Understanding the Intersection of Reformed Faith and Dutch Immigrant Culture in Ontario Independent Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives

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Abstract

In the aftermath of World War II, a wave of Dutch Reformed immigrants arrived in Ontario, many of whom joined the Christian Reformed Church. Following familiar cultural patterns, history, and their Reformed Christian faith, these immigrants settled in Ontario with remarkable institutional completeness (Breton, 1964). They quickly established independent, parent-operated Christian schools across Ontario. The primary purpose of the schools was to educate children through a comprehensive biblically based school program, yet this religious purpose often intersected with a Dutch immigrant ethnic culture. Van Dijk (2001) states that “the schools were the most important organization in maintaining the religious and ethnic identity of Calvinists” (p. 66). In this qualitative study I explore the intersection of Reformed faith and Dutch Canadian immigrant ethnic culture in Christian schools through the experiential and professional lens of eight retired principals. Employing a theoretical framework informed by Berger’s (1967) Sacred Canopy, I suggest that the intersection of faith and culture was experienced in the schools and was embodied by the schools themselves. Findings point to this intersection being located in the participants’ experience of (a) Dutchness, (b) the struggle for Christian education, (c) the ties that bound the school community together, and (d) the cloud of witnesses that founded and continues to support and encourage the Christian school community. The study offers insight into a Dutch Reformed immigrant group’s experience carving out a niche for themselves on the educational landscape in Ontario. This study also offers suggestions on how Christian schools can broaden their canopy and become more ethnically and denominationally diverse in the future.
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Can we build a foundation on this foreign soil and land?
Can all we’ve uprooted be planted again?
We stand in a vacuum between the old and the new.
With faith and with vision, we’ll see our way through.

“53” by The Immigrants from the album “In-between Before and After”
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Some Dutch Reformed denominations
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I grew up under the sacred canopy (Berger, 1967) of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in St. Catharines, Ontario. My life was very much shaped by the patterns and the routines of this sheltering canopy, meaning much of my experience revolved around the church and the local Christian school. The church and the school helped shape my understanding of who I was. I was a Christian and because my parents were Christian Reformed and not Catholic, I went to Calvin Memorial Christian School, an educational alternative for people who wanted a Protestant Christian education. This was not easy financially for my parents. The government offered no financial support for independent schools; therefore, parents of the Christian schools had to pay the full cost of educating their children in addition to the taxes they paid in part to fund local public and Catholic schools. Yet, my parents and most of their friends committed to supporting the Christian school for their children.

My connection to The Netherlands is distant. Technically, I am a second-generation immigrant. My parents were young children when their families immigrated to Canada from The Netherlands in the early 1950s. By the time I was born, they did not speak Dutch (unless they did not want me to know what they were talking about) nor did they speak English with a detectable accent. My grandparents spoke Dutch and, as a child, I thought it sounded strange to hear a senior citizen speaking English without a Dutch accent. Regardless of the distance between my parents’ homeland and my Canada, I grew up knowing that I was Christian Reformed and that I was of Dutch descent.
How did these two identities intersect? In church, the intersection was quite apparent to me. Suk (2011), writing about his childhood experience in the CRC put it this way:

Our church was Christian Reformed, which really amounts to conservative Dutch Presbyterians. Our congregation was composed of immigrants like us. My parents said that we went to that church because we specifically believed what it taught. In fact, we actually went because our tribe did. (p. 28)

As a child, it was obvious to me that our church was rooted in a Dutch ethnic heritage. I had no understanding of Dutch church history, the *Hervormde Kerk* or the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (both words mean Reformed), or how this translated onto the Canadian scene in the early to mid-1900s. What I knew was that all my friends in church had parents who came from The Netherlands and everyone in church had Dutch last names. The seniors in church spoke Dutch or English with a strong Dutch accent, and the church had special Dutch language services once a month on Sunday afternoons. At Christmas we sang *Ere Zij God* (Glory to God) in Dutch, and many eyes would tear up. The intersection between my Dutch roots and my faith community was obvious to me.

The intersection of faith and Dutch ethnic culture in the Christian school was a little harder for me to grasp. I never heard a Dutch word spoken at school, except once a year on Grandparents’ Day. There were some children who did not have Dutch last names in my class—they were a minority—and there were some children I knew from church who did not go to the Christian school. It was just school to me; *Schol mit der Bibel.*
Over the years both as a student, but more so as an educator and administrator in various independent Christian Schools, I have come to understand that the Dutch identity found (or not found) in Christian schools can be problematic. For some, especially those whose ethnic roots are other than Dutch, it is evident that many Christian schools in Ontario are Dutch in heritage (Schryer, 1998). When I was a principal, I once had a conversation with a parent who mentioned, “I didn’t go to the Christian school because I wasn’t Dutch.” She did not say this out of anger or bitterness. She was simply stating a personal fact. I remember wondering what being Dutch had to do with attending a Christian school. It is not a Dutch school; it is a Christian school. As an administrator, the distinction was important to me. The school I led was faith-based, much like a separate Catholic school. References to ethnicity in connection to the school’s identity served to exclude those who were interested in a Christian education but who were not of Dutch descent. That was something I worked hard to avoid. Yet, I could see why people, such as the parent mentioned above, understood that it was a Dutch school. At about the same time, I saw a post on a Facebook wall from a long-time member of a Christian school celebrating the school hockey team’s victory against a rival school whose student population is traditionally French-Catholic: “Dutch vs French. Dutch win 3-1. Way to go boys.” In a short period of time, I observed individuals recognizing the Dutch identity found within the school. For the one, this identity placed her on the outside of the community. For the other, this identity served as a source of celebration and belonging; something to rally around.

The intersection of faith and ethnic culture emerging from a shared heritage is a phenomenon that is part of the reality of social institutions that Dutch, Christian
Reformed immigrants established in Canada. Interestingly, this intersection is often denied or at least down-played by members of this group. According to Schryer (1998), Dutch-Canadian Calvinists often fail to acknowledge the cultural aspect of their identity. He writes: “While Dutch-Canadian Calvinists emphasize the Christian and not the Dutch part of their identity, their non-Dutch neighbours continue to talk about Dutch schools and Dutch churches when talking about Reformed institutions” (p. 286).

According to MacDonald (2008), faith and ethnic identity have functionally merged into one for some Reformed groups in Canada. He writes that for the Dutch Reformed people “religion functions in a way similar to that of an ethnic identity, in that it acts as the touchstone for a group of people” (p. 197). Whether faith and ethnic identity are viewed as two distinct and competing elements of identity or as two overlapping or intersecting characteristics, my personal experience and the experience of people I have spoken to both within and outside of the Christian school community suggest that faith and ethnicity have played a role in peoples’ experience in Christian schools within the Dutch, Christian Reformed tradition over the decades.

**Historical Background of the Study**

In The Netherlands in 1945, the Canadian Army and other members of the Allied forces liberated the Dutch people from four years of German Nazi occupation. The liberation brought about much joy and celebration as well as shed light on the devastating effects the war had had on the country and the people. According to Ganzevoort (1988), after the war, the Dutch faced “the critical problems of overpopulation, unemployment, and lack of arable land” (p. 64), a situation that exacerbated an already exhausted society. Many people began to look for new opportunities and a hopeful future for their children.
Given the strong connection the Dutch had with their Canadian liberators, people began to seek out Canada as their new home.

The situation in The Netherlands led to a wave of postwar immigration of Dutch citizens to Canada. Dutch immigration to Canada rose from 97 in 1946 to 9,866 in 1949 to 20,617 in 1954. Between the years 1946 and 1954, 94,533 people from The Netherlands immigrated to Canada (Peterson, 1955, p. 175). According to VanderMey (1983) this number grew to 184,150 by 1982 (p. 53). Large numbers of Dutch Calvinists were included in this wave of immigration. According to Koops (2010), members of the Gereformeerd Kerk, many of whom joined the CRC in North America, were overrepresented in statistical terms given their population in The Netherlands. Members of the Gereformeerd Kerk made up 7% of the postwar Dutch population. In contrast, they accounted for almost 20% of postwar Dutch immigrants. These Reformed immigrants began to settle in Canada and to remake their lives. They joined or built Christian Reformed Churches, the closest alternative to their home church. Soon after, and sometimes prior to building the church, they established parent-owned Christian school societies. In Ontario, the first of these schools was established in 1943 in Holland Marsh.

Currently in Ontario, many schools in the CRC tradition are associated with the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) in Ancaster, ON. According to the OACS 2013-2014 statistics, 70 associated Christian schools, serving 11,256 JK–Grade 12 students, operate across Ontario. These numbers do not include other independent Christian schools unaffiliated with the OACS that have grown out of other smaller sects
of the Dutch Calvinist group (e.g., The Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed Churches).

The Christian schools the Christian Reformed immigrants built are important for a number of reasons. First, these immigrants established independent schools in an attempt to be faithful to their religious convictions. Second, the schools emerged out of a specific Reformed Christian worldview that integrated religious understandings with ideas of how society should be structured, a worldview found in the teachings of John Calvin and rearticulated by Abraham Kuyper in the early 20th Century. Third, institution building was consistent with Dutch societal patterns at that time. Van Dijk (2001) states the following with regards to the importance of Christian schools: "the establishment of Christian schools was next in importance to the establishment of churches and local immigration societies. The schools were the most important organization in maintaining the religious and ethnic identity of Calvinists" (p. 66). According to Van Dijk, between 1946 and 1960, Reformed immigrants started 21 Christian schools in Ontario.

The immigrants were performing a cultural act when they built their Christian schools. In many ways, they were duplicating the social structure of their previous homeland in Canada (Schryer, 1998). They were seeking to set up their sacred canopy in their new home. The sacred canopy, a concept Berger (1967) articulated, is a meaning-making structure people apply to their experiences to understand and deal with their life circumstances and their need for social belonging. It is a structure that enables people to connect to something eternal and significant in the face of their own temporal, limited existence. An essential stake in this canopy, in addition to the churches the immigrants built, was independent, parent-owned Christian schools.
Being Reformed

The history of Dutch Reformed churches, both in The Netherlands and in North America, can be traced to the Reformation when a number of churches separated from the Roman Catholic Church, beginning in the 1500s. It is important to note that the term Reformed should be understood as Calvinist in this study. There are numerous other Christian churches that stem from the Reformation, but which follow the teachings of other Reformers, including but not limited to Luther (Lutherans), Knox (Presbyterians), and Simons (Mennonites). There is also a variety of different churches within the Dutch Reformed tradition as well. The State church of The Netherlands was called the Hervormde Kerk, or the Reformed Church. The Reformed Church in America was founded by members of the Dutch National Reformed Church in New Amsterdam (later New York) in 1628. It, along with the Reformed Church in Canada, represents the oldest Protestant church in North America (VanderMey, 1983). The Gereformeerde Kerk also means Reformed Church; however, it refers to members of Reformed churches that followed the teachings of Abraham Kuyper and seceded from the Hervormde Kerk in the late 19th Century. These Christians were referred to as neo-Calvinists, or Calvinists who believed in active involvement in society (Schryer, 1998).

A number of Reformed denominations emerged from both the Hervormde and Gereformeerde churches. For example, the CRC began in 1857 when seceders from the Hervormde Kerk who had immigrated to America separated from the RCA to begin their own denomination. The Canadian Reformed Church emerged from the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt Artikel 31 (or Liberated Reformed, Article 31) which was a group that broke away from the Gereformeerde Kerk in The Netherlands in 1944 (VanderMey,
There are several other denominations in North America that have emerged from the Dutch Reformed population, including Free Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, and United Reformed. Each has its own particular history and doctrinal distinctiveness. See Figure 1.

There is more to understanding the Dutch Reformed in North America than knowing the different Reformed denominations. Bratt (2002) analyzed the mentalities of Dutch Reformed people in North America, categorizing them into four groups. Bratt described two of these groups as somewhat defensive and introverted. These groups tended to emphasize sin and were pessimistic about the future of humanity as a result. The Confessionalists focused on Reformed confessions and scriptures. Emphasizing personal piety, they typically avoided cultural engagement. The Antitheticals drew a hard line between those who were called by God and those who were not. Unlike the Confessionalists whose main concern was the church and keeping doctrinally and personally pure, the Antitheticals emphasized cultural engagement through distinctly Christian institutions. They typically practiced what has been called a strategic withdrawal from society and sought little contact with secular or public institutions.

In contrast to the Confessionalists and Antitheticals were two other groups who Bratt (2002) referred to as optimistic and outgoing. The Reformed Church West group was generally represented by the RCA and those Dutch immigrants who joined them, Reformed Christians who Bratt characterised as having a piety of joy which turned to a life of service. This service tended towards “cooperation with other American Christians in the YMCA, Sunday School federations, and especially foreign missions” (p. 45). The final group was referred to as the Positive Calvinists. Like the Antitheticals, these people
Figure 1. Some Dutch Reformed denominations.
believed that there was a line between those who honoured God and those who did not; and, in fact, understood that this line existed in every human heart. However, they also tended to emphasize a common grace which resulted in all humans being able to do good things in the world. Christians can learn from and enjoy cultural development regardless of the source. As such, these Reformed Christians tended to advocate for separate Christian institutions in some key areas, like education, but cooperation with a variety of social institutions in other areas. According to Vriend (1992), it was the Confessionalists, the Antitheticals, and the Positive Calvinists who developed Christian schools in North America, each with their own educational emphasis and perspective.

Rationale

Faith-based schools are a fixture of the educational scene in Canada. According to Van Pelt, Allison, and Allison (2007), there are more than 400 independent schools in Ontario with a declared religious or denominational affiliation, 80% of which are associated with the Christian faith. Although the mission and focus of the educational program of faith-based independent schools can be said to be related to key religious affiliations or teachings, their existence on the educational landscape often represents more than that. They can also reflect a newly arrived community’s attempt at beginning a new life in a new country while maintaining their identity as a cultural group. Riley, Marks, and Grace (2003) write, “Historically, faith-based schools have provided a route for immigrants, refugees and minorities (to many Western countries) to gain a foothold in their new country” (p. 295). They suggest further that faith-based schools provided security and belonging: "In immigrant societies, faith-based schools performed a bridging function between the native country and the new, for children whose background and
culture might have subjected them to stares, ridicule, or even outright hostility in some public schools” (p. 297). Although public schools are meant to be places that celebrate multicultural diversity, the experience of many immigrants has been less than hospitable. This goes beyond the stares or casual intolerant comments in the hallways. Literature surrounding immigrant parents and their interactions with schools tends to use a deficit model (Cummins, 2003; Guo, 2012) emphasizing the lack of knowledge parents have rather than what they bring of value to their children’s school and education. The dominant culture can use differences of culture, language, and religion as reasons to marginalize immigrant students and their parents within mainstream schools rather than as tools to help them succeed (Guo, 2012). Whether arising out of such marginalization or parents’ deeply held desire for an education that is consistent with religious beliefs, faith-based schools are a social, cultural, as well as religious phenomena often with deep historical roots.

The focus of this study is on the experience of the intersection of faith and ethnicity in independent Christian elementary schools. The rationale for this focus is specific to the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrant group, and by extension, to me. I have always found it interesting that I identify as Dutch even though I do not speak the language and have never been to The Netherlands. I found it interesting to hear Dutch immigrants talk about Canadians as if Canadians were foreign or different, even though they were technically Canadian themselves. I often wondered what they meant. Did they mean people who were born in Canada were foreigners? Or did they mean anyone who was not Dutch was Canadian? Were Canadians necessarily non-Christians? What about non-Reformed Christians? I was not sure. It seemed to me there were elements of the
CRC immigrant experience that spoke to cultural, religious, and group identification in multilayered yet complicated and little-understood ways.

Identity making involves a struggle or at least a tension between individuals’ self-identity—how we see ourselves or would like to be seen—and ascribed identity—how we are seen and described by others. Said (1994) writes:

The construction of identity . . . involves the construction of opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us.’ Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others.’ Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of ‘other’ is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (p. 332).

The Dutch, Christian Reformed people arrived in Canada as immigrants. They were displaced and entered a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), not at home in The Netherlands or in Canada. They fit in well with the majority White Protestant cultural group and, as such, did not always stand out as other in their new surroundings. This perceived sameness might have heightened the surprise among some of their Canadian neighbours when they began to set up their own parent-operated Christian schools rather than send their children to the public schools. For the immigrants, the public schools in Ontario did not align with their beliefs or their experience in The Netherlands. They viewed public schools as secular or at the very least dominated by an Anglican worldview. By setting up schools, they set themselves apart as an identifiable minority group on the education landscape in Ontario.
The separation was not just physical separation, but a divide of perspective and belief about education. The Hall-Dennis Report (Hall et al., 1968) commissioned by the Government of Ontario, addressed private schools this way:

Many of those who favour the existence of private schools defend them on the ground that their presence enhances rather than detracts from the vigor of the publicly-supported system. Others are equally strong in the belief that private schools, because of their selective nature, weaken the public school system. The issues are far from simple, and their historical roots and present-day ramifications are exceedingly complex. (p. 164)

This report defined the private schools through the lens of the public school system, paying attention to arguments regarding how such schools impacted the public system. This was not the primary concern for the CRC immigrants. They were concerned with the ability of parents to raise and educate their children in ways they deemed appropriate. They were viewed as other, as outside the norm, and different from the majority public education establishment in Ontario; defined using someone else’s terms. Bhabha (1994) suggests that such defining creates a “closed circle of interpretation” in which “The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse” (p. 46). The CRC immigrants’ historic and religious desire for Christian schools did not align with the establishment’s public education norms.

Regardless of the difficulties, the immigrants established themselves fairly quickly with an impressive level of institutional completeness (Breton, 1964) with which they were able to worship, play, do business, and learn with people within their group.
The schools played a key role in this completeness. A minority in the larger school community, they were the majority in their own educational world. The schools were not set up to extend Dutch culture, and yet inevitably, the identity of the schools was a mixture of Dutch and Reformed. This identity is more difficult to understand than the ascribed identity described above. Yet, such understanding is worth the effort. Katerberg (2010) writes:

The challenge, then, is to rethink what it has meant historically and what it means today to be ‘Dutch-American’ or ‘Dutch-Canadian,’ both the ‘Dutch’ part and the ‘Canadian’ or ‘American’ part. For scholars of religion, and members of Reformed church communities, the related challenge is to reconsider what it means to be ‘Reformed’ and ‘Canadian’ or ‘American’. . . .

The point is to learn to see familiar ‘Dutch,’ ‘Reformed’, ‘Canadian,’ and ‘American’ identities, and the borderlands between them, in new ways, as strange rather than familiar, investigating the categories themselves, rather than taking them as givens. (pp. 15-16)

Katerberg suggests that the Dutch Reformed examine their identity as a way of moving forward. This is important for the school communities because if they want schools to be truly inclusive educational spaces for all those seeking parent-owned Christian education, they need to do some thinking about how they identify and communicate such identity to those from outside the Dutch immigrant ethnic group. This study can serve to facilitate growth and understanding for the Christian school community itself, providing an avenue to think about what it means to be both Dutch and Reformed Christian in independent schools. It can also serve the broader educational community which may benefit from
learning more about the experience within this particular educational context in an officially multicultural Canada.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the intersection of Dutch immigrant ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith in independent Christian schools in Ontario through the experiential and professional lens of eight retired Christian school principals. I aim to accomplish a number of goals through this study. I would like to foster a greater understanding of Christian schools and the communities in which they operate. Christian schools have been a part of the educational landscape in Ontario for over 50 years and have provided a unique educational option that is worth exploring and understanding. I hope to promote dialogue about the experience of faith and Dutch immigrant ethnic culture in such schools. The Christian schools that are the focus of this study grew out of a particular religious and ethnic culture. It is worth understanding this experience as it is one element of the diverse, multicultural society that is celebrated in Canada. Finally, I hope to encourage critical discussion regarding the changing role of such schools and their communities in 21st Century Ontario. It is my desire that such critical discussion take place both within Christian school communities and in the larger educational community as well.

Research Questions and Methodology

I explore the intersection of Reformed faith and Dutch immigrant culture through the experiential and professional lens of retired Christian elementary school principals. Christian school principals have been at the center of school life on a day-to-day basis. They have played a key role in the governance and overall direction of Christian schools.
As such, they have been in a unique position to witness, dwell within, and shape the culture of the schools.

The following three research questions guided this investigation:

1. How do retired Christian School principals experience and understand the intersection of faith and Dutch ethnic culture in their schools?

2. How are Christian Schools shaped or defined by the intersection of faith and Dutch ethnic culture?

3. How has the experience of this intersection changed over the decades? How might it continue to change?

I conducted this study within an interpretive paradigm which stems from the belief that knowledge and meaning are actively constructed by individuals engaging with each other and with their world (Lather, 2006). This constructivist perspective suggests that reality is open to interpretation and is dependent on the perspectives of those involved. I employed methods consistent with generic qualitative research (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, 2009) as I sought to understand the intersection of faith and ethnicity from the experience and perspectives of my participants. Primary data include two open-ended, semistructured individual interviews with eight participants as well as two focus group interviews. I analyzed two Synodical Reports from the CRC concerning Christian education (1955 and 2005) and my research journal. In addition, I analysed 50th Anniversary Commemorative books published by local Christian schools.

**Limitations**

This study is limited to the experiences and perspectives of eight retired principals in Christian schools that were started by immigrants who were members of and closely
associated with the CRC. Results from this study should not be generalized to all Dutch 
Reformed groups in North America. It should also be noted that this study seeks 
understanding from a particular group within this particular community; retired 
principals, and, as such, is limited to their specific experiences and perspectives as well 
as the researcher’s interpretations of these experiences and perspectives.

**Review of the Following Chapters**

In the chapters that follow, I explore the experience of the intersection of Dutch 
immigrant ethnicity and Reformed faith in Christian schools from the experiential lens 
and perspectives of retired Christian school principals. In Chapter Two, I explore the 
thoretical framework from which this study was conducted, emphasizing Berger’s 
(1967) sacred canopy and Bhabha’s (1994) third space as useful conceptual tools for 
understanding the Dutch immigrant school building enterprise. I review the history of the 
development of the Dutch Reformed group, particularly as this history relates to 
independent schools within the CRC tradition. I explore the literature that explains the 
postwar settlement of the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants in Ontario and the 
establishment of independent Christian schools. Finally, I review the literature that 
highlights the role schools play in the religious and civic lives of Christian school 
students.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the interpretive, qualitative research that I conducted, 
explaining the methodology and methods I employed and reflect on the experience of 
being a researcher. In Chapter Four, I discuss my findings under the four themes that 
emerged in the study. In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of this study for the 
Christian school community in Ontario. Finally, in Chapter Six, I explore the
implications of this study for me, a researcher, seeking to make effective and productive use of the experience and knowledge gained in this study and suggest a direction for future research based on my findings.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical framework and the literature guiding this study. I review Berger’s (1967) conception of the sacred canopy as well as Bhabha’s (1994) understanding of the location of culture, and the third space within which culture and identity are constructed and articulated. Following this, I explore the foundations of the Dutch Reformed tradition particularly as these relate to education and the development of independent Christian schools. I explore the literature that describes the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigration into Canada, focusing on their settlement and development as a group, as well as the development of independent schools. Finally, I explore literature which sheds light on the role Christian schools play in the cultural and faith development of students and, by extension, the way in which Christian schools serve as a key institution in the formation and maintenance of the Dutch-Canadian, Christian Reformed community.

Theoretical Framework

The sacred canopy (Berger, 1967) provides a framework whereby religion can be understood as an aspect of human world-making/meaning-making activity, a product of the society from which it emerges. Berger offers useful insights into the connections between society/culture making on the one hand and the development and role of religion in society on the other. Bhabha (1994) provides a framework within which concepts of identity and accommodation can be explored. The institution building that the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants engaged in soon after their arrival to Canada took place at a time and location in which they were very much occupying a “third space,” an “unhomely place” in which the articulation of identity, partly seen through the
development of community and institutions like the school, was something sought after yet never fully realized. Rather, it was a shifting space where they were constantly “in between before and after” (The Immigrants, 1995).

**The Sacred Canopy**

According to Berger (1967), humans are born imperfect or incomplete. They are born physically unable to survive on their own and they remain that way for many years. Further, humans are born into an environment that is imperfect for their needs. They are not born with an instinctive ability to live in a particular environment. Rather, they have no instinct whatsoever concerning their environment, except perhaps their instinct to hold on to or grasp the people closest to them. As such, they depend on a community to sustain them. They must build or shape a world that suits their needs when they are able to do so. They must order the world in such a way that it makes sense to them. In short, they undertake activity that becomes part of the process of world-building and meaning-making. They establish or adopt a nomos, a meaningful order into their lives.

The nomos is the social order into which human beings mesh their lives and choices. According to Berger (1967), the constructed nature of the nomos is for the most part hidden to people. This is due to the three stages of culture-building: externalization, objectification, and internalization. As noted, humans must make a world in which they can live. They do this through their activity in the world, thus externalizing their needs and desires in the nonhuman world. In doing so, they develop a society. This idea of externalization is seen in Berger’s earlier work (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in which the process of externalization, objectification, and internalization is described as follows:

“Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man [sic] is a social
product” (p. 61). Berger clarified his earlier thoughts on the constructed nature of society and humankind in his more recent work (Berger & Zijderveld, 2009). He laments the way in which his earlier views on the social construction of reality have been used to support relativist tendencies in postmodern thinking:

Perhaps the word ‘construction’ in the Berger/Luckmann volume was unfortunate, as it suggests a creation ex nihilo – as if one said, ‘There is nothing here but our constructions.’ But this was not the authors’ intention . . . What they proposed was that all reality is subject to socially derived interpretations. (pp. 65-66)

For Berger, the distinction between construction and interpretation is important (Berger & Zijderveld, 2009). Society develops out of a need for protection, community, and meaning. As people establish a society, they often interpret what is there as having always been there, as normal, and set up institutions to reinforce and support this interpretation. Berger is intent on articulating a sociology of knowledge, or how the knowledge or interpretation of what is around us is produced and reproduced. Thus, he prefers the word interpretation to construction for understanding how humans act in the world.

Crouch (2008) responds to Berger’s (1967) world-making thesis by stating that “Culture is not just what human beings make of the world; it is not just the way human beings make sense of the world; it is in fact part of the world that every human being has to make something of” (p. 25). Crouch believes that since culture is something humans both make and are born into, they need to consciously and reflectively take up their role
as culture makers. Such reflective action is not so easy to achieve, according to Berger (1967) who writes:

Once produced, this world cannot simply be wished away. Although all culture originates and is rooted in the subjective consciousness of human beings, once formed it cannot be reabsorbed into consciousness at will. It stands outside the subjectivity of the individual as, indeed, a world. In other words, the humanly produced world attains the character of objective reality.

Objectification eventually leads to internalization. Internalization is that process whereby humans come to understand objectified society as having always been the way it is, have it embedded in their consciousness as such, and in the process adapt their choices to what they see in the world around them. Not only do they perceive the social order as natural, they also accept their place in it in a taken-for-granted manner. Further, their actions tend to reinforce this now taken-for-granted social order.

The nomos, the meaningful social order, can be seen as the sense making structures that are produced through human activity in such a way that the effects of such production take on a natural or objective quality, a life of their own, to which humans adapt their lives and choices. In the end, a society or culture is produced and reproduced. Berger (1967) writes: "to live in a social world is to live an ordered and meaningful life. Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness" (p. 21). The human condition is such that meaning is crucial. According to Berger, this is because the opposite or alternative to nomos is too terrifying to deal with, humanly
speaking. This opposite is radical or complete separation from the social world, total
meaninglessness, a state Berger refers to as anomy. He writes, “Just as an individual’s
nomos is constructed with significant others, so is the individual plunged toward anomy
when such conversation is radically interrupted” (p. 21). Such nomic disruptions occur
from time to time over the course of one’s life: immigration, serious illness, or perhaps
the death of a family member. In such situations, humans find themselves in marginal
positions in relation to the nomos. At its peak, anomy is found in the consciousness of
the reality of one’s own death. The utter meaninglessness and permanent social isolation
of death can produce the need for the sacred in the human meaning making, world
building activity.

What, then, is the sacred? In order to make sense of anomic experiences, humans
tend to seek meaning in a higher reality outside or above that experienced over the course
of one’s life. They seek connection to something more permanent than themselves, a
solid and stable point of reference. They seek to connect marginal experiences with a
higher calling or purpose, thereby providing meaning to the apparently meaningless. The
sacred, according to Berger (1967), is “a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other
than man [sic] and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of
experience” (p. 25). Religion, it follows, is “the establishment, through human activity,
of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of
maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos” (p. 51). A religion, like society
itself, is produced through the pattern of externalization, objectification, and
internalization. It creates what Berger refers to as a sheltering canopy, a meaningful
social order that protects people from the ultimate terror of meaningless, disconnected chaos.

Berger’s (1967) definition of religion is not unproblematic, especially when one considers that not all people would define themselves in the sense described above. Berger explains the way in which religion and society are constructed and interpreted by those who are religious. He does not describe the origins of religion itself. In fact, according to C. Smith (2003), Berger could have used his own observations to show how humans could have become quiet irreligious:

Why could not humans in the course of their evolutionary history simply construct ‘reality’ as a bulwark against the terrors of chaos – without reference to anything sacred – and pass that immanently, empirically grounded ‘reality’ to their children with different versions of the legitimating explanation ‘This is simply the way things are.’ (p. 110)

C. Smith (2003) describes religion as “sets of beliefs, symbols and practices about the reality of super empirical orders that make claims to organize and guide human life” (p. 98). Religion addresses believed-in realities that cannot be sensed empirically. People can be very much irreligious in this sense, not believing in the existence of anything beyond what they can see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. Regardless, all people are, in C. Smith’s words, moral, believing animals, if not explicitly religious. All humans structure their thinking and lives around beliefs of some sort or another.

Another question that can be raised regarding Berger’s (1967) sociology of religion is whether or not humans can find meaning without reference to external or sacred sources. The answer is yes, they can. For example, many find meaning in the
belief that the natural world is all that there is and find great comfort in being a part of this larger natural universe. In an article in the Globe and Mail (Saturday, April 16, 2011), David Suzuki was interviewed about his work and his reflections concerning his achievements and failures during his life as a geneticist and environmental activist (Verma, 2011). This interview is framed within the context of Suzuki living in “The Death Zone” the time of life where the people in the obituaries are mostly younger than you. The article concludes with the following:

An atheist, he says he isn’t preoccupied by thoughts of his own mortality, but he is practical. “I mean, I hate the thought of dying and that’s it,” he says. “But it gives me a bit of comfort to know that my body was created out of atoms that don’t disappear. I emerged out of nature and I will simply go back to it. I am someone who doesn’t enjoy the idea of disappearing forever”. (p. F3)

One can see in this quotation the struggle against anomy that death assures. Suzuki finds nomos in the belief that he will live on forever where he started, as indestructible atoms in the universe. An atheist, Suzuki expresses views that fall outside of what might be understood as religious. He does not rely on the sacred for security. Yet, his beliefs have provided meaning for the work he does as a scientist seeking to leave this world better than how he found it.

C. Smith’s (2003) critique of Berger’s (1967) work as well as the experience of people who do not claim any religious belief are important to consider. Berger’s sociology does seem to imply that all people are religious whether they know it or not. C. Smith’s definition steers clear of this judgment, leaving room for an understanding of
humans as moral believers, if not necessarily religious. Yet, for societies that are religious—both in Berger’s and Smith’s conception—the sacred canopy is helpful for understanding how religion and society follow similar and interwoven patterns of construction.

For Berger (1967), the development of society and of religion is similar and interrelated. In fact, society and religion reinforce each other. Although both can be understood as human productions, they take on the appearance of objectively existing on their own. This process is reflected in Bourdieu’s (1980) analysis of social relations and economic and political systems in a number of significant ways. Like Berger, Bourdieu speaks of the world-making capacity of human beings in which social structures, as seen specifically in institutions (like schools), economics and politics, are developed and maintained.

Bourdieu’s (1980) concepts of habitus and misrecognition are particularly interesting in relation to Berger’s (1967) sociology of religion. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a set of durable dispositions within a social group that have the effect of maintaining the group as it is. Habitus is a human-developed structure that functions as a structure for human action (a structuring structure). Bourdieu writes:

The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. (p. 54)
Human societies and institutions engage in activity which over time become the norm, the tradition, and serve as a reason and pattern for doing things over and over again in a similar fashion. Habitus makes acting in alternative ways other than how things have always been done unthinkable. Individuals demonstrate belonging to a group or society by acting in ways that are appropriate given past experiences and institutional disposition. In doing so, they further ingrain such actions as natural and taken-for-granted. The effect for both Berger and Bourdieu is a society that is formed through human activity, but one in which humans forget, to use Berger’s term, or misrecognize, to use Bourdieu’s term, that the very society that orders their lives, including institutions like schools, are structures they themselves have made.

Berger (1967) offers a helpful framework from which to view human society and the role religion plays in their social, cultural activities, including the development of and experience in Christian schools in Ontario. Humans seek meaning. The human search for meaning, order, and security provokes society building, including the building of social institutions that over time take on a life of their own, and become things that humans tend to try and fit their lives into. Human-developed institutions begin to develop human beings, perhaps schools more so than any other social institution. Society begins to determine the life of humans rather than the other way around. This society provides security for the most part, but this social security only helps so much. The human search for meaning, the nomos, is continually disrupted by events that serve as reminders of ultimate, possible meaninglessness; chaos and death. In order to deal with this, a sacred canopy, a religious framework, can emerge from human society under which ultimate meaning and belonging is maintained.
Berger (1967) did not theorize about religion as a way of debunking religious claims about divine truth or of a sacred cosmos. His interest is in the purpose of religion for the development and maintenance of human society and the interpretation of life within it. He writes, “For the individual, existing in a particular religious world implies existing in the particular social context within which that world can retain plausibility” (p. 49). Religious participation becomes part of social belonging and vice versa. Common religious experiences are a part of belonging within a particular group. Put another way, the pragmatic Rorty (2007) writes that “what counts as an accurate report of [religious] experience is a matter of what a community will let you get away with” (p. 11). The sacred canopy, then, not only serves a meaning-making function but also provides a basis for social belonging and perhaps even group identification.

**Third Spaces and Unhomely Spaces**

The Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants were displaced, uprooted from all that they had known and much of what they loved. This dislocation came soon after years of war and Nazi German occupation. The immigrants had lost and given up much. They came to Canada with little and needed to start again. The anomy (Berger, 1967) they experienced included finding themselves in-between their home in The Netherlands and their new home in Canada. Some were, and perhaps still are, in this in-between space, never really at home anymore.

Bhabha (1994) provides a helpful framework for understanding the immigrant cultural and religious experience studied in this dissertation. He writes, “The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address” (p. 52).
According to Bhabha, humans, and the culture they dwell in and (re)produce, cannot be defined using binary terms that reinforce ideas of us and them because there is no pure culture, no pure identity to be found. Nor is there a pure identity to be articulated. Rather, there is a space within which we all dwell, always in-between, never arrived. This Third Space is an ambivalent space, an unhomely world “halfway between . . . not defined” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 20). It is a hybrid space where individual or group identity is not simply something one assumes. Identity is often articulated in a contest of identification and the articulation of this identification. Bhabha writes that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (p. 64). Identity, individual, and cultural, is found in-between how we might identify ourselves and how others might identify us. It is found in-between Dutch and Canadian, in-between Reformed and Evangelical. The Third Space is where identity is lived out and contested. For the Dutch-Canadian Christian Reformed immigrants, this Third Space is found somewhere in “the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (p. 56).

The postwar immigrants built schools, in addition to other social institutions, as a way of living-out their religious beliefs. The schools can be seen as part of their sacred canopy (Berger, 1967) under which they found meaning, community, and security. This canopy, however, was established in a time of transition, in a type of Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) in which they found themselves dislocated. They were no longer home in The Netherlands; they could not go back. Yet, they were not Canadian; they would struggle to go forward. They found themselves in an unhomely place as immigrants in
the new world. The building of Christian schools can be seen as their attempt to claim this space as they made sense of their new reality while keeping connected to the past, to that with which they were most familiar.

**Historical Review: The Establishment of the Dutch Reformed Pillar**

In this section, I explore the literature surrounding the historical development of the Reformed group beginning in the 1500s. My focus is on the historical development and defining of a distinctly Calvinist social pillar in The Netherlands particularly as it emerged in response to educational and school struggles. I focus on the development of the orthodox Calvinist group in the Netherlands, a group that has come to be called the neo-Calvinists. I trace the development of neo-Calvinist thinking specifically as it was articulated and enacted by Abraham Kuyper. This history is important as it had a dramatic influence on the thinking and actions of the postwar Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants to Ontario.

**Religious and Educational Struggles in Dutch History**

The Dutch Reformed have a long history which includes a variety of ecclesiastical and social struggles beginning with the Protestant Reformation in the late 14th century. These struggles came together significantly in disputes over the purpose and nature of schools.

The Dutch Reformed Church was essentially the state church of The Netherlands during the years of the Dutch Republic (1588-1795). In order to hold public office in the Republic, one had to be a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Reformed Church emerged out of the Reformation, its doctrine rooted in the teachings of the French Reformer John Calvin. During this period, the Reformed Church had great influence on
the Dutch government. This influence extended to the schools (Sikkema, 2010; Van Brummelen, 1986).

According to Soleiman (2012), the Dutch Reformed Church played a crucial educational role as early as the late 1500s. As the national church, the Reformed church baptized anyone who requested the sacrament, whatever their background or participation level in the church. The Reformed Church was not inclined to let the promises made at baptism end once the sacrament had concluded. Baptism, as understood by the Reformed Church, was an agreement between two parties, both of whom had responsibilities. Soleiman writes:

The formula for Reformed baptism made it very clear: God’s covenant with mankind had two sides, a promise and a demand. At baptism God promised to accept the baptized as His child. But only later when they could take up the promise of true belief and show the role of the Covenant in their lives could they be declared Christian in the true meaning of the word. To be able to appropriate the Christian faith, people needed to understand it properly; hence education was always a main emphasis of the Reformed church. (pp. 16-17)

The Dutch Reformed Church was responsible for the spiritual well-being of the people. As such, it educated people about what it meant to be baptized into the church. This educational emphasis translated into a fairly extensive school system for all social classes and levels of education. The aim of this education was, according to Soleimon, “promoting religious and practical life” (p. 17). Students would learn key academic subjects such as reading and writing. They would also learn the Bible and the church
doctrine including what is referred to as the Three Forms of Unity (The Heidelberg Catechism, the Cannons of Dordt, and the Belgic Confession).

Over the course of the Republic, the Dutch Reformed Church began to moderate its Calvinist views and practices and to liberalize its theology. This was due in part to the influence of the Enlightenment that was sweeping Europe (Schryer, 1998; Van Brummelen, 1986). When the Republic came to an end with the French invasion of 1795, the Reformed Church’s status was radically and officially changed. The French, under Napoleon’s leadership, liberalized many Dutch institutions and supported a further separation of the state from the church.

This liberalization had an impact on the national schools. In 1806, the First Schools Act was passed. According to Kossmann (1978), this Act “provided an excellent basis for building up a system of public primary schools” (p. 96). The Act centralized the running of state schools and included many regulatory provisions concerning curriculum, class size, and teacher qualifications. It also put an end to the Calvinist monopoly of local schools. The Schools Act of 1806 was significant in its move away from Calvinist, biblically-based teaching, to teaching with a more generic focus on virtues and proper moral conduct. Public education remained Christian in nature, but did not adhere to a specific set of Reformed doctrines (Kossmann, 1978). In the eyes of many Calvinists, this was not Christian education.

In 1813, the Dutch regained independence from the French, this time emerging as the Kingdom of the Netherlands under King William I. The new king reinstated the Dutch Reformed Church, but restructured it (Tenzythoff, 1987). He changed its name
from the *Gereformeerde Kerk* to the *Hervormde Kerk*, and placed himself as head of the church.

William I maintained the Schools Act of 1806. He conceived of The Netherlands as Protestant in nature, meaning schools had to be Christian (Sturm et al., 1998). He wanted the schools to be truly public, and leaned towards a type of ecumenism that Berger (1967) believes is typical of pluralistic, liberal societies. Traditional statements and doctrines of the *Gereformeerd Kerk* were replaced with more general statements of faith. The singing of psalms was replaced by the singing of hymns. Jesus was referenced as a wise moral model to follow (Sturm et al., 1998), no longer as Christ in state-sponsored Christian schools. The schools were steered towards a more inclusive direction with a theology heavily rooted in 18th Century Enlightenment reason.

According to Strum et al. (1998), the Kingdom of the Netherlands was set up to be a progressive, modern state, unified by the modernized public schools. This echoes Kossmann (1978) who states that the public schools, resulting from the Schools Act of 1806, had merit. The schools ensured that the people had adequate knowledge and understood their role as citizens. For the Calvinists, however, the new schools taught lessons that were antithetical to their beliefs (e.g., Jesus was a good moral leader rather than Lord; singing hymn rather than Psalms).

The Schools Act of 1806 and the concern it caused among many Calvinists hinted at a much larger struggle surrounding Dutch schools that would be one of the dominant political issues in the 1800s (Glenn, 2011). The school struggle, or *schoolstrijd*, was basically the fight for parents to have the freedom to run schools independent from the
state, and then the right to public funding for these schools. According to Glenn, the
schoolstrijd occurred in three phases:

- from 1830 to 1848 it was about challenging the state monopoly in the name of
educational freedom;
- from 1848 to 1857 it was about the character of public
schools, whether they would be Christian or not;
- while from 1857 to 1917 it was about the effort to put private Christian schools on the same footing with
public schools. (p. 127)

Berger (1967) believes that it is not uncommon for religious adherents, in the face of
increased liberalization and secularization, to reassert their orthodox views, to reinforce
their sacred canopy as well as their traditional place in society. The adherents of the
traditional religion will begin “taking their stands of determined resistance to the
encroachments of secular thought and pluralistic tolerance” (p. 161). This process began
to take place within the orthodox Calvinist community in the early 1800s in The
Netherlands. In a movement called the Afscheiding (or secession), groups of families
began to revolt against the national Dutch Reformed Church. The Seceders, as they came
to be called, believed that the Dutch Reformed Church had given in to liberal
Enlightenment theology and called for it to return to a more orthodox faith of the
Reformation. In 1834, this group left the national church (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999).

In addition to withdrawing from the national church, the Seceders also withdrew
their children from the public schools. They demanded that parents be given the right to
direct the education of their children through parent-owned Christian school societies.
This was forbidden under the Schools Act of 1806. The Seceders persisted in their
efforts to worship and educate according to their own beliefs. The result was a period of
government coercion and oppression. Seceders were fined and jailed, their assemblies regularly dispersed (Van Brummelen, 1986). In spite of government oppression, the Seceders continued to appeal to the government on constitutional grounds that they be allowed to set up their own schools.

Finally, in 1848, in what Sturm et al. (1998) believes was a reaction on the part of the king to the democratic revolutions occurring all over Europe, the Seceders were promised the right to start their own parent-owned and operated Christian schools. This was finally entrenched in Dutch law in the School Act of 1857. In this Act, public schools consisting of students from diverse religious backgrounds were still considered the norm; however, it became easier for parents to start their own free schools (Kossmann, 1978). Free in this sense referred to being free from government control.

The first school struggle had come to an end and the connection between the Reformed church and parent-owned independent schools had begun. Christian subgroups took full advantage of their new rights; by 1864, 267 Christian schools existed in The Netherlands. More than 40 of these were started by the more conservative wing of the Dutch Reformed Church and an additional 40 by groups of Seceders (Van Brummelen, 1986). According to Kossmann (1978), by the 1870s, about 200 of the 3,800 primary schools—2,800 public and 1,000 free—were orthodox Protestant (p. 293). The question of the legitimacy of the Seceder’s church and independent schools had been settled.

In the 1840s, economic conditions became difficult. Since the Seceders were mostly poor labourers, they were hit especially hard. Adding to their difficulty was the fact that they had to pay for their own schools and clergy (Van Brummelen, 1986), a consequence of secession from the national church and public schools. As a result,
emigration became a source of hope for many. In 1848, a small group of like-minded Seceders left Holland and started a colony in what is now Holland, Michigan. Initially, this group found support with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), already present for over a century in the New England States, descendants of the Dutch explorers who settled at New Amsterdam (which would eventually become New York). It did not take long, however, for disputes similar to the ones that had split the Dutch Reformed Church to emerge in the new land (Noll, 1992). Many opposed union with the RCA and in 1857 they organized their own denomination, calling it the Christian Reformed Church (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999; Tenzythoff, 1987). These settlers would lay the groundwork for a future wave of Dutch immigration to Canada less than 100 years later.

Meanwhile, in The Netherlands, tensions continued to exist, with a particular focus on the church and the schools. The liberal theology of the Dutch Reformed Church continued to be the focus of much debate. Many Calvinists who had not joined the Seceders eventually left the national church as well. This group came to be called the Doleantie or “the grieving.” They were soon joined by another splinter group led by Abraham Kuyper, who would become the Dutch Prime Minister in 1901. They called themselves De Gereformeerde Kerk, a reference to the Dutch National Church prior to the introduction of liberal reforms and the restructured Hervormde Kerk (Prinsen, 2000). This new church marked the establishment of a visible orthodox-Calvinist pillar in Holland, which existed alongside the mainstream Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic social pillars.

The Gereformeerde Kerk emerged at the time a second school struggle was beginning (Schryer, 1998). According to Sturm et al. (1998), the religious groups who
had won the right to have their own schools were initially happy to be independent from government funding. No funding meant that they would remain truly free to educate their children as they saw fit. However, by the 1870s, the government began to enforce strict regulations for all schools, regulations concerning educational quality, proper facilities, and adequate teaching staffs. As a result, the cost of education rose dramatically.

In response, those who ran independent schools began to argue for equal funding. With their increasing political power—especially that of Abraham Kuyper and his coalition with the Roman Catholics—the orthodox-Calvinists were finally able to bring about equal government funding for their parent-run schools. This came in stages, first in the Education Act of 1889 in which independent schools were reimbursed one third of their costs and then in 1917 when independent schools received funding equal to that of the public schools (Kossmann, 1978, p. 354). The school struggles were over, at least in The Netherlands.

**Societal Pillarization and Neo-Calvinism**

The funding of denominational schools in 1917 is significant as it can be seen as both symptomatic of and a cause of increasing social divisions in Dutch society. State funding further institutionalized existing social divisions that had been developing for over a century in The Netherlands. The funding of schools meant that each group could reinforce its beliefs and raise its own leaders to maintain their social groups.

Pillarization, or *verzuiling*, was firmly entrenched in Dutch society.

Pillarization was the separation of society into separate sections or subcultures. Since all the pillars were ethnically similar, the separation was based primarily on
religious or philosophical worldviews (Jansen, 1998; Sturm et al., 1998) and cut across other societal markers including class. According to Schryer (1998), there were four main pillars: the Roman Catholics, the mainstream Calvinists (*Hervormden*), the orthodox-Calvinists (*Gereformeerden*), and the nonaligned or neutral, many of whom were socialist. These pillars were able to coexist with each other, often coming together in the form of government coalitions; however, such coexistence was marked by substantial separation. Schryer writes:

People belonging to the major Dutch groups or pillars lived in separate worlds. Their children did not associate with “others” who attended different schools and joined only youth organizations connected with their own zuil [pillar]. A young person was thus more likely to meet, and eventually marry, someone holding similar religious or non-religious views. There were separate health care organizations – the Catholic White-Yellow Cross, the Protestant Orange-Green Cross and the non-aligned Green Cross – and even segregated goat-breeding organizations! (p. 24)

The pillarization of Dutch society, especially as it came to exist in the late 1800s and early 1900s, was shaped by neo-Calvinist thought at the time, especially as articulated by Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper was a Calvinist. His goal was to take Calvin’s teaching and apply it to all of life. His focus supported the introduction of a new form of Calvinism, often referred to as neo-Calvinism. The Calvinists before Kuyper had tended to focus on personal piety, often achieved through withdrawal from society. Kuyper believed that what was
needed was an all-encompassing worldview that would engage culture and actually shape or transform it. Mouw (2011) describes Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist perspective this way:

Calvinism is well known for its insistence that we are saved by grace alone, and that God ‘elects’ those who are to be recipients of this saving grace. This perspective focuses on human sinfulness and divine sovereignty. Out of sheer mercy God does for human beings what they cannot do for themselves. . . .

Many think that’s all they need to know about Calvinism. But Kuyper was not content to leave it there. When God saves us, he insisted, he incorporates us into a community, the people of God. And this community, in turn, is called to serve God’s goals in the larger world. (p. 5)

Calvinism is often understood through the lens of total depravity, election, and the sovereignty of God; humans can do nothing to save themselves but depend wholly on God’s grace for salvation. As such, Calvinism has been experienced by some as an inward looking perspective, with a focus on personal piety and escaping the perceived evils of the world has become a priority. Neo-Calvinism had a much different focus.

Bartholomew (2004) summarizes the perspective under four points:

1. Neo-Calvinism insists on a comprehensive and integrated understanding of creation-fall-redemption. All things belong to God and all things are subject to decay but also restoration. The focus of salvation in not just on the soul, but on all of creation;

2. Neo-Calvinism emphasises God’s good and dynamic order for creation. God created everything to be good and harmonious, with inherent structure and meaning;
3. Neo-Calvinism affirms the historical development of creation. Neo-Calvinists appreciate and enjoy the historical development of culture and society. They view this as an essential human calling;

4. Neo-Calvinists believe in an ultimate religious conflict in all of life. They believe that there is an inherent tension or struggle in each person, institution, and society between following God and moving away from God.

The particulars and nuances of neo-Calvinism led to a dynamic public theology rather than a private religious perspective. Kuyper believed that Christians needed to be engaged in all areas of society because all areas of society belong to God. He demonstrated this belief by not only preaching, but also getting involved in politics, writing newspapers, and helping to form the Free University in Amsterdam. Christians need to be involved in culture. Berger (1967) views the culture-making activities of human beings as an attempt to make meaning, nomos, in an otherwise meaningless world. Kuyper, however, saw it as an obedient response to a biblically rooted cultural mandate in a world that is filled with meaning. This socially active philosophy shaped the canopy under which the people within the neo-Calvinist pillar lived, including many Reformed Christians who would soon immigrate to Canada.

A key aspect of Kuyper’s thinking was his notion of what has come to be called sphere sovereignty. Koyzis (2003) explains it this way:

Perhaps the most important implications of [sphere sovereignty] are that (1) ultimate sovereignty belongs to God alone, (2), all earthly sovereignties are subsidiary to God’s sovereignty, and (3) there is no ultimate (or rather, penultimate) locus of sovereignty in this world from which other sovereignties
are derivative . . . . Kuyper applied this doctrine not merely to political authorities or to the church/state question, but to all institutions of society. The family, the school, business, labour, the arts and so forth, are all sovereign in their respective spheres. (p. 230)

An important aspect of Kuyper’s thinking was that the school should be independent from the state. According to Kuyper, raising children was a parental responsibility, and therefore, it was the parent’s right and, in fact, duty to direct how this education should be accomplished. It was the government’s job to ensure just or fair conditions within which parents could effectively educate their children. The church should support the parents in this task but should not take over.

Of equal importance to this development was Kuyper’s understanding of how Christians should function in a secular society. Kuyper believed that Christians had beliefs that would inevitably lead them into conflict with secular society, a conflict that could never really be resolved. There was a divide between Christians and secular society, sometimes referred to as the antithesis. The antithesis, combined with the view of sphere sovereignty created the philosophical backing for the development of distinctly Christian institutions. Kuyper believed that “Christians must form collective entities within each of the spheres in order to make our confessions to God’s sovereignty concrete: art guilds, political parties, farmers’ federations, laborers’ associations” (Mouw, 2011, p. 42). Kuyper believed that Christians should establish institutions that were distinct from and parallel to secular or public institutions. He advocated for a structural pluralism, believing that “diversity, respect for differences and real freedom do not exist unless they are allowed to develop communal or institutional form in a particular society”
(Vriend, 1992, p. 7). In doing so, he laid the philosophical groundwork upon which his followers would engage society through the development of distinctly Christian social organizations and institutions. This thinking also laid the groundwork for the development of non-Reformed, non-Christian institutions in The Netherlands as well.

By the 1930s and 40s, this neo-Calvinist Reformed pillar had established itself as a largely self-contained subgroup within Dutch society. Within this pillar, they had everything needed to live life well. They worshipped in Gereformeerde churches, did business with Gereformeerde businesses, read Gereformeerde newspapers, played sports on Gereformeerde sports teams, and sent their children to their Christian schools. Their children married into other Gereformeerde families, had children of their own and started the cycle over again. The other Dutch pillars functioned in much the same manner.

Then, world events shook the nation. The German Nazis Army invaded in 1939, initiating an often brutal occupation that would take its toll on all segments of Dutch society. In the end, many would leave. For Kuyper’s Reformed followers, a prime destination was Canada.

The Dutch Reformed Come to Canada

Dutch immigration to North America had begun prior to the 1900s. As previously noted, the immigrants had started to arrive in America in the 1840s, mostly to Michigan and Iowa. Dutch immigration to Canada did not start in earnest until the 1890s (Ganzevoort, 1988). After World War I, Dutch immigration began to increase. In Ontario, Dutch immigrants established themselves especially in the areas of Chatham, Hamilton, and Holland Marsh (Hofman, 2004).
World War II brought about a dramatic increase in Dutch emigration. The Dutch government started to look for ways to address postwar social and economic conditions and saw emigration to Canada as a possible solution. There was already a growing connection between The Netherlands and Canada: the Canadian army had played a large role in liberating Holland and the Dutch royal family had sought refuge from the war in Ottawa. The close relationship between the two nations made migration from one country to the other plausible. Hofman (2004) writes:

the Canadian government, in need of more people to develop its agriculture and its industry, was quick to open its doors to immigration, especially to the Dutch. In turn, [the Dutch] were eager to escape the misery of a shattered nation and to accept a new challenge that offered hope for the future of their children. (p. 31)

Dutch immigrants benefited from the close relationship that had developed with Canada during the war. They also benefited from being White and Protestant, members of the dominant cultural group in Canada.

The demographics of this migration are significant in terms of the Dutch Reformed presence in Canada. A large number of neo-Calvinists, members of the Gereformeerde Kerk, immigrated to Canada during this time. Koops (2010) found that of the Reformed people who immigrated, almost 20% were members of the Gereformeerde Kerk. Although members of the Gereformeerde Kerk accounted for only 7% of the Dutch population at the time, they made up roughly one fifth of all Dutch immigrants to Canada. The result was a large number of Dutch immigrants arriving in Ontario holding Kuyper’s disposition, or what Noll (1992) refers to as a “distinctly Dutch mix of piety
and culture-formation” (p. 482). This disposition inclined them to do as they had done in The Netherlands; group together through the development of their own social institutions. In addition, they also exhibited a positive emigration culture that facilitated their quick establishment as a group in their new home. According to Koops, an emigration culture is “the presence of experiences and stories about emigration within a cultural group and the transformation of those aspects into positive or negative action” (p. 20). The postwar immigrants to Canada had a positive emigration culture reflected in the stories of Dutch Reformed immigration to America many decades earlier and, to a smaller degree, to Canada in the early 1900s. They had an example to follow, and, maybe more significantly, they had people who were ready to meet them and support them in their new home. They were often met by “fieldmen,” members of the CRC in North America who were paid to help immigrants settle and find work (Hofman, 2004). There was a pre-existing church infrastructure. Koops writes:

After the Second World War, these churches and the enclaves around them turned out to be stepping-stones for newcomers. The Dutch-Canadian immigrants also profited from earlier experiences of fellow immigrants in the United States. They had learned, for instance, that immigrant churches should make the language turn quickly to prevent the loss of the second and third generation. (p. 22)

The transition to Canada was not easy. The language barrier was huge, as were the financial difficulties many faced. Most worked for farmers who had sponsored their immigration. Children in their early teens were also expected to work and contribute to the family budget. According to van Arragon Hutten (2001), this burden was felt
especially by young women who were not expected to go as far in school as their brothers and were often given the task of caring for their families in support of their overwhelmed parents. Many young women were sent to work as housekeepers for Canadians, having to live away from their families during the week, unable to communicate in the English language of their employers, exacerbating the homesickness of leaving The Netherlands. Dutch boys and girls were often expected to give their pay cheques to their parents; however, van Arragon Hutten found that some parents tended to be more lenient with the boys than with the girls in this regard.

In spite of these hardships, the immigrants seemed predisposed to succeed. According to Koops (2010), they were, “the only Reformed group that interpreted emigration and North America in a predominantly positive way” (p. 23). In a sense, they were not running away from something; they were running towards something. Their faith, informed by Kuyper’s positive, active Calvinism made a new start in Canada seem like something they were capable of doing.

The Dutch experienced the benefits of their sameness to the dominant White Protestant Canadian group, a reality which in addition to the experience of war, likely played a strong part in the opening of Canadian immigration doors to them. These immigrants also demonstrated their uniqueness as a group through their settlement patterns in Canada. These patterns distinguished them from other Dutch groups arriving in Canada during the same time. Van Dijk (2001) studied the settlement patterns of Dutch Catholics and Calvinists during these postwar years. She discovered that the Catholics integrated well into their communities, often joining the local parish and mainstream society, quickly disappearing as a distinguishable group in most areas.
Members of the Dutch Reformed Church generally found themselves attending the United Church, and integrated well into their neighbourhoods. The RCA did send representatives to Canada to meet with Dutch immigrants from the Dutch Reformed Church. They formed two churches—one in Hamilton and one in Chatham—in 1949 (VanderMey, 1983). The neo-Calvinist immigrant settlement was different. They tended to settle where a Dutch CRC community was already present. This presence was usually marked by the existence of a CRC, the closest match to the Gereformeerde Kerk they could find. If there was no church, they would soon build one. They also started a variety of immigration societies in order to help more Gereformeerde immigrants settle, thus increasing their numbers in their particular area. They became very organized and efficient at drawing in and enfolding people within their pillar. Schryer (1998) refers to the neo-Calvinist Dutch in Canada as a transported pillar. They left as a group and came back together as a group defined somewhat by their shared nationality, but more so by their deeply held religious beliefs.

The immigrants assimilated well into mainstream Canadian culture in many ways. One explanation for this apparently quick assimilation is that they were White, northern European people and, as such, fit with the dominant English Protestant majority of Canadian society at the time. From a social-cultural perspective, they did not stand out as other from mainstream White, Anglican Canada. In many ways, they were invisible immigrants (Horn, 1997), who, if they kept quiet and perhaps changed their names, would not initially seem out of place in their new home. Katerberg (2010) addresses the role Whiteness played in the acculturation of Dutch immigrants into North American society, writing:
The shared white racial identity of Dutch immigrant communities has made acculturation simpler and less painful than it has been for Mexicans, other Latinos, Asians, and others non-whites. This is not to say that Dutch immigrants experienced no discrimination or hostility, whether for their accents or the way they dressed, ate, or otherwise could be marked as ‘foreign’; compared, however to non-white immigrants and historic racial minorities in North America – notably people of African and First Nations descent – the cultural barriers to socio economic success have been minimal.

Dutch immigrants adopted the English language and participated in Canadian society in a variety of ways. For many, the separateness they have experienced in Canada, after the initial immigration years, is a separateness they chose. This is seen in the wide variety of institutions they founded, one of the most important being the schools.

Schryer (1998) conducted an extensive study of the Dutch in Ontario, focusing primarily on how identity and ethnicity have been defined and refined since postwar immigration. He is careful to point out that when speaking of the Dutch, it is important to remember that there were different groups arriving in Canada. Even those who identified as Reformed often came from a variety of different denominations. In many ways, the Dutch in Canada have a “silent ethnicity” (p. 2). The neo-Calvinists, however, have been more conspicuous than others. According to Schryer, this group has been “characterized by social cohesion and institutional completeness going well beyond the second generation” (p. 2). Patterns from The Netherlands were continued in Canada during the early years, but were also continued in the next generations. Schryer states his
thesis as follows: “postwar immigrants from the Netherlands replicated many structural features of Dutch society, despite a high level of linguistic assimilation and weak ethnic identity” (p. 23).

Schryer (1998) explored how the Dutch Reformed effectively remade their lives and social/religious patterns in Canada after the postwar wave of immigration. In fact, he states, “The Reformed community today resembles its counterpart in the Netherlands fifty years ago” (p. 139). This suggests that while the Reformed pillar in The Netherlands continued to develop and change after World War II, the Christian Reformed community in Canada put its effort into reestablishing what they left, or at least what they remembered of what they left.

The social/cultural activity in which the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants engaged in Canada was not perceived by them as Dutch in any way. In The Netherlands, a pillared society, split along religious/philosophical lines was normal. It was a reality rooted in principle and faith, not ethnicity. In Canada, however, such social action was not the norm and it soon became viewed as a Dutch ethnic activity rather than an outworking of religious conviction. As Schryer (1998) writes: “While Dutch-Canadian emphasize the 'Christian' and not the 'Dutch' part of their identity, their non-Dutch neighbours continue to talk about 'Dutch schools' and 'Dutch churches' when talking about Reformed institutions” (p. 286). The distinction between a Dutch school versus a Christian school became a source of tension. The reality is that both descriptions were correct in their own way and from the perspective of those who were defining them.

Fallon (2000) studied Dutch Reformed immigrants in Canada exploring the worldview which guided their actions in Canada and the reason why this worldview
“motivated a significant segment of the Reformed community to remain institutionally and socially separate from much of Canadian society” (pp. 10-11). Rather than looking at this phenomenon through the lens of social/historical replication, Fallon employed the framework of covenant. Covenant is a key concept in the Reformed worldview. This harkens back to the Old Testament promises made to Abraham, promises that in the Biblical story revealed God’s plan to choose one nation (Israel) through which the Messiah would be born. This covenant, or promise, was stated as follows:

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all the people of the earth will be blessed through you.* (Genesis 12: 2, 3)

The Reformed church places great emphasis on the sovereignty and mercy of God, believing that humans can do nothing to save themselves. The covenant, the promises made to a group of people through whom God would work in history, was a concept that established God as a faithful promise keeper. It was a promise that in Reformed theology connected the Old and the New Testaments and that extended to all believers in the present. The promises made to Abraham are the same promises made to all who believe today, to them and to their children.

The Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants arrived with a theology that was rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the connection between them, as believers in the present, to the promises made to Abraham and his family. Did they see themselves as direct descendants of Abraham? According to Fallon (2000):
The answer to that question is no. Nevertheless, it is clear that as much as the ancient Hebrews felt that they were the children of God, these modern day sojourners felt themselves to be the spiritual heirs of the Israelites. . . . If we do believe that the Dutch Reformed that came to Canada conceived of themselves as Covenant people, we need to know how this perception influenced their behaviour. . . . This argument goes a long way to explaining the proclivity of the Reformed to keep other communities at arm’s length while socializing and marrying mainly within their community. (pp. 173-174)

The literature reveals a number of reasons why the Dutch, Christian Reformed tended to group together after their arrival in Canada. There may not be complete agreement as to why this was so, but there is no disagreement that it was, in fact, so. An important aspect of this grouping together, this separateness, was the establishment of Christian schools.

**The Development of Schools**

A number of scholars have focused their research on the Dutch-Canadian immigrants’ school building enterprise, including several graduate theses and dissertations. Peetoom (1983) discussed the formation of Christian schools as largely the Dutch immigrants attempt to reconstruct their social worlds in Canada. Under the provocative title of “mythology to mythology,” Peetoom traces the history of the establishment of Christian schools and connects them to stories of school-struggles over the centuries in The Netherlands. Prinsen (2000) explores the history of Dutch-Calvinist schools in Alberta. Like Peetoom, Prinsen connects the Dutch immigrants’ school building efforts with their long history of struggles over the right of parents to educate
their children. He explores what he views as a Dutch Calvinist pattern of isolation, engagement, accommodation, and, finally, schism when it comes to their churches and schools. He uses the term “the old Dutch disease” to describe this pattern, describing this as the tendency of social and religious groups to be intolerant of doctrinal difference and to seek to control social conditions, through their separate institutions, so that their particular worldview maintains its validity. Sikkema (2010) also explores this historical, schismatic tendency in his historical review of the Dutch school struggles and his case study of how these struggles resurfaced in the schism of the CRC and an independent Christian school in St. Catharines, Ontario. Like Peetoom and Prinsen, Sikkema connects Dutch Calvinist school buildings to their worldview and their past history of school struggles.

These studies demonstrate the connection between the various Reformed churches and Christian schools. Whether that connection is something inherited as part of the story through which Dutch-Calvinists understand their lives, or whether it is something that springs out of their understanding of God’s promises, the connection is clear. The experience of this connection was not only contextually unique given the type of Reformed church it is found within; it was also experienced in diverse ways in American and Canadian CRCs. Zwart (2010) analyzed commemorative books from CRCs in the 1960s and 70s. He found a difference between the way in which American and Canadian congregations portrayed their Christian schools. In particular, a difference in the motivation for starting Christian schools was evident. American CRC congregations tended to portray their schools as a means of retreating from a corrupt society. In contrast, Zwart found that Canadian congregations saw their school building efforts as a
continuation of the patterns they followed in The Netherlands. The Dutch immigrants to the United States left a Netherlands that was much different than the one the immigrants to Canada were leaving, a Netherlands that had become much more socially divided into separate philosophical/religious social groups. Zwart describes the difference as follows:

Demographically, the Dutch in Canada largely immigrated following the Second World War leaving a very different Netherlands than most of the Dutch in the United States who had left in the nineteenth century and earlier twentieth century. The Netherlands the Canadian contingent left was a pillarised society that few of the nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants could fully understand. This separated society created different ideas about how immigrant institutions should interact with the broader society. (p. 142)

The Christian Reformed immigrants built their schools for reasons that were closely aligned with their familiar social and religious patterns in The Netherlands. They were not hiding from society as much as they were seeking to build a society within which they could feel at home.

Schryer (1998) found that Christian schools were a key institution in the ability of sections of the Dutch Reformed community not only to stay together, but also to continue past the first few years of immigration. He provides a couple of reasons for this. He writes, “The schools introduce children to a Reformed perspective and ensure they will meet students from like-minded families” (p. 130). Christian schools have played a key role in maintaining the Reformed perspective or Kuyperian worldview, the main reason for the schools existence. They also provide a social opportunity for Reformed youth to
find life-partners who think in similar ways. This has ensured the extension of the Dutch Reformed canopy, both in terms of a Reformed worldview as well as homogeneous Dutch-Canadian families, some 60 years after immigration and has maintained in many ways a Dutch Reformed subculture in Ontario.

The Role of Schools in the Sacred Canopy

The establishment of a distinctive Dutch, Christian Reformed group was well underway in the postwar years in Canada. As has been seen in the literature above, this group had strong religious principles and was determined to live these out in Canada. Members of the Gereformeerde Kerk, in particular, came in relatively large numbers and began to establish themselves rather quickly with the help of a pre-established CRC. Their schools enabled them to stay together and maintain their cohesiveness as a people-group. The school’s primary purpose was not to keep the group together but rather to enable parents to direct the education of their children in accordance with their religious beliefs. In this section, I explore the literature that illuminates the role schools play in this regard.

Christian Reformed history is not atypical for orthodox faith groups trying to maintain their meaning structures in the face of pluralistic, individualistic modern society. Berger (1967) states that in order to maintain faith, religious groups must not only define and redefine their faith and beliefs, they must also keep their group together. He writes that if one wants to maintain faith in a changing and challenging society, “then one must be rather careful to huddle together closely and continuously with one’s fellow believers” (p. 164). The institutional completeness (Breton, 1964) with which the Dutch
Christian Reformed established themselves in Canada allowed them to stick together and to live out their beliefs.

Christian schools are an important element of this completeness. A product of Dutch and Christian Reformed history, independent Christian schools also continually create more Dutch-Canadian Christian Reformed history. They do so in two significant ways. First, they have been effective in maintaining the Dutch, Christian Reformed as a distinct group through two generations, mostly by enabling CRC children to grow up together and eventually marry each other. Second, the schools can be effective in passing the Reformed faith down through the generations, thus helping to maintain the Christian Reformed canopy over the years.

The CRC grew rapidly in the decades following World War II, in large part due to the wave of immigration that took place between the years 1945-1960. After that period, the CRC continued to grow, in fact growing 17% in the 1970s (Bouma, 1980). Bouma (1979) analyzed the reasons for this continued growth by looking at yearly CRC reports. He discovered that the CRC was growing internally, first by retaining its members, and then through a relatively high birthrate, rather than attracting new members from other denominations, or through evangelism to new Christians. Bouma (1979) writes, “Most members of the CRC become so by birth. Its socializing activities include Christian day schools, church schools, theological indoctrination, and youth group participation” (p. 135). Education and the schools, therefore, played a key role in maintaining the group.

The CRC strongly supported the building of Christian schools. The church itself did not own or operate Christian schools. The schools were independently owned by parents. However, the church did exert much influence in the establishment of the
schools. In a 1955 report on Christian education, the CRC affirmed its full support of the parental task of raising and educating their children. In doing so, it also stated its full support for independent schools through which parents could fulfill this task. The report states that: "Since the Christian school is the only agency that can provide a Christian education for the youth of the church, the church is duty bound to encourage and assist in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools" (CRCNA, 1955, p. 199). This commitment was once again reaffirmed in a Synodical report in 2005 (CRCNA, 2005).

The effectiveness of Christian schools in passing along or encouraging the faith is somewhat difficult to determine. Faith development is a process that occurs over time. Where it starts and ends is not empirically distinguishable. However, religious affiliation and other indicators of faith commitment are observable and can be connected to other variables. For example, studies have shown that religious affiliation is something that develops early in life. Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch (2003) suggest that a religious upbringing at home is much more influential than evangelism later in life. Vermeer (2009) echoes this finding stating, “Religious socialization in the home is of vital importance, along with continuous (or secondary) religious socialization in church and at school” (p. 201). Schools can play a role in religious affiliation, however, that role is secondary to the home.

The fact that schools seem to play a secondary role in the religious affiliation of young people does not mean that their role is unimportant. Research indicates that education in a Christian school may contribute positively to the religious identification and/or affiliation in young people and the retention of this affiliation.
Regnerus, Smith, and Smith (2004) studied the level of importance adolescents place on religion as indicated through church attendance (measured from never to once a week or more) and the importance they place on their own personal faith (measured from not important at all to very important). The individual responses were compared with those within the students’ own religious context. This context included three groups; parents, close friends (individual chose five same sex and five other sex friends that were compared to them), and whole school. Questionnaires were distributed to students in Grades 7-12 in 16 schools. Private religious schools and public schools were included in the study.

Parental church attendance played a key role in youth church attendance (Regnerus et al., 2004). This is to be expected, since parents have a large amount of control over the whereabouts of their children. Interestingly, the attendance of friends and the whole school average attendance also relates positively to individual attendance, even when controlled for parent attendance figures. This was the case with both religious and public schools.

When the data were analyzed to determine the role religious context played in youth’s self-assessment of the importance of their religious faith, the results were different (Regnerus et al., 2004). Parental influence was still highest, but only slightly. In contrast to the attendance effect, the school average for religious importance was higher than that of the youth’s friends. These results were similar across both religious and public schools.

The effect of the school climate on the importance of religion in a youth’s life is significant. Regnerus et al. (2004) write:
The school environment, and particularly whether one’s schoolmates are more or less inclined toward religion and its expression, also matters both for youth religious service attendance and how important they consider religion in their own lives. The overall level of religiosity within the school (by either measure, as they appear nearly coterminal) displays consistently stronger relationships with adolescent religiosity than does the status of being a religious school. (p. 35)

The school does, indeed, play a key role in the nurturing of a religious self in youth. Further, the school does not need to be an officially religious school in order to do so.

Regnerus et al. (2004) demonstrate that the school environment matters in the development of faith in students. Whether such faith is retained after Grade 12 is another matter. Smith and Sikkink (2003) conducted research to determine which people remain in their religious traditions, which people left for other traditions, and the social factors behind these events. This research was conducted in the United States and was accomplished through the use of telephone surveys, 2,590 in all. They explored religious affiliation using four religious traditions rather than denominations. For example, Protestant participants chose from fundamentalist, evangelical, mainline, and liberal Protestant. The purpose was to account for the different traditions that exist within denominations. Numerous social factors were compared with whether or not the respondents left the religious tradition in which they were raised. One of the factors was Christian education. Religiously committed Protestants, in particular, were asked if they
had exposure to formal Christian primary, secondary, or university education for at least one year.

An important finding of this research was that “different social factors influence different groups of people in diverse religious traditions in dissimilar ways” (Smith & Sikkink, 2003, p. 200). Religious identification is a highly personal and contextually rooted phenomenon; therefore, this finding seems reasonable. For example, they found that for those raised as mainline, liberal, Protestant, and Catholic, there was a positive correlation between greater importance of faith in one’s family of origin, and remaining in the religious tradition in which one was raised (p. 196). This was not the case with the other traditions (e.g., Fundamentalist Protestant, Mormon, and Jewish) they studied.

When the researchers focused on the influence of Christian education, they found differences within the three Protestant traditions they studied. Christian education is a predictor for the retention of mainline-liberal Protestants, a group that includes the CRC tradition, but for no other group. Christian education can be seen as effective in passing down the faith to future generations within specific Protestant traditions, but not all.

Given the connection between religious tradition retention and Christian education within certain Protestant traditions, including that to which the Christian Reformed churches belong, a reasonable question can be asked: Why the difference? Uecker (2008) provides some insight into this question through his research on different approaches to Christian education on the religious lives of adolescents in the United States. Uecker sought to determine the correlation between the type of religious school attended and the importance of religion in the lives of students as indicated by their
involvement in church and personal religious activities. He explored the religious effects of Catholic, Protestant, and homeschools using surveys.

Similar to prior research, Uecker (2008) found that the number one influence on the religious lives of adolescents is the religious lives of their parents. Controlling for this, however, he found that of the three approaches to Christian education, Protestant schools appear to contribute more to the religious lives of their students, including their private religious activities, than the other Christian traditions. Uecker suggests the following as a possible explanation:

Protestant schoolers are surrounded by a community of religious peers and adults who place a high premium on religious faith and practice and who encourage religious and spiritual development in students. This religious community serves as a plausibility structure that helps to sustain religious commitment. (p. 580)

Uecker does not provide reasons why he sees community as such a significant factor for Protestants as opposed to the other Christian denominations. Certainly, community must play a key role in all traditions. What is significant is the connection Uecker draws between the Protestant community and the religious plausibility structure, a direct reference to Berger (1967). Berger believed that religious groups need specific communities for their continued plausibility. He writes:

The reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialized in such a way that this world will be real to them. When this plausibility structure loses its intactness...
or continuity, the Christian world begins to totter and its reality ceases to impose itself as self-evident truth. (p. 46)

According to Uecker (2008), Christian schools are key social institutions in the plausibility structure of Christian students.

The research reviewed in this section demonstrates that the attachment of youth to a particular religion depends first and foremost on the attachment of their parents to that same tradition. It has also been shown that the broader religious-social context plays a significant role in this attachment. When youth are surrounded by like-minded religious people, they tend towards similar beliefs. Parents certainly play a key role in this development. However, as Regnerus et al. (2004) have shown, when it comes to a youth’s personal religious commitments, the overall commitment or atmosphere of the school they attend is very close in importance to the influence of their parents, and more significant than that of their closest friends.

**Goals and Outcomes of Christian Schools**

Van Pelt et al. (2007) address the question, Who sends their children to private schools in Ontario and why? In this study, private schools were classified under the terms “academically defined” and “religiously defined” schools. Questionnaires were distributed to households which sent children to two types of private schools across Ontario; religiously defined and academically defined schools. A total of 919 households completed questionnaires from 38 different schools; 523 from religiously defined schools and 396 from academically defined schools.

Van Pelt et al.’s (2007) study illuminates the reasons some parents had for choosing private over public schools. Among other things, this study found that 90% of
the private school parents stated that religion was very important to the way they live. Further, parents sending their children to religiously defined schools “were much less concerned about class size and individualized attention than parents choosing academically defined schools, but they were significantly more interested in relational and identity opportunities offered by the school community” (p. 4). This finding suggests that parents choosing Christian schools for their children do so out of a sense of religious conviction and community belonging.

Sikkink (2001) reports on findings similar to Van Pelt et al. (2007). In this study, Christian school principals were surveyed regarding what they believed to be the top educational goal in their schools. Sixty-eight percent stated that religious development of students was their number one goal. This was followed by 13% stating basic literacy as their top goal, 12% academic excellence, 6% specific moral values, and 1% vocational skills and self-discipline. Of the principals who stated that religious development was their top goal, 37% stated academic excellence was their second goal, followed by 27% who stated that basic literacy was their second goal. The religious direction of the school was of primary concern to the principals of these Christian schools as well as for the parents who sent their children there.

Parents who choose faith-based education may be seeking an experience that supports their religious convictions and sense of belonging. The extent to which parents would be drawn to one school over another is often determined by the way in which a school presents itself and its goals to the public. According to Boerema (2006), these goals are often communicated via the vision and mission statements of private schools.
In order to determine the diversity of private schools, Boerema (2006) conducted a content analysis of the mission statements of 81 private schools in British Columbia. He found a wide range of purposes and missions among them. He writes that “faith-based schools (evangelical, Catholic, and Calvinist) reflect a desire to provide training in a school environment that arises from the communities’ beliefs and desire to pass on the faith to the next generation” (p. 197). This mission and purpose is consistent in many ways with Eisner’s (1994) discussion of religious orthodoxy, one of six curriculum ideologies “that provide the premise from which decisions about practical educational matters are made” (p. 47). According to Eisner, the religious orthodoxy ideology is rooted “in the belief in the existence of God and the importance of God’s message in defining the content, aims, and conditions of educational practice” (pp. 56-57). The focus of such an education is learning that is accomplished within a religious framework for the purpose of passing that same religious framework on to the next generation. The defining goal of the schools adhering to a religiously orthodox ideology is just that, religious.

Zandstra (2012) also studied the mission statements of Christian schools, comparing the statements made in schools in the United States with those from The Netherlands. The schools in the United States made similar claims to the faith-based schools described in Boerema’s (2006) study, focusing on religious themes with direct reference to the Bible, God, and Jesus Christ. The statements made in the Christian schools from The Netherlands referenced concepts that were not explicitly religious, but focused more on common virtues and values (e.g., respect and educating the “whole child”) than on biblically-based goals. This finding suggests that the Christian schools
studied in North America function much more as a tool for passing on specific religious beliefs than those in The Netherlands. It also reveals that the trends early Dutch Calvinists noticed and opposed seem to have continued in publically-funded Christian schools in The Netherlands.

The articulation and pursuit of goals is one matter. Achieving these goals is another. Hull (2003) explored the extent to which the articulated goals of Christian schools were actually achieved in practice. The mission of Christian education is clear (Boerema, 2006; Zandstra, 2012). So, too, are the goals of Christian school principals (Sikkink, 2001) and parents (Van Pelt et al., 2007). The achievement of the mission is another matter. Hull believes that the mission has not been met: “As far as I can tell, Christian schools do not provide an alternative Christian education, if by that term we mean that our biblical perspective on life leads to a biblical model of education” (p. 206). Hull states that rather than having a distinctively Christian education, what is most often achieved in independent Christian schools is “Christians educating.” The result is an educational model very similar to public education except that it is delivered by Christians and supplemented with devotions and some religious education. Rather than adhering to Eisner’s (1994) religious orthodoxy ideology, such schools deliver a program similar to those based on rational humanism or progressivism.

Zandstra (2012), Boerema (2006), and Van Pelt et al. (2007) paint a picture of independent Christian schools whose purpose is explicitly religious in nature. Hull (2003) elaborates on the difficulties achieving this goal through a distinctively Christian educational program. It is important to keep in mind, as Regnerus et al. (2004) found, the school could be effective in socializing students into a particular religious worldview.
even if it were not focused on achieving specific religious development goals. It is also important to note that Hull focused on educational methods rather than outcomes.

The question of goals and outcomes was the focus of the Cardus Educational Survey (Pennings, Sikkink, Van Pelt, Van Brummelen, & von Heyking, 2012). This research was based on survey responses of 2,054 individuals between the ages of 24-39 who had graduated from high school. The purpose of the survey was to understand school effects on the graduates’ participation in public life. They sought to understand to what degree different forms of education in Canada served the public good. Religious dispositions, participation, and values were measured, as were aspects of civic, economic, and cultural engagement. Comparisons were made between graduates from different schools, namely Public, Separate Catholic, and Independent schools. Independent schools included Independent Catholic, Independent Non-Religious, Evangelical Christian, and religious home education.

As one might expect, graduates from evangelical and religious home education showed higher levels of religious conviction and participation than graduates of the other groups. This is a finding similar to the research reviewed earlier. What is interesting is the high level of civic and cultural engagement among graduates from independent Christian schools. Pennings et al. (2012) write:

Evangelical Protestant school graduates, in particular, are seeking to contribute to the common good in a culture which makes them feel unwelcome. Although showing comparatively high results in measures relating to life satisfaction, graduates of evangelical Protestant schools and of religious home education report that the dominant culture is hostile to their beliefs and values.
Nonetheless, they continue to be engaged with the culture and contribute to it.

(p. 6)

This study suggests that the goals of independent Christian schools are being met. However, the authors expand the goals that should be measured beyond religious conviction to include the way in which Christian school graduates participate in their society. Graduates of Christian schools exhibit religious attitudes and participation at levels in keeping with the religious focus of the schools. They also reveal a high level of civic engagement even though these graduates tend to view their culture as opposed to their Christian beliefs. Their active engagement with culture is interesting given Kuyper’s original call to participate in society in all areas. These findings seem to indicate that although the Christian schools have functioned as a sheltering canopy for its community members, graduates are emerging from these schools and becoming actively involved in the broader culture. It seems that even though Christian schools set students apart from the larger society for the purposes of education, the result may be an increasingly civically engaged Christian Reformed group.

Conclusion

The historical and empirical literature reviewed in this chapter contextualizes the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrant school building activities in Ontario. The social and theological foundations of independent Christian schools developed over hundreds of years. This review reveals that immigration to Canada occurred at a time when Reformed thinking, particularly as expressed by Abraham Kuyper, made it almost predictable or inevitable that Dutch Reformed immigrants would begin school societies once they settled in Ontario. The literature shows how such schools, once established,
served to keep the Christian Reformed group together. It also demonstrates how Christian schools can play an important, if not complicated, role in the development and maintenance of faith in students and, in some cases, lead to increased civic engagement.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In 1985, Lincoln and Guba discussed how inquiry has traveled through three distinct phases or paradigms; prepositivist, positivist, and finally postpositivist. These paradigms “represent a distillation of ideas of what we think about the world (but cannot prove)” (p. 8). In a sense, these paradigms express the way in which people are guided by a “superempirical order,” to use C. Smith’s (2003) term, an order that “is real and consequential, even though it normally cannot be directly seen, heard, touch, smelled or tasted” (p. 98). Each paradigm was composed of certain sets of beliefs about the world (physical and metaphysical) that guided both the questions that were asked and the answers that were possible. As such, Lincoln and Guba suggest these paradigms were both enabling and constraining. Inquiry was moving into a new, postpositivist paradigm. Positivism, with its adherence to the scientific method and a belief in objectivity (increasingly tenuous) was being challenged by people who knew the world in different ways. The shift in thinking was marked by a significant change in the way the world or reality was viewed. Rather than seeing the world as existing out-there as a coherent reality standing apart from human action, many people were seeing the world as something actively constructed through human action and interpretation. Inquirers were beginning to recognize, seek out, and describe the messiness of lived reality. They were beginning to think in “postpositivist” ways.

Naturalist inquiry, commonly called qualitative research, was not easily defined. Lincoln and Guba (1985) shied away from providing a concise definition. They write that “it is precisely that the matter is so involved that it is not possible to provide a simple definition of what naturalism is. Thus nowhere in the book will the reader encounter a
sentence of the form 'Naturalism is defined as’” (p. 8). They suggest a broad perspective in their description of naturalistic inquiry; however, they direct the understanding of the paradigm with the following statement: “Naturalistic investigation is what the Naturalistic investigator does” (p. 8). Briefly put, the naturalistic inquirer carries out his or her research in the natural setting in which the events or phenomena occurs and relies on human actors within those settings (the observed/participants and the observer/researcher) for data. Using qualitative methods, the inquirer describes and actively interprets what is seen and heard in the field.

Three decades since Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) important work, the definitions of qualitative research have remained relatively constant. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observers in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Yilmaz (2013) offers the following definition of qualitative research:

I define it as an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social interactions and processes in
their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that
people attach to their experiences in the world. (p. 312)

There is general agreement that the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the
meanings people make of their experiences.

**Interpretive Generic Qualitative Research**

The qualitative field has grown and expanded to include a vast range of methods
in an expanding number of paradigms. Some authors (Lather 2006; Wright, 2006) have
discussed the emergence of the qualitative approaches as a proliferation of paradigms, a
phenomena that offers opportunity for understanding but also some confusion and
ambiguity. Lather describes the characteristics of various research paradigms.

Positivism seeks to predict. Interpretive research seeks to understand. Critical theory
seeks to emancipate while poststructural researchers seek to deconstruct. I conducted my
research within an interpretive research paradigm. This framework is grounded in the
belief that individuals engaging with each other and with the world actively construct
knowledge. This perspective has roots in the social-cognitive views of Vygotsky, among
others, who believed that human activity cannot be understood apart from the cultural
setting in which they take place (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2012). Humans construct
knowledge and meaning as they interact with others, situated in social contexts.
Understanding is constructed in community; it is the *truth* that emerges between us
(Palmer, 1993, p. xii) as we live, work, and learn in our social worlds.

I describe the research I conducted as a generic qualitative study. Generic
qualitative research—also called basic qualitative research—is a common type of
qualitative research, particularly in applied fields such as health care and education
According to Kahlke (2014), generic qualitative research is best defined by looking at what it is not; it is not grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, or ethnography. It can also be described as an approach that combines a number of different methodologies. Caelli et al. (2003) take both these approaches with the following definition:

generic qualitative studies are those that exhibit some of all of the characteristics of qualitative endeavor but rather than focusing the study through the lens of a known methodology they seek to do one of two things: either combine several methodologies or approaches, or claim no particular methodological viewpoint at all. (p. 2)

Kahlke (2014) discusses Caelli et al.’s (2003) definition, highlighting some problems. First, research that combines several methodologies while still maintaining the characteristics of these chosen methodologies may be better referred to as mixed-method or multiple studies. Second, no study can accurately claim to emerge from a methodological vacuum; “Research can never be designed on a blank slate” (p. 38). With these concerns in mind, Kahlke describes generic qualitative research as “studies that intentionally refuse to claim full allegiance to any one established methodology” (p. 39), adding that “researchers may choose to draw on a single established methodology, but deviate from its intent, rules, or guidelines in a way that they see as beneficial to the study” (p. 39).

In contrast to Caelli et al. (2003) and Kahlke (2014), who define generic qualitative research by its lack of adherence to or even blurring of methodologies, Merriam (2009) aligns generic qualitative research with the other more prominent types
of research, having a distinct purpose and place under the qualitative research umbrella. According to Merriam, researchers involved in generic qualitative research are typically interested in the following: " (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p. 23). Merriam adds: "all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings" (p. 24). I purposefully chose a generic qualitative approach for this study as it aligns best with my research questions and purpose. The purpose of this study is to understand the intersection of Dutch immigrant ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith in independent Christian schools in Ontario through the experiential and professional lens of retired Christian school principals. It is not my intention to (a) bind this study to one specific school, as in a case study; (b) create a theory about this intersection, as in grounded theory; or (c) provide insight into the essence of being Dutch and Reformed in Christian schools, as in a phenomenological study. My purpose is to understand this unique, ethno-religious intersection from the perspective of the participants against the backdrop of history and through the lens of a specific theoretical framework.

**Researcher Positioning**

Qualitative researchers need to understand how they are positioned in relation to their participants and the context of the study. They must reflect on how this positioning may impact the progress of the study, and how this position may influence the interpretations that are arrived at. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) write:
The issue of researcher membership in the group or area being studied is relevant to all areas of qualitative methodology as the researcher plays such a direct and intimate role in both data collection and analysis. Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristics, role or experience under study with the participants or an outsider to the community shared by the participants, the personhood of the researcher, including his or her membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever present aspect of the investigation. (p. 55)

As such, researcher positioning must be addressed.

Reflection on positioning needs to take place at the beginning of a study as researchers question whether or not they should even engage in the research in the first place. As Tracy (2010) writes: “Questions to ask include ‘Why am I doing this study?’ ‘Why now?’ Am I ready for this?’ If you can’t answer these questions, then perhaps now is not the right time” (p. 842). Cairns (2013) asks two similar questions: “Why here? Why us?” (p. 324). Researchers need to be clear about why they are going into their chosen field of study and how this motivation may help, complicate, or even hinder their study. Grant (2014) states that researchers “need to be cognitive of one’s own role or position as it affects one’s understanding in the research process” (p. 2). Our perspectives are shaped by the position from which we perceive. As such, researchers need to work to understand this position in order to understand their perceptions. Positioning reveals a researcher’s experience with the research context as well as his or her prior knowledge and perhaps opinion of the topic under study. Hamdan (2009) suggests the self-awareness enabled by positioning is closely associated with reflexivity,
which she describes as “researching myself and reflecting on my personal beliefs and values both as a researcher and as a member of the researched group” (p. 378). As such positioning is an ongoing process of self-reflection in relation to the emerging research.

The literature surrounding researcher positioning highlights insider/outsider status of researchers. Terms such as indigenous-insiders (Acker, 2000) or cultural-insiders (Ganga & Scott, 2006) have been used to describe this location. Ganga and Scott write, “By insider research we mean social interviews conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage” (par. 3). Outsiders then are researchers who fall outside of these descriptions.

Literature surrounding researcher positioning questions whether or not insider or outsider positioning can ever totally be resolved. According to Ganga and Scott (2006), the perceived familiarity of cultural insiders can have a distancing affect. They write:

Insider interviews of this type create a distinct social dynamic, whereby differences between researcher and participant are brought into focus as a result of shared cultural knowledge. We term this “diversity in proximity” which effectively means that as insiders we are better able to recognize both the ties that bind us and the social fissures that divide us. Our insider status can make us accepted within the group, but it can also affect the way in which others perceive us within this relatively close world. As insiders it is easy to take-for-granted ones social proximity and the advantageous consequences this may have. It is important, however, to temper this with the realism that such status gives us, and our participants, greater access to our private selves. (par. 3-4)
The “diversity in proximity” reveals the fact that there are always differences of position between researchers and participants, subtle or obvious. Others discuss the possibility that insider/outsider positioning may, in fact, be a false binary. Acker (2000) suggests that researchers are often positioned somewhere in between the two. Some have discussed the nature of insider-outsider research in which the researcher consciously occupies both positions. Hamdan (2009), for example, discusses the discomfort and benefits of being an insider to the group of Arab women participants in her research, and yet an outsider as researcher from a Western university. She consciously occupied both roles simultaneously.

I initially claimed insider positioning at the beginning of this study. I wonder now to what extent the researcher can claim such insider status. As a researcher, I can make claims to community membership, of being an insider. In the end, however, it is up to the participants to grant such status. There is always a tension between insider and outsider status. By paying attention to this tension, one can more effectively understand how positioning enables and complicates the interpretive process.

Perhaps the best I can do is to describe my positioning and reflect on how I came to understand it through my interactions with the participants. I am a second generation Dutch immigrant. I was educated and work within independent Christian schools that are rooted in the Dutch, Christian Reformed tradition. My participants are first generation Dutch immigrants, but have also worked within independent Christian schools. We have all been principals. We have a shared interest in the health and future of independent Christian schools. I believe this shared background and interest provided me access to them and helped to convince them that participation would be beneficial.
There were “social fissures” (Ganga & Scott, 2006) between my participants and me that revealed a difference of position and perspective. One such fissure is the generation gap between us. They are first-generation immigrants, having closer ties to The Netherlands than I. They are also what I might call first-generation Christian school members. They started the schools and have seen them through good times and bad. As a second-generation immigrant, I have inherited the results of their hard work and commitment. The difference of community position became apparent almost immediately in the interview process, particularly around my use of the term “Dutch Calvinist” in the initial title of my study. An example of this can be seen in my first e-mail contact with Participant Liz. Having provided her with the Information Letter and other details of the study, she responded as follows:

I have been pondering your letter and don’t quite know what my response to your request should be. The words "Dutch-Calvinist" Christian Schools don’t sit too well with me, since I never considered the schools where I served as Dutch nor particularly Calvinist. However, perhaps that would be part of the discussion with you. (E-mail Correspondence with Liz, February 27, 2012)

I was surprised at first to receive this reaction to the term Dutch-Calvinist. At this point in the research, I had claimed indigenous or cultural insider status. Liz’s response challenged this perception as I realized that I understood the term Dutch Calvinist differently. I was not completely prepared for the sensitivities around the term or for Liz’s perspective of the term as troublesome and perhaps inaccurate. I was using the term Dutch Calvinist in my research, but realized through interactions with the participants that such usage revealed that I was differently positioned than they.
The generational difference between participants and I situated us differently. So, too, did our experience in Christian schools. Not all Christian schools within the Christian Reformed community are the same. Each emerges out of different local communities and is very much independent. Some are located in rural areas, some in urban areas. Some have memberships that are quite ethnically and denominationally diverse. Others are located in regions that are much more homogeneous. Together, my participants had experience as principals in over 15 different Christian schools. I have experience in two different Christian schools, both of which were located in more rural areas of the province. My experience in these schools had shaped the way I understood my research questions. My participants helped me see how this was so. For example, Ken and I were discussing the importance of defining the Christian school in religious rather than ethnic terms. I related a story of how I found this difficult, especially during the FIFA World Cup:

Phil: You know, I was fighting a losing battle on that a couple of years ago, because people came to the school and said you’re the Dutch school.

And I said no. And it was the World Cup and you look around and there’s just Dutch soccer shirts all over the place. And I thought, well, I guess we are a little bit, but really we’re not *laughter*. But there still is that perception that it’s a Dutch group and it makes me curious how that perception can change, right?

Ken: Well, I think [at your old school] more strongly than here.

Phil: Oh yeah. It’s a different community right?
Ken: Oh definitely. I mean here we have become a community Christian School. Where you were it’s not called a community Christian School. We are a community Christian school. We get into the paper on a regular basis. (Ken, Interview #1)

This exchange stood out for me as I transcribed the interview. I took notice of how much I was talking about my experience in this section. The point of the interview was to hear more of Ken’s experience. However, more significantly, I took notice of how my experience was different than Ken’s and how he made me aware of that. I wrote the following in my journal: "A reflexive moment. Ken reminds me that my school experience is different from others. Not all Christian schools are that way. Each is contextualized. So am I. This is a good, wise reminder" (Research Journal, March 21, 2012).

My positioning, as an insider, provided me with access to participants with whom I could have rich discussions about a topic that is dear to all of us. However, by paying attention to the “diversity in proximity” (Ganga & Scott, 2006), the key experiences and locations that positioned me differently than my participants, I was better able to better understand my own perspectives in relation to the study.

The process of positioning continues. I have discussed the tension of insider positioning. My participants and I are differently positioned within the Dutch, Christian Reformed school community; the degrees of difference becoming apparent as the research evolved. I am conscious that we are differently positioned in another crucial way; I am a researcher. I have sought to understand a phenomenon from their perspectives and experiences, and, yet, I have guided the study and my interpretations
have ultimately shaped this document. I believe that I have acted ethically, following the protocols cleared by the Research Ethics Board. I have employed member-checking (e.g., returning transcripts and initial interpretations to participants; discussing the process and findings at second individual interview and focus group interviews) as a strategy to remain transparent and develop mutual understanding. Yet, there is a tension and a sense of dis-ease on my part. I am conscious that it is still up to my participants to decide if I am an insider or an outsider.

I made a number of notes during the proposal hearing for this study. One of these notes reads: What is disruptive? I cannot remember if it was a direct question from a committee member or if it was something I was thinking about in relation to the discussion we were involved in. The question is interesting when asked in the light of researcher positioning because the answer depends upon the location and perspective of the one posing the question. The question itself speaks to my positioning in the academy. Research can be expected to be disruptive. Within an interpretive framework, such as this study, there may be disruptive constructions and conclusions, but the extent of the disruption depends on the audience. The findings show that my participants did not tend to think about the schools in ethnic terms and, in fact, fought hard to eliminate the Dutch label. As noted, some took issue with the terminology I used in the study: Dutch-Calvinist schools. My terminology, and, in fact, the focus of this study was disruptive to a degree from the start. Some might wonder why disruption in research is necessary. Would genuine insiders seek to disrupt a community of which they are a part? Others might look at such a perspective and wonder how that may be disruptive given all of the things that could be explored. Could an insider really conduct quality research? I cannot
control how the different audiences who may read this dissertation perceive my positioning. What I can do is describe my positioning and explain research activities and findings as clearly as possible.

**Data Collection**

In this section, I discuss the data I collected and the procedures I used to collect data. Participant recruitment is explained as well as the process I employed for individual and focus group interviews. I discuss transcription in relation to the interview process. Additionally, I discuss the secondary data collected for this study including my research journal, 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary commemorative books, and Synodical reports on education from the Christian Reformed Church.

**Participants: Recruitment**

The primary data for this study were individual interviews and focus group interviews with eight retired Christian school principals. Individuals who were asked to participate were previous principals in independent Christian elementary schools that were members of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) and associated with a Christian Reformed Church community. Participants had a common frame of reference in terms of the history and experience of Christian education in general, as well as the developments that have taken place over the past several decades. I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants (Patton, 2002) according to the criteria described above. In addition, I employed a snowball method asking the participants I already recruited to suggest others I might contact. My initial contact with each participant was through e-mail rather than by phone or in person. I chose e-mail communication because I felt individuals who I may be familiar with might not have felt free declining participation.
over the phone or in person. An e-mail provided them with the opportunity to take time to consider my request and the information I sent and decide whether or not to decline the invitation. I contacted 11 potential participants, eight of whom agreed to participate in the study. One who declined was out of the country and the other two stated that they were too busy to participate. I believe that my status as a member of the CRC and the Christian school community did provide me with access to these participants and likely played a role in their initial acceptance of my invitation to participate.

The participants understood through the informed consent that data would be kept confidential. This meant that I would take measures to ensure that data would be appropriately safeguarded and could not be connected to the individual participants. Anonymity was not guaranteed because I knew who was participating in the study, as did the other participants in the focus group interviews. Data were coded and reported in such a way that they were not connected to the individuals in the study. The duty of confidentiality becomes complex when researchers describe participants and their experiences. The Christian school community in Ontario is a small world with many collegial and familial connections. "Dutch Bingo" is well understood in the community as the process individuals use to determine how the person they are talking with is connected to people they already know or are related to. It would not take much information for community members to connect seemingly insignificant dots and identify the participants. Therefore, my description of the participants is brief and disconnected from their assigned pseudonyms.

The eight participants in this study had served an average of 16 years as principals in Christian schools. The range of their administrative experience runs from seven to
over 30 years. The average numbers of schools they led is 2.5, with service at one school being the least and service at six schools being the greatest. There were four female and four male participants in this study. The participants were assigned the following pseudonyms: Sue, Liz, Lisa, Joy, Ken, Jim, Rich, and Ron. I am beyond grateful for their participation.

**Interviews**

Qualitative research seeks in part to understand the nature of an experience and phenomenon from the perspective of people who have lived the experience. In this research, I used interviews as a primary source of data to understand how Reformed faith and Dutch immigrant ethnic culture have intersected over the decades in Christian schools. As Turner (2010) writes: “Interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (p. 754).

Interviews are important sources of information, but they are not neutral tools (Fontana & Frey, 2005). There are different types of interviews for different research contexts and purposes. Merriam (2009) lists three types of interviews: highly-structured, semistructured, and unstructured or informal interviews. In highly-structured interviews, all participants are asked the exact same questions and are often given a list of answers to choose from, such as in a survey or poll. Semistructured interviews begin with a list of questions or topics the researcher wishes to address; however, the direction that the interview goes is determined by the way in which the participant responds. Exact wording and ordering of questions is not always essential. Semistructured interviews allow “the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Unstructured
 interviews have no predetermined set of questions. In many ways, they are exploratory and narrative in nature. Such interviews are useful when researchers have little background knowledge about the topic.

I interviewed the participants from November 2011 to November 2012. I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews using an interview protocol (Appendix A) I developed, keeping the research focus and questions in mind. I used the protocol to guide the interview, but was attentive to the different directions the participants’ chose to direct our conversations. My experience using the protocol was similar to the research experience Turner (2010) describes:

During research for my doctoral dissertation, I was able to interact with alumni participants in a relaxed and informal manner where I had the opportunity to learn more about the in-depth experiences of the participants through structured interviews. This informal environment allowed me the opportunity to develop rapport with the participants so that I was able to ask follow-up or probing questions based on their responses to pre-constructed questions. I found this quite useful in my interviews because I could ask questions or change questions based on participant responses to previous questions. (p. 755)

The interviews were structured so that I could direct the conversation overall towards the research questions, yet still listen to the stories and perspectives of the participants and move with them as the conversation developed.

I conducted two interviews with each participant. The interviews were held in locations participants suggested. Primarily we met in their homes around kitchen tables, the participants offering coffee and treats. At their request, I also met participants in
public spaces such as restaurants and offices. During the first interviews, I discussed the research information and informed consent with the participants to ensure they understood what their agreement to participate required. This discussion was important because it provided us with a chance to relax a little bit, to get to know each other a little as well as to adjust to the presence of the digital voice recorder. As I conducted the interview, I took notes of ideas or concepts that stood out as interesting or items I wanted to return to after the participant had finished his or her thought. Soon after completing the interview, I recorded my initial thoughts in my journal, documenting my general impression and highlighting ideas and concepts of significance. I transcribed the interview soon after it was completed, returning two items (the transcript as well as a brief synopsis of my interpretations of the interview) to the participants for member checking.

I began the second interview by asking the participants about their impressions of the first interview, including the transcript and the synopsis I had sent them. The protocol for the second interview (Appendix B) was semistructured. I asked the participants questions related to the research questions; questions that were being shaped by the emerging concepts in the data. The second interviews became more open-ended than the first. In some cases, the participants wanted to clarify things they had said during the first interview. Some of the participants were prepared with documents, newspaper articles, books, and pictures for me to look at; items related to what we had spoken about during the first interviews. This experience reinforced for me the importance of conducting more than one interview. My goal was to understand the intersection of faith and ethnicity from the perspective of my participants. This was partially achieved in the first
interview. However, I believe the space between the first and the second interview enabled participants and me to think more about the topic, and what we had thought and said about it during the first interview. The second interview enabled us to grow in our understanding. This process continued as we moved into the focus group interviews.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups are an important source of data in the social sciences. In a focus group interview, the researcher can hear from a variety of participants and deepen the knowledge of the topic at hand. Simply put, focus groups are “collective conversations” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011), small group discussions that are focused on a particular topic. Onwuegbuzie, Dickenson, Leech, & Zoran (2009) review the literature surrounding focus group interviews and highlight several benefits: (a) they are efficient and economical, (b) they take place in a socially-oriented environment that can lead to group cohesiveness and (c) they are a safe place to share experiences and information. Further, Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise (2008) believe focus groups can enhance ethical research practice, as they “may provide the best example of reciprocity in data collection because of its emphasis on relationship building” (p. 316). In a focus group, participants can connect with and learn from people with interests similar to their own.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) discuss the “multifunctionality” of focus groups stating that they can serve a pedagogical, political, and inquiry function. Pedagogically, focus groups can enable participants to see beyond the limits of their own knowledge through dialogue with others. Politically, focus groups can raise critical consciousness within groups, possibly leading to social action and justice. As a form of
inquiry, focus groups can lead to new and important knowledge, which is why they have been such an important data source in social research.

I was interested in using focus groups for a number of reasons. I was intent on receiving participant feedback through member-checking, as a way of holding myself accountable to my participants. Focus groups offer an opportunity for member checking about the research process and the researcher’s interpretative work to that point. I was also intent on continuing the conversations that had begun in the first two interviews, deepening the data. I reflected on my motivation for using focus groups in this research in the light of Kamberelis and Dimitriadis’ (2011) discussion of the pedagogical, political, and inquiry functions of focus groups. I am aware that my focus was primarily on inquiry and partly on pedagogy at first. I was focused on understanding my topic and my participants and framed the research as such. The following excerpt from the information letter sent to participants demonstrates this:

Potential benefits of your participation include the opportunity for you to share your experiences and learn from others who have participated in Christian schools in much the same capacity as yourself. Further, by participating in this research and sharing your perspectives and experiences, you have the opportunity to contribute to a deeper understanding of independent Christian schools. This deeper understanding can help such schools move more reflectively in the future. (Information Letter)

The idea of the possible political function of focus groups emerged as the study progressed, as the participants began to discuss topics around identity, and discourse about us and them. Through my analysis of this data, as indicated in Chapter Four, I was
able to see possibilities to be more political, perhaps employing a more critical framework in future research endeavours in Christian schools.

The literature suggests the ideal number of participants for a focus group is 6-12, a number which helps ensure a diversity of opinion and perspective while not being too big so as to intimidate participants (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). I conducted two focus group interviews, one with the female participants and one with the male, for a total of four participants in each focus group. This decision was made primarily with two reasons in mind. The first reason focused on confidentiality. I had taken steps to ensure confidentiality through the coding of data and by assigning pseudonyms. By participating in a focus group, the participants were revealing their identity to three other participants. Participants were informed of this through the consent process. They were also asked to agree to and sign a Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix C) in which they acknowledged the duty to respect the confidentiality of all participants who would be present at the interview. We discussed this agreement individually at the first interview and collectively at the beginning of the focus group interviews. Even with these measures in place, I still wanted to limit the number of people in each focus group so that only half the participants would ever know the identity of any other participant.

The second reason for conducting two focus groups had to do with gender. It was my intention to have equal representation of male and female participants. To ensure the female and male voices were heard in the research, I proposed to hold two focus groups, one for the women and one for the men. It is interesting to consider the decision I made around gender in the light of focus group literature. In their discussion of the political function of focus groups, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) discuss the way in which
such research can serve the needs of traditionally subordinated groups. Research within the critical feminist perspective, for example, recognizes the role power plays in social settings and stresses that representation—being present at an interview—does not necessarily lead to being heard. Power inequality in focus groups often results in one group or individual being heard over another. As such, some critical research leaned towards using homogeneous gender groups. This perspective was further developed as third-wave feminists challenge the idea that all women will have the same opinion:

third-wave feminism both challenged the monolithic treatment of difference under the sign of “women” that characterized much of second-wave thinking and highlighted the importance of creating focus groups that are relatively “homogeneous” with respect to life histories, perceived needs, desire, race, social class, region, age and so forth because such groups are more likely to achieve the kind of solidarity and collective identity requisite producing ‘effective histories’ (Foucault, 1984). (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 552)

My decision to hold separate male and female focus groups can be justified using the perspective mentioned above, although difference in power presents itself in groups in many ways besides gender (e.g., race, class, personality, etc.). However, it was important for me to realize that that is not why I chose initially to do so. My reflections on the analysis I conducted when it came to gendered perspectives emerging from the focus groups revealed to me that when I suggested hearing from different genders, I understood that as meaning a female perspective. Taken further, this indicates that at some level I was aware of female as gendered and male as normative. This is essentially a sexist
perspective that I have tried to understand more clearly. Such realization, however, is part of the learning process.

The focus groups themselves were highlights for me. I enjoyed watching the participants enter the meeting room, peeking around the corner to see who was there. As expected, many were familiar with each other. Their greetings, hugs, and handshakes helped me understand how focus groups can serve as a form of reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008). I began each focus group by welcoming the participants and thanking them. I then referred them to the Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement, which they had received at the beginning of the research. We read this agreement together once more and mutually agreed to abide by its stipulations. I led the focus group using the protocol (Appendix D) I had developed for the occasion. The transcripts of the focus groups interviews were not shared with the participants for reasons of confidentiality. Sending transcripts of the focus group interviews to all participants would have placed individual participant data outside of the control of the individual participants and the researcher. Instead, we reviewed the main points of the interview at the end of each focus group session.

During the focus groups, I was able to listen in a way that was much different than when I was conducting the individual interviews. Once the discussions began, I had the experience of being an observer. I experienced being de-centered (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). The participants engaged in meaningful discussions and told fascinating stories. They asked each other questions and found respectful ways to raise alternative perspectives. I believe their familiarity with each other and their passion for Christian education created conditions for interesting discussions. I also believe that my
research and the questions I was raising created conditions for problem-posing and a sense that we were exploring important ideas together.

**Transcription**

I experienced transcription as an important aspect of my research. Technically speaking, transcription is the process of transferring the spoken word - the interview – into text for the purpose of analysis. It is a time-consuming and labour intensive task. In the literature, transcription is described as more than manual labour. It is seen as value laden and interpretive work (Kvale, 1996; Lapadate and Lindsay, 1999) with transcribers often leaving subtle fingerprints (Tilley, 2003), their interpretations of what they heard, on the transcriptions themselves. A transcript is a representation of the data—the actual interview—and, as such, is the result of important technical and interpretive decisions. It is a form of analysis.

Mero-Jaffe (2011) discusses the five main factors that may influence the quality of a transcript; the researcher, interviewer, transcriber, interviewee, and the environment or location of the interview. In larger scale research projects, the researcher, interviewer, and transcriber may be three different people. In this study, I performed these three roles, which according to Mero-Jaffe, helps to reduce the “compromising influence to transcript quality” (p. 233). I transcribed the individual and focus group interviews using a protocol (Appendix E) based on the work of Tilley and Powick (2002). I was concerned about accuracy in the representation, seeking to record what was said, but I was also concerned about preserving an accurate account of the meaning of what was said as well. As such, I did not record every single mispronunciation, stutter, or pause unless I deemed such occurrences significant to the meaning of the conversation.
My transcription routine was consistent throughout the interview process. My goal was to complete a transcript within one week of the interview, a goal I achieved most of the time. I never took longer than two weeks to complete a transcript. I formatted each transcript with a two-inch margin on both sides of the page leaving room for coding. I numbered each page and each line of the transcript for easier documentation. I single-spaced the transcripts but left a double space when there was a change in speaker. In total there were 416 pages of transcripts.

Throughout the transcription process, I took notes in my journal. I documented important words or ideas, and items I wanted to pursue further the next time I spoke with the participant. After transcription was complete, I reviewed the transcript and my notes recorded during the process, and constructed a synopsis representing my summary of the interview as well as some key items that were discussed. I consistently included direct quotes from the transcript itself in the synopsis so that my participants would see how their words might be used in the research.

I sent a copy of the transcript and the synopsis to the participants by mail with a note thanking them and requesting that they contact me if they had any questions or wanted to clarify anything regarding the transcript. The literature mentions a number of reasons for returning transcripts to participants including the clarification of unclear statements and to facilitate further discussion (Forbat & Henderson, 2005; Lapadat, 2000). Mero-Jaffe (2011) suggests that returning transcripts to participants is potentially problematic, with participants possibly challenging the validity of the transcript wanting changes made to what was originally transcribed for the sake of sounding intelligent or more refined. I returned transcripts to participants for a number of reasons. Ethically, I
felt strongly that the participants should see how I had transcribed the interview and how I was using the data in the synopsis. I was also interested in the role returning transcripts plays in member checking. Further, I viewed returning transcripts to participants as a way of continuing the conversation, a way of connecting the first and second interviews.

I experienced the benefits of returning transcripts to participants and raising them as a point of discussion during my second interview with Rich. In our first interview, Rich and I were discussing how the schools had gone through many stages of development over the decades and how, in spite of the difficulties and challenges, the schools keep growing and moving forward. Rich used the phrase “We just hobbled along and tried to do our thing” (Rich, Interview #1) during the interview. At the beginning of the second interview, he wanted to clarify what he meant by that phrase:

Rich: And the other part was more – I’m not sure where to find that {paging through the transcript} – I used the term ‘we’re just hobbling along’. I’m not sure where you pick that up near the end. But I really wanted to say…

Phil: Right here {pointing to the transcript}

Rich: Yeah, and what I really wanted to say, the struggles that we experienced in the Christian school as well, whatever tensions there were, I think we were all influenced by the debate of the educational theories. (Rich, Interview #2).

Rich read the transcripts, reflected on what was written, and then clarified his intended meaning with me. Through this process, I was able to better understand what he meant. Had Rich not been able to see and respond to the first transcript, I might have been left
with the impression that the schools were “hobbling along” in the sense that they were without direction and organization. Rich wanted to ensure that I understood that he meant the schools were trying to find their way in the midst of competing educational and philosophical forces. I went back through the transcript and confirmed that Rich’s clarification was consistent with the rest of what we had spoken about.

Throughout the transcription process, I was constantly reminded of the actual interview, the event that is the data. The transcription process slowed me down and forced me to focus on the words that were spoken. In fact, the transcription process, the slow, methodical process of typing the spoken word had the powerful effect of connecting the voice of the participants to the words they were speaking, the words I would read over and over again throughout the research. James (2012) suggests, “It is as profitable to ‘hang out’ in a set of interview transcripts of conversations with people one does not know, as it is to hang out in their living rooms” (p. 574). Transcribing interviews kept me close to the data, to those moments in participants’ kitchens or coffee shops. When I read the transcripts, I could hear their voices because of the time taken to relive the conversation through the transcription process. This is not to suggest that transcription was not experienced as a chore or a drudgery as it certainly was at times. It was work, but beneficial work.

**Research Journal**

The interpretive role of the researcher in qualitative research makes it necessary to reflect upon the choices made during the research process as well as the reasons behind those choices. As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009), researchers must pay attention to their perspectives and biases related to the study
and the way in which these perspectives may impact the research. The goal of such reflexivity is not to eliminate such bias (as if this were possible) or set aside values but to “consciously acknowledge those values” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). One way to do this is through journaling.

Research journals are important tools with which qualitative researchers can account for their thoughts and decisions and reflect on how these affect the research. Watt (2007) suggests that journals can help researchers “take stock of biases, feelings and thoughts so that they may understand how these may be influencing the research” (p. 84). Additionally, Lamb (2013) states that research journals can help researchers reflect on their experiences and make sense of the data they collect during interviews. Further, journals can provide data that are not available through other means such as documenting unexpected important experiences with participants that were not recorded. Malacrida (2007) emphasizes the value of journaling to reflexivity as this relates to the ethical treatment of participants, but also to the “emotional safety” of the researchers themselves. Journals can be cathartic for researchers engaged in emotionally difficult research.

I journaled about my thoughts and reflections related to the study. For example, I made entries immediately after I concluded each interview, capturing my initial thoughts on the event. The following is an example of an entry I made after my first interview with Ron:

Ron has a very interesting historical perspective with strong opinions of the community, what it is and what it could be. The political connection is also strong. The struggles . . . makes me wonder, does the school identity exist without the struggle? (Journal Entry, November 24, 2011)
This entry marks the first time I began to think about the intersection of faith and ethnicity in terms of a struggle. As the research went on, this theme began to emerge more clearly and more often. The journal enabled me to record this idea, but also highlighted the role I played in interpreting what Ron had said using the word "struggle." It was my construction for understanding the data and it became important in the research.

I documented important ideas related to the process and questions regarding my methods. In the following excerpt, I reflected on what the participants were saying regarding the transcripts:

Jim is the second person to ask me about the use of the transcripts.
Specifically, he was wondering whether or not they would be published or not.
Of course they will not be but it reinforces for me the trust my participants have put in me. Our relationship is based on trust. They need to know that I will protect their confidentiality. (Journal Entry, April 4, 2012)

This entry documents the importance of making the process clear to my participants, ensuring that they understood the way in which the data would be used. It provided me a way to record and consider the questions that were being raised and to reflect on the methods I was using.

I found that journaling requires commitment and discipline. As a part-time student, full-time professor, and parent, this commitment was tested. There were many entries—daily entries—during the time I was interviewing, traveling, and transcribing. There were many entries during the analysis phase. There were fewer entries during the in-between times. These were times when I needed to focus on grading, teaching, or
family. The gaps in my journal during these times reflect gaps in the research process, those times when I was literally away from my study. I do wonder if I could have made better use of journaling during these in-between times, as a bridge to keep my research on my mind even in limited ways when I was necessarily preoccupied with other things.

50th Anniversary Commemorative Books

I identified 50th anniversary commemorative books produced by various Christian school societies as possible data early in my research. These books provide an interesting glimpse into the history and experiences in Christian schools over the decades and, as such, are important for revealing insight into the experience of faith and culture. The 50th anniversary commemorative books give school communities the opportunity to remember and celebrate 50 years of Christian education in Canada. In doing so, they strengthen a Dutch, Christian Reformed symbolic universe which “locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.103). These books emerge from a specific culture with the purpose of reinforcing and passing on that culture, similar to the church commemorative books Zwart (2010) studied. I was able to locate and analyze five 50th anniversary books:

Book #1. Dundas Calvin Christian School (2011)


Synodical Reports

The CRC has expressed its commitment to Christian schools in two reports on Christian education. Appointed committees prepared these reports and presented them to the annual Synod, a meeting of representatives from the various North American regional groups of churches from the CRC. These reports provide insight into the way in which the CRC balanced its interest in Christian education with the belief that it is a parental responsibility to educate children, not a church responsibility. They also provide interesting context for understanding the intersection of faith and ethnicity in the schools. Two reports were written, one from 1955 and the other from 2005. Both were analysed in this study.

Analysis

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that analysis is not simply that period of the research process in which the data are organized into manageable, understandable information. Analysis is much broader. It is “a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project” (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996, p. 11). I was conscious that as I conducted and transcribed interviews, I was, in effect, analyzing the data, making decisions about what to ask and what to record based on my perceptions of the data. Ellingson (2011) discusses this broad view of analysis, highlighting the connection between analysis and representation:

Of course, the processes of analysis and representation overlap throughout the duration of a qualitative project; for example, the production of ethnographic fieldnotes involves both selection of details of an encounter or setting to a
Document (i.e., analysis) and generation of a representation of that analysis (written notes). (p. 595)

Interpretive qualitative research requires ongoing analysis. Researchers must be conscious of this as they make methodological decisions during their research.

In this section, I discuss what can be referred to as formal data analysis, or analysis that I conducted after I had completed my interviews and left the field. I begin with an explanation of triangulation and its importance to analysis. I then discuss the process I used to make sense of the data (Merriam, 2009) that were, true to most qualitative data, textual and nonnumerical (Basit, 2003).

The formal data analysis in this research occurred in two stages. First, I analyzed the individual interviews, focus group interviews, synodical reports, and my research journal through a three-part process of coding, categorizing, and theme development. Second, I conducted a document analysis of the anniversary books using an ethnographic content analysis method (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). These two stages were brought together in the theorization of my findings.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is the process of collecting data from a variety of different sources and/or analyzing data in different ways or from different perspectives for the sake of increasing the rigor of the study and strengthening the credibility of the findings. There are a number of methods of triangulation including collecting data from different people, in different ways and even analyzing data using different methods (Carlson, 2010). Triangulation can require “comparing and crosschecking data collected through observation at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from
people with different perspectives or follow up interviews with the same people” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). According to Tracy (2010), “Triangulation does not lay neatly over research from interpretive, critical or postmodern paradigms” (p. 843) which are suspect of claims that there is one conclusion that can be arrived at regardless of the methods employed. That being said:

making use of multiple researchers, data sources, methods, and theoretical lenses is still considered valuable by a host of researchers from different paradigms. Multiple types of data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis allow different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re) interpretation. (Tracy, 2010, p. 843)

In the sections that follow, I describe the procedures I used for data analysis. In doing so, I show how I understood triangulation to mean not only gathering data from different sources, but also seeking ways to compare and contrast data.

**Coding, Categorizing, and Theorizing**

The procedures I used to analyze interview and focus group data as well as my research journal and synodical reports were drawn from Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Merriam (2009) as well as discussions and guidance from my dissertation supervisor. Coffey and Atkinson write, “Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 178). The goal of the process is to make sense of the data as they reveal insight into the research questions.
Formal analysis began with coding, a process of naming and organizing data through which I was able to “communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension” (Basit, 2003, p. 152) of the experiences and perspectives of my participants. I began my formal analysis by developing a list of a priori codes that were connected to my research questions and that had emerged throughout the data collection and transcription process. I began with the first individual interview, along with any connected data (e.g., journal entries, transcript notes, synopsis sent to participants) and coded using this list. I coded with priori codes in the left-hand margin and entered emergent codes in the right-hand margin. Once I completed analyzing a set of data, I revised the initial code list to include the emergent codes, paying attention to codes I used and codes that were left unused.

Once the code list had been revised, I reanalyzed the transcript using the new code list. Once complete, I dated the updated code list and attached it to the analyzed document data. This final code list was used to begin analyzing the next interview transcript. This process was repeated for each set of data.

As I moved along, the process of redefining, merging, and crunching codes transitioned into category development. It was also at this point that I began to consciously theorize the data, to see how my research questions and my theoretical framework were coming together through my interpretive analysis activity. I documented this process in my journal. The following excerpt provides a description of the theorizing process as it evolved:

I’ve been working through the first round of one-on-one interviews using the codebook, revising the codebook, etc. I got to Rich’s interview and some
things struck me. Rich mentioned the name of a certain minister who early on tapped him on the shoulder to become a principal in a Christian school. The name of this person struck me because I’ve heard of him before. I believe that he was a minister in my childhood church. I’ve seen his black-and-white picture in various publications. This minister is behind the scenes in many developments in the Canadian CRC.

This image of the black-and-white picture drew my attention to the commemorative anniversary books I am using as data. They too contain pictures of past members, people who started schools soon after immigration. I can hear my conversations with the participants talking about some of these people, some still alive, some long since passed away. It struck me that these people, these founders, function like a “cloud of witnesses” to use some biblical imagery. They have left us a legacy upon which we build.

I spent some time last night thinking about the “cloud of witnesses” and its relationship to the Sacred Canopy. We not only shield ourselves from chaos through the religious sense making of Berger’s sacred canopy; hanging over the canopy is the cloud of witnesses who set it up in the first place. I hear that when my participants talk about their formative experiences and their influences. I also hear it when they suggest what they expect and hope for in the future generations, and from my study in particular. There is a call to be faithful both to the cause, as good “children of the Reformation” to use Runner’s words, but also to be faithful to our leaders, to show our gratitude by maintaining and furthering their work and sacrifice.
I wrote the following in my notes in an earlier entry: “The cloud of witnesses is the intersection of faith and culture. The intersection of any identity marker is always found in people. Hybridity?” (Note: strong hint of Bhabha there). In this statement, I find myself theorizing about the nature of the intersection and the experience of it. My participants embody the intersection. So do I. The experience of this intersection then is the experience of people with people. This is something Berger can speak into with his analysis of institutionalization.

I’m not sure where this will go, but I see codes overlapping with this concept. If I reanalyze the first interviews once more with this theme in mind, I may have a better idea of how it works. (Journal Entry, June 4, 2013)

The analysis process led to theorization that was enabled by the theoretical perspective that I applied to the study. It also pulled together, or triangulated the various data sources I was using. The extensive journal entry above highlights how this occurred; it is just one example of the dynamic nature of data analysis within an interpretive qualitative paradigm.

**Document Analysis**

The questions of how to analyze the 50th anniversary commemorative books was a puzzle for me initially. As I made plans for the formal analysis phase, I was challenged by the documents. The journal entry below demonstrates this dilemma:

Document Analysis: Some work will be done to identify a suitable way to code the documents. The documents need to be interrogated in the same way as the interviews. I need to ask the same questions of the documents that I did of the
participants. It will be a form of discourse analysis. I will flesh this process out more clearly in the next few weeks. (Journal Entry, May 17, 2012)

The 50th anniversary commemorative books created two dilemmas. The first was logistic; how to code documents that have some text but also a substantial number of pictures and images, mostly on glossy paper. The second had to do with meaning. The documents could be analyzed for the meaning contained in them much the same way transcripts are. However, the documents themselves are meaning. They have been put together by people within the school communities I am studying. Zwart (2010) analyzed commemorative books of CRCs in Canada and the United states. He believed that these books were written for a specific purpose stating, “While it is clear only a few people in each congregation actually wrote the books, they had to work within the parameters of what would be acceptable to their readers” (p. 149). The same can be said of the 50th anniversary books analyzed in this study. The books emerged from the school community to reflect the community in a way that would be pleasing to that community. As such, they can be viewed as part of that culture, an artifact that emerges out of the experiences and perspectives of the culture while at the same time contributing to the maintenance and construction of that culture. As data, they are significantly different than the interviews and, therefore, I felt they needed to be analyzed differently in order to understand how they might inform the study.

The analysis method I chose is one based on Altheide and Schneider’s (2013) method, which they refer to as Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA). According to Altheide and Schneider, documents can be viewed as an element of the culture from which they are produced. Documents are not simply representations of a culture. They
are culture themselves. As such, an analysis of documents can be understood as an observation and description of culture, or an ethnographic approach. They write, “It is suggested that an ethnographic perspective can help delineate patterns of human action when document analysis is conceptualized as fieldwork” (p. 23). Going into a document can be seen as going into the field. The emphasis of this approach is to understand the culture through careful observation and to provide a thick description of what is observed. As they write, “ECA is not primarily oriented to theory development but is more comfortable with clear descriptions and definitions” (p. 27).

This perspective was very helpful as I sought to understand my participants’ experiences and perspectives. The anniversary books offered a way of “seeing” what my participants were talking about in the interviews. When they spoke about community celebrations, I could see these celebrations in the books. When they discussed struggles they had starting the schools, I could read some of the stories from different schools. When they spoke of the immigrants who started the schools, I could see them posing seriously in black-and-white pictures that captured their first gatherings. Qualitative media analysis provided a way for me to make sense of these books in the light of my participants’ experiences.

ECA involves the development and use of a research protocol. The protocol provides a way to describe and code the media being analyzed in a systematic way while enabling reflexivity and responsiveness to the themes that emerge. As McGannon, Hoffmann, Metz, and Schinke (2012), who used ECA to study socio-cultural constructions in professional hockey, suggest, “The researcher strives to be reflexive and interactive as opposed to applying foundational 'set in stone' rules that ensure
trustworthiness and truth, with the goal being toward concept development and emergent data analysis” (p. 28). Researchers construct the protocol using priori codes and descriptive details to record what is on the page or the media being analyzed. Codes can be added, combined into categories, or redefined to account for the data being analyzed, similar to the interview coding process.

I developed a protocol based on my initial interview analysis and used it to code what was written and portrayed in the books. As I analyzed the data, I refined the protocol to account for what I was seeing. An important aspect of the protocol was the notes section. I used this space to reflect on what I was seeing on the pages as well as any thoughts I had as I went through the books. It was like taking field notes, but in this case, the field was the anniversary book. (See Table 1)

The document analysis contributed to my understanding of my participant data. I was able to get a better “feel” for what they were saying and reflecting upon. I was not present in the schools throughout all the decades of Christian schooling. The books and the analysis of the books provided me with the feeling of being there at least to some degree.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is a process whereby researchers check in with their participants to verify and clarify the processes they are using as well as their interpretations and analysis (Carlson, 2010). Tracy (2010) expands on member checking, offering the term member reflections to describe the process through which researchers not only check their results with participants, but also engage with them in reflection and elaboration on the emerging analysis of data. Throughout this chapter, I have mentioned
Table 1

Content Analysis Protocol

___________________________________________________

Book Name

_____________________________________________________

Page Description:
• Title of Entry
• Direct References to Faith
• Direct References to Dutchness or being Dutch
• Who is in the pictures? What are they doing?
• Is there a caption?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worth Fighting For:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Money</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Marginalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Ties:
• Community
• World View
• Language

Cloud of Witnesses:
• Founders
• Board members
• Alumni

It’s in our DNA:

_____________________________________________________

Notes:
a number of ways I communicated with my participants during this research. Participants were sent copies of the transcripts as well as synopsis of my initial interpretations after the first individual interviews with a letter asking them to contact me with questions or clarifications. I began the second interview by returning to the first transcripts and asking again if they had any questions. Sometimes they did, but most of the time they stated that they were happy with what had been written. I also conceived of the focus group interview as a form of member checking in which I could once again review my process and interpretations with the participants and have them respond to their words and my ideas.

Member checking was a valuable way of ensuring that my research and interpretations as well as my process were transparent to my participants, the people who were in the best position to verify the research I was conducting. More than that, it helped me maintain a reflexive stance in relation to my position as researcher. By returning to my participants, I had to reassess my process and findings; I had to communicate what I was thinking and why throughout the process. Finally, member checking encouraged a respectful research approach. It invited participants (a) to clarify their words, (b) to be clear about their meanings, and (c) to help me further clarify my understanding of the topics we discussed. The member checking I employed helped the process be more collaborative overall.

Given all of the benefits of member checking, it is still the case that member checking has its limits in terms of how far researchers can go in checking research with participants. Eventually, the research process needs to come to a conclusion, usually in the form of a product and presentation. At any stage, participants might change their
opinions on the study. Tracy (2010) writes: “participants may argue against findings at one point, and endorse them down the line – for any number of personal and political reasons” (p. 844). The opposite is true as well. She adds that “the researcher has very little control over participants’ reactions or the ways the research is eventually evaluated or used” (p. 844). I followed a process that led me continually back to my participants for feedback and clarification and I am pleased with the effect such returning had on my relationships with the participants and the depth of data collected. I am aware that their response to the final representation of the data is beyond my control and may shift over time.

**Representation**

The representation of data, the write-up, or the final text that is produced is an important element of qualitative research. Researchers need to choose a format that is appropriate to the nature of their study as well as to the clear communication of their findings. The document that I have produced is traditional in nature as opposed to alternative, more artistic representations of data. According to Ellingson (2011), a traditional research report is typical of researchers conducting interpretive, or in Ellingson’s words “middle ground forms of analysis” (p. 601).

Mantzoukas (2004) states that researchers need to acknowledge the epistemological and ontological issues of their research and align their final written texts with their understanding of what counts as knowledge and reality. Interpretive qualitative research is conducted within a constructivist framework that acknowledges multiple voices and perspectives, multiple interpretations and truths. I understand this to mean that among other things, the voices of the participants are present, not silenced in
the final text. Tracy (2010) refers to this as multivocality, “including multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report or text” (p. 844). This requires that the statements made by participants are not simply summarized, but are included in the report itself.

I sought to include the voices of my participants in this report by including numerous and full quotations. I sought to situate these conversations by providing context about the topics we were discussing or documents we were looking at when the statements were made. When appropriate, I included conversations between participants and myself. In so doing, I wanted to portray how meaning was being made collaboratively. I also chose to include substantial quotations from the anniversary books in order to provide more context to the perspectives of the participants. My goal was to provide thick descriptions and accounts of what was said and why. Thick description refers to situating data in its context and showing, rather than simply telling, what was observed (Tracy, 2010). Such descriptions provide readers with a way to understand the data as well as to transfer what they read to understand other contexts (Carlson, 2010).

I was challenged to represent all of the participants equally, and at times I had to go back through the data and coding to find statements from participants I had not represented as much as others. Some participants spoke at length, employing many examples and anecdotes. Others were more direct and to the point. The data from those who offered more detailed accounts came to mind more easily than that from participants who were more concise. I was conscious, for example, that I used quotes from Sue more often than the others. This troubled me, even though I understood that all of the participants had shaped my understandings significantly. For me, this has raised the question of the ideal number of participants in a study. More participants means more
perspectives. However, I wondered about the ethics of asking someone to participate and then not including their voice equally in the write up.

In addition to the voices of the participants, the final report must include the voice of the researcher. As has been noted, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). This important role requires reflexivity as researchers acknowledge and reflect upon how their values and experiences shape the study. It also means representing themselves, their voice and experience in the final product. Mantzoukas (2010) writes:

The research text does not write itself, nor is there a hand as an object that mechanically jots down symbols and letters; instead research texts are written by someone and by a hand that is attached to a greater body that is part of a whole person, which includes mind and soul. (p. 1001)

The researcher must make him or herself clearly present in the final report. This is an area that I struggled with as I wrote the document. I was hesitant to include my experiences in the write-up, choosing primarily to include my participants’ voices and then my interpretations. I realized that by not including my experiences when appropriate, I was hidden to a degree. I wondered if this was intentional or if I was simply leaving myself out for the sake of highlighting my participants. Was I afraid to make my opinions known? If so, why? Was the absence of self related to the question asked earlier: What is disruptive? I realized that my experiences as a principal and an educator are part of the study and, as such, had a place in the final document. This is an area of complexity that I continue to ponder. The stated purpose of this study is to understand the intersection of faith and ethnic culture in Christian schools from the
perspective of retired principals. Their perspectives are the focus. Yet, as researcher, my perspectives shape the interpretation of data. I need to acknowledge this interpretive act by showing how my perspectives shape the study. As such, I have included specific reference to my own experiences in the findings as they help to illustrate not only what I think about the data, but also how I came to think the way I do.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the methodology that guided this study and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. I have sought to make clear the reasons behind the research choices I have made. I have also provided personal reflections on my choices as the research was taking place. I have experienced qualitative research as an intensive, fluid process filled with numerous practical questions that are layered with ethical considerations. I have learned through this research that qualitative research is ultimately about people, their experiences and their perspectives. I have sought to honour the participants in this study through careful, transparent research practices. With thanks to them, I transition to the findings of this study, the culmination of the processes described in this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

I have sought to understand the intersection of Dutch immigrant ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith over several decades of education in independent Christian schools in Ontario through the professional and experiential lens of retired Christian school principals. In addition to participant data, I also analysed 50th anniversary commemorative books, and Synodical reports from the CRC. The data reveal that the intersection of faith and ethnic culture was experienced in but also embodied by the schools themselves. Independent Christian schools emerged out of a distinct cultural and religious worldview. Once established, these schools became a source of this worldview for Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrant communities in Ontario. Seen through the lens of Berger’s (1967) sacred canopy, Christian schools have been a part of the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants’ meaning-making activity in their new home of Canada after World War II.

In this chapter, I discuss findings under the following themes that emerged as a result of data analysis: (a) Orange-coloured glasses, (b) The struggle, (c) The ties that bind, and (d) The cloud of witnesses. In the first section, I explore data that reveal the participants’ perspective on the nature of Dutchness in Christian schools. I examine how this term has been used to define both the community that started the school and the nature of the education that was offered. I also explore the perceived hazards of this Dutch identification. The participants believed that the Dutch label drew attention away from the primary religious foundations of the school. They also believed that opponents of Christian education used the Dutch label to marginalize their schools. In the second section, I explore data that demonstrate how the intersection of faith and ethnic culture
have been experienced and embodied by the immigrants’ struggle to establish schools in Ontario, and the continuing struggle to keep them going. In many ways, the data reveal how the identity of the Christian Reformed group is experienced and located in the struggle for Christian education. In the third section, I explore how the intersection of faith and culture is evident in the way in which the schools have tied Dutch, Christian Reformed communities together. Initially, communities came together to build the schools. Over the decades, the schools themselves became the glue that held the communities together, the tie that binds. Finally, I explore the intersection of faith and culture as represented in the people, past and present, the cloud of witnesses which embodies the Dutch ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith, the Dutch-Canadian Reformed people in Ontario.

**Orange-Coloured Glasses**

The schools had characteristics that immediately stood out as Dutch for the participants. Most obvious was the fact that the schools were started by Dutch immigrants, based on the pattern set in The Netherlands where faith-based schools were the norm. When parents in The Netherlands set up schools, they did not set up Dutch schools any more than schools built in Canada can be said to be Canadian schools. They set up faith-based schools according to their understanding of their God-given role in society, similar in many ways to when Catholic parents send their children to separate Catholic schools in Ontario. When parents duplicated this activity in Canada, the schools took on a Dutch identity largely due to the fact that they were attended by mostly Dutch immigrants. What did this Dutchness look like?

Jim and I spoke about the perception of being Dutch in our first interview:
Phil: The Dutchness? Do you think that’s a holdover from the immigrants who started [the schools]? What would characterize the Dutchness that I hear about every now and then?

Jim: I think a lot of it has to do with the close connection to the Christian Reformed Church in the early years and the fact that they see all the Dutch names. I have a friend of mine now who mentioned to me too that when they think of Christian schools, they see all the Dutch names . . . . There’s still a huge amount of Dutch kids, faculty, board members involved that without them, the places would have difficulty. (Jim, Interview #1)

Jim’s observation concerning the Dutch identity of the schools was similar to those of the other participants in this study. The connection of the schools first to the CRC and then to the Dutch names and faces were seen as strong identifiers of the Dutchness in the schools.

The participants discussed other cultural markers that created a Dutch feel in their schools. Language stood out. The immigrants were new to Canada and fairly new to English. This made for some interesting and, at times, humorous experiences in the classroom. Sue related the following experience with one of her students from those early days:

I remember a story doing phonics in Grade 1. I had above the board the letters of the alphabet with a picture [matching the letter]. So I needed a word that started with an ‘I’ and this little boy jumps up and he said strijkizer, which is
the Dutch word for iron. . . . There was this picture of an iron on the board. He didn’t know the English word. So strijkizer (laughing). (Sue, Interview #1)

For many immigrant students and their parents, Dutch was the language spoken at home. School was the place where Dutch and English met and, at times, became confused. It is clear, however, that there was an intentional push for English to become the language of the new schools. This can be seen in several of the anniversary books. For example, Book #1 states the following: "In March of 1960 the board decided that, from then on, the minutes would be written in English. Up until that point, they had been a mixture of Dutch and English" (Dundas Calvin Christian School, 2011, p. 3). The push for English extended into the expectations of children coming into the school. Book #1 records the following message sent to parents with children entering Grade One: "Children should be sufficiently secure to leave mother for some 8-9 hours. Dress himself, find his own boots, work a zipper. Know the difference between Dutch and English words" (p. 9).

In addition to language, Dutch pedagogy or ways of structuring school had been transplanted in the new country. Liz spoke about some of the patterns immigrants carried over from The Netherlands. In particular was the place of the Psalms and memory work in school. In The Netherlands, students learned Psalms and songs that would be used in worship in church: "In those days, boy, you had to recite that memory work every Friday. And that was a big thing. That was definitely Dutch" (Liz, Interview #1). It is interesting the reaction from home when the teaching went against this pattern. Liz recounts the response when the typical Psalms were replaced by other types of songs in class: "That generation, they knew all the Psalms and the songs based on the Psalms and the next generation didn’t. And then to come home with different songs that we don’t even sing in
church. What’s the use of that?” (Liz, Interview #1). The singing of Psalms in schools, a religious activity, was considered Dutch in the minds of the newly arrived immigrants. This singing followed the pattern of the experience of Dutch schools and, as such, became associated with life in The Netherlands and further understood as the way things ought to be.

Sue also spoke of the reliance of patterns established in the schools in The Netherlands:

So, it was very strong, not only in language, but also in methodology I think. We’re talking the 60s now and those folks who started the schools were in school in the 40s I suppose by the time you have a 6 or 10 year old. And so the methodology was very much, you know it wasn’t per se Dutch but if they did it in Holland when they went to school, then it was good. (Sue, Interview #1)

There were Dutch patterns, habits, and expectations that gave shape to the schools. In addition, there were other Dutch cultural symbols that were woven into the school experience. *Sinterklaas,* the Dutch version of Santa Claus, often made an appearance on December 5th. Most schools had regular social events, a major one of which was the annual fundraising bazaar where people could purchase Dutch food. These events were not created because they were Dutch. They were part of the pattern, it was familiar and, in many ways, it was comforting.

Analysis of the participant data revealed that the surface connections to the above Dutch traits were fairly common in the participants’ experiences. There was a difference in the participants’ understanding of the degree of Dutchness in these Ontario schools depending on familiarity the participants had with the CRC community in the United
States. The experience of CRC immigrants in Canada was different than that of those in the United States. The Canadian schools developed in a unique historical and cultural setting which, in turn, shaped the way being Reformed and being Dutch was experienced.

When Lisa arrived in Canada, she was “blown away” by how Dutch the community was. She described it this way:

I think it was 100% Dutch Reformed. Very Dutch. Run by the flower industry, the green house industry. Lots of farmers. . . . Agriculturally driven with lots of farm kids from outlying areas and within town there were probably educators and a variety of people. But a very Dutch Reformed culture. (Lisa, Interview #1)

When I asked Lisa to describe what she meant by a very Dutch Reformed culture, she stated the following:

Looking back on those days, strengths and weaknesses. The strength was if there was a need, if money was needed, people rallied. They provided which was wonderful. When something went wrong, everybody knew about it and had a comment about it and had a very strong opinion. The Dutch culture tends to be fairly blunt. They call it honest. I call it blunt /laughter/ (Lisa, Interview #1)

Sue spoke about this Dutch bluntness as well:

The immigrants, they were the go-getters that came. They weren’t the ones who – they all wanted to be leaders to a certain extent. So there was a lot of tension and differences of opinion. And you know in Holland, Dutch people
love to argue and debate and walk away and still be good friends. They do that quite well as a matter of fact. (Sue, Interview #1)

Entering the Christian Reformed community in Ontario meant entering a very close and, at times, closed community. For Lisa and Sue, this was experienced as both a blessing and a challenge.

Ron expressed a similar perspective. When he arrived in Ontario, he noticed that the people in the school he worked in still spoke about immigration and The Netherlands. Some of the teachers he worked with still spoke with a Dutch accent. The community, largely involved in agriculture and horticulture, did not value higher education to the degree he was familiar with. Ron recognized this immediately upon his arrival:

The school was basically all still [Dutch] immigrant. . . . the minute you listen to the people talk, the moment they started talking you could tell that they were immigrants. You couldn’t hold that against them but they were immigrants and they had never themselves gone to college or university. (Ron, Interview #1)

The recent Dutch immigrant experience shaped the Canadian Christian schools. The Dutch traits of language and routine were still very evident in those early years.

There was an intentional effort to become less Dutch, as can be seen by the early push to use English in the schools. This effort to move away from the Dutch label became more important as the Dutch identifier began to be used by people within the broader community as a way of marginalizing the schools and their students. Rich powerfully stated this concern: "It would be incredibly sad after 50 years in the Dutch Calvinist Christian schools that the demise of these schools would hang on the word Dutch" (Rich, Interview #1).
The participants could all point to aspects of their experience that resonate with a Dutch identity. There was, however, a note of caution when talking about being seen as Dutch. There was plenty at stake. Dutch identity interferes with the primary reason for the school, namely a faith-based education in a school that is governed by parents who, in the opinion of the participants, have the primary responsibility for the education of their children.

In my first interview with Rich, we discussed the original purpose of the Christian Schools in relation to the Dutch identity. Rich spoke about the care that was taken early on to define the schools as Christian and to move away from the ethnic label. This was difficult because, in Rich’s opinion, there were powers at work that sought to marginalize the Christian schools through the use of ethnic labels:

So [the Dutch immigrants] were not of a mind to start a Dutch school, you know. As a matter of fact they forever kept saying we’re not a Dutch school. And the media kept saying you are a Dutch Reformed school. And I’m not sure who delights in maintaining the notion that Christian schools are Dutch schools. We are, there is a time block, there is a heritage that has to be respected and honoured I think, but we’re now dealing with the third and fourth generation, Canadian born children and the vision is still alive. (Rich, Interview #1)

Rich felt that the Dutch labeling went beyond the casual observation that Christian schools had sprung up alongside Dutch churches to a more intentional effort on the part of the media and government to marginalize the schools. He spoke of his interactions with a local MPP who had been telling people that the Christian schools would
“disappear after the first generation” once the immigrants got used to life in the new land. The Dutch label served opponents of Christian schools well by allowing them to construct the schools as ethnic holdovers that would disappear in time. Rich’s perspective is similar to Guo’s (2012) findings that the majority culture in Canadian schools view immigrant parents and the knowledge they have through a deficit lens. It was a patronizing perspective, positioning the immigrants as children who simply needed time to adjust and grow, rather than capitalizing on the value of their cultural and religious knowledge. For Rich, therefore, it was very important that the schools not be seen as Dutch, a school for immigrants, but as a school rooted in deeply held religious convictions for how education should be offered.

Rob also spoke of the marginalizing effect of the Dutch label. In the focus group interview, he told the story of an incident in which a Christian school from a Reformed denomination other than the CRC had an outbreak of an infectious disease. The local paper had published an article discussing the dangers of religious communities not vaccinating their children. The story referred to Ron’s school by name, believing that since Dutch immigrants started the school, they must have the same antivaccination policies as the group in question. This was false and Ron went to great lengths to correct the misinformation, writing an article of his own. However, the damage had been done. The local Christian school had been identified as archaic and unscientific, and, in fact, a risk to the health of the broader community. The assumption was made without the due diligence of fact-checking. This served as a reminder that constant attention needed to be paid to the communication of the school’s Christian principles rather than its Dutch immigrant heritage.
The participants in this study understood the marginalizing effect the Dutch label had on the school communities. They were equally aware of the marginalizing affect the term had on school society members who were not Dutch. As mentioned earlier, there were elements of experience in the schools that were obviously Dutch. Language, customs, and other ethnic markers, such as Christmas festivals, music, and food, were simply part of the scenery for these early school communities. Problems of identification emerge when communities take elements of Dutch heritage and celebrate them to the exclusion of those who are not Dutch. Liz spoke about an experience related to this self-identification in our first interview:

I would go into a school and in the staff room I hear Dutch spoken. And I thought, whoa, are we back in the 50s or what? And having a Dutch plaque in the staff room with a Dutch saying? And I said, get that off of the wall. You don’t want to be ashamed of your roots but don’t flaunt it in that way because every teacher there who is not Dutch comes in there and is immediately set apart. (Liz, Interview #1)

Speaking Dutch and displaying Dutch language served to marginalize people who were not Dutch and did not understand the language.

We discussed a similar incident in the Men’s Focus Group. Ron spoke of an incident where a newspaper reporter was given a tour of a local Christian school:

Ron: The principal invited some newspaper reporters to get a picture of the school. But low and behold, what did the newspaper pick up on? They had a picture of Queen Julianna and Prince Bernhardt hanging, a big
picture hanging in the hallway. No picture of Queen Elizabeth. And the reporter wrote, they are a Dutch school.

Jim: And he was correct.

Ken: Yes

Jim: He was correct. That was probably an error on the part of the founders.

They should not have had a picture of Queen Julianna up. (Men’s Focus Group)

The error in both incidents was not that the schools that were being spoken about were of Dutch heritage. They obviously were. The error was giving visible expression to the ethnic aspect of the identity in a way that focussed attention on that and not on the religious principles of the school. For the participants in this study, it was the founding principle that always needed to be communicated. Respecting history and roots was appropriate. However, highlighting the historical roots in ways that set the schools apart from other schools for any reason other than religious was wrong. The participants certainly appreciated their heritage. They were also cautious of celebrating this history too openly, whether that be through the sale of traditional Dutch food at school functions or the wearing of The Netherland’s orange national football team jersey during the World Cup, for fear of communicating a vision of the school that was not in keeping with the vision of the immigrant founders.

The challenge of Dutchness in Christian schools continues to this day. Joy made this clear as we spoke about the Dutch aspects of Christian schools over the decades. She had the experience of serving on various committees at Christian schools prior to becoming principal. She noticed that the concern of becoming less Dutch, or broadening
into the wider community, was something that was very much a priority now as in the past:

If you look back to the late 70s and early 80s, we tried to get into other [church and ethnic] communities. You’d be amazed at the promotion committees that we had at that point. We had breakfasts for all the Christian teachers in the public schools. We would have ministers come for breakfasts. We had, for that time, sharp brochures go out, thousands to churches. We did our best to make it as un-Dutch as possible. And it’s interesting that those same themes come up when I got on the promotion committee 5 years later. We still have those same themes now. . . . So it wasn’t that we wanted to be Dutch because we had been trying to break that mould for the last 40 years. (Joy, Interview #1)

Joy’s statement highlights the tension that Schryer (1998) found in the Dutch Reformed community in Ontario, the continuing “tension between religion and ethnicity as two interrelated yet also competing aspects of social reality” (p. 318). The participants wanted to have the schools identified by their religious purpose. This always overlapped with a Dutch ethnic culture, which was rich in history and something to be proud of, yet an aspect of the experience in Christian schools that was troublesome. The participants tread a line of being proud of these roots but careful in managing how this pride was shown, if it was shown at all, in the schools. This was difficult because, as Joy expressed in our first interview, the Dutchness is “so much a part of us that it’s hard to hide.”

The Committee to Study Christian Day School Education (CRC, 2005) addressed the concept of hiding an aspect of identity at the 2005 meeting of Synod. The report
encouraged Christian Reformed people to reach out beyond their communities but warned the following:

It is worth noting that the laudable goal of reaching out beyond our own community and tradition can also have unintended consequences. It is possible to be so self-conscious and defensive about our own identity as Reformed people, particularly when we link it to the particularity of Dutch ethnic identity, that we devalue its importance, minimize it, and eventually lose it altogether. (p. 370)

The committee recognized the self-consciousness many in the CRC have in regards to Dutch identity. It was concerned that efforts to minimize this aspect of identity might result in watering down the Reformed religious identity as well. The Dutch and the Reformed identity can be so closely linked that by downplaying the Dutch character, one might also downplay the Reformed identity in the process. This is particularly true if one does not understand the difference between the two.

The discussions concerning the Dutch character of the schools were very interesting and lively. The participants sought to balance their Dutch heritage with a careful articulation of the faith-based purpose of the schools. Joy offered a rich analogy of this careful balance in the following excerpt:

How would I explain [it] to newcomers to the school? I would say those are our roots. Our Dutch Reformed roots. We don’t want to hide them, but know they’re there. Know that there is a foundation from where we draw our belief system and a lot of our strengths. Our root system. But look at the tree that’s above it now. It’s very diverse and all these grafts on it are just blowing us
away because it makes – I don’t want to say product – but it makes the product of Christian education more beautiful, because we can learn from each other.

So I, the Dutch Reformed community I see as the roots from which a lot of other wonderful things have come. So would I deny the existence of that? Of course not. You don’t deny your roots, figuratively or practically. But it tends not to be what you emphasize so much when you are looking at a tree. (Joy, Interview #2)

This analogy was echoed by Ken in a brief conversation we had as I was leaving his house after our second interview:

As I was leaving Ken’s place, he said something that stood out as important:

“Our roots are important, crucial, but if they rise above the surface, people will trip on them.” The Dutch heritage, that ethnic culture, is nothing to be ashamed of. However, if that remains the focus, the school’s reason for being, it will become a source of exclusion for those whose ethnic heritage is not Dutch. (Research Journal, May 12, 2012)

The schools were certainly a continuation of a cultural practice in The Netherlands, but the cultural practice grew out of a Christian Reformed tradition. The participants understood the Dutch perceptions others have of the school given the roots Joy and Ken spoke about. However, the purpose of the school as a Christian school was of prime importance to them. When people of Dutch descent focused on their ethnic heritage, they effectively excluded non-Dutch people from feeling like full members of the school community.
The participants experienced the intersection of Dutch ethnic culture and Reformed faith as a balancing act. They sought to balance their heritage with their mission, their ethnic culture, and their religious worldview. This balancing act was and is tricky because it is experienced as two elements of identification: an ascribed identity or how people on the outside identify the school, and a self-identity, how the school community describes itself. Both are contested.

At the Men’s Focus Group, we discussed how the ascribed identity of Dutchness, the blurring of Dutch identity and Reformed faith, was understandable to some degree:

Jim: But you can see in some ways how people could easily confuse a particular worldview with a nationality. I mean, they were all Dutch kids of course. So how wouldn’t people then associate the two? There go all the Dutch kids and they’re in their own school. What’s that school called? The Dutch school. So you can forgive them for saying this. It’s almost like our perception of the Mennonites in the Waterloo region. There’s tonnes of different groups but they’re all to us the same because we can’t delve into the niceties. We don’t bother delving into the niceties. Most people don’t care about the niceties of our community either. They’re Dutch. Well, there’s Free Reformed, Canadian Reformed. They’re just Dutch [to them].

Ron: And they’re just Mennonite.

Jon: And they’re just Mennonite.
Ken: I wonder where they get this. How does this Dutch identity come across? In what ways? And I’m just going to throw this out and maybe get a response. When they first of all see the names of the people going to the school? Dutch names. When they see the little ad about a bazaar you are going to have, you know – try these *ho-blokjes* [pastry]. We are going to have some *stomput* [a potato and kale dish]. All these little Dutchisms, they were all over the place. You go to the school board meeting and you hear the little Dutch jokes, Dutch expressions. I wonder if it’s these little things that do it as much as this big overwhelming Dutch identity somehow?

Rich: I’m not really aware of that.

Ken: Oh man, I am. It strikes me every time. I mean it’s not happening in our school anymore but when I first went to those meetings, it really struck me. (Men’s Focus Group)

The participants wrestled with the way in which those from outside may view the schools as simply Dutch rather than Reformed Christian by reflectively considering how they view other ethno-religious groups. As can be seen, the opinion was not unanimous among the participants, but a process was occurring that enabled the group to consider how others might view them by thinking about how they view others. Ken and Jim had introduced a form of reflexivity into our conversation.

The confusion of the connection between the Dutch ethnic culture and the Reformed faith was not isolated to the ascribed identity, the being labeled by others. The confusion was located inside to the school communities as well. Not all participants
expressed this, however, some raised the possibility that the school communities did not understand the distinction between Dutch and Reformed and, in fact, used the terms to define group identity rather than a rich expression of key religious beliefs. Consider my conversation with Lisa:

Phil: When we talk about being Reformed or Calvinist, what does that look like? What did that look like?

Lisa: Well, it meant that we were Dutch.

Phil: Okay

Lisa: And I think that had a huge impact: “Well, they’re not Dutch”. You know, well now they say, “Well, they’re not Reformed.” I think we still have that very much. If we say they’re not Reformed, we say well, they’re not Dutch.

Phil: You think that’s what meant? They’re not us?

Lisa: Yes, us and them. I think it’s still very much an us and them mentality for some people to this day. I think it’s changed a lot. It’s a big push we’ve had here. (Lisa, Interview #1)

Dutch-Reformed: The term itself represents the intersection of faith and culture. The participants in this study believe that if Dutch Reformed means anything at all, it is that particular worldview that is rooted in the neo-Calvinist thinking of Abraham Kuyper. It is a particular perspective on the integration of faith into all areas of life, including education. Apart from this understanding the term *Dutch* only serves to marginalize the schools as well as people in the schools who are neither Dutch nor Reformed, perhaps people from Scottish Presbyterian or Italian Catholic background. Without an
understanding of the philosophical/religious principles, Dutch Reformed becomes an exclusive term, a tool for "Othering."

Said (1994) states that identity “involves the construction of opposites and others whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from “us”. Each age and society re-creates its “Others” (p. 332). The participants’ experiences of Dutchness as the intersection of both ethnic and religious identity—both ascribed and self-identified—reveal this construction. They expressed the frustration of being labeled Dutch at the expense of their religious identity. They also were able to see, to some degree, that seeking to be identified as Reformed with no attachment to their Dutchness was difficult.

A reflexive posture, as indicated through the participants’ willingness to have these conversations, may yet prove helpful to broadening the Christian school canopy to all those seeking a Protestant faith-based education. The participants experienced marginalization when powerful people around them—including government officials and the media—spoke about their Dutchness in ways that set them aside as fundamentalists or immigrants needing guidance and time to adjust and integrate. They were also able to see to some extent how they actually were Dutch in many ways, expressed through their names, language, and customs. They could see how people from outside the Dutch, Christian Reformed community could see them this way.

The Struggle

The participants told many stories of the struggles the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants faced establishing their schools and maintaining them over the decades. These struggles were often closely connected to issues of the school community
members’ commitment and the willingness to sacrifice time and money for the sake of Christian education.

The struggle for parents to have a controlling interest in the education of their own children was so ingrained in the minds of postwar immigrants that they had a word for it: schoolstrijd. Schoolstrijd refers to the historic Reformed fight for the right of parents to develop independently owned and operated faith-based schools as well as the struggle to have these schools funded on an equal basis as public schools (Glenn, 2011, p. 127). This was a fight that was won when Protestant Christian schools were not only permitted to exist, but also received government funding equal to that of the public schools in The Netherlands.

The postwar Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants brought a vision of society that was shaped by what they perceived to be the fight for educational justice. They had grown up in an environment in which parent owned, Christian Protestant schools were the norm. This was made clear in an interview with a pioneer school board member, recorded in Book #3, who stated: “In The Netherlands, there were three different school systems, Public, Catholic and Christian. Why should that not be the case in Canada?” (Huron Christian School, 2012).

These immigrants discovered fairly quickly that their idea of parent-run Christian schools was not the norm in Ontario. As a result, a school struggle began again, a struggle that tested the commitment of these immigrants to their deeply held principles, but also a struggle that pulled the group together in ways that church membership and a common language alone could not do. This struggle connected the immigrants to their not-so-distant past and, in many ways, became a rallying point for the community.
The analysis of the data reveals that the struggle connected the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants to their cultural and religious heritage, how the struggle defined them as a community in the new world with a common goal and, in some cases, a common foe, and how this struggle came to define the group as an embodiment of the intersection of Dutch ethnic culture and their Reformed Christian faith. Faith and ethnicity intersected in the experience of the struggle for Christian schools.

The immigrants had challenges to tackle. As far as they knew, they were leaving their homes, friends, and families forever. Given the distance they were travelling and the nature of trans-Atlantic transportation in those days, this belief is understandable. Not only were they leaving behind people they loved, they were also leaving behind much of whatever prosperity they had accumulated. In the interest of protecting their fragile economy, the Dutch government had regulated that emigrants could take only $100 per adult, $50 per child, and anything that could fit into a large wooden crate (van Arragon Hutten, 2001, p. 41). This was to be a traumatic, anomic (Berger, 1967) experience.

From the perspective of the participants, the lack of independent parent-run schools in Ontario was a shock. Ron described it this way:

The Christian school is part and parcel of our life and of our being. If you go to church, you send your kids to the Christian school. There was no other way. That was just the way it was done. And then we come here to Canada: What do you mean you don’t have Christian schools? There are public schools. Well in Holland, public schools are Godless schools. Do you think we want to have our kids immersed in Godless schools? (Ron, Interview #2)
The immigrants could not imagine sending their children to a public school. They could leave everything they knew and move to a new country, but they could not imagine life without a Christian school. This desire was an important element of their Reformed worldview. Rich explained this as follows:

But to pick up for a moment on coming from The Netherlands to here, I think trying to understand the meaning of Dutch Calvinist schools has to be seen in the sphere sovereignty of Calvinism. It has to be seen in the Kuyperian notion of how that developed, the struggle for the recognition of the schools in The Netherlands. And then coming here and to notice that there’s only one state school, perhaps dominated by the Anglican ideal that the state might be under the church, but the state regulates the rest. So they simply brought with them the notion that parents have the right to choose, that parents can establish a school, a school recognized by the state. All of those assumptions. Then they hit a wall. (Rich, Interview #2)

The Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants came out of a context in which they had fought for and won the right to establish parent-owned schools of whatever particular religious persuasion they choose. In The Netherlands, this resulted in a form of educational plurality in which parent-operated, state-funded schools could flourish. They assumed, in Rich’s words, they would find a similar situation in Canada. Rich’s words reveal an understanding of the historic struggle for such schools, a struggle recently won. His words also reveal that the struggle would continue in Canada.

Many of the immigrants started sending their children to public schools upon their arrival in Canada because there was no other educational choice. When Sue and her
family first arrived in Canada, they went to the local public school, but only for a brief time:

The first 2 years that we were here we went to the public elementary school. There was no – the closest Christian school was [far away] . . . but then after that my parents sent their kids to [that Christian school] because my dad just couldn’t stand the idea of his children going to a public school. And they really couldn’t afford it. But that was very important so they did. (Sue, Interview #1)

The clear obstacle to establishing Christian schools in Ontario was finance. Many Dutch immigrants had very little money; therefore, starting a school may have seemed impossible. It was interesting listening to the participants describe these early struggles. The struggles contributed to an overall sense of the importance of the endeavour they were involved in. Sue summed this up well, describing the perspective of those early founders:

We’re in this together, we’re poor, we’re working hard, it’s for the good cause and let’s just do it. . . . We were all learning. But you know what? For the parents and for the school board that wasn’t important. Performance wasn’t all that important [in the early days]. We had a Christian school. And we could have stood up to our ankles in mud. Doesn’t matter. You’re in the Christian school. (Sue, Interview #1)

The participants recognized the determination of the immigrants in Ontario to start Christian schools in various ways. The struggle took place in different phases. Rich described these phases in our first interview. The first phase was simply getting the schools started and survival. The second phase was learning how to be a school, getting
organized, and becoming more professional. The third phase was curriculum
development and a focus on learning. Each phase had its own stories and struggles, from
bare financial need, to funding discussions with the government, to the clarification of
boundaries between parents and teachers. Nothing came easily, but looking back, the
participants all agreed that much had been accomplished and there was much for which to
be thankful.

Principals and teachers who supported the school through the tuition they paid for
their children to attend were paid relatively low wages to keep the cost of tuition at a
minimum for the rest of the membership. Ron told the following story of how difficult
this was:

Ron: So those years as an early parent and everything else and making your
choice to send your kids to school. We didn’t have money but my wife
and I said we’re going to send our oldest to Christian school. We’re not
going to sign for a whole year but we’ll do it for one semester at a time
because I don’t know what we can afford. I had just graduated from
[university]. I graduated with a wife and kids. So there wasn’t a whole
lot of money. And we sent our oldest to school and so after one
semester, we were careful and we said we can afford a second semester.

Phil: A day at a time.

Ron: A day at a time, that’s right, but we kept sending him. (Ron, Interview
#1)

Ron and his wife continued to send their other children to the Christian school as well.
Sue’s story demonstrated her parent’s commitment for Christian schools. Ron’s story illustrated his experience as a parent seeking to provide Christian education for his own children. Ken told a story of what it was like to be a teacher in those early days, having to spend their summers working on curriculum because, in the beginning, there was no curriculum to speak of:

Well I remember in our early days we would go to [the next town] because there were courses being offered there in curriculum development and we would be developing curriculum there. And we would drive over to our friends and one of them would babysit our kids and the rest of us would be at the school. Yeah, you spent a lot of your summer doing course work and other things. (Ken, Interview #1)

This story highlighted the communal effort that was required to help the schools and teachers progress.

For all the participants, the choice to dedicate their professional careers to service in Christian education was a choice to connect to a larger, meaningful story of the struggle of Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants to establish themselves in Ontario. The struggle for schools in Ontario is linked in the minds of the participants to the school struggles of the past, to their ethnic and religious heritage. As Sue stated:

The church has a real social aspect and of course doctrine and faith. The school, we were almost fighting for that. I think we fought more for the schools than we did for the church. Because the church, people from the Reformed Christian background who immigrated to Canada, they go to the Christian church. The school you had to fight for, pay a lot of money for so it’s
kind of like the fighting spirit, the Abraham Kuyper spirit came out. (Sue, Interview #2)

The schools required a commitment that was marked by significant sacrifice of time and money. These terms, commitment and sacrifice, emerge regularly in the 50th anniversary commemorative books. The following are two excerpts that illustrate this point.

Book #2.

The Early Years: Commitment and Sacrifice

Today, you hear that same commitment in the voices of the few remaining founders, and you can read it in the neat, handwritten pages of the first minutes of the first meetings – this was at the core of how they were, and they were determined to make it happen, to the glory of God. It was no small challenge.

The complications were many: all were Dutch immigrants; few spoke perfect English; almost all of them struggled to keep jobs and feed their families. Financing a school took the form of memberships, and every Christian Reformed adult – single, married, with children and without – was expected to be a paid-up member. With today’s eyes, it might seem unusual that non-members were so frequently “reminded” of their obligations in pointed church sermons, personal letters and home visits, but the founders recognized that only a collective effort would make the vision of a school become reality.

Membership cost $12 per year, and there are some who still remember going door-to-door to collect that $1 each month. It was undoubtedly difficult.
This was a time when average household income in Canada was $3000 a year – and few of them earned even the average.

By 1954, the society had just $654.64 in the bank; it was hardly enough to start a school. Then it was proposed each member pay $2 per week. “But,” the minutes read, “Mr. Speyers said he would rather see it raised to $3.00 – in order to get a school, we must make sacrifices.”

Sacrifice they did. (London Christian Elementary School, 2011)

In this excerpt, the financial struggle is highlighted, not so much to impress the reader about the incredible feats of the founding members. Rather, the struggle is connected to the biblical basis upon which the schools were founded. The struggle is highlighted by sacrifice and commitment to the cause. The historical context further illustrates this point; in difficult times, the community did not hesitate to give. On the contrary, they gave more. They embraced the struggle.

Book #1

We built the school with much prayer and hard work, because in those days we had no money. We were very proud of ourselves that we had come in under our original budget by at least a couple hundred dollars, which was a lot of money back then. Interest rates at the time were running 6%, which we wanted to avoid. The biggest mistake we made when building the school was the flat roof, which was noticed almost right away the ventilation was so poor. How many times weren’t we on that roof trying to figure out how to fix the problem? The problem would not get fixed until many years later when a pitch roof was installed. **When the school started it was not about the money, it**
was about the heart commitment, we had to educate our children in the fear of the Lord. When we got paid, we took money out for church, then the school, and then what was left we lived on [bold print in original].

(Dundas Calvin Christian School, 2011)

Similar to the first excerpt, this story links the struggle to pay for and maintain the school with commitment and sacrifice. The willingness to sacrifice indicated a heart commitment to the cause of Christian education and a connection to the founders and their principles. It is interesting that the writer notes that it was not about the money, given the fact that the anniversary yearbooks are filled with facts and figures about the cost of tuition, buildings, buses, and the amount of money raised at community events. The money indicates both a commitment on the part of the community and the blessings the schools have received.

Both excerpts provide a story of sacrifice and commitment as well as a model of what this sacrifice, this participation in the struggle, looked like. These stories present the struggle for Christian education as a worthy cause of great significance. It is presented as a noble undertaking, both from the perspective of the participants and in the anniversary books.

There was a sense in the interviews that second and third generation immigrants were not as eager to take on the struggle as the first generation was. Among all the stories of struggle, this seemed to be the biggest one for the participants. They compared the past commitment and struggle to the present and were concerned with what they were seeing. Lisa summed it up this way:
And when you see how much of their income people committed to Christian education and today how little of our income we dedicate to Christian education. It’s phenomenal what they gave up, what they, quote, sacrificed, and yet they didn’t look at it as a sacrifice. And here we have much bigger incomes and we’re paying much less proportionately, and yet it’s become a big sacrifice. (Lisa, Interview #1)

It was interesting to hear Lisa talk about sacrifice. She, and the others, did not see Christian education as a sacrifice. The school founders were immersed in the struggle not a sacrifice. A sacrifice is something you chose to do, sometimes grudgingly. Sacrifice is also something one needs to be told to do, which is perhaps why the word sacrifice appears so prominently in anniversary books. The authors of the anniversary books perhaps grudgingly acknowledged that the current generation experienced Christian education as a sacrifice, something they would have to give up some comforts for. The founders never had such comforts. According to Lisa, it could not be assumed that the current generation would support independent Christian schools; some are homeschooling, some are opting for the local public and Catholic schools, and others have left the church and, therefore, the Christian school as well.

Ron identified this concern as well. He stated:

I see the biggest struggle today is we have a group of people, probably in every church in every school community who are talking about we should be a witness to the public world at large. We’ve got to get out of our schools, we ought to join the public school. And the movement is slowly growing here in Ontario. . . . They think we should be a witness in the public school. And I
don’t believe that for a minute. I think what has happened is that they have 
bought into the good life. And school tuition isn’t a priority anymore.” (Men’s 
Focus Group)

Jim expressed similar concerns:

The end product now seems to be less and less people buying in, except in 
some of the bigger urban areas. The smaller urban schools are getting smaller. 
And that’s not just demographics. It’s because people don’t see the need. So 
why not? What have we not done? (Jim, Interview #2)

Ron and Jim’s concerns, and those of the other participants in the study, are based 
on their experience of seeing people move away from Christian schools. They also see 
what is happening within the CRC itself. In 2011, The Banner, the official 
denominational magazine of the CRC, published an article entitled Supporting Public 
Education (Hoeksema, 2011). In this article, Hoeksema argued that the existence of 
private Christian schools in North America has had unintended negative consequences 
for public schools including the removal of money and expertise from the public schools. 
He argued further that participation in public education can be “inherently Reformed” 
(para. 13) and in line with Kuyper’s theological understandings that Christians should be 
involved in all of society. It is unlikely that the founders mentioned in the anniversary 
books would have agreed. This argument challenges the view that there is only one way 
to educate children within a Reformed worldview. This shift in perspective is also 
reflected in reports that suggest CRC pastor’s themselves are no longer 100% committed 
to sending their children to Christian schools (Schuurman, 2013). It seems as if the 
current generation may be losing its appetite for the struggle and commitment required to
make Christian education a reality in Ontario. Perhaps they agree with Hoeksema that there is more than one way to educate within a Reformed worldview. Perhaps the current generation does not view the education offered in Christian schools worth the financial commitment.

As I reflected on these stories of struggle, driving to an interview with a participant, I heard an interview on CBC Radio (2011) that influenced my thinking. The topic of the interview was land claims and the struggle of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people to obtain justice in relation to the treaties they had signed with the Government of Canada. The following quotation is from Louise Mandell:

The only thing which could expire the right to land, is if Indigenous People decide that they don’t want to fight anymore. But that’s never been the case. The fight is passed from generation to generation. I was part of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and I listened to the late Grand Chief George Manual when he said that he’d rather leave his kids the legitimacy of the struggle than to leave them with a settlement they can’t live with. (CBC Radio)

As I analysed the data, the concept of “the legitimacy of the struggle” lingered. The concept that the struggle could be so closely tied to identity and legitimacy of a group was compelling. I wrote the following in my journal:

The legitimacy of the struggle. It seems to me that this might be an important idea when looking at the connection between the Dutch and their schools. It is a struggle. They called it the school struggles for good reason. The struggle could be deeply connected to identity as an ethno-religious group. It is the one thing that stands out as uniquely ours. If we let it go, are we done as a group?
Mandell spoke of the struggle being the only thing that keeps their claims to legitimacy alive. Could that be the same for the Christian schools? Is it the struggle for the school, the fight that keeps the group together? Is it the struggle that defines us? Take away the struggle and the group fades away. Maybe that’s why the school is so important. Family and church are relatively private matters. School is public, requires obvious commitment of time and money and flies in the face of public policy. It’s counter-cultural. When it ceases to be that, you get conformity. There’s no struggle in conformity, nor is there separation. Our identity is in the struggle. We are the struggle?

(Research Journal, May 8, 2012)

As I considered this theme, I wondered about the legitimacy of the struggle. Has the next generation been left with the legitimacy of the struggle, the school-struggle in this case, or have they determined that Christian schools are something they can live without? For the struggle to remain legitimate, it needs to be established in the minds of those who would continue to take it up as essential, as worthwhile. I wondered if this is the case.

The importance of the struggle and the identification with the struggle was reinforced for me very personally. I was speaking with a current Christian school principal regarding some of the challenges he was facing at his school. Membership was declining and tuition was rising. He saw community members making financial choices that excluded Christian education and was concerned about the future. As we spoke, I mentioned how I was feeling the financial pressure of paying for two tuitions (grade school and high school), and how my wife and I were struggling to get accustomed to our
new monthly payment rhythm. I also expressed how, deep down, I was frustrated that some
Christian school teachers did not send their children to Christian schools; they were
benefiting from the schools through employment but not participating in the struggle
(aside from lower than average wages). Reflecting on this part of the conversation, I
could see that I was identifying with the struggle and judging those who I perceived were
not. The importance of this identification came a moment later when, in conclusion to all
the difficulties I had just listed, I said, “It better be worth it.” The principal stopped,
looked at me, and said [paraphrasing]:

Now that scares me. You have been a student in Christian schools, a teacher in
Christian schools, and now teach teachers in a Christian university. If you are
wondering whether or not it is worth it, then everyone else will be as well.

I said what I did in the context of my role as a professor of education who is in a position
to help teachers continually grow in their craft, to help them be excellent teachers. My
words, however, were construed as expressing doubt that all the sacrifice and
commitment would be worth it, and I received a reaction. As a leader of sorts within the
Christian school community, it is important that I embrace the struggle. It is an essential
component of the experience of the intersection of Reformed faith and Dutch heritage in
Christian schools.

The theme of struggle is significant because it signifies something more than the
willingness to work hard for one’s ambitions. The struggle, and the willingness to take on
the struggle, is symbolic of one’s understanding of and commitment to the cause of
Christian education and the religious principles on which it is built. The struggle can be
Theorized to be part of a symbolic universe that ties the community together. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) the symbolic universe:

locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. With regard to the past, it established a ‘memory’ that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regards to the future, it established a common frame of reference for projection of individual actions. Thus the symbolic universe links men [sic] with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality. (p. 103)

The intersection of Reformed faith and Dutch immigrant ethnic culture was experienced as the struggle to start and maintain independent Christian schools in Ontario. The struggle was rooted in ecclesiastical and social battles that took place in the generations prior to the arrival of the Dutch immigrants to Canada. The struggle was also a sense of identity for the group. Those who were a part of the Dutch, Christian Reformed group are identifiable by their willingness to join the struggle through commitment of time and money to the cause of Christian education.

**The Ties that Bind**

The topic of community came up repeatedly in the data. For the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants, this community was crucial for flourishing in their new home. They had come out of six years of war and several years of postwar fatigue and stress. They had left their friends and family, presumably forever, and found themselves as strangers in Canada. Their cultural instincts were to group together with like-minded individuals. Their immigrant reality heightened this tendency even more. If they were going to make it in Canada, they were going to have to do it together. The schools would
play a crucial role. They came together to build the schools. The schools, in turn, served to keep them together and shape them as a group over the decades.

The history of this Dutch Reformed immigrant group prior to their arrival in Canada after World War II is one of institution building, including the establishment of parent-owned Christian schools. It was in their DNA to do so, bred in the bone. This did not mean, however, that they knew how to build schools or even educate children for that matter. Throughout my research, I became increasingly aware of the fact that even though these immigrants came from the same country, they were beginning again. Whether or not they had been a part of Christian schools in The Netherlands, they would have to learn how to be a school community in Canada. Rich had some interesting observations about the process of becoming both a school and a school community:

I think we were all learning and trying to refine what Christian schooling was all about. We know it in some theoretical way. We did not really know how to do that in practice. So we went into different directions. . . . It was a completely new experience. . . . You don’t just make [a school community]. That takes time to grow. And of course these immigrants came from different regions in The Netherlands as well, so they had different practices. But I think the home practices, the home expectations, what parents expect from children, there was more commonality than perhaps what there is now. (Rich, Interview #2)

In Rich’s experience, the early school communities consisted of people who had diverse school experiences, and little to no expertise in running a school. They were starting from scratch.
The participants spoke of the difficulties and struggles of those early days as their schools moved from their first years into their first decades. Several of the participants spoke of the physical conditions those first schools operated in; damp church basements, old, drafty buildings, and small houses. Sue spoke about the first school in which she taught:

In the earliest days? All I know is that the building, it was four classrooms, had no staff washroom, because whoever built that never thought we needed one of those. . . . So it was minimal. It was just four rooms and a hall and a furnace room and a little office; the principal’s office which also was the staff room. (Sue, Interview #1)

In Anniversary Book #5, Mrs. Visser, the first principal of Calvin Christian School, records her fond memories of the early days:

Somehow I missed the sound of the hand-bell, the lines of over 80 children with bucket and books, lunch pails, boots, the disposing of foot wear against the hall wall, and making contact with the chilly cement floor, but excited to see what was inside the classroom. It was memorable, second hand school desks, scrubbed down to Dutch cleanliness, (‘tones of gum-wads removed’ said Mrs. K., initialled liberally by former learners), and below the table top a place where you could store your treasures and books. Pots of blooming geraniums cheered the windowsills – which after two or three weeks looked distressed for the sulphur water gave no vitality to growth. ‘Neither,’ said one of my former pupils, ‘could you detect whether the toilet flush had the odour of water, or of what you tried to lay waste’. (Calvin Christian School, 2002, p. 3)
The sights, sounds, and smells were still clear after 50 years.

Anniversary Book #3 relays the story of a teacher’s first night at his new school:

[He came] fresh out of teacher’s college in Stratford, a nervous 20 year old.

Surviving his first night, listening to the noises of a water heating furnace at the school, he could not imagine the plans God had for him. Forty-four years later he has been blessed with lifelong friendships and a community that became his life’s work and passion. (Huron Christian School, 2012, p. 44)

Rich reflected fondly on those first early years as well:

In my first year I was actually in one of the classrooms in the school. The second year I was in the basement of the church. What struck me there was you suddenly get a group of people together who have no experience being a school community, and without much strong leadership. [The first principal], good person, a wonderful Christian steeped in his joy of being with students. But very little formative guidance from the perspective of what does a young teacher do? (Rich, Interview #2)

The first Christian schools in Ontario existed in whatever space could be obtained and were staffed, in some cases, by people who had taught in The Netherlands, but often by people who had achieved some sort of higher education, not necessarily related to teaching. School leaders did not have extensive curricular knowledge or a clear understanding of effective teaching practice. The schools were not necessarily pillars of educational excellence at that time, but they were Christian schools, and for these immigrants, that was what mattered.
The schools had a way of pulling the community together and providing a sense of consistency to the lives of this new immigrant community. The common history, a shared ethic heritage and religious purpose, helped form a cohesive community. In the early days, procedures were developed which turned into routine. Routines turned into traditions and traditions became definitive of the school communities of which they were a part. This process creates what Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to as “firmness in consciousness”:

They [in this case the school founders] understand the world they themselves have made. All of this changes in the process of transmission to the new generation. The objectivity of the institutional world ‘thickens’ and ‘hardens,’ not only for the children, but (by mirror effect) for the parents as well. The ‘There we go again’ now becomes the ‘This is how things are done.’ A world so regarded attains a firmness of consciousness; it becomes real in an ever more massive way and it can no longer be changed so easily. For the children, especially in the early phase of their socialization into it, it becomes the world.

For parents, it loses its playful quality and becomes ‘serious.’ (p. 59)

Through this process, pragmatic decisions on how to do things in a school become the right and proper way to do things, perhaps the best and only way to do things. The community, or those who feel most a part of the community, are those who know these routines instinctively.

As the schools became established as institutions, they also began to develop traditions and celebrations that pulled the communities together on a regular basis. Many of these traditions and celebrations were established for the sake of fundraising. The
anniversary books are full of descriptions and pictures of such events, from dinner theatres, to bazaars and auctions, to plant sales.

The participants were aware that their individual school experiences were being lived out in communities across the province. As such, they generalized about the phases of development the school communities had gone through over the decades. The participants spoke about the early days when the focus was on survival. After these first 10 years, the focus shifted to organization. Principals and teachers got organized, each developing their own associations and system for professional development. There was a focus on what good teaching was and a shift towards curriculum development. Individual Christian schools began to communicate more often, sharing policies and best practices. Overall, in the opinion of the participants in this study, there was a general increase in the professionalism of the schools as institutions of learning.

In the background, philosophical debates were ongoing. Each school community had its own idea of who they were and what they wanted to be. The overall principled purpose for being a school was articulated and understood differently in each community. The hiring of a principal was a very important decision as this was the professional who would articulate and implement the community’s mission and vision. The participants in this study understood the importance of their ‘fit’ with the community from the day of their first job interview to the day they left to serve at another school.

Lisa described her first job interview this way:

When I went in for the interview there were all the Christian Reformed pastors sitting there in a room full of cigarette smoke {laughing}. . . . And the first question that was asked of me in {speaking with a Dutch accent}, “Ya, now
what is your view of the Kingdom of God?” {laughing}. And that’s what they asked right? And I was blown away by a question like that. You know, what about education? What about where are my credentials? Who am I? (Lisa, Interview #1)

Jim also spoke of the pressures teachers and principals experienced to embody the vision of the school. He stated “It was very important that the principal and the teachers were, in the minds of those who ran the place, orthodox according to what they saw as orthodoxy” (Jim, Interview #1). When the principal did not function according to the wishes and vision of the school community, he or she would run into difficulty. Jim spoke of one particular experience he had in this regard:

[That school] wanted somebody who would protect their kids. And they weren’t too worried about the excellence of the education. It was almost like they hired me to run a home school program. They were actually in charge and I was to coordinate it. And I said, that’s not the way I think about it. You hired me as principal and I want to get rid of this curriculum and I think we should do this. They didn’t like that at all. (Jim, Interview #1)

The other participants echoed Jim’s experiences as well. The school communities kept a close eye on the people they hired to run the school in order to ensure that the mission and vision were upheld. Christian elementary schools were independent, operating under Section 21(2) of The Education Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990) that provides the right for students to be excused from public school attendance providing they are “receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere” and do not fall under the Ministry of Education curriculum regulations. The Act does not define “satisfactory
instruction” nor does it stipulate that nonpublic schools be inspected by Ministry staff. (It is important to note that Christian high schools that offer the OSSD do have to teach the provincial curriculum and follow Ministry guidelines. They are inspected biannually by the Ministry of Education). As such, parents relied on their principals to have the educational expertise to run the school. Parental oversight often increased over issues of the overall vision of the school and the Christian character of the curriculum. When principals and parents disagreed over such things, the tension could be enormous in the school community.

The picture presented in the interviews and reinforced in the anniversary books is one of a community knowing that they would build a school and then figuring out what that meant over time. This process and history is one that is remembered fondly in the present. It is a common experience, a common story that holds the community together. As hooks (2000) states, “To remember together is the highest form of communion” (p. 16).

The process of becoming school and the organizational growing pains that went with these extended to the role of women in leadership positions. I wondered what the experience was like for female principals to lead schools within communities that were in many cases quite conservative. It was not unusual for Christian schools to hire female principals, even going back to the early years of the Christian school movement in Ontario. As Sue said:

We, you know, you’ve got to say the Christian schools were pretty good at allowing women to and appointing women as principal. How they treated them after that was done is a different issue because I think that whole male
thing was still there. But they were pretty good in appointing them. Because at one point, I remember [someone] saying there was an equality study from the government or something, and that they counted up how many female principals we had and it was proportionately more than the public system.

(Sue, Interview #2)

Representation was not an issue for aspiring female leaders in Christian schools in Ontario. This is not to say this leadership was barrier-free. There were barriers to break through as the schools developed over the decades and female leaders took on more of a role in Christian schools. Barriers to female leaders have been pictured as the glass ceiling preventing individuals from rising to the top. The Christian schools had done well in recognizing female leaders. Yet, the data reveal that the leadership of female principals was made more difficult because of gender.

Eagly and Carli (2007) use the metaphor of a labyrinth to describe the difficulties women face becoming and serving as leaders:

A better metaphor for what confronts women in their professional endeavors is the labyrinth. It’s an image with a long and varied history in ancient Greece, India, Nepal, native North and South America, medieval Europe, and elsewhere. As a contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead. It is this meaning that we intend to convey. For women who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected. Because all labyrinths have a
viable route to the center, it is understood that goals are attainable. The
metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging. (p. 64)
This metaphor acknowledges that women can and do, in fact, become leaders. However, it also acknowledges that there are “walls all around” (p. 64) that complicate and aggravate female leadership.

One barrier was the expectations of the participants’ immigrant parents as to the role men and women should play in institutions like the school. Lisa remembers the reaction of her mother to her appointment, and the contrast of her reaction to the community’s sense of celebration at having appointed its first female principal:

That’s interesting. Only from a mother, my own mother; “Dat is hien joppe for a woman” {using a Dutch accent – laughing}. My mom has passed away but she always thought that I’d get over it. No, my mother is the only one who really made any negative comments but in the community here? No. When I came in, quite a big deal was made out of that and it was kind of joyful. It was fun and it was good. (Lisa, Interview #1)

This positive, supportive community reaction was a point of interest for me given the more recent history the CRC had had struggling over the decision to ordain women to serve as elders and pastors. This issue, among others, led to a split in the CRC in the early 1990s. I wondered how this might carry over into the schools in terms of community reaction to a female leader. Lisa felt a sense of celebration and joy surrounding her appointment. Sue helped me understand why female leaders would be accepted in one role but not another:
Phil: It surprised me in a way that [the CRC] had so much trouble accepting women in church office, and women ministers and yet there’s a line of women principals in the schools. There seems to be, this was alright, but this wasn’t.

Sue: Well, yeah, but don’t forget they came from Holland where they had a Dutch queen.

Phil: Okay.

Sue: They always went to the text in the bible where it said that women should be silent in church. It doesn’t matter where else they speak. So it was okay elsewhere because that was their experience. (Sue, Interview #2)

Doctrinally, there was no argument against female principals. It seemed from the interviews that when female principals failed in their jobs, it was perceived in the community that the difficulty in doing the job was not only due to a lack of competence or character on the part of the principal, but also due to the gender of the struggling female principal. I noticed this particularly in my conversations with Jim:

[This school] was always having difficulty because they were so isolated.

And those who came there were not always the highest calibre I would suggest. So when I got there, they were quite pleased to get me, because a male, you know, all that sort of thing. (Jim, Interview #1, p. 1)

The principal Jim replaced had struggled, and yet, from this excerpt it seems as if the community was first all happy that the new principal was a male. Jim elaborated on this situation later in the interview:

Jim: She was the principal, high class
Phil: Okay

Jim: and a woman. Educated. She ran the school. The people who sent their kids there were farmers where the women didn’t run anything.

Phil: That’s right.

Jim: And the tension, the tension.

Phil: She wasn’t going to back down, I mean if she’d gotten that far at that time, she’s not backing away from anything.

Jim: She wasn’t backing away but it hurt her like crazy the way they treated her. You know, because the men hated a woman ruling them.

Phil: Yeah. It goes against everything they grew up with.

Jim: Yeah, so that was again where they were historically. (Jim, Interview #1)

Other barriers existed that impacted the work of female principals. One noticeable problem was a not uncommon practice of members of the school board going out for a drink and a smoke after a meeting. This is what Lisa called the postmeeting meeting: “The postmeeting meeting. And I’ve had it where I’m the only woman sitting at the restaurant you know and I’m thinking there’s something awkward about this. Those days are really over” (Lisa, Interview #1). One wonders what opportunities for networking and informal discussions female principals missed, not being part of these postmeeting meetings.

The participants did not dwell on the gender issues surrounding their experiences. They did recognize that gender did play a role in the development of the schools and the school communities. As communities learned what it meant to be a school, they learned how to accept and really listen to the female leaders. It seems that in addition to all of the
other duties the principals had, the female principals carried the task of educating their school communities and moving them forward in this regard.

The school communities were pulled together by the shared struggle and financial commitment. The schools provided a community, but one that had many demands of time and money. School events regularly distributed throughout the year continually brought the community together. In addition, the schools were one institution of the Dutch, Christian Reformed canopy. They also had the CRC church, a labour union (CLAC), a credit union (DUCA), and Dutch import stores that rounded out their social circles. The institutional completeness (Breton, 1964) of the CRC canopy was comprehensive and demanding on the time and resources of the community. Jim spoke about the comprehensive community that CRC immigrants had developed:

We didn’t integrate as fast. Having our own schools caused us to stay somewhat separate. . . . Because for many of the Dutch, it was a comfort thing. I don’t blame them in that way at all. It was very comfortable. They had left [home] behind and never expected to go back. Some of them, they had left behind a whole life, family and everything. So to be together in the church, in the school, in all things. You had a grocery store, you had your own butcher, you had your own, you know, all these things. It was really nice.

This statement was followed immediately by the following: “I didn’t honestly converse or interact with many Canadians until probably in high school. I had no need to. I was extremely busy in the community” (Jim, Interview #2). The ties that bound the community together in the school also served to separate school members from the rest of their community. For Jim growing up in the community, it was a matter of familiarity
with his classmates, many of whom were the same people he went to church with, and the
time that was devoted to school and church activities.

Lisa spoke about the busyness of school and church involvement as well:
You know, that’s one of my biggest losses in life, one of my biggest regrets.
We live here and it is just a small town. When my kids were just tiny ones, I
was involved in town. We started at the Christian school, we lost those
contacts except through the sports programs and stuff like that, but you know
there’s people down the street that I don’t know because I was too busy to
make connections with them. . . . The school, the Dutch culture really sucks us
into a bubble. And my kids have actually reminded me of that numerous times.
(Lisa, Interview #1).

Involvement in an independent Christian school is no small commitment. The
shear cost of tuition often made it necessary for parents to find additional sources of
income. This meant additional jobs and, in some cases, starting their own businesses
apart from their day jobs. Being a member of the school meant possible service on the
school board, including monthly meetings and committee work. If one parent was on a
school committee and the other involved in church council, life was doubly busy. In
addition were the community events, described above, that helped raise money for the
school. It was an all-encompassing life. The kids, like Jim, went to school and church
and took for granted the social circle they were a part of. For parents, it meant hours
devoted to school and church that limited their involvement in the broader community.

The school’s demand on time and money limited members’ involvement in other
areas of society. In a sense, this can be seen as an accidental or unintended, if not logical
consequence of the establishment of Christian schools. The participants could see how the schools set them apart from their communities. It was interesting to hear how some of the participants had experienced the reaction of people from their communities to their schools. Sue related this story:

Sue: There’s a woman once said to me when I spoke to a group in the United Church about being an immigrant kid. And there was a woman there. She was a retired school teacher, and she said, “Yeah,” she said, “Our country is good enough for you, but our schools weren’t.”

Phil: That says a lot

Sue: I didn’t know what to say to her.

Phil: Yeah

Sue: You don’t want to get into, I didn’t want to get into a big discussion or argument or debate about something. But I thought, wow: “But our schools weren’t.” (Sue, Interview #1)

The establishment of the schools was a productive undertaking, the founders actively engaged in moving forward in their new country. It was not meant to be a reaction against society, yet, as Sue discovered, some people in the broader community experienced the building of schools this way. What would it be like, I wondered after this interview, to see Dutch immigrants coming to your town, knowing how much the Canadian army sacrificed to liberate the Dutch from German occupation, and then to see them huddle together in their own circles. It is not surprising that the decision to start independent schools was seen by some as a rejection of them as neighbours and friends, a display of a lack of gratitude at the very least. What does it mean to reject a
neighbourhood school? It is not a perspective I had ever considered prior to my interview with Sue. The local school ties a community together. The Christian schools perhaps sent a message that the Dutch immigrants were not interested in being a part of the larger community.

This is not to say that people from the community did not come into the Christian schools. Many of the participants spoke about the growing ethnic and denominational diversity of the schools of which they have been a part. In our second interview, Ken spoke about the growing ethnic diversity of his local school community:

We’re getting a mix. And the school participates in the Fall Fair. We’re part of the mix in that way. And with the activities it’s really interesting to notice, I see it often at field day or something happens at school and the paper is notified and they take pictures. And here are three kids or even if it’s six kids [showing me a recent local newspaper], I’m looking for the Dutch background names and I find one or two, right? Those other names are in there. (Ken, Interview #2)

Ken’s observation that there was a growing diversity in the school was echoed in the other interviews as well. Ken noticed this diversity reflected in the local newspaper in articles written about school events. Lisa noticed it at her school’s annual Grandparents’ Day:

It’s also become a multicultural event, you know. We have grandparents in their East Indian saris and long beards. . . . There are still many Dutch cliques here and they’re hard to crack into for some people. But on the other hand, the
critical mass has risen so there are enough non-Dutch people here, they all find each other, which I think is a wonderful thing. (Lisa, Interview #1)

Grandparents Day is a significant event on the school calendar. It is a day when the grandparents and seniors are invited to the school to visit their grandchildren, see old friends, meet the teachers, and enjoy a program. It is an event that pulls together the generations in celebration of the school. It connects the pioneer generation to the present generation in a visible way. Having grandparents from outside the founding Dutch Christian Reformed tradition is important for broadening of the school community.

Liz spoke about connecting new members to the mission and vision of the school:
The new people have to appreciate and understand why all these grandparents are getting so excited about Grandparents day. It’s the school we began and how the Lord has blessed it. You’ve been through this for generations. Oh yes. I’m here to see my grandchild. And you know? Generations have been here. And the new people have to experience some of that and get in on that story. And then the grandparents have to appreciate that not all these people are Christian Reformed so please don’t just sit with all the people you know and all the church people. (Liz, Interview #2)

Events, such as Grandparents Day, serve to remind the community of the school’s heritage. They reinforced the symbolic universe (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) that connects the present to the past. When the participants speak about a new generation of grandparents coming to the schools, they do so enthusiastically. As can be seen in Liz’s comment, such events encourage new members to see and understand the school and its
heritage and it allows the original founding generation to see and get to know people who are outside their CRC circle. Such events broaden the Christian school canopy.

Both Lisa and Liz spoke about having to push the traditional members of the school to branch out and get to know the visitors who are coming to their schools for the first time. There is a genuine concern that the traditional community members are so close, so tied together, that they might not be perceived as welcoming or hospitable. Sue spoke about this difficulty:

And so when you have non-Dutch people join and you have your membership meetings for instance, or your bazaars, and you sit there and have your breakfast or coffee, you gravitate towards the people you know. So the non-Dutch ones are there by themselves. I returned to a school I worked at and there were two mothers in the parking lot, and I had heard that their kids weren’t coming back. So I went to them and said, “I hear you’re not going to come back. That’s too bad. Why not?” “Well,” they said, “our children are very accepted, but we as parents have not been accepted by the community.” Is that a Dutch thing? I don’t know. It is a little insular then. And I thought, that’s a sad, sad thing. (Sue, Interview #1)

This story illustrates the difficulty a community can have being open to newcomers. It is the difference between being a friendly community and a community within which one can make friends. The ties that bind the community together can serve to keep people out if no intentional efforts are made to first be aware of this tendency, and second to do something about it.
Throughout this research, I became aware of another concept that lay in the background to the experience of Christian education, namely fear. In the background of all that tied the Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants together were fear, a nervousness, and a sense of inferiority. Initially, the fear was of Canadians in general, a fear rooted in the immigrant experience. Sue described it this way:

You see, I’m an immigrant kid. So you feel somewhat, well, you’re different. My clothes were different. The food that we ate was different. We spoke a different language in the home. You know, etc. And so you have that differentness and so then you start to feel a little intimidated and inferior and all that kind of stuff. . . . So maybe we ourselves, with our inferiority complex or our immigrant mentality promoted that whole Dutch thing too. (Sue, Interview #1)

Sue believed that part of what caused the immigrants to come together was their fear of the new land they were in. The community created by the schools provided a safe place in the new land for the Dutch to educate their children. Culturally, there was security in the schools at first.

The participants discussed the maintenance of the religious foundation of the schools with overtones of fear. Ron and I were discussing the process of new people, non-Dutch, non-Christian Reformed people joining the school, and the resistance of some in the school community to this:

Ron: But there was always a small group of people in the community who said, you know something, if we get a big enough group, they’re going to try and change us. And they were always on the defensive.
Phil: Right. And were they always on the board?

Ron: Yes, they were always on the board. They always made sure they were on the board.

Phil: Gatekeepers?

Ron: Yeah, they were gatekeepers, that’s right, yes. They really saw it as their duty to make sure that, if in doubt, keep them out. Whereas I was more, you know, if you give them a chance, they will do well. But we have to give them a chance. (Ron, Interview #1)

The fear of new people joining the school was also addressed in the Women’s Focus Group:

Lisa: We never allowed others to speak to us. We always spoke to others.

Sue: To them, yes.

Lisa: We never allowed others in to become instrumental on our boards, on our committees, the culture of the schools. And I think that has changed. That’s what’s changed in the schools, in many schools.

Sue: But the reason we’re allowing others in is often for financial and enrolment reasons.

Joy: I think that’s the Lord’s irony. I think he said, okay, you’re not going to do it on your own? I’m going to force it.

Liz: Were we afraid?

Sue: I think so.

Joy: We were afraid that the foundations would be gutted. (Women’s Focus Group)
Ken spoke in similar terms:

And I think in some schools, it’s quite threatening. If you’re going to be a community school are you redefining community to go beyond the Christian Reformed situation? That means you’re inviting people in with different thoughts and different ideas and how can they be – and their idea of what it means to be a school community is definitely not the same. (Men’s Focus Group)

New people posed a problem for the Christian school communities. They wanted to grow, but they were afraid that growth would mean giving up control of their schools, both in terms of the religious principles upon which the schools were founded, and in terms of the cultural, familiar setting that they had worked so hard for, had given so much for.

The fear that was in the background of the decision to come together and to stay together also seems to have had the effect of isolating the schools as educational institutions as well. Joy spoke about it this way:

Maybe some people tried to come and didn’t feel accepted. Dutch people – as generous as they are – and I think we have an incredibly generous and passionate community about Christian education – I think there was a sense of inferiority, that we’re not quite good enough to make it with the others. I know that even as a principal, I had to screw up my courage to go down the street and introduce myself to the public school principal because I always felt that they didn’t think we were up to their standards when I knew very well we were above their standards. But there was something about a fear. I don’t know if it
was because I was a woman or where I was at – but that feeling that we’re not quite in the in-crowd. So that feeling of inferiority, it was almost a matter of survival. (Joy, Interview #1)

Joy’s perspective was clarified in our second interview as we pushed this theme a little further:

I think there was a bit of inferiority, a cliquish complex that set in – we don’t know if we have anything good to offer. We know it’s good enough for us, but we didn’t really know how to carry out a dialogue with others, so to speak. (Joy, Interview #2).

A principled purpose tied the community together through this common venture. Over time, however, the schools themselves became the tie that bound them together as a community. Berger (1967) discusses such a process:

The institution is there, external and coercive, imposing its predefined patterns upon the individual in this particular area of life. The same objectivity belongs to the roles that the individual is expected to play in the institutional context in question, even if it should happen that he [sic] does not particularly enjoy the performance. (pp. 13-14)

The newly arrived Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants came together to form school communities. They were bound together by the desire to have a say in the education of their children in accordance with their Christian faith. This commitment brought them together to build a school. The demands of the school, both in terms of time and money, kept the community circulating around the school. The school itself became the tie that bound the community together.
Cloud of Witnesses

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that community was key for understanding both the motivation for building Christian schools, as well as the inspiration for continuing the project six decades after the first schools were built. This community, a cloud of witnesses, had formed around the schools, and exists as an important element of the experience of the intersection of faith and ethnic identity found in the Christian school experience.

The 50th anniversary commemorative books analyzed in this study were developed in different independent school communities, and yet they have several similar features. Most striking, at first glance, are the cover pages and the thematic verses that were chosen for the books. Four of the books use Psalm 100:5 as their theme: “For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” One uses Psalm 78: 4-7, “and we will tell the next generation the praise worthy deeds of the Lord.” The generational theme certainly reinforces a covenantal theological understanding that Fallon (2000) sees as so important in the life experience of Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants in Canada. The promises are for them and their children, a phrase heard often at the baptism of children in Reformed churches. It also establishes an understanding of community, a community comprised of significant others who can be relied on to remind the community of who they are and where they came from.

The anniversary books serve to remind the community of God’s faithfulness. From a covenantal perspective, this is important. The CRC community rests on God’s blessings; this was made very clear in the conversations I had with the participants. From
Berger’s (1967) perspective, this is also important. Individuals find legitimacy in their relationships with other like-minded, similarly believing people, their significant others. However, even the most reliable significant others are prone to forgetting who they are and where they come from. God, however, is stable in the hearts and minds of people finding meaning through their religion. God does not forget, and so “God then becomes the most reliable and ultimately significant other” (p. 38). Any sacred canopy loses its strength without its god.

The anniversary books are also consistent in the way in which they highlight the words and pictures of founding board and staff members. These individuals represent the first wave of postwar Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants to Ontario. The books speak to their stories and their struggles moving to Canada and starting a new life. They are also consistent in highlighting the founders’ reliance on their God’s faithfulness, and their desire that the next generation will remain committed to the cause of Christian schools. The connection between God’s faithfulness, made evident through the faithful dedication of the founders is made clear. The following excerpt from Book #3, featuring an interview with a founding Board member, illustrates this point:

At the time, Board members were not looking to the future, they had no idea of the great changes that would take place within the school; they were simply looking for quality Christian education for their children. Peter Damsma [a former board member] is amazed at God’s generational faithfulness. You can see the hand of God working through the dedication and commitment of the first board members, the teachers, and various parent run committees. (Huron Christian School, 2012, p. 9)
These board members, teachers, and parents embody the first members of the cloud of witnesses that uphold and encourage the current school members in their own attempts to continue the work that has been started. These people connect current members to the principles of Christian education and provide a model to follow. In some cases, the call to be faithful is subtle, a message that can be inferred from the vast number of pictures of former students graduating and original board members staring seriously at the reader; a silent testimony to the value and heritage of Christian schools. In other cases, the call is direct and unmistakable. Book #1 provides an example of this:

This book is dedicated to the committed families of the past, and the industrious families of today, some of whom are third and fourth generation school supporters. Today we encounter similar struggles as the families that stepped out in faith some 50 years ago. Despite living with financial uncertainly, our forbearers pushed forward with a deep heartfelt desire to provide Christian education for our covenantal youth. Their dependence on God, their faith, is an example to us that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us. As we move forward in faith, we know the children of today are the generations of tomorrow. (Dundas Calvin Christian School, 2011, p. 89)

The cloud of witnesses spans the generations, and provides a testimony that God is faithful and that Christian schools are worthwhile and necessary.

The participants spoke of significant others, their own personal cloud of witnesses, who spurred them on and provided them with the motivation to do the hard work that needed to be done as teachers and as Christian educators. Most of the
participants came to Canada with their parents and, as such, their initial impressions were shaped by the commitment of their parents to the Christian schools. There are several examples of this in the interviews. Sue spoke about how being a teacher was always something she wanted to do because a number of her relatives were teachers, including her grandparents. Liz could not remember a time when she did not want to be a teacher in a Christian school. Knowing this, her parents decided that she should attend the nearest Christian school for Grades 11 and 12 so that she would have some experience. The nearest Christian school was roughly 300 km away; therefore, she lived with a family in that town, and traveled home for major holidays.

All of the participants had a story of how and why they became involved in Christian education. For the most part, these stories involved the commitment and determination of important people in their lives, mainly their parents. The participants knew where the commitment of their parents and other influential people lay. They understood the influence of Kuyper on the thinking of the early immigrants. Jim expressed it this way:

I remember my Dad talking often about Kuyper and Colijn and my dad was only a Grade 6 student. That’s as far as he went, but he knew all about what was going on [in Holland]. So the group that came at that time really felt it important to follow the concept of Kuyper, Colijn and the others had that there was a such thing as pillars in society, there were zuilling[pillars] in society. That every particular institution must be Christian based, but it also must have its own separateness from the church. (Jim, Interview #2)
All the participants found resonance with the influence of Abraham Kuyper on the Christian school movement in Ontario. They knew this neo-Calvinist worldview lay behind the actions of their immigrant parents. They were quite conscious that their parent’s generation, uneducated perhaps in any formal way, were knowledgeable about scripture and how this should impact society. Joy described it this way:

And the whole Kuyperian/Dooyweerdian thing. I think that was just part of the DNA. Also, because when you talk to people from those generations, they discussed these things in their Young Adults [church] meetings. They had to discuss this stuff. They had to present papers whether they were at university or not. Most of them weren’t of course. They discussed these issues there. It was the – what is the Dutch word for common people? Klieneleiden. They were an educated kleineleiden. A lot of them would be reading books. My husband talks about it; his grandpa didn’t go past Grade 8, but he was reading Kuyper. That’s true for a lot of people. You’d see it all over. You don’t see that today, right? (Joy, Interview #2)

It became clear in the interviews with most of the participants that their early education and their passion for Christian schools was shaped by the thinking of Kuyper as explained by Evan Runner, professor of philosophy at Calvin College. Several had been in his classes. In many ways, the participants carried out the philosophical thinking of Runner in their careers in Christian schools. Joy spoke enthusiastically about Runner’s influence on her and on Christian schools in Ontario:
Joy: So I graduated in the early 70s, as I mentioned, several of us who lived together and were bitten by the Reformational bug applied [for jobs] here. We all got positions and we’ve been here ever since.

Phil: Now that Reformational bug, is that the Runner stream, the Kuyperian stream?

Joy: That’s the Runner stream where it talks about all of life is religion. So all the curriculum needs to be developed from a certain perspective and Christian curriculum needs to be as well. (Joy, Interview #1)

Joy saw her work as an educator and a principal as a direct continuation of Runner’s thinking that all of life is religion. Adding Christian principles to a secular curriculum was not enough. For Joy, Christian curriculum is that which begins with an understanding of God as the origin of anything that can be studied and known. Further, it is curriculum that is embedded in the biblical narrative of creation (everything was created good), fall (sin entered the world and as such things are no longer good), redemption (Jesus’s resurrection initiates healing of creation), and reconciliation (humans are called to take an active role in restoring harmony and wellness to creation). For Joy, and the other participants, such an approach is distinctive and important. As such, Christian schools were a necessity, not a choice.

Rich spoke with fondness about the impact Runner had on his thinking as well:

Rich: He kept on repeating that theme, about life and the relation of the Word of God to that life whenever you met Dr. Runner. There’s a couple of things I learned from him apart from life is religion was there was a clear distinction between how you experience life. There is an experiential
side and there is a scientific side. . . . It’s like seeing a rainbow, you
know, you can see it experientially. You can also see it – he always used
the example of a couple in love, you know. Explain the experience as a
chemical reaction.

Phil: *(laughter)* you lose the meaning that way.


Rich honoured the thinking of Runner and the legacy he had begun in Ontario. Runner’s
main theme, that life is religion, stuck with him over his career.

The cloud of witnesses, the group of significant others, spans generations and
includes the founding immigrants (and in the background their teachers and preachers),
their children, and their children’s children. The commemorative books, the school
buildings, the stories told all point to a remarkable group of supporters who have
committed to the cause of Christian schools. This cloud of witnesses, these Dutch and
Reformed forbearers stood as models to follow. They testified to the groundwork that
had been laid and they faithfully passed the task, the cause of Christian education on to
the next generation.

On the edges of the main cloud of witnesses, however, are others who, ethnically
and denominationally were part of this group, but who have moved away from either the
CRC, the Christian schools, or both. This group includes people who experienced
hardship, struggle, maybe even pain and rejection within the walls of Christian schools or
in the CRC community in general. They did not fit in. They were mistreated. They were
bullied.
Several of the participants spoke about those they knew who had bad experiences as students in Christian schools and, as such, have abandoned the movement. A couple of the participants referred me to an address given at the Ontario Christian Schools Teacher Association Convention in 2004. In this address, Hugh Cook (2004) traced the history of Christian Education over 50 years, following the theme, *Jaded or Jubilee: OCSTA at 50*. He told stories of joy and celebration, as well as stories of pain and frustration. He retold the following story he had heard from a Christian school principal at the time:

In one of my school experiences I was discouraged to see the number of young families that were not opting for Christian education, even though one or both of the parents had been students at that school. In conversation with several of the dads I sensed a negative attitude to the school because of their own student experiences. It was obvious that Christian education had not been a positive experience for them.

A few years later the school entered into a building program that involved a major demolition of part of the facility as well as interior ‘gutting’ of floors, doors and windows. I approached some of these same dads and requested their involvement in organizing the demolition crew and salvaging as much of the reusable building materials for a parking lot garage sale. The response was overwhelming and on a Saturday, a stream of volunteers came forward with wheelbarrows, sledgehammers, crowbars, etc. It was almost as if this was an opportunity to vent out some of the underlying memories and frustrations many of these men had been carrying around. (p. 21)
Cook concludes the story, explaining how during this day of demolition, many difficult stories were told of the bad experiences that were had in the school these men were tearing down. He also told how many of these men involved themselves in the school from that point on, somehow exorcising the bad memories through the act of destroying the building and building something new. Not all these bad experiences turn to good. Some people have left permanently.

During both focus groups, we spoke about John Suk. Suk is a former minister in the CRC, and served as editor of *The Banner* for 10 years. In 2011, he published a book titled *Not Sure* in which he describes his journey from faith to doubt, a journey that has seen him shift from being a key voice in the CRC, to what he describes as a “Christian Agnostic” (p. 6). He had, in a sense, stepped outside of the sacred canopy. He writes:

> After being raised in a deeply committed and loving Christian family; attending Christian day schools, college, and seminary; after serving eight years as a church pastor and ten more as editor of the denominational magazine – after all of this, I realized that my faith-as-usual had little currency. (p. 2)

Suk’s step away from the faith he had been brought up in, a faith he had encouraged in others, created a significant crisis for him on a very personal level. It also created tension or at least an awkward situation for him in relation to the CRC community he had been a part of. In a sense, he had experienced anomy (Berger, 1967) as he moved away from the structures of the CRC. He writes:

> My doubts have made [my wife and me] both aware of just how formative and comfortable our church membership has always been, and how difficult it is to reconsider it for something new and uncertain. The worship committees, the
family devotions and Sunday coffee klatches, the shared commitment to Christian education, para-church organizations, and a community of friends – all these make for a cozy, ordered way of life. Question any of the planks that everything else stands on, though, and you are on shaky ground. People – whether elders and deacons, friends or family – don’t know what to make of it. (p. 5).

We spoke about Suk’s (2011) statement at both focus group interviews and wondered about its significance. Both the men and women participants recognized that Suk was wrestling with some very basic and crucial elements of faith and Christianity, topics that lay outside of the Christian school experience. Still, I wanted to know if they agreed with Suk, that “a shared commitment to Christian education” (p. 5) was, in fact, an important plank “that everything else stands on” (p. 5), a crucial stake in the sacred canopy of the Dutch, Christian Reformed group.

I received mixed responses from the women and men on this question. The men did not feel strongly about Suk’s (2011) statements as they pertained to Christian education. They believed that Suk was dealing with doctrinal issues that lay well outside of the realm of Christian schools. In fact, Suk does write about his difficulty with certain Reformed doctrines including election, creation, common grace, women in church office, as well as other important issues including the possibility of a personal relationship with Jesus. The women, by comparison, did understand Suk’s reference to Christian schools as a plank in the Christian Reformed sacred canopy, albeit a plank that was beginning to grow weaker:
Lisa: When I started as an administrator, we had 90% of our Grade 8 students move on to the Christian high school. Now it’s less than 50%, 40% at best. Part of that is financial. Part of that is what they perceive as program. Part of that, a big part of that is the Dutch culture and that they don’t want their kids – because they view the local high school as being much more Dutch culture entrenched than the elementary school. And I think that’s a big part of it. They can’t cut in.

Joy: How much of that happens? Because I thought of that too. I think that’s a really good point. Is it maybe because only the real dedicated people send their kids to the high school which tend to be from the traditionally supporting community core, so already it’s more Dutch than our elementary schools who, yeah, now us too, now less than 50% from the traditional supporting community [go to the Christian High School].

(Women’s Focus Group)

This conversation reveals some important ideas. Yes, Christian schools were once an important stake in the Christian Reformed sacred canopy, so much so that at least from the perspective of these two participants, the truly Reformed sent their children to the high school as well as the elementary school – demonstrating their commitment through their willingness to struggle with the additional cost of two tuitions. The result is that the high schools may have become more “Dutch culture entrenched” than the elementary schools. Suk’s (2011) words highlight the fact that Christian schools are a part of the Dutch CRC universe and that at least for him, turning away from that, and other aspects of this universe, created tension in previously strong relationships. Given
his position in the CRC, his words at the very least caused my participants to pay attention.

We also spent time at the focus groups discussing another significant other who had spoken recently, this time about the value and need of Christian schools in general. Kooy (2012) published an article in the *Christian Courier* the week the focus groups were being held and some of the participants wanted to discuss it. Kooy writes:

> Although I attended a Christian elementary, high school, and college, was a Christian schoolteacher and sent our children to Christian schools, I have, over the years, become less convinced that Christian education is either necessary or viable. This shift developed as my educational journey evolved. In graduate school I met other skilled scholars in education – many of them outstanding educators – who introduced new-to-me theories and approaches to education. New questions emerged. The world that had at one time been clearly marked as white (us) and black (them) slowly faded away. (p. 1)

The fact that Kooy (2012) sets up her argument by first situating herself as a cultural insider is important. She knows the community she is speaking to and of. Kooy represents a significant other who is challenging, quite publically, this important stake in the Dutch CRC canopy. She argues that Christian schools use “insider” language, often rooted in biblical sources, which marginalized those outside of or new to Christian schools. Such language stifles critical discussions that many inside the community would like to have, but who feel powerless to speak up. She writes, “Are there those in the Christian school community who dare not speak up, create conflict, or ask the
challenging questions because they are afraid to disrupt the status quo?” (p. 2). Kooy believes there are.

The participants were interested in what Kooy (2012) had to say. This interest reflects the weight the words of significant others hold on the community. Had Suk (2011) and Kooy been individuals from outside the CRC community with an obvious ideological axe to grind against Christian schools, the participants might not have been that interested in discussing them. As principals, they were accustomed to defending their schools’ right to exist in an educational landscape that is at times somewhat cold to or even directly opposed to their existence. However, the fact that two people from within the community had stepped out to publically discuss their misgiving and concerns about basic Christian doctrine and the very value of Christian education, that was something that required thought.

Suk (2011) and Kooy (2012) provide an example of the importance of significant others to the maintenance of the legitimacy of Christian schools. Even the presence of contrarian voices from within the group provides evidence that significant others are important. Their voices cannot be ignored; they need to somehow find their way into the overall discussion of what it means to be a school community. The participants in this study all expressed gratitude for the leadership and sacrifice of those who came before them. They also recognized that this cloud of witnesses was a combination of Dutch and Reformed, a particular intersection of these two identities.

What consistently came through the interviews was that the participants had encouraged and experienced a change in the make-up of this cloud, a change initiated by
new people who, while not Dutch in heritage, were interested in and increasingly committed to religious principles upon which the schools were built.

In previous sections, I wrote about the difficulty new members to Dutch CRC school communities had in feeling a part of the schools they had joined. The ties that bound the schools together, both ethnic and religious, could also keep people out, or at least at a distance. New members did not have the common stories of war and immigration to fall back on. They did not participate in the sacrifice originally required to build and maintain the schools, at least at the beginning. They did not go to church with many of the other members and, as such, missed out on key conversations and shared experiences that many of the more traditional school members had.

The participants indicated a great desire to expand the school community to include more people from different denominational and ethnic backgrounds. They had stories of failed attempts to become more inclusive and stories of great successes integrating a diverse cross-section of people from the community in their schools. This move indicates a significant intentional effort to add to the cloud of witnesses.

Issues of language and jargon used in the schools have been highlighted through the inclusion of new people into the school community. The participants spoke about the in-house language school members use. Kooy (2012) described the dangers of this stating:

The language issue remains. Christian school ‘insiders’ use a particular language (much of it biblical and, therefore, beyond debate) that those outside the circle do not understand. Dialogue becomes impossible. Those not using
the same language (educational discourse instead, for example) become the
‘other,’ the excluded outsider, the silenced voices. (pp. 1-2)
The interviews revealed that this language problem was nothing new. Sue related a story of a formative conversation she had in the 80s with an Anglican colleague:

Sue: I worked with [name of an individual], who was a devout – still is –
Anglican. And we would have the biggest discussions . . . . We would walk at recess time with our coffee and yack. And I’ll never forget, we talked about everything. Capital punishment, you name it. And finally I remember one time she said to me, ‘But Sue, The way you say things, I believe it too, but I just say it differently. Why do you use those words?’ And that’s when I started to realize that while I might know what I’m talking about, she doesn’t. And yet we agree. And so we have got to start using different terminology.

Phil: We put up a wall that is not necessary.

Sue: That’s right. Because we think our terminology is holy. Well, it’s not.

(Sue, Interview #1).

People within Christian schools used phrases, such as the integration of faith and learning, a kingdom vision, the sovereignty of God, reformational, and Christian perspective, to discuss their main foci and distinctiveness. Sue found that through talking with other Christians serving in other educational contexts, her main beliefs were very similar to other Christians. The language prevented communication and perhaps cooperation. For Sue, the way in which the Christian school community speaks about education marginalizes people who in many ways would agree with what is being said,
but who do not understand the jargon. This was not a unique perspective. Jim felt the same way:

It’s the words you use, your terminology, these sorts of things. And it’s the teachers themselves who have to watch it, when they’re talking in class that they unwittingly say things that only those in their communities understand. And the other ones automatically feel, oh, there’s something here. Almost like an inside joke. And we thought, oh, okay. We want to have a greater community here. How do we make them feel comfortable and part of it? (Jim, Interview #1)

People of Dutch descent in the schools possessed a cultural capital that others from outside Dutch circles did not. They had relatives in the school. They went to church with many other students and teachers, and they understood the Dutch jargon and traditions. They knew how the community worked on an intuitive level.

Dealing with the language issue had become a priority for the participants. Lisa challenged people within her school to explain what they meant when using insider language: "And so I will quickly call someone on it and say, ‘What do you mean by that? What do you mean by that? Put it in other terms because we don’t want to be that Dutch school, right?’ (Lisa, Interview #1). The Dutch and Reformed jargon was something the participants sought to weed out in their school communities. Through the research, we discovered that this weeding out process required much more attention on a personal, reflexive level. We found that there may be more to the issue of marginalizing non-Dutch members than using words and phrases that are misunderstood. There may be a discourse at work that structures language in ways that identifies who is on the inside and
who is not. In the following conversation, we were talking about non-Dutch people who had become part of the school community:

Sue: And who else is there in our schools? Why do they stay?

Liz: [name of an individual]

Sue: Ask them if they see Dutch or Reformed or whatever their definitions or what their experiences are.

Lisa: But do you see the language you are using? Our schools.

Sue: Well, yes.

Lisa: Not the Christian school, right. It’s our school. It’s possessive. They have joined us, right?

Sue: Yes, you’re right.

Lisa: I don’t mean to offend in any way, but I think that’s so deeply entrenched in our culture as Dutch Reformed people that it’s hard to get outside of that. (Women’s Focus Group)

It was interesting the effect this discussion had on the rest of the conversation. We found ourselves using the phrase “our schools,” and then stopping and correcting ourselves, seeking phases such as “the school” or naming specific schools instead. It was awkward. We realized that through our language, we constructed those to whom the schools belonged, and those who were welcomed as guests.

This conversation reminded me of an incident I experienced as a teacher. I was giving a Black family, new to the community, a tour of my school. After the tour was done, I walked past a couple of parents, long-time members of the school. I could hear the discussion as I walked around the corner: “That was nice. We need more people like
that.” I did not stop to talk with them about this statement at the time. Maybe the parents knew this family and had good reason to say what they did. It seems to me, however, that the discourse of us and them was obvious: We are the White-Dutch. They would be good for us. There is plenty more to unpack in that statement: What do you know about them? Does their Blackness somehow provide something we need? Isn’t it more important for us to be good for them? I have become much more conscious of the need to think about not only the words that are used, but the meaning behind those words as well.

I became aware of other forms of this insider Dutch CRC discourse during the study. One example is from a science unit my daughter brought home from school during the time I was analysing my data. The unit focussed on movement and motion. Looking closely at it, I could see the connection to the Ministry of Education curriculum expectations as well as a fairly comprehensive integration of Christian faith. What stood out for me was the title page. It consisted of a Dutch windmill and the title God Made Us To Move. Certainly the intention of this title page was not to instil in the students the connection between the Dutch windmill and God’s gift of movement. Yet such images, when consistent, and especially when experienced along other ethnic markers, such as the majority of teachers having Dutch last names, serve to reinforce the idea that this is a Dutch school. There is a discourse at work that defines this school as Dutch.

In her overview of poststructural feminism, St. Pierre (2000) discusses the power of discourse in the shaping of identity and an understanding of the world. She explores how a humanist perspective tends to divide the world along binary lines – mind/body, subject/object, us/them. Agreeing with Foucault, she writes:
The rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistics since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world. (p. 485)

Discourse, a system of speaking, normalizes the way things are from the perspective of those who are in a position to speak. It creates and maintains an us and a them, a Dutch and an other-than-Dutch, Reformed and not-Reformed.

Tatum (1997) believes that members of dominant social groups rarely mention the category that sets them apart from others. For example, writing from a critical race perspective, Tatum notes that White people rarely recognize or mention Whiteness as an aspect of their identity. The interview process revealed how, from the perspective of the participants, it was easy to see when they were being identified in particular ways. It was harder to see when they were identifying others.

The participants spoke about ways in which they were seeking to change the language that was used in their schools so that it is less "jargony." One participant, for example, has started to replace the word Reformed with another term:

More lately, I used the term the Big Picture. The Big Picture Gospel. And the Big Picture gospel simply means that it’s all inclusive. It is not just a personal salvation. It’s a redemption of everything the Lord has made that is incorporated into what the schools need to be about.” (Interview #1)

He has shifted from using labels and jargon to descriptive statements that more accurately describe the mission and vision of the schools. In doing so, he, and the others, are hoping
to be more inclusive and to focus on what is most important in terms of the school identity; the religious foundations.

The participants spoke of exciting experiences they had involving people from outside the Dutch CRC community joining their schools and inviting others in. They saw people from outside the Dutch community teaching in Christian schools and holding key positions on the boards. The participants spoke of the different Christian communities who were starting to call the Christian schools "their schools;" Egyptian Coptic Christians, Korean Presbyterians, and Italian Catholics—all examples of the intersection of faith and ethnicity in their own right—who were seeing value in the community the Christian schools offered. Newcomers were experiencing and enjoying the closeness of a small school community, the partnership they experienced with their teachers, the voice they had in their children’s education, and the comprehensive biblically informed curriculum.

The cloud of witnesses has represented the intersection of Dutch immigrant culture and Reformed faith in Christian schools. The stories of the past, the pictures in the commemorative anniversary books, the founding members represented aspects of what it means to be Dutch and Reformed in Canada. They represent the heritage of the schools. And yet, the schools were never meant to be Dutch. They were meant to be Christian, following the model of Christian schools in The Netherlands; parent-owned independent schools. The founding principle of the Christian schools in Ontario was religious, yet the significant others were Dutch. The identities came together and intersected in the schools. The participants realized that the Dutch ethnic heritage of the schools was not something to be ashamed of. Earlier, I indicated Ken and Joy’s tree
analogy; the Dutch heritage is part of the root system, but you do not look at the roots. You look at the beautiful tree that has emerged. If the roots come above the surface, people trip on them. Throughout the interviews, it became quite clear that the principals’ experiences of the intersection of faith and Dutch ethnic culture was one of honouring the foundations or the roots of the Christian school, while at the same time broadening the canopy of the tree that was growing above them. As educational and school leaders, they were in a position to not only encourage the learning of the students in their care. They were also in a position to guide the learning and growth of the school and the community as a whole. As such, their educational leadership was much broader than a focus on individual student learning and teacher effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

The findings explored in this chapter reveal a community that was bound together by a common ethnic, immigrant experience and deeply held Christian beliefs. The Dutch CRC immigrants had arrived in Canada with a rich heritage and a clearly understood worldview that stimulated them to establish parent-operated Christian school societies. It was in their DNA to do so. The religious purpose of the schools was always primary; however, this identity intersected with their Dutch roots. This intersection was experienced through common stories of struggle to find a legitimate space for faith-based education in Ontario, through the way in which the community was experienced and tied together, and through the people who provided vision, encouragement, and even resources to keep the schools going. The intersection of Dutch immigrant identity with a Christian identity was a tense one at times, layered with feelings of insecurity and misunderstanding, as well as with hopes that over time, the Christian identity might
emerge as the primary signifier of meaning in independent Christian schools. The participants all told stories of their hopes for a broader Christian school canopy under which all who wish to educate their children from a Protestant Christian perspective might truly feel at home.

Christian schools are a particular educational context in Ontario. The religious aspect of their existence is real, but also inherently connected to an educational vision. Like any other school in any other context, the learning that takes place is both implicit and explicit. The leadership the principals provided was one of maintaining a distinct educational vision while expanding the pool of those who may benefit from it. This leadership sought to move the community forward by rearticulating the vision for new and evolving realities. In that sense, the learning that can happen in Christian schools is one of learning how to be "Reformed" in the current and broader social context; learning how to understand, contribute to, and serve society in effective ways. The role of schools in general in this regard is important. All schools have an educational vision, one that is practiced in school for the sake of a positive contribution in society. The school as an institution, regardless of its creed or governance, plays a powerful role in the formation of individuals and communities. Educational leaders need to reflect on the power of the institution in the formation of the individual and the group, whatever that group may be. They should also reflect on the very real influence they have, given their privileged and complex position, to enable institutional and community learning. From their position, they can maintain community and institutional memory to some degree so that school communities know where they have come from, but also educate so that their communities can continue to learn, thrive, and enfold.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Data analysis revealed the experience of the intersection of faith and ethnic culture under themes of Dutchness, struggle, the ties that bind, and the cloud of witnesses. Interestingly, these themes also emerge in other accounts of Dutch, Christian Reformed history and culture. van der Mey (2005) wrote a book on the horticultural industry in the Niagara Peninsula, telling the story of over 100 Dutch immigrant growers. In one story, Noble Origin, he tells how one business, in particular, was directly connected to the Christian school:

When Jim Heida, a salesman for Vineland Feed, needed extra income to pay for the education of his six children at a Christian School, which operated without the benefit of tax support, he turned to a field that interested him greatly: greenhouse growing.

With the advice and help of his father-in-law, Louis Dam, a grower for Westbrook Greenhouses, he put up a 25,000 square-foot structure on 13th Street in Jordan Station in 1975 and began growing tomatoes. It was a part-time pursuit, providing him and his wife, Elise, the means to give their children a schooling based on biblical principles.

Both had come from the Netherlands with their parents in the early 1950s – he from the province of Friesland and she from the province of Drenthe. They, like so many other immigrants from that country, strongly believed that the public school system could not guarantee the wholesome curriculum that they desired. (p. 140)
The narrative continues, demonstrating how Jim overcame many obstacles, including a devastating greenhouse fire, and passed his business on to his son Louis (van der Mey, 2005). Louis, like his father, continues to value a Christian education as well as the hard work necessary to make it happen. It is significant that in the middle of a book on the horticultural industry, the story of Christian schools is told. The themes are all present: the Dutch history, the supporting community, and the financial struggle. The school is central to this story of community, struggle, and resilience. The school is central to this ethno-religious, Dutch, Christian Reformed identity.

There was uneasiness or a wrestling with the topic of how the Dutch identity relates to the schools. On the one hand, there was an effort to set that identity aside. On the other hand, there was the recognition that people gathering together within their ethnic groups is not unusual. In fact, it is often celebrated. As we talked, we started to recognize that what was interesting and perhaps unique for the Christian Reformed immigrant group was that they started schools at all. The participants recognized the uniqueness of the school-building enterprise when compared to other immigrant groups. It is important to understand in this regard that not all postwar Dutch immigrants developed schools. For example, the Dutch Catholic immigrants largely joined the preexisting Catholic schools in their areas, similar to the schools they left in The Netherlands. The Dutch Hervormde group mostly joined the public schools, much as they had done at home as well (Van Dijk, 2001). The Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants started their own schools. It was these immigrants who themselves embodied the intersection of Dutch ethnic immigrant culture and the Reformed faith. In many
ways, this embodied intersection was externalised in the Christian schools they established.

It became clear throughout this research process that the Christian school was crucial not only in the settlement and establishment of a Christian Reformed group in Ontario. Significantly, data suggest that the school has played a key role in the maintenance of this group in Ontario over the decades. This finding is consistent with Van Djik’s (2001) assertion: "The establishment of Christian schools was next in importance to the establishment of churches and local immigration societies. The schools were the most important organization in maintaining the religious and ethnic identity of Calvinists" (p. 66).

In the interviews, we discussed the important role the schools have played in the Dutch, Christian Reformed ethno-religious group, focussing on the following question: What would have happened to this group had the schools never been established in the first place?

Lisa discussed this in comparison to the melting pot of the United States into which all ethnic groups were expected to merge into one American culture. When asked what would have happened in Ontario, she stated:

Lisa: I think exactly what happened in America. We were assimilated. . . .

And I think that’s what would have happened here as well. I think the Dutch people would have just disappeared and become part of today’s culture. And we would still have had churches but I don’t think it would have been as strong a bond.

Phil: So that group thing wouldn’t have existed two generations later?
Lisa: I don’t think so. And I think it’s disappearing. I think it’s largely, if I look at the list of people who were founders of our school and then I think third generation, I would say two thirds of the third generation is not coming to the Christian school. (Lisa, Interview #2)

Ron made a similar connection between the Christian school and the ongoing existence of a Dutch Christian Reformed group:

Phil: Do you think our group would have disappeared or would have been different without the school?

Ron: What happened to that group that came in 1896?

Phil: They’re quite integrated, aren’t they?

Ron: They disappeared. What happened to the group that came in 1912? They disappeared.

Phil: I never heard of them, no.

Ron: What happened to the group that came in 1921, from 1921 to 1929? They disappeared. They disappeared. Those three distinct groups, 1896, 1912, 1920s all disappeared.

Phil: And you think it’s because of the schools perhaps?

Ron: Oh yeah. (Ron, Interview #2)

It became clear that from the perspective of the participants, the Christian school has played a key role in the cohesion and perhaps even existence of this Dutch, Christian Reformed group. From Berger’s (1967) perspective, this makes sense. The Christian school is a crucial part of the Christian Reformed sacred canopy. It emerged out of a
culture and has become an institutional mechanism in maintaining that culture. 

According to Schryer (1998), this presents the neo-Calvinists with a dilemma:

To keep their pillar strong requires mechanism of socialization – the schools – which are rooted in a highly endogamous ethnic community; a large number of students and almost all teachers still carry Dutch names. At the same time, the inclusion of non-Dutch members, which requires compromise and accommodation, is bound to dilute the typically Dutch forms of Calvinism that inspired such a vision in the first place. . . . There is also a growing gap between the intellectuals, who want to perpetuate a Kuyperian vision, and their Dutch-Canadian constituency, who no longer know much about Kuyper and his ideas. (p. 136).

Schryer’s (1998) perception of the challenge facing Dutch, Christian Reformed people in Ontario has been echoed in the perceptions of the participants in this study. As has been demonstrated in this research, the participants also see the challenges newcomers to the cloud of witnesses cause. The participants understand the weakening of the school as the tie that binds the community together. They have heard different interpretations of the Reformed perspective on education from within their traditional circles, which stress involvement in public rather than Christian institutions. They have seen traditional members of the school community decide to leave the struggle for Christian education behind, making education more expensive for those who wish to carry on. They have seen all of this in the province of Ontario which funds one faith-based educational option and no others. They all agree that these are challenging times.
Yet, in all the interviews, hope is expressed that there is a future for faith-based schools in Ontario. Schryer (1998) describes a situation in which the Dutch, Christian Reformed pillar is under stress and in danger of decay. The participants, however, did not express a strong interest in maintaining the pillar at all, at least as it is manifested in ethnic terms. What they were interested in is an education that is rooted in the Reformed faith as it intersects with Christian Canadians of all backgrounds.

The schools isolated many Dutch, Christian Reformed immigrants from their Canadian neighbours early on and caused them to remain separate, to some degree, over the decades. Yet, there was a perception that this was changing. As discussed, the cloud of witnesses was broadening to include nontraditional members. This is to the delight of the participants. In fact, it is crucial, as Rich indicates: "And so it’s in that respect that I think your study is incredibly important. You know, how to transcend the Dutchness into a vibrant Canadian presence" (Men’s Focus Group). Interestingly, while the schools may have played a role in setting the Dutch, Christian Reformed group apart and establishing it as a distinct, ethno-religious group in Ontario, it is those same schools that are helping this community transcend the Dutchness, variously defined. As more nontraditional (i.e., non-Dutch) members join the schools, the more likely it is that children from different backgrounds are coming together, playing at each other’s houses, and ensuring that parents of different backgrounds come together in the schools. According to Ken, the Christian schools that are growing and thriving are those that are experiencing such diversification. The result is a new intersection of faith and culture found in and as the Christian school. Ken noted:
Ken: Maybe these schools eventually, unintentionally become part of the
Canadianization of the Dutch immigrant community /laughter/
Phil: Well, I think they could.
Ken: I think it’s beginning to happen a bit that the Canadians aren’t the other
anymore. (Ken, Interview #2)
Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the participants understood the
Christian schools as part of the Dutch, Christian Reformed sacred canopy (Berger, 1967).
They were also determined that the canopy expands to include all those who are
interested in a parentally-owned, Christian education for their children in Ontario.
Broadening any canopy requires that the stakes be reinforced and driven in more
securely. For the participants, the only stake that could uphold such a canopy is the
religious one, an all-encompassing vision, articulated clearly by Kuyper and Runner, the
Big Picture gospel perspective that Christian education has something positive to say for
all and for all of life.

**Dutch, Dutch-Reformed, Reformed….Canadian?**

I write this section on the day before The Netherlands plays Argentina in the 2014
World Cup in Brazil. It has been very interesting considering the intersection of faith and
ethnic culture as experienced in Christian schools as this tournament has been taking
place. It has struck me that any protestations and arguments against the idea that the
Christian schools which are the focus of this study, and the communities that support
them, are largely Dutch come off as hollow at this time. When I go to church on Sundays,
the orange jersey of the Dutch national team was proudly worn by many. This is an odd
experience for me when I consider the seriousness taken by my grandparent’s generation
to dress appropriately for church. I am familiar with the stories of the incredibly uncomfortable wool pants and long dresses that needed to be worn not only to church, but, in fact, all day on Sunday. Sunday was a day of worship; therefore, one dressed ready to worship, in church, twice. I observe that it is my generation, twice removed from the immigration experience, which is dressing up in the Dutch colors, finding community and taking pride in a national identity that is really quite distant. Most of these orange-shirted worshipers have likely never been to The Netherlands. Yet, the CRC I attend seems to be quite Dutch.

I make similar observations at the Christian school my children attend. When I pick them up at the end of the day, I see the same orange jerseys. I see Dutch flags in the parking lot, draped over the hoods of cars and hanging out of windows. There are Korean flags as well—a visible sign of the growing Korean Presbyterian presence in the school—but the majority of the cars display the orange flag of the Dutch national team. My kids tell me that they have taken time to watch the Dutch games during the school day in the final weeks of the school year. Good for the teachers, I think; a perfect distraction for the kids on the long last days of the school year. I wonder if they took time to watch the Korean games.

I notice that my own children have become quite interested in the Dutch national team. They cheer for them loudly and talk about the next game with enthusiasm. I like this because it is something we are doing together. More significantly, however, it is something they are doing as part of a larger community, a church and school community that they are a part of. It is clear to see that being a part of this community means
cheering for the Dutch national team. To a certain degree, they have learned this from me. They have also learned this in school.

This study reveals that the participants sought to avoid a Dutch identification of the Christian schools. The data suggest that they worked hard to eliminate Dutch carryovers that would serve to identify and perhaps marginalize the Christian schools as simply ethnic social structures, temporary steppingstones as the Dutch immigrants acclimatised themselves to their new home in Canada. This, they argue, was not the purpose of the schools. The purpose was to provide a comprehensive, parentally controlled, Christian education for their children. They had a model to follow that they took with them from The Netherlands, but the schools they developed were never meant to be Dutch. Yet, their experience, and now that of my own children, is a mixture of Dutch immigrant ethnic identity and Reformed Christian faith. In reality, it could not have been otherwise.

Throughout the research, the following question nagged at the back of my mind: What is wrong with being Dutch? In the interviews, there was always care taken when discussing this point of identification. The Dutch, Christian Reformed community had been warned soon after their arrival that their Dutch identity was not to be emphasized. Evan Runner provided the following caution in 1960 in his address to the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (published in 1973):

It is extremely important, of course, that we make clear by our actions that we are not interested in the first place in extending Dutch ways of thinking and Dutch customs and institutions, and that we clearly lay the accent on our faith and our principle. (p. 89)
Runner warned the “young children of the Reformation” that they needed to avoid talk of Dutch-Calvinism and instead focus on the principle of a Biblically comprehensive world and life view. This caution was taken to heart.

The warnings surrounding Dutch identity were sounded again in 1980, in an editorial published in *The Banner* entitled, *It’s Time to Burn the Wooden Shoes* (Kuyvenhoven, 1980). Kuyvenhoven writes about the dangers of hanging on to Dutch ethnic identity at the expense of a broader Christian identity:

Inevitably the church is changing. We must not only accept this fact, but we must work for the renewal of the church. And we can contribute to its upbuilding only if we are able to discern between the historical, accidental traits and the Reformed distinctiveness. The Dutch accent has little or nothing to do with Reformed distinctiveness. We must not be afraid when we are losing it. Just as the Mennonites have forgotten that Menno Simons was Dutch, not German, so we tend to forget that Calvin was French. (p. 8)

The call to burn the wooden shoes, to finally leave The Netherlands behind for good, is one that remains incomplete, both in the church and the school. I wonder if it is even possible or desirable. The identity of many Christian schools as both Dutch and Reformed can be managed to some degree, but it is not something that can be controlled. The founders wrestled with this identity, celebrating their Dutch roots, yet downplaying them when they felt necessary and when they could. As immigrants, they were sensitive to being different, and yet in their school building (not to mention the other institutions and organizations they established) they set themselves apart. They were pulled between who they were portrayed to be, who they wanted to be, and who they tended to be. This
experience reinforces that identity, and the intersection of ethnic and religious identities, in Said’s (1994) words, “is not only not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally invented outright” (p. 332). Rearticulation of the Christian schools in modern day Ontario, and perhaps even the rearticulation of what it means to be Dutch and Reformed, or simply just Reformed, needs to be considered in the realization that to speak of oneself in certain terms is one thing; to be spoken of in competing, perhaps less flattering terms, is something else. Both articulations of identity are present always. Identity, even a hybrid ethno-religious institutional identity, is, as Bhabha (1994) suggests, an unhomely space, “half way between... not defined” (p. 20) that is beyond control. However, for Bhabha, that is not the end of the story. He writes: "As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation" (p. 17-18).

What might such accommodation look like? The experience of the intersection of Dutch immigrant ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith over the decades in Christian schools in Ontario suggests that there is room to accommodate a broader understanding, and a diversification of the experience of what it means to be educated in a Christian school. The themes discussed in this study reveal that the location of this intersection—the understanding of Dutchness, the struggle, the ties that bind and the cloud of witnesses—is changing, weakening perhaps. Yet, at the same time, the participants see signs of new life entering the schools through the slow arrival of new, non-Dutch Christian members. Should this continue, the “There we go again” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 59) will change, not most significantly in terms of what is being
done in the schools, but rather in terms of who we are. Rearticulation and accommodation will require a reflective understanding of the experience of the intersection of faith and ethnicity as the root or heritage of many Christian schools, and then a serious commitment to listening carefully to those who would choose to be a part. It will require an accommodation that moves in two directions; traditional members accommodating new members and new members accommodating the traditional members. It will require openness to becoming different and new. It will require openness to the idea and the experience that the schools themselves exist in a third space, a shifting, changing ethno-religious cultural space.

**School Communities Moving Forward**

Talk of accommodation and rearticulation arrives at a time in which many Christian schools are facing difficulties. The struggle has become very difficult, and it is beginning to wear out the traditional ties that bind the Dutch Christian Reformed community together. The participants referred to the financial cost of Christian school tuition and the pressure this puts on young families. They did not see it as a new struggle, but they understood it nonetheless. They have lived it. The participants also referred to the current political climate in Ontario specifically. Education in Canada falls within provincial jurisdiction. As such, different provinces have different funding approaches for faith-based schools. According to MacLellan (2012), the Western provinces provide partial to full funding for all faith-based schools. Quebec offers partial funding to established religious schools. The Maritime Provinces offer no funding at all. Ontario provides full funding to one faith-based school, the Catholic or Separate schools—a Constitutional provision guaranteed in the British North America Act of
For the participants, it is hard to understand why Ontario would take such a hard stand against a diversity of faith-based educational funding when some other provinces have chosen a more accommodating path. They spoke of the fact that Ontario has chosen to fund one faith-based group, the Catholics, and not others. In their opinion, it is discriminatory, an opinion supported by the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) (MacLellan, 2012). In its response to a complaint filed by Ariel Waldman in 2005, the UNHRC stated that Ontario had to eliminate its discriminatory practice of funding one form of faith-based education and no others. No action has been taken (MacLellan, 2012). In 2007, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party offered partial funding to faith-based schools as part of their campaign platform. The Liberals defeated them during that election. These factors taken together suggest that the struggle has become huge and the hope of winning, or at least finding some of what the participants view as justice, is slim. A struggle is legitimate if one can overcome it. With little hope of success, participants in the struggle may choose to give up. The legacy of the struggle becomes a story of the past. If the intersection of faith and culture is found partly in the struggle that connects school members to the past and gives them a reason to push forward into the future, one wonders what may happen to this group should the struggle be abandoned.

Still, there is hope that Christian schools can articulate their reason for existing on the educational landscape in Ontario in positive ways. As Pennings et al. (2012) discovered in their research, many graduates of Christian schools do, indeed, feel opposed by and, in some cases, oppressed by the culture they live in, and yet they maintained high levels of civic engagement. Their Christian education was not causing
them to avoid society but rather to engage it. In this way, their Christian education produced productive rather than isolationist tendencies. This is an aspect of Christian school education that needs to be highlighted. Or, as J. Smith (2012) points out in a recent interview:

First of all, I think Christian schools need to re-articulate the importance and rationale for Christian education. I don’t think it’s enough to say we need to protect our heritage, or this is what we’ve always done. I think we need to positively re-articulate the rationale for Christian education for new generations. And that positive re-articulation of the rationale for Christian education can’t just be anti-public. It can’t just be, “This is what we’re against.” It has to be a positive vision.

Secondly, I think that positive vision needs to come with a very holistic vision of how Christian education forms the whole person for the sake of being ambassadors of the kingdom for the common good. So that this isn’t just about an education that is protective or preserving or guarding. It is actually about an education that prepares ambassadors of the coming kingdom who then go and serve their neighbours, serve the common good, serve the public.

The vision for Christian schools is one of articulating purpose and direction in forward-looking, civically and culturally engaged ways.

School as a Multilayered Community

As I consider the Dutch flags hanging from the cars in the school parking lot this spring, I cannot help but be grateful. Last spring something else was appearing in the car windows in the school parking lot; stickers and posters with the words “Find Tim
Bosma” written on them. Tim Bosma and his family were members of Ancaster CRC. On May 6, 2013, Tim went for a drive with two men who had responded to an ad for a truck he was selling. He never returned. Ten days later, his remains were found on a farm outside of Kitchener, Ontario. This story captured national attention, but was acutely experienced within the CRC and the local Christian school community. One of our own had been harmed, and the community pulled together both in the search for Tim and in support of the family. My mind returned to my interview with Lisa and her recollection that an element of the experience of being a part of the Christian Reformed community was that when something went wrong, the people pulled together in support. My children also learned this in school.

The CBC (Rogers, 2013) covered the CRC community angle of this horrible story. They interviewed Michael Fallon, CRC chaplain at McMaster University in Hamilton. Fallon explained the history of the CRC in Canada and also why the community was so close-knit:

He said the close-knit aspect of the community is multilayered. There’s their faith, of course, but also the cultural aspect because so many members have Dutch backgrounds. The denomination itself is also relatively small, with 300,000 members in North America and only 25 per cent of those living in Canada. All of this creates a feeling of closeness that Fallon described as “multi-layered.”

The school community brings people together in shared moments of joy and celebration as well as during times of pain and grief. The closeness experienced in the community springs out of a shared past, a shared faith, a shared vision for education and
shared experiences in the living out of that vision together. Fallon’s term “multi-layered” is apt.

This research suggests that the experience of the intersection of Dutch ethnic culture and Reformed Christian faith in Christian schools is complicated and shifting. It is a hybrid experience, one that spans three generations. The question remains: Can it become culturally multilayered in ways that provide a rich faith-based educational option that is representative of the Christian community at large? Can the closeness be maintained in a more denominationally and ethnically diverse school environment? The participants in this study believe that it can, and, in doing so, may even pull the fourth generation of Dutch, Christian Reformed Canadians into the broader Canadian culture in new and dynamic ways. Ken’s words bear repeating: "Maybe these schools eventually, unintentionally become part of the Canadianization of the Dutch immigrant community" (Ken, Interview #2). They just might. Yet, there is still a sense that the Christian Reformed perspective on society and school is quite distinct from how society and schooling is conceived of by the majority in Ontario. Katerberg (2010) puts it this way:

The Dutch Reformed thinkers have emphasized Christian ideals of “transforming” society and defending the legitimacy of religiously educational and political institutions, their ideas and practices also have been part of creating a more multicultural, fragmented kind of society and politics in Canada. They have also, in effect, contributed to individualism and consumerism and to changing the character of citizenship by creating new kinds of borderlands and new identity choices. Parents who send their children to Christian schools might think of it as a Christian obligation, but they are
equally likely to think of it as a choice, and measure the benefits of a local Christian school with Dutch Reformed roots in comparison to a local Roman Catholic or public school. And they certainly have defended their choices against critics who have feared that independent Christian schools threaten national unity and emphasized that it is a matter of religious freedom and equal rights. (p. 15)

This research suggests that there is a desire for increased ethnic and denominational diversity within Christian schools, a desire to broaden the canopy of parent-owned, Christian education beyond the Dutch roots. The process of discussing taken-for-granted patterns and identities is helpful in this regard, understanding what Dutchness is, how it is communicated, seeing if and where it includes and marginalizes, understanding the binaries between us and them that may exist. If the goal is to include more people beyond the Dutch banner under the canopy of Christian education, the school communities will need to invest time and effort into understanding their Reformed foundations, that Big Picture gospel, more completely in order to achieve this. In doing so, more layers may be added to the already multilayered community that is the Christian school community.
CHAPTER SIX: EPILOGUE

David Foster Wallace (2009) told the following story in his commencement speech at Kenyon College:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?” (pp. 3-4)

What is the moral of the story? “The immediate point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about” (Wallace, 2009, p. 9). For Wallace, this reality is that most people tend to interpret events and the world around them through their natural default setting; namely, that they are the centre of the world. Wallace argues for a more generous, compassionate stance in which we imagine the possibility that those around us, in front of us, those ‘in our way,’ actually are of great value and may be living in conditions that require us to put them ahead of ourselves physically, and even in the way we think. For Wallace, the point of education is not learning how to think, but rather learning what to think about.

Through this research, I have learned a lesson about the water I swim in and the air I breathe both as a member of the Dutch, CRC school community and as an academic/researcher. Throughout my Ph.D. studies, I have been a member of both communities, each one informing the other to greater or lesser degrees over my years of
study. Membership in these communities intersected in this dissertation as I researched faith and ethnicity in my own community over the past three years.

An important lesson I learned in these studies was that both communities I was a part of have their own plausibility structures. According to Berger (1967) plausibility structures are those social institutions and the people within them who reinforce our way of looking at the world. We are involved in societies and cultures that have shaped us and how we think. This shaping is often times hidden from us. We can take society as it is for granted. Important in these structures are the individuals in our lives, the significant others who influence and support us. Berger writes:

The world is built up in the consciousness of the individual by conversation with significant others (such as parents, teachers, “peers”). The world is maintained as subjective reality by the same sort of conversation, be it with the same or with new significant others (such as spouses, friends, or other associates). If such conversation is disrupted (the spouse dies, the friends disappear, or one comes to leave one’s original social milieu), the world begins to totter, to lose its subjective plausibility. In other words, the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation. The reason why most of us are unaware of this precariousness most of the time is grounded in the continuity of our conversation with significant others. The maintenance of such continuity is one of the most important imperatives of social order. (pp. 16-17)

The conversations we have with the people closest to us impact our taken-for-granted view of the world, our default settings.
My involvement in the both the Christian school community and the academic/research community have impacted how I see my world. This impact was felt differently at different times in the process. When I began my studies, I was immersed in literature and conversations surrounding qualitative research and authors foundational to the social-cultural field of study in education. Critical, postcolonial perspectives were explored in-depth and revealed to me that culture formation is a power struggle and that those who have the power are often unaware of their privilege, and definitely reluctant to give up the power. This learning came through reading and reflection, but also through continual connection and conversation with people engaged in similar reading and reflection.

This deliberate theoretical concentration led me to take a closer look at those aspects of my life that I take for granted. My focus narrowed to my own racial identity, my Whiteness; an aspect of being that I never considered before. This learning was documented as follows:

Phil recognized in hindsight that he had enlisted a common strategy people use in Canadian contexts that encourages silence around race. Such acts of colour-blindness ignores the fact that we all have socially constructed racial identities, including those of us who are white and lighter skinned. He wondered by avoiding talk about race, if he was simply reinforcing racist structures that subjugate some while privileging others. (Ratkovic, Tilley, & Teeuwsen, 2010, p. 401)

This self-reflection extended to my thinking about being of Dutch immigrant heritage. I began to wonder what that aspect of my reality meant, particularly in the
Christian schools I have learned and teach within. My studies to that point had taught me what to think about (Wallace, 2009). My reflections were supported by readings and conversations with significant others in the social-cultural field; critical friends.

The academic community that supported my reflections was not easy to stay connected with as time went on. I experienced the distance of being a part-time doctoral student and reflected on this with my colleagues, reflections that were eventually published as well (Teeuwsen, Ratkovic, & Tilley, 2014). I struggled to stay connected to the academic world in ways that would sustain my growth as an academic. I felt distanced from significant others who could help shape my academic identity as a researcher.

My early experiences in the Ph.D. program helped me consider what I needed to know and how I wanted to know it. This, in turn, led directly to this study. It has been interesting to look at this process from the framework of plausibility structures (Berger, 1967) and water (Wallace, 2009). Given the context and the field within which I studied, it is not surprising that I came to question Whiteness and race initially. I can trace the path that led me there. My studies encouraged me to ask different questions and supported my initial findings about the water I swim in as a Dutch, Reformed Christian educator. It is interesting to consider that my studies also became the water that I swim in, representing a paradigm that is both enabling and constraining (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My field of study and methodology enable certain questions and facilitate certain interpretations. My situated professional, educational, and ethnic-religious backgrounds function in similar ways. My goal has been to bring the two together, to swim in both
waters and discover more about my world and myself. I have come to understand more clearly the intersection of Reformed faith and Dutch immigrant ethnicity as it is experienced in Christian schools. The themes Orange-coloured Glasses, The Struggle, The Ties that Bind, and The Cloud of Witnesses are useful for understanding this intersection.

Lather (2006) uses colours, sports, and board games to describe the unique perspectives and tendencies of various research paradigms. I have considered the research I conducted in terms of songs. I have found that Leonard Cohen’s (1992) *Anthem* best summarizes what I have done in this study:

*Ring the bells that still can ring;*

*Forget your perfect offering.*

*There is a crack, a crack in everything.*

*That’s how the light gets in.*

This research was a journey of understanding. The original purpose of this research was to foster a greater understanding of Christian schools associated with the CRC and the communities in which they operate. It was also my purpose to promote dialogue about the experience of faith and culture in Christian schools and to encourage critical discussion of the changing role of Christian schools in the present. My participants and I engaged in a process of discovery and inquiry, examining the way in which our often taken-for-granted realities are experienced. Through the process, we came to understand our schools and ourselves more clearly, and have gained some understanding as to how to move forward.
Through this study, I have become much more knowledgeable and appreciative of my own upbringing and heritage. I had always known that my grandparents, my parents, and their generation had foregone much material wealth for the sake of Christian education. What surprised me in this research was the depth with which that first generation cared about Christian schools. I learned about the deeply principled commitment my participants had for Christian education and how those principles and beliefs guided their actions. Their social and religious beliefs were not left as abstract ideas, but were lived out in real life. I also learned about the role schools can play in the cohesiveness of the community. The school provided a meeting place, a place for communal effort and achievement, a place for the generations to be together, tell stories and dream together about the future. Beyond Christian schools, this insight has caused me to wonder about local schools in towns and cities across the province. What role does that local school play as a meeting place in the community? What happens to a community when the local school closes due to shrinking enrolment and amalgamation in bigger, more centralized public schools?

This research has enabled and encouraged me to transition into future research endeavours within my school community. I would like to take what I have learned and apply it in more critical ways. In this study, I have spoken to members of the Dutch, Christian Reformed community to understand what it means to be Dutch and Reformed in school. Having explored this, I would like to turn my attention to non-Dutch, non-Reformed Christian school members and discover how they have experienced the intersection of faith and ethnicity in Christian schools, employing the themes developed in this study as a framework. My goal is to promote dialogue about the experience of
faith and Dutch immigrant ethnic culture with current educational leaders as a way of understanding current realities and possibilities. I want to engage in critical discussions with various Christian school stakeholders about the role of Christian schools in today’s culture. I would also like to collaborate with scholars who conduct research in non-Christian faith-based communities in order to see what commonalities and differences there are. When I consider this type of research and service, I envision shifting from Cohen, and the cracks that let the light in, to Cockburn’s (1984) *Lovers in a Dangerous Time*:

*Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight.*

*Got to kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight.*

If Christian schools are to expand beyond their traditional roots, those involved will need to understand more completely who is heard and seen in Christian schools as well as who is silenced and invisible. In doing so, my goal is to grow personally as well. This research revealed the cracks in my own perspectives and shed light on areas in which I need to grow further. I realize that my work at understanding race and gender needs to be revisited in more concentrated ways as I move forward.

This research has helped me understand the water (Wallace, 2009) I swim in personally, and the water those in Christian schools swim in corporately. My goal is to grow in my commitment to test the waters and to decide to think about school and school culture in ways that broaden the canopy that has provided such a valuable and important educational community in Ontario for over 50 years.
References


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Appendix A

First Interview Schedule

Title of Study: Understanding the Intersection of Faith and Culture in Dutch-Calvinist Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives

1. How did you become involved in education? Why Christian schools?

2. What was the school community like, in terms of faith and culture, when you first began your career? In what ways was life at school shaped by the immigrant past and culture?

3. Are there memorable incidents or events that you can describe that reflect how you have experienced the culture of the Dutch Christian Schools?

4. The schools where you have worked are referred to as Christian schools. In what ways is this Christian character experienced in the schools you worked in?

5. How would you describe the Calvinist aspects of the schools in which you worked?

6. The schools where you have worked are sometimes referred to as Dutch schools? How would you describe this Dutchness?

7. What do you believe have been the most significant external influences on Dutch Calvinist Christian Schools in recent years?

8. What are some of the most significant changes to have occurred in the Christian School community in recent decades?

9. In what ways has your role as principal impacted your experiences in and understanding of the school community?

10. Do you have any other thoughts related to the intersection of faith and culture in Dutch Calvinist Christian Schools that you would like to contribute?
Appendix B

Second Interview Schedule

Title of Study: Understanding the Intersection of Faith and Culture in Dutch-Calvinist Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives

1. You have had a chance to look at the transcript from the last interview. Do you have any questions about it? Is there anything you would like to clarify regarding what we spoke about last time?

2. Why was the school such an important institution in the Dutch Calvinist community?

3. What do you think would have happened to the Dutch Immigrant community if the schools had not been built?

4. The Dutch immigrants came together pretty quickly and cohesively. Having done so, do you think they in any way marginalized or excluded their neighbors, those who were not Dutch Reformed?

5. In what ways did the leadership in the church and in the school overlap? Were the leaders in the church also the leaders in the schools?

6. The schools are not Dutch in mission, and yet the staff lists and school directories are filled with Dutch names. What impact do you think this has on members or potential members who are not Dutch?

7. Do you have any other thoughts or stories that you would like to share?
Appendix C

Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

Title of Study: Understanding the Intersection of Faith and Culture in Dutch-Calvinist Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives

Researcher: Philip Teeuwsen, Ph.D. (Candidate), Faculty of Education, Brock University 519-355-0532, pt96ad@brocku.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Susan Tilley, Ph.D., Faculty of Education, Brock University 905-688-5550 Ext. 3144, stilley@brocku.ca

Research Ethics Office: Brock University, 905-688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca

Name of Participant: ______________________________

Dear Participant,

When you signed the Informed Consent form and agreed to participate in this study, you also agreed to respect the confidentiality of the participants you would meet during the focus group interview. The purpose of this form is to remind you of and reinforce that initial agreement so as to ensure our mutual respect and understanding that each participant’s presence here and contribution to this study will remain strictly confidential.

Specifically, you agree to the following confidential:

- Any information about the participants in the Focus Group that is not currently in the public domain or readily available to the public.
- Any participant’s personal information, a person’s identity or information that might possibly allow for the identification of the person.
- Any and all information concerning participants’ personal and professional lives that is disclosed during the Focus Group Interview.

Participant: ______________________________ Date: ______________________________

Please take one copy of this agreement with you for your records.

This study has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. (REB File # 11-071-TILLEY).
Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

1. Welcome and Introductions.

2. Review of Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement.

3. Review of the research process so far. Take time to ask for questions and comments regarding the process, transcripts and next steps.

4. Introduction of the focus question: One topic that emerges in all of the interviews so far is that the building of independent Christian schools was a part of who we are. The phrase, “It was in our DNA” came up a number of times. The question for today is this: In terms of the experience of faith and culture in Christian schools, what else is in our DNA? We will use other topics from the interviews in connection with literature I have been using to address this question.

5. In all of the interviews, terms such as passion, purpose, and community came up repeatedly. Do these seem to be accurate descriptions of your experience with the Dutch Reformed school community? In what ways? Do these concepts need to be redefined in the future?

6. Kuyper and Runner came up repeatedly as important influences on the Christian schools in Canada. Can we talk more about Kuyper and Runner and their impact on the schools in Canada?

7. Many of you spoke about “in-house language”. Can we discuss ways in which such language or jargon impacted who felt a part of the Christian school community and who felt excluded?

8. Schryer (1998) states that while Dutch Calvinists emphasized their Christian identity, their non-Dutch neighbours continue to see them and their institutions as Dutch. Have you experienced this in your communities? What does it mean?

9. Schryer (1998) states that there is an ongoing tension in the Dutch Reformed community between faith and ethnicity. Have you experienced this tension? How so?

10. Berger (1967) uses the framework of the Sacred Canopy to describe how religion and society often emerge together and reinforce each other. Are Christian schools a part of the Dutch Reformed Sacred Canopy?

11. Suk (2011) has described the CRC as a ‘tribe’ and has stated that Christian schools are “one of the planks upon which all everything else rests in the Dutch Reformed community. What are your impressions of a statement like that?
12. Are there any other stories or topics you would like to discuss or bring up here in relation to this study?
Appendix E

Transcription Conventions

Sounds
- Thinking before speaking um
- Affirmative Sounds ya, aha = yeah

Tone of speaker CAPITAL LETTERS

Environmental Sounds
- One person laughing {laughing}
- Several people laughing {laughter}
- Interruptions [inter] where interruption occurs

Descriptive Cues
- Significant gestures and action {described in brackets}

Punctuation
- End of a thought Use a period (.) at the end of the thought
- Pause for thinking time Use ellipse for significant pauses ( . . ) or when a thought trails off
- End of a phrase Use a comma (,)
- A thought is cut off Use a double hyphen (--)

Cross-talk: Two or more people speaking at the same time (CT)

Words that were omitted or changed for reasons of confidentiality Indicated with square brackets [ ]

Recording is unclear [indistinguishable word/phrase]

Conventions based on:
Appendix F

Brock University Research Ethics Clearance

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 10/31/2011

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: TILLEY, Susan - Graduate & Undergraduate

FILE: 11-071 - TILLEY

TYPE: Ph. D.

STUDENT: Philip Tezuwe

SUPERVISOR: Susan Tilley

TITLE: Understanding the Intersection of Faith and Culture in Dutch-Calvinist Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 10/31/2012

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University’s ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 10/31/2011 to 10/31/2012.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 10/31/2012. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

1. Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
2. All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
3. New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
4. Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Jan Frijters, Chair
Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.