"Behold the turtle. He only makes progress when he sticks his neck out."

~ James Bryant Conant

Yet, I'm tired of inclusion without knowledge. I'm tired of 'well, I try to pick a boy and a girl to do these tasks' or 'I throw in a female mathematician'. I'm tired of half ass equality which really isn't equality at all. Chances are boys aren't asked to do 'girl' tasks, which makes the first one unequal at its base. And only the budding feminists will pick up on the inclusion of a female historical figure if it's not made a big deal of. You can't go from unequal and exclusive and expect token gestures are going to cut it.

When I talk about gender issues in schools with other teachers, those are the responses I get. Kind of, 'I'm doing my part, I'm an equal opportunity teacher, leave me alone'. Well, if those band-aids worked, then we would have a much more equal society. And school. Schools are not breeding grounds of equality. Not with subcultures and expectations and the hidden bureaucratic curriculum to breed little businessmen. Yes, I said businessmen.

Equality of opportunity is an equal opportunity to prove unequal talents.

~ Viscount Samuel

We need education. We need courses. We need teachers trained in this. If not, they're teaching what they learned. We need gendersensitivity training, gender history training and gender heritage training. We need to offer something to our students besides 'Johnny and Susan, move the desks'. We need to for their sakes. Relatedly, we also need similar sexuality training. What if Pauline and Juliet were free to have a relationship? What if those who killed Brandon Teena and Matthew Sheppard were taught about respect for differences? We breed hatred and inequality. We need to do something about it. Otherwise we're still going one step forward and two backwards.

As a profession we are well trained. We have at least one degree, we have summers off where if we want to learn more, we can take courses and we have to have some sensitivity to the needs of children, otherwise we wouldn't have stayed with teaching. Where do we go wrong? Where do the Paulines and the Juliets and the 'Corridor Girls' and the countless others come from? We can't base it primarily on home life - yes, home life reinforces the lessons being learned in school. But what comes first - learning it in school or home practices? If society builds the schools, doesn't society dictate what is taught? And, if that is the case, isn't society simply then repeating the lessons that have been taught in schools for years? If in school we are building the world we want, then we are also teaching the lessons that keep society the way it is. We need to educate past the societal norms, include other viewpoints and options, and allow more than one goal to be the best for those involved. Allow the society that the student comes from to build a basis so that instead of committing cultural suicide they grow cultural pride. Help them learn the words to define themselves in a non-limiting way so that they can fight back if others aren't as open as they are and need some education. It's a ripple effect.

Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among rocks.

~ Charlotte Bronte

Perhaps as our students begin to learn it, they will apply it to their lives. Then more people will learn it. Then, as that continues, through the years more and more people will develop a feeling of equality and apply that. We are started in some ways, but in others, we are far behind.

I talk a great deal about Pauline and Juliet in this paper. There are times I think of them, where they are now, living lives knowing their past and measuring the influence it has on their present. These two girls who had brains, creativity and talent and lacked a person to listen to listen to them. They are as much the victims of their society as Honora was of their brick. This doesn't excuse their crime, but can make you think about it. Many who drop out or leave school unhappy, unsure if they are worth anything as also victims. I don't know if I've answered the question for this week or if I've simply repeated myself enough to

feel I've left something out. Perhaps this self-doubt was taught through the rubrics and mainly male writings that I had through school. Or perhaps the tangent that seemed ok in my head didn't come out as well on paper. But I believe everything I've written. Can I make big changes in the world? Perhaps not. But I can try to make changes in people who can carry these changes into their lives and perhaps change someone else's. And I know that one of those lives they change will be mine.

Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process.

~ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*