

TEACHING FOR THINKING

**AN ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY INTO THE
PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF MODERN
LITERATURE TO FOSTER CRITICAL
THINKING AND FACILITATE CRITICAL
CONSCIOUSNESS IN THIRD LEVEL STUDENTS**

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. The aim of education is to foster the elements of character native to a soul and to help bring these to their full perfection. The thing most needful for such an education is an adequate inspiration and you are mine.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the pedagogical use of modern literature in fostering critical thinking and facilitating critical consciousness in adulthood. This thesis will make a small but significant contribution to knowledge in the field. My original contribution to knowledge lies in releasing the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and critical consciousness in adulthood. The gap I intend to fill with this research is the gap between theory and practice; while we aspire to develop critically engaged students, the banking model (Freire 1970) we employ negates the very possibility of this outcome. My research aims to consolidate the role of critical thinking and critical consciousness in education and to embed these concepts in third level education through the medium of literature. This research is focused on third level students in their first year of study. It is facilitated by literature circles and class discussion, and independent learning is fostered through a critical lens approach to literature that requires students to think critically about a topic, evaluate a topic from different perspectives and engage critically with the world around them.

The objective of this qualitative research is to explore the role of literature in fostering critical thinking and facilitating critical consciousness in third level students. The review of the existing literature indicates that while there are several major strategies for encouraging critical thinking in programmes, there has been little research on the role literature can play in facilitating critical thinking. The methodology used to carry out this research is Critical Constructivist Action Research which acknowledges that the world is socially constructed, so too are people and the knowledge they possess, and there is no neutral perspective. Research in this context involves understanding the nature of these constructions and the purpose of this research is not to transmit a body of validated truths or outcomes but to reveal how perspectives come to be constructed and to enable students to understand the nature of interpretation which is, after all, a central feature of being an educated person. This research employs literature to facilitate critical thinking and consciousness-raising and concludes that modern literature is a valuable medium through which students can learn to think critically and become more critically conscious citizens.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to re-appropriate literature as a disruptive force, breaking up our fictions about the world we live in and showing us new possibilities for the future. The objective of using literature as a pedagogical tool is twofold, firstly, to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness, and secondly, to encourage students to read thus improving literacy skills whilst fostering critical awareness. The overall aim is to provide students with an empowering education. Through empowering education, a democratic discourse can be developed to ease student-teacher alienation and promote a critical learning process that develops critical scholars and critical citizens both of which contribute to a fuller potential of humanity. Therefore, this thesis makes, to paraphrase Mezirow (2000), an insufficient but indispensable contribution to the field of education by outlining the possibilities of embracing such a framework; possibilities for growth, for transformation and for a humane education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

How do you teach students to think critically? This question is the seed crystal of academic thought surrounding the discourse on critical thinking within the third-level curriculum and a question that has been pondered by thinkers and poets for centuries. I lecture in Critical Thinking and English Literature in WIT and my professional responsibility for teaching critical thinking as a core subject to third level students has developed into a personal goal to uncover a method to teach students how to think critically. My thesis thus focuses on teaching for thinking and educating for critical consciousness in third level students through the medium of modern literature.

My intentions are critical; they don't lie in prioritising a particular truth but instead in encouraging students to think for themselves and arrive at their own truth, a truth that recognizes that there is no meta-narrative but rather a plurality of perspectives representing the variety of human existence and diversity of human experience. The philosophy of teaching that I utilize is best described by Paulo Freire (1970) as a practice of freedom and, like Freire, I believe that education can be a tool for psychological and physical liberation. With this research, I have attempted to create an atmosphere whereby all students, regardless of their previous educational experiences and level of consciousness, develop a framework for learning based on critical engagement with the world around them.

For me, the value of teaching students to think critically is that it facilitates the development of critical consciousness in each student. This ability to engage critically with the world, to see the world from different perspectives, to recognise injustice and inequality and take steps towards change, is, for me, a critical element of third level education. So, I set out to find a way of teaching students to think that relies on a waking of the imagination coupled with engagement in the world beyond the self to develop critically conscious citizens.

1.1 Research Problem

This research evolved in response to a situation I confront annually when teaching students who are crossing the bridge to third level education. Years of adhering to a didactic teaching model has resulted in learners unable or unwilling to engage in the process of critical thinking. The process of critical thinking requires a catalyst and it is my belief that modern literature can be such a catalyst, a lens through which readers can look at the world. When referring to literature, I am explicitly referring to the class of literature comprising works of imaginative narration, especially in prose form but also incorporating poetry and drama, and I will use it in this context throughout the thesis.

The educated mind is fundamentally one with a capacity for free thinking and the competitive curricula of the modern education system do not foster intellectual freedom. Max Weber's description of the iron cage of rationality, Heidegger's analysis of science technology and Foucault's regimes of truth all depict the hegemony of scientific and technological ways of thinking within social reality and the consequent limiting of ways of thinking and knowing that do not adhere to this model. This approach is problematic because it leaves little room for genuine agency on the part of students. Cognitive development presupposes a level of personal and intellectual agency and 'very little of current education is designed to help students to recognize their past conception on the basis of new experience and to develop personally generated insights and paradigms, even though these learning processes may reflect higher stages of development' (Diamond 1988, p.139).

This thesis will argue that developing critical thinking and critical consciousness should be a key component of third-level education. Techniques outlined herein to develop critical thinking and critical consciousness include creating learning expectations of critical consciousness in the classroom through tutorials, providing opportunities to practice critical consciousness using literature circles and critical reviews, and translating critical consciousness education into instructional possibilities through the use of literature.

1.2 Research Objectives

Sometimes it is the road less travelled that provides us with the greatest possibilities. Like Freire I believe there is no such thing as a neutral education process, therefore we must, choose our path wisely. Schaul (1996) observes that education either functions as an instrument to facilitate the integration of students into the logic of the present system, or it becomes the practice of freedom, a means by which students deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world, thus becoming what bell hooks refers to as enlightened witnesses, committed to pathways that offer possibilities for growth, for transformation and for a humane education. The primary objective of this research is to release the pedagogical potential of modern literature to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness in third level education. This thesis focuses on students embarking on their first year of third level education. The secondary objective is to encourage students to read more. Stemming the growing tide of ‘aliteracy’ (Layne 2009, p.2), the condition where one has the ability to read but chooses not to, is of critical importance and one of the explicit goals of this research is to engage students in reading and to help them find enjoyment in reading and talking about books.

I have focused on modern literature, that is, the literature referred to in this research is almost exclusively composed during the twentieth century (with the exception of *The Yellow Wallpaper* written in 1891 and widely acknowledged as the first feminist text) for the following reasons; firstly, it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to seek to incorporate the whole of the literary canon, and furthermore, the classic works of great literature have already been explored in great depth. Secondly, selecting modern literature allowed me to choose modern high-quality fiction, drama, and poetry focused on critiquing ideological distortions or connecting us with the uncertainty of our condition. While this focus is not exclusive to modern literature, conscious engagement with social concerns is more prevalent in modern literature due, perhaps, to greater intellectual freedom, less censorship and the influx of new cultural groups into the canon. Finally, students more readily relate to modern literature and when students relate to material, they are more motivated to engage with the material (Kostecky and Hoskinson 2003).

This engagement with literature was central to my aim of enabling students to think and engage critically with the world around them because if I couldn't motivate my students then I would be teaching in a vacuum. Successful change initiatives don't occur in a vacuum nor are they isolated events. The enduring and successful change initiative is the result of linked steps and events, with each link building in a momentum that ultimately leads to the desired objective. This gradual but cumulative change in thinking and consciousness is what I have endeavoured to achieve with the tutorials, literature circles and critical reviews employed in this qualitative study. This approach parallels Mezirow's description of transformation as 'a cumulative progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in point of view and leading to a transformation in habit of mind' (2007, p.13).¹ Literature can be a powerful tool in fostering a curriculum of consciousness focused on developing culturally literate critical thinkers, moving beyond adherence to a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, to one that encompasses a gradual growth of consciousness into expression.

¹ Mezirow asserts that transformations may be epochal - a sudden major reorientation in habit of mind, often associated with significant life crises, or a cumulative progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in point of view and leading to a transformation in habit of mind (2007). This thesis focuses on the latter type of transformative learning.

1.3 On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner

Like hooks, I came to theory wanting to comprehend, ‘to grasp what was happening around and within me’ (1994, p.3). This thesis represents a personal turning point in my educational path as given my background in English literature I considered research in literature a natural progression. Nevertheless, there was a question I couldn’t answer; why am I teaching literature to students, many of whom don’t read and moreover, seem completely disengaged from the world around them? I decided that therein lay my research question, how to foster critical thinking in students and facilitate critical consciousness, that understanding of the world that Freire considered so central to our mode of being. Critically reflexive practice embraces subjective understandings of reality as a basis for thinking more critically about the impact of our assumptions, values, and actions on others. My quest was to find a way of employing literature to achieve this objective and help my students understand the world around them and take informed action.

More alarming than the lack of ability to think critically, which I would argue is an inevitable consequence of the banking system that characterises modern education, is the lack of critical consciousness among students. Students seem unmoved, for example, by the terrorist attacks abroad that are coming to characterise the ideological struggles of modernity, and untouched by the horrifying revelations at home of the Catholic Church’s systematic failure to protect the vulnerable members of society because it doesn’t concern them. I mention these examples because I want to place this learning in societal context and this is the socio-historical situation that constitutes my reality and the reality of my students. Reflecting on my own reality, I think about my grandmother who was taken at the age of eleven from her father and brothers after her mother died and sent to the Magdalene Laundry as it was deemed inappropriate for a young girl to live in a male only environment. The implicit faith that constituted Irish society at that time allowed such things to happen and my interest in emancipatory education stems from my desire to question, and to interrogate, implicit assumptions to determine their reliability. The moral invisibility I see in students does not for me reflect the character, or lack thereof, of the student, rather it reflects the egocentric cognitive position of the student who has not learned to reconcile disjunction between conceptual schemes and empirical experience to achieve what Piaget (1969) called decentration, or the replacing of the egocentric position with a more objective one that

accommodates a deeper understanding of society and self. It further reflects the lack of critical analysis of why things are the way they are, observing the suffering of others as pervasive societal problems that are unfortunate rather than constructed realities in socio-historical, political, and economic contexts.

I write these notes on my doctoral thesis in a climate of increased threat of terrorism, the desperate act of those marginalised by lack of access to the dominant literacy. There is no escaping the fact that terrorist attacks have almost exclusively been executed by young males isolated from the rest of society, fixated by a binary world view where there is only faith and infidelity. Radical groups systematically target young males on university campuses looking to fill a vacuum in a life absent of purpose, by manipulating their sense of hopelessness and lack of belonging. As Bagnall observes ‘morally, individuals appear to be capable of anything at all, so long as it is sanctioned by the frameworks of belief within which they are operating’ (1999, p. 108). But we are not powerless to stop such destructive radicalisation, which is the message of Freire’s pedagogy of hope and one of the starting points of this thesis. Building the resilience of young men, and women, before they become candidates for radicalisation by communicating a message and opportunity is not only possible, but essential. I think one way we can do this is through an empowering educational framework that aspires to teach for critical consciousness and social transformation, anchoring hope in practice to effect change.

The role of an educator is, therefore, to help students analyse and discuss ideas; to help them find their truth or their role in the world. By way of the critical educator, a moral education is possible, moral in the sense that everyone encounters their essence and place in the world. This research is motivated by a desire to instil a love of learning in my students consolidated by a commitment to social change, with the aim of providing them with a complete education. Such changes begin, I believe, in an empowering education that encourages students to think critically and engage in active citizenship and this is what I hope to achieve with this research. So I will end this reflection as I began, with the words of hooks:

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness.

(1994, p. 117)

1.4 Research Approach

The research approach I took was a practical approach to professional inquiry and the methods I used were guided by my interest in gaining a rich and complex understanding of my students' experience. The images above highlight an important aspect of my research, the focus on participative learning and dialogue to facilitate growth in critical thinking and critical consciousness.

- Tutorials allowed me to create a space for literature in the classroom to foster critical engagement in my students.
- Literature circles, in which students jointly constructed knowledge, developing and extending reader response, were used to facilitate dialogue which is an essential part of developing critical awareness. Creating a collaborative learning environment and ongoing dialogue (inside and outside of classroom) is an essential component of my praxis. The students' self-reports on the literature circles as well as my field notes enabled me to produce meaning and understanding of the changes taking place.
- Critical Reviews asked students to evaluate a chosen text from different perspectives and analysing their responses helped me to determine if changes were taking place.
- Interviews were used in a confirmatory capacity to enable me to triangulate my data and gain a deeper insight in to how the students think and reflect.

This research demanded a critical theoretical framework and I found what I was looking for in critical constructivist action research. The key tenets of this model as outlined in the above images, are that reality is always socially constructed, so are people and the knowledge they possess, and research in this context involves understanding the nature of these constructions (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1993). It was these ideas and assumptions that provided guidance to my research and functioned as a meta-level through which I clarified my methodology. The aim of action researchers is to bring about development in their practice by analysing existing practice and identifying elements for change, the iterative nature of this process is highlighted in the above diagram. The process is founded on the gathering of evidence on

which to make informed rather than intuitive judgments and decisions. My aim is to arrive at an informed judgment of the role of literature in fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness in third level students.

One of the most important aspects of action research is that the process enhances teachers' professional development through the *fostering* of their capability as professional knowledge makers, rather than simply as professional knowledge users. Another important aspect is *fostering* the capability of the students, enabling them to engage in critical thinking and engage critically with the world around them. Action research thus differs from other research approaches in satisfying a dual aim; improving the subject of the study and generating knowledge, achieving both *at the same time*. Taking an action research approach therefore allowed me to improve my own practice and gain further knowledge about my practice whilst enabling students to become more effective critical thinkers and more critically conscious citizens.

Educational research through action research does not produce understanding that has universal truth; it is about me in the here and now understanding what I can do to ensure my values and intentions are realized in my teaching situation. If my deliberations produce an understanding which helps me, then I can offer it to others to try. In this sense, action research can produce generalizations about practice, but such generalizations are only part of a wider search for understanding, it is my hope that this qualitative research will enhance understanding and add to the existing body of knowledge in a meaningful way. My application of action research to education arose out of a strong sense of dissatisfaction with technical approaches to curriculum development. Because education is a practical enterprise, the resolution of educational problems can only take place by adopting a course of action and this action cannot exist outside my history, beliefs and values. To help me understand what course of action to take, it was essential to have a research approach that would help illuminate the personal complexities of my own situation. The clear reflective rationality of action research enabled me to do so.

My use of critical-constructivist action research was a carefully considered decision. Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 53) suggest that action research can be differentiated into three clearly distinct types: 'technical', 'practical' and 'emancipatory'. They draw parallels between these types and general modes of inquiry in the social sciences, claiming that they represent the

three knowledge-constitutive interests identified by Habermas (1974). Within these interests, the supposed objectivity of the positivist paradigm actually conceals a 'technical' need for prediction and control. In contrast, interpretative social science has the 'practical' interest of understanding why a situation is as it is and how effective communication is promoted within it, but it works at the level of subjective understandings. Only a reflexive, critical stance which exposes the context within which subjective understandings are formed, will serve the 'emancipatory' interests of people by freeing them from the 'dictates of compulsions of tradition, precedent, habit, coercion, as well as self-deception' (Kemmis and Taggart 1990, p.108). According to Carr and Kemmis (1985), such emancipatory action research is necessarily collaborative. This understanding of reality exposes the reflexivity of our consciousness.

Reflexivity is an explicit self-consciousness about the researcher's social, political and value positions in relation to how these might have influenced the design, execution and interpretation of the theory, data and conclusions (Greenbank 2003). It involves making the research process itself a focus of inquiry, laying open pre-conceptions and becoming aware of situational dynamics in which the researcher and participants are jointly involved in knowledge production. Reflexivity in qualitative research thus requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meaning through the research process and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter whilst conducting research. When faced with the challenge of understanding a situation, we cannot do so without using our existing ideas and beliefs to help us interpret. Understanding thus becomes personal; there is no inevitability of meaning dictated by the facts themselves and, as Freire asserts, there is no neutrality in human practice (Freire 1985). Ongoing reflexivity on the part of the researcher therefore means that we must look critically at what is assumed in any approach that assumes that we can empower somebody else. As Lather (1991, cited in Antonesa et al 2006, p.7) points out, even 'an intendedly liberatory pedagogy might function as part of the technology of surveillance and normalisation'. This research involved much introspection and reflection on my part as I was forced to examine my vision of what ought to be and to what extent I was imparting this to my students. These moments of negotiation in my research are explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Analysis within action research is about possibilities, not certainties. It is not about why things have to be as they are, but rather what possibilities for change lie within a situation.

Action within a complex social world is not static; it is dynamic and forever evolving. It is hoped that this research will continue to evolve and empower me and my students on a journey of lifelong learning; I think action research will help me to contribute in a unique way in the classroom by encouraging my students to take a more active role in the classroom and in society through free discussion and the acceptance of divergent perspectives, and enable me to contribute to the knowledge base in relation to facilitating critical thinking and critical consciousness in the classroom thus leading to professional learning in the workplace.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework or way of thinking draws primarily on the writings of Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene and bell hooks, because I think their works seek to understand the contradictions that limit human beings from living up to their human potential. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks observes that if, as educators, we are to teach not just to share information but to assist in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students, then we should directly and consistently educate students to critically discuss sexism, racism, classism, and cultural respect (1994). This is perhaps why the following quote from Freire resonates with me so deeply:

Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral

(Freire 1985, p.122)

To be silent is to be complicit in the status quo and to educate without a level of criticality is to participate in perpetuating the dominant ideology and structures of power that oppress us. Reflecting on the etymology of the word education, from the Latin *educere* meaning to lead, I don't feel I'm leading my students anywhere if I simply provide information for consumption, memorisation and storage. The goal of education is to help students to realize their deep connection to and responsibility for not only their own individual experience but also for other human beings who share this world and it was the work of Freire, Greene and hooks that encouraged me to create strategies for conscientization in the classroom. Although their work shares many commonalities they have different foci. Freire's writings are driven by a desire for transformation; Maxine Greene explores living in awareness in order to advance social justice and bell hooks focuses on education as a political act and the practice of freedom. However, all of the aforementioned theorists are united in their commitment to critical consciousness and it is this commitment which makes their work, for me, an integral part of this conceptual framework for providing a particular kind of education at third-level; the kind that fosters critical thinking and facilitates critical consciousness in students. My position is that literature has the pedagogical potential to foster critical thinking and critical consciousness in third-level education. In this thesis I will show the relationship between literature, critical thinking and critical consciousness and do so in a way that can be replicated

by other professional practitioners. To that end, I have included in this thesis all 12 tutorials from my critical thinking module, which provided the constructs for exploring this relationship. In the qualitative analysis I have focused on the meaning of the literature employed, I have observed how students respond to the literature and I have scrutinised these observations for meaning. I will endeavour to answer my research question based on what I deduce from these findings.

Although literature may not have been used specifically to foster critical thinking and critical consciousness in the past, as a society, we have always used books as a medium to instil truths about morality, empathy and etiquette; we have done so since Aesop's Fables. We use allegory as an entry point into theory; we have done so since Plato's cave for metaphorical interpretations often shed light in a way that literal and theoretical positions do not, indeed literature has been one of the principal modes of thinking about the world and the human condition since words were first committed to page (Mack 2012). Literature not only represents to us our world but it also shows us ways in which we can change the world or adapt to changes which have already taken place without our realization. Literature's cognitive dimension helps us cope with the current as well as future challenges by changing the way we think about ourselves, our society and those who are excluded from or marginalized within our society (Gerrig 1993). It is this structure of meaning which guides the development of this research.

The position ultimately outlined in this thesis is that literature is an important tool in enabling students to think critically, engage in critical reflection, awaken the imagination and ultimately facilitate critical consciousness. Literature can be used to develop the imagination; to help us entertain ideas we never could have had, to interpret and translate our experiences, to shape our world, and to enlarge our imaginations, 'to take us out of ourselves and return us to ourselves as a changed self and to enlarge our thinking while educating our hearts' (Huck 1987, p.56). This research focuses on accessing new understandings of the world – reading the world (Freire 2005); re-reading the text from our own point of view and using literature circles to enable students to work collaboratively to identify key concepts and analyse content whilst learning from each other, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning and transforming learning through critical reflection. Dewey observes that 'the arts remove the veils that keep the eyes from seeing' and in that sense he added 'the arts are more moral than morality' (1934, p.13). The crucial matter in education then is the transition from relative ignorance to one of intellectual agency and it is my belief that literature has the power to transform as well as inform.

1.6 Key Concepts

All frameworks are based on the identification of key concepts and the relationship among those concepts. The key concepts referred to throughout this thesis include fosterage, critical thinking, empathy and moral understanding, critical consciousness and a critical lens approach. These concepts will be discussed here and the relationship between them delineated to create a unified narrative.

1.6.1 Critical Thinking

A clear understanding of the term critical thinking is a precursor to teaching for its development. Critical thinking has been examined in myriad ways by different scholars. However, it is universally accepted that critical thinking is the process of purposeful thinking that encompasses interpreting and understanding, analysing, drawing inferences, evaluating, explaining, and self-regulation of and pertaining to concepts, issues, questions and problems (Scriven and Paul 2003). The ability to think critically influences one's worldview and approach to life and learning. Ennis offers a definition of critical thinking more closely aligned with the objectives of this research; he defines critical thinking as 'reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to do or believe' (Norris and Ennis 1989, p.1).

Much of the literature in the domain of critical thinking is devoted to lists and taxonomies of what a critical thinker should know and be able to do (Ennis 1989). More recently, however, various authors in this tradition have come to recognize that teaching content and skills is of minor importance if learners do not also develop the dispositions or inclination to look at the world through a critical lens, that is, that the critical person has not only the capacity to seek reasons, truth, and evidence, but also that he or she has the drive to seek them. For instance, Ennis claims that a critical person not only should seek reasons and try to be well informed, but that he or she should have a tendency to do such things (Ennis 1996) which is the crux of critical consciousness. Siegel (1998) criticizes Ennis somewhat for seeing dispositions simply as what animates the skills of critical thinking, because this fails to distinguish sufficiently the critical thinker from critical thinking. For Siegel, a cluster of dispositions (the critical spirit) is more like a deep-seated character trait. Paul also stresses this distinction between skills and dispositions in his distinction between 'weak-sense' and 'strong-sense' critical thinking. For Paul, the 'weak-sense' means that one has learned the skills and can

demonstrate them when asked to do so; the ‘strong-sense’ means that one has incorporated these skills into a way of living in which one’s own assumptions are re-examined and questioned as well. According to Paul, a critical thinker in the ‘strong sense’ has a passionate drive for ‘clarity, accuracy, and fair-mindedness’ (Paul 1994, p.8).

I think it is important that students view the relationship between critical thinking and their beliefs about the world as more than an instrumental one; developing the ability to think critically should also develop the critical being (Barnett 1997) who has a critical viewpoint on the world and who is willing to act on that view. As Facione (1995) observes, effective teaching must include strategies for building intellectual character rather than relying exclusively on strengthening cognitive skills and this is what I have tried to achieve with the help of modern literature focused specifically on social concerns. It is in this sense that I view critical thinking as an integral part of critical consciousness because it aims to teach students to be judgmental, reflective and purposeful.

However, students generally do not reach the levels of critical thinking regarded as both desirable and achievable in third level education. As Deanna Kuhn observes, ‘seldom has there been such widespread agreement about a significant social issue as there is reflected in the view that education is failing in its most central mission—to teach students to think’ (Kuhn 1999). This research aims to develop students’ critical thinking skills through reading and interacting with texts from multiple perspectives. Textbooks tend to reduce myriad perspectives to a simplified, singular viewpoint that implies that it is fact or the truth. The purpose of this research is to engage students in critically analysing and evaluating the validity of diverse perspectives through engaging with modern literature. In support of this research, most educators favour the view that critical thinking skills must be taught in the context of a subject specific matter (Perkins and Salomon 1989). Brown (1997) elaborates on this position, claiming that we cannot expect students to progress in the development of critical thinking unless we give them something to think about, this is what I intend to do with the modern literature employed to facilitate this research; to provide a framework for thinking critically, that is, to supply the conditions which foster growth (Dewey 1934).

Freire emphasises the importance of students’ ability to think critically about their education situation; this way of thinking allows them to ‘recognize connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded’ (Freire 1978, p.38). While traditional Western modes of thinking might be said to be culturally biased and devalue other ways of knowing Richard Paul has developed a conception of critical thinking that regards ‘socio-centrism’ as itself a sign of flawed thinking (Paul 1994). Paul believes

that, because critical thinking allows us to overcome the sway of our egocentric and socio-centric beliefs, it is ‘essential to our role as moral agents and as potential shapers of our own nature and destiny’ (Paul 1994, p.67). For Paul, part of the method of critical thinking involves fostering dialogue, in which thinking from the perspective of others is also relevant to the assessment of truth claims; a hasty imposition of one’s own standards of evidence might result not only in a premature rejection of credible alternative points of view, but might also have the effect of silencing the voices of those who need to be encouraged as much as possible to speak for themselves. In this respect, Paul introduces into the very definition of critical thinking some of the social and contextual factors that Freire has emphasized in his work on critical pedagogy.

The primary preoccupation, then, of critical thinking is to supplant distorted thinking with thinking based upon reliable procedures of inquiry. This research is emancipatory in nature because where our beliefs remain unexamined, we are not free; we act without thinking about why we act, and thus do not exercise control over our own destinies. Critical thinking, as Harvey Siegel states, aims at self-sufficiency, and ‘a self-sufficient person is a liberated person...free from the unwarranted and undesirable control of unjustified beliefs’ (Siegel 1998, p. 58). This research aims to teach students to move beyond passive adherence to a dominant narrative or world view and think autonomously and critically, through the medium of modern literature.

1.6.2 Critical Thinking and Literature

A key element of my research is my understanding of the relationship between critical thinking and critical consciousness. I see critical thinking as a precursor to critical consciousness because students cannot reach awareness without first coming to an understanding. One way that students can reach understanding is through literature, through reading and actively analyzing texts and engaging in discussion. As hooks observes, so much enlightening information only comes through the printed page and a secondary aim of this research is to stem the growing tide of aliteracy (Layne 2009). Maxine Greene writes ‘if we regard curriculum as an undertaking involving continuous interpretation and a conscious search for meanings, we come to see many connections between the grasping of a text and the gaining of multiple perspectives by means of the disciplines’. Transformation can occur through pedagogical practices grounded in literature because literature opens vistas of possibility and experience that draw from and move beyond a student’s lived world and allow students to understand and appreciate multiple perspectives. Explorations through literature can lead to a community inspired by a passion for multiplicity and social change. Maxine Greene outlines the three key elements of her approach in *Releasing the Imagination*; transformative encounters with literature, pedagogical possibilities and creating a community with passion for multiple voices and multiple realities. My approach seeks to build on her work and create a space for such a community to exist at third level.

For Freire, reading combined with contextual critique creates an additional transformative dimension to human understanding. Reading and understanding the words and the world is the first step in liberation and humanisation. He suggested that reading the word and the world uncovers the inhumane situations in which many humans are forced to live. Critically literate people are forced to confront dehumanisation and discover democratic alternatives to transform society. Literature is thus offered as a gateway to understanding in this research. As a discipline, literature aims just as certainly as science does to understand the worlds in which we live and to interpret our own role as participants in the human condition (Skelton, 2003, p. 213). So, from what may initially seem an unlikely pairing, we discover that when critical thinking and literature converge, together they allow a profound gaze into the human condition.

I want my students to understand the literature they are studying as an important lens for understanding the world and for guiding action; above all, I want my students to be critical thinkers. Literature-based reading has an important effect on the development of critical thinking. A reader must recognize patterns within text, fit details into these patterns, then relate them to other texts and remembered experiences. Literature reading facilitates the development of critical thinking in numerous ways because it is a complex process that requires readers to recall, retrieve and reflect on their prior experiences or memories to *construct* meaning of the text rather than passively *receive* a preferred reading:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological meaning’ (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

(Barthes 1977, p.146)

While they are doing so, they need to demonstrate the capacity to differentiate facts from opinions; to understand the literal or implied meanings and the narrator’s tone; to locate details related to the issues discussed; to find out the causal relationship or the connections between the events or actions; to detect an inferential relationship from the details observed; to be perceptive of multiple points of views; to make moral reasoning and fair-grounded judgments; and most of all, to apply what they have learned from this process to other domains or the real world. In a sense, readers are exercising ‘explanation, analysis, synthesis, argumentation, interpretation, evaluation, problem-solving, inference, logical reasoning and application’ (Lazere 1987). All these abilities, in sum, are critical thinking skills. That is why Lazere argues that ‘literature...is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking’ (1987, p. 3). The mental dispositions increasingly emphasized within critical thinking circles parallel the capacities required to study literature: to unify and make connections in one's experience; to follow an extended line of thought through propositional, thematic, or symbolic development; to engage in mature moral reasoning and to form judgments of quality and taste; to be attuned to scepticism and irony; and to be perceptive of ambiguity, relativity of viewpoint, and multiple dimensions of form and meaning (Lazere 1987).

Walsh and Paul (1988) assert that a setting that facilitates the exchange of free dialogue between opposing views is essential to any authentic exercise of critical thinking. The tradition of humanistic and creative literature is principally a tradition of dialogue from Socrates and Greek tragedy to Albert Camus's civilization of dialogue. Every great work of literature engages the reader in critical dialogue with its author, language, and characters, and in the dynamic interaction that Emerson characterized as 'Man Thinking' (sic) rather than 'a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking...the victim of society...the sluggard intellect of this continent' (Emerson, cited in Sacks 2003, p.2).

Moreover, a growing body of research in both English literature and psychology strongly indicates that neither critical thinking nor cognitive development can effectively advance except in dialectical interaction with a substantial body of domain-specific knowledge (Hirsch 1987). Clearly, that particular body of knowledge contained in literature, in its broad sense of humanistic letters, is eminently congenial in its subject matter and, in the qualities of mind it reflects, to the essential traits of critical thinking. Hirsch argues that although nearly every other discipline has come forth to claim that it too has been fostering critical thinking all along, in none of these is the very concept of criticism central as it is in literature (1987). What is called for is perhaps no more than a minimal rethinking of the discipline to bring this tacit component of critical thinking in literary study to the surface and this research hopes to facilitate this shift in perspective by focusing on a critical lens approach to texts.

1.6.3 A Critical Lens Approach

A critical lens approach offers one way in which we can explore the meaning of a text. This is a response to the text based upon a critical knowledge or theory. This technique enables students to evaluate a text from multiple perspectives thus facilitating multiple ways of knowing and creates a horizon of dissensus that undermines the idea of a single, unifying narrative with which to characterise the human experience replacing it with a plurality of perspectives representing the variety of human existence and diversity of human experience.

The critical lenses employed in this research study are *Marxist*, *Feminist*, *Formalist* and *Reader Response*. The *Marxist* lens focuses on analysing the structures of power that perpetuate and reinforce social inequality, the *Feminist* lens focuses on the gendered nature of politics and society, the *Formalist* lens encourages students to focus on structural aspects of the text such as tone and imagery and evaluate the role of structural devices in shaping the text and conveying meaning, and the *Reader Response* lens encourages students to personally respond to the text whilst instilling awareness that our response is always shaped by our socio-economic status, gender, race and other socio-political factors (an outline of the Critical Lens approach used in tutorials may be found in Appendix 3).

The explicit purpose of the critical lens approach is to help students decide which is the most convincing of conflicting readings of a text. For example, a formalist approach might enable students to choose between a reading which sees the dissolution of society in *Lord of the Flies* as being caused by too strict a suppression of the bestial side of man and one which sees it as resulting from too little suppression. We can look to the text and consider what textual evidence there is for the suppression or indulgence of the bestial side of man. Does Ralph suppress Jack when he tries to indulge his bestial side in hunting? Does it appear from the text that an imposition of stricter law and order would have prevented the breakdown? We might use a formalist approach to argue that a Michael Longley poem is of high quality because it contains numerous intricate conceits that are well sustained. Or we might use the same approach to question why there is no tone of condemnation in a poem about killing. The critical lens approach thus fosters critical thinking in students by encouraging them to evaluate a text from different perspectives and arrive at a reasoned judgment. For example, a Marxist approach to *The Great Gatsby* will address the issues of wealth, power and inequality in the novel whereas a feminist approach will focus students' attention on gender expectations and the role women play in the society portrayed in the novel.

The critical lens approach aligns with the goal expressed fully in Section 2.2.4 (p.52), namely, to move students along the continuum of epistemological development from absolute knowing to evaluative knowing. The significance of using a critical lens approach lies in its ability to help students engage at the level of evaluative knowing wherein all opinions are not equal and knowing is understood as a process that entails judgment, evaluation, and argument, as opposed to multiplist knowing wherein there lies no basis for judging the strength of an argument, except possibly its power to persuade (Kuhn 1999). The overarching aim of this approach is to instill in students awareness of the plurality of perspectives that constitute reality, that realities are constructed in socio-historical, political, and economic contexts, and that our reading of the world is always shaped by our positionality.

1.6.4 Empathy and Moral Understanding

To foster empathy in students is to enable students to manifest solidarity and engage meaningfully with others and, I think, literature is a gateway to facilitating this process as students reflect on the experiences of the other and, in doing so, learn to think more critically about the world around them. Gould (1990) considers the defining feature of empathy to be a person's ability to appreciate the feelings of people who are unlike him or her. Holden (1990) views empathy as a form of emotional knowing in which one projects oneself into the physical being of the other while simultaneously retaining detached objectivity. Noddings (1992) further argues that empathy entails the indispensable function of 'cognitive understanding of the other's situation and emotional resonance with the other...Not only must the one caring emotionally resonate with the other, she must move to do so: She must shift herself into the other's perspective and affective life' (p.89). Taylor (2001) uncovered the necessity of emotion to filter out relevant from irrelevant information, thereby functioning as a guide to cognition. In response to adult educators' concerns with the development of people in many dimensions as they relate to learning including the emotional, cognitive, social, psychological, and biological domains (Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler 2000), it has been suggested by Taylor et al that research investigate the emotional dimension of transformational learning. For example, students can learn how to explore their emotions in a literature class. Indeed, one of the outcomes of this research was that literature can, and frequently does, elicit an emotional response from the reader and is instrumental in developing empathy. Moreover, in the psychology of learning, emotions have been studied as a crucial component of reading when constructing meaning (Oatley 1999). Oatley describes

reading as a process whereby the reader becomes emotionally involved in literature through identification with the protagonist, developing sympathy for characters, and activating personal emotionally laden memories that resonate with story themes. That is, readers go through a process of transformation. Consequently, they assimilate the story and the emotions that arise through the language of the literature, which are transformed into the students' feelings. The research of Cupchik, Leonard, Axelrad, and Kalin (1998) reported significant differences in cognitive processes when students interpreted the emotional content of the reading subject matter. Damasio (2000) argues that emotion is involved in all aspects of every cognitive function and is central to consciousness. Moon (2004) further analysed the role of emotion in reflection and learning and suggested that there are a number of different relationships involved, that is, emotion can be the subject matter of learning, can inhibit or facilitate learning, can change the nature of a learning process and can arise as a result of learning. Cognition and emotion are thus intertwined in the act of reading (Zambo and Brem 2004). According to Freire, reading is:

not just to walk on the words, and it is not flying over the words either. Reading is re-writing what we are reading. Reading is to discover the connections between the text and the context of the text, and also how to connect the text/context with my context, the context of the reader.

(Freire 1987, p.11).

Reading thus involves active engagement and connection with the text rather than passive engagement with words on a page.

Furthermore, intellectual empathy is defined by Elder (2004) as one of the essential intellectual traits for the development of critical thinking. Therefore, to realize the objective of developing critical thinkers, we must also develop empathy. To have intellectual empathy is to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others on a routine basis, so as to genuinely understand them. The opposite of intellectual empathy is intellectual self-centredness. When we think from a self-centred perspective, we are unable to understand others' thoughts, feelings and emotions. An explicit aim of this research, then, is to use literature to foster intellectual empathy to facilitate greater understanding of oneself and of the other and to move away from flawed socio-centric thinking (Paul 1994). Literature has the power to make us more human, to help us see the world from inside the skin of persons very different from

ourselves; to live more lives than the one we have; to try on various roles, to develop compassion and insight into the behaviour of ourselves and others through characters so real that the reader lives and suffers and rejoices with them, to show us the past in a way that helps us understand the present, to move us in ways that facts, statistics, and history texts can never do or rarely do.

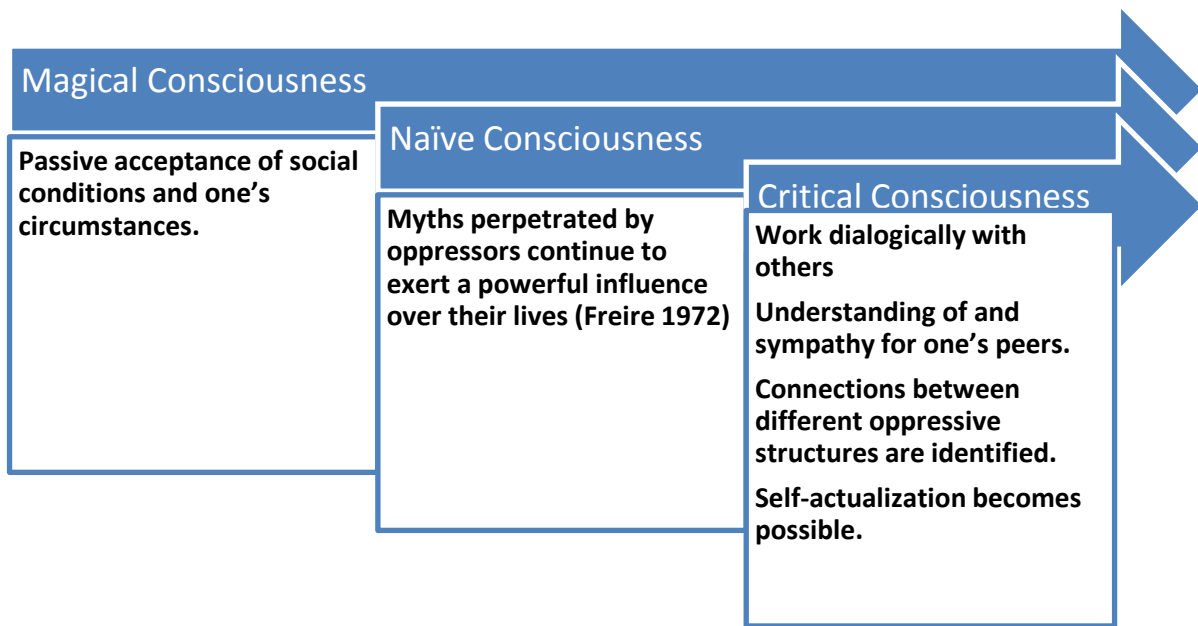
Aristotle was the first to recognize the role of literature as cathartic and indeed literature provides us with an insight into difficult, emotive and sensitive topics as well as a release. For example, the poem *Literacy Class: South Inner City* by Paula Meehan forms part of this research (Appendix 4, Tutorial 6) and is a poignant account of a traumatic personal experience. It articulates the struggle of the victimised through the emotive image of the child in the classroom, humiliated and broken, experiencing pain that is almost too much to bear. It is difficult to read as we intuitively respond to the child, powerless against the forces of oppression, living in a climate of fear under the guise of an ideology that espoused humanity, compassion and forgiveness. The transformative power of this poem, however, lies in the overarching theme of liberation. The three women, bound at first through their communal suffering, together seek to mend the wounds of their past through the act of creation. As poets and gardeners, they explore new territories and plant words on the 'blank fields' or empty pages, releasing their pain and overcoming powerlessness through poetic expression and in doing so they allow for transformative growth, not only for themselves but for the reader. It is, in many ways, a shocking poem and, as Virginia Woolf observed: 'shock is always followed by a desire to explain it' (Woolf, cited in Schulkind 1985, p.14), the poem thus offers a pathway to accessing collective understanding, opening minds and overcoming barriers to transformative action for catharsis through literature is more than just an emotional release, rather it is a release which contributes to our understanding of, and response to, events in the human world (Halliwell 1987).

Literature also has the potential to enhance moral understanding. Indeed, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum claims that some novels are themselves works of moral philosophy. To support this claim, she suggests that philosophy be viewed as the pursuit of understanding, and that ethics be seen as '...the search for a specification of the good life for a human being' (1990, p.142). Texts which deepen and expand comprehension of the good life ought, Nussbaum claims, to be included in moral philosophy. Information affects people's outlook and behaviour, and reading is a source of information. Imaginative literature conveys ideas,

opinions, and information, often with great power. Reading, therefore, can have consequences, leading to not only perspective change but action within the moral and political sphere which is, after all the goal of critical consciousness.

Think of the role that novels by Turgenev (*Fathers and Sons*), Dostoevsky (*The Possessed*), Conrad (*The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes*), Koestler (*Darkness at Noon*), Orwell (*Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four*), and, of course, Solzhenitsyn played in exposing the horrors of anarchism and communism. The novels of Dickens had an indirect influence in creating in society a feeling for regulating and removing social wrongs, calling for necessary reforms. Of *A Passage to India* it has been said that ‘as an account of the social conditions of British India it was powerful enough to have influenced events’ (Posner 1997, p.23). Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* is thought to have incited federal regulation of food processing; and few doubt the effect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the abolitionist cause. These novels have the potential to inspire the commitment to social change that Freire espoused and my commitment is to harness that potential. Such transformative action can be achieved not only by novels but short stories and poems too. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, reflecting on her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, reveals she wrote it to effect change in the treatment of female mental health, specifically the ‘rest cure’ advocated by Weir Mitchell, a famous physician of the time. And it worked; the physician subsequently altered his treatment of neurasthenia upon reading the story (1913). Literature is, then, one way in which we can access the affective dimensions of education which Kincheloe has argued, is a missing element of many models of education and, as Freire has always maintained, education has as much to do with the teachable heart as it does with the mind (Kincheloe 1991).

1.6.5 Critical Consciousness



The stages of critical consciousness are outlined above to provide a framework for understanding its development from a position of passive acceptance in learners toward a critical awareness of their oppressive situation, including an understanding of structures of domination or power, and what they could do to improve it. This move from semi-transitive consciousness to transitive consciousness to critically transitive consciousness does not occur automatically but is grounded in the experiences and daily lives of the participants and requires clearly identified teachers to initiate the process

Freire explains critical consciousness as a socio-political educative tool that engages learners in questioning their socio-historical situation, which he addressed as *reading the world*. The goal of critical consciousness, according to Freire, should be acting as subjects in the creation of a democratic society. Central to Freire's work is the belief that societal and individual liberation are interdependent. The focus of education is on bringing about a new social order by changing the structures of society and liberating the individual from a false consciousness which is unaware of the structural and historical forces which have domesticated them. Reflective thought and action are seen to be dialectically related which, for me, consolidates the relationship between critical thinking and critical consciousness. The teacher is a facilitator who guides and questions instead of providing answers and directions for the learner. Freire described the true function of education as radical conscientization and called for a problem-posing approach to education as opposed to the more traditional banking form

which involves stripping phenomena of their spatio-temporal context, thus preventing the oppressed from obtaining a truer understanding of the wider context of contingency to which the phenomenon in question relates (Freire 1970).

The life experience of the learner and a critical analysis of this experience is at the centre of conscientization. As learners interrogate their own experience so they are able to reinterpret it and understand the societal context in which they find themselves. This understanding leads the learner to action, which again becomes experience to be reflected upon. Therefore, life experience is the source of learners' knowledge which liberates them and provides them with the tools for changing the society in which they live. Freire concludes that the educational system mirrors the oppressive society as a whole; students are oppressed by being completely denied the opportunity to think for themselves, and therefore denied the opportunity to grow and progress through the levels of critical consciousness. Freire urges a mode of critical consciousness that necessitates a critical focus on the reality of our world, on what we face and hear and feel each day. He declares that the radical must act on emerging perceptions, thereby helping to create necessary and desirable changes for human beings, and, as with Greene (1997), to move beyond what has already been. Freire's passionate commitment to *conscientizacao* thus strengthens the curriculum and consciousness philosophy of Maxine Greene.

One could argue that conditions are indeed favourable for an awakening of critical awareness and that Freire was tapping into the zeitgeist when he argued for a movement towards critical consciousness. The socio-historical context in which Freire was writing was characterised by social unrest and the questioning of hegemonic structures of power, most notably, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement. I would argue that within my socio-historical context, given the current economic and cultural climate, recession, mass emigration and disillusionment with the Catholic Church that once offered hope, never have we been in more need of a paradigm shift towards a greater understanding of our selves and society. In fact, Maxine Greene highlights the very significance of art experiences at moments of pervasive unease and uncertainty in society surrounding education:

Concerned more with a loss of expectation and a sense of futility than actual fear of catastrophe, I turn towards encounters with the arts to activate imagination which, as Emily Dickinson wrote, may "light the slow fuse of possibility." The sense of possibility, of what

might be, what ought to be, what is not yet-seems to be essential in moving the young to learn to learn. It may be nurtured, not only through art education as ordinarily understood, but also through aesthetic education, moving people by means of participation, to awaken to the wonders of authentic appreciation.

(Greene 1995, p.17)

Greene uses a poem, *In Those Years* by Adrienne Rich because it suggests the climate that has given rise to an argument for the arts in education. Moreover, the reader who can activate his imagination may be able to participate in the reality the poem creates:

In these
years, people will say, we lost track
of the meaning of *we*, of *you*
we found ourselves
reduced to *I*
and the whole thing became
silly, ironic, terrible;
we were trying to lead a personal life
and, yes, that was the only life
we could bear witness to

But the great dark birds of history screamed and plunged
into our personal weather
They were headed somewhere else but their beaks and pinions drove
along the shore, through the rags of fog
where we stood, saying *I*

(Rich, cited in Greene 1995, p.34)

To open spaces for learning is, according to Greene, to give learners a sense of absence, of open questions lacking answers, of darkness unexplained. If people respond to all of this with a blank disinterest, they are, often without realizing it, acquiescing in the given, the fixed, the unchangeable. They may have given up their 'personal weather' and simply bowed to what is 'natural' and given. This acquiescence is what Freire refers to as a 'semi-transitive state' (Freire 1973) and to move to the state of critical consciousness what is required, asserts Greene, is the imagination. Literature has therefore a crucial role to play in society and a good society foregrounds its value. This is aptly illustrated by Nussbaum:

That 'terrified' gay teenager needs, and deserves, equal respect, and a sphere of liberty equal to that enjoyed by others. Before he is likely to get these things, however, something else also has to be present in our world: the capacity to imagine his experience and that of other gay and lesbian citizens. Disgust relies on moral obtuseness. It is possible to view another human

being as a slimy slug or a piece of revolting trash only if one has never made a serious good-faith attempt to see the world through that person's eyes or to experience that person's feelings. Disgust imputes to the other a subhuman nature. How, by contrast, do we ever become able to see one another as human? Only through the exercise of imagination.

(2010, p.17)

To cultivate the capacity of imagination and the exercise of imagination, you read a novel, a play, a short story, or a poem. In other words, the narrative imagination supports the democratic and moral imagination. The nature of moral consciousness has been a central human concern for as long as humanity has existed. However, its comprehensive understanding and the implementation of this understanding into educational practices have become defining needs, as we recognize our interdependence and the complex problems we face in this age of turbulent transition to a global civilization (Marsella, 1998; Annan, 2002). Mature moral consciousness, central to negotiating the challenges of the 21st century, is understood as a way of being, an optimal path of human development, which exhibits a wholesome engagement with meaning and positive change in one's social world and is characterized by ever-expanding circles of agency in the service of humanity. This moral consciousness was poignantly described by Freire as critical consciousness:

Men relate to their world in a critical way. And in the act of critical perception, men discover their own temporality. As men emerge from time, discover temporality and free themselves from 'today', their relationships with the world become impregnated with consequence. As men create, re-create, and decide, historical epochs begin to take shape. Whether or not men can perceive the epochal themes and above all, how they act upon the reality within which these themes are generated, will largely determine their humanization or dehumanization, their affirmation as subjects or their reduction as objects. If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change.

(1973, p.3)

Critical consciousness thus stems from authentic moral motivation that underlies and empowers those who have achieved it. It involves elements of critical thinking, an understanding of causality, a grasp of the processes of history, and the ability to translate thought into action. It is my hope that the framework outlined here will incorporate these

elements and guide students along a pathway to critical consciousness.

I would consider most of my students to be at the stage of naïve consciousness and I considered it my goal to facilitate their movement along the spectrum towards critical consciousness. This awakening of critical awareness is at the heart of a liberatory education and moving students along a continuum from absolutist knowing towards the level of contextual knowing (Baxter-Magolda 1990) is necessary for students to be able to engage in critical consciousness. This research explores literature as one way of facilitating this transition, for as Maxine Greene observes, literature can move people to critical awareness, to a sense of moral agency and to a conscious engagement with the world which she argues, must be central to any curriculum that is constructed today. Maxine Greene continually shows how the arts can disrupt one's consciousness and make people aware of possibilities, how teachers can use the arts in their curriculum to provoke students to break through the limits of the conventional and the taken-for-granted and see things anew (1997). I think that literature has thus great power to transform as well as inform.

1.7 Relationship between Critical Thinking, Reflection and Consciousness

In enabling those who are marginalized to become more fully human, it is essential to facilitate not only action but also critical reflection on the consequences of the action. Facilitating critical reflection is an essential element of educational practice. It contributes not only to learning but to what Freire calls the 'act of knowing' (1973, p.43). The contingent nature of knowledge remains invisible without reflection and the language of teaching separates content from method, feelings from thoughts, objectivity from subjectivity, teaching from learning, and, ultimately, teachers from students. Conscientization is a process by which a fragmented understanding of reality is changed into a critical understanding. Developing critical thinking is part of the conscientization process. Freire explains that in the case of consciousness alone, our reading is naïve, whereas consciousness combined with conscientization gradually makes us more critical (1973).

This helps explain why non-literate communities, having suffered injustice, attribute the forces that oppress them to destiny, fate or God. Only in the struggle for survival do they begin to overcome the naïve and magical perception of the phenomenon. Conscientization changes one's perception of the facts, based on a critical understanding of them. The person who has

reached conscientization is capable of clearly perceiving hunger as more than just not eating, but as the manifestation of a political, economic, and social reality of deep injustice. If that person believes in God and prays, his or her prayer will certainly focus on asking for the strength to fight against the deprivation of dignity to which he or she is subjected. The person who has reached conscientization and is also a believer in God sees God as a presence in history, but not one that makes history in lieu of men and women's actions.

The person who has reached conscientization is able to connect facts and problems and to understand the connections between hunger and food production, food production and agrarian reform, agrarian reform and reactions against it, hunger and economic policy, hunger and violence, hunger as violence, hunger and the conscious vote for progressive politicians and parties, hunger and voting against reactionary politicians and parties, whose discourse may be deceptively progressive. The person who has reached conscientization has a different understanding of history and of his or her role in it. He or she refuses to become stagnant, but moves and mobilizes to change the world. He or she knows that it is possible to change the world, but impossible without the mobilization of the dominated. He or she knows very well that victory over misery and hunger is a political struggle for the deep transformation of society's structures (Freire 1996). This is the goal of an empowering education.

Using literature to facilitate critical thinking and empower people is not new. A women's group working on women's health issues in India (Ravindran 1997) uses the following fable to facilitate discussion among poor rural women regarding injustice they often experience. It is a fable with animal characters, Sister Goose and Uncle Fox:

Sister Goose offends Uncle Fox, who is rich and powerful. She is dragged to the police station, where Inspector Fox files several charges against her that she hardly understands. She is summoned to the magistrate's court and despite all her arguments to prove her innocence, Magistrate Fox pronounces her guilty. Angered by the injustice done to her, Sister Goose decides to appeal to higher courts for justice. She has little money and she mortgages all her valuables with Moneylender Fox, who willingly lends her money at an exorbitant rate of interest. Judge Fox of the high court accuses Sister Goose of antisocial tendencies and actions, and declares that people like her are a threat to the very fabric of society. She is punished with rigorous imprisonment for two years.

(Ravindran 1997)

The fable is read to the participants in a play-reading style with different people lending voices to different characters. The story may appear simplistic, but it normally strikes a familiar chord with poor rural women. They narrate similar episodes from their lives. The participants analyse the story and conclude that the poor often do not realize what they are up against until they chance to confront the system. When a lone victim naïvely seeks justice, as Sister Goose did, he/she finds himself/herself overpowered and beaten. The mistake Sister Goose made was that she fought her battle alone. If she had had the support of others like her, the outcome would probably have been different. This narrative clearly illustrates the use of literature for pedagogical instruction and the value of such narratives.

What is new about my study is the harnessing of the pedagogical potential of literature to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness in educational practice at third level. Critical thinking and critical consciousness differ in their primary focus. If we construe one as useful and the other as valuable, then we will see that one is concerned with the practicality of knowledge, while the other is valuable for moral and ethical living (Rall 2002). We obviously want our students to be capable of succeeding inside classrooms and outside classrooms. By teaching both critical thinking and critical consciousness, we develop not only critical scholars but critical citizens. There is an implicit hope herein that enhanced critical thinking can have a general humanising effect across all social groups and classes. By helping to make people more critical in thought and action, educators can help to free learners to see the world as it is and to act accordingly; critical education can thus increase freedom and enlarge the scope of human possibilities (Burbules and Berk 1999).

Whilst the overarching structure of this thesis may diverge from the well-trodden path, it is nevertheless a journey that shares the goal of all who are engaged in the ongoing process of intellectual discovery; to contribute something new to the existing body of knowledge. The concepts explored herein traverse the domains of literature, education and philosophy, weaving them together in the search for a unified narrative while cognisant of what Lyotard termed the 'incredulity towards metanarratives' that constitutes the postmodern condition (1979). In a world where totality and absolute truth have been replaced by a plurality of perspectives, this research does not offer a panacea; rather it explores a way of knowing.

1.8 Research Outline

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that has outlined the objectives of this research; the methodology used to carry out the research study; the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis; the key concepts which provide a context for observing the findings of this study, and established the possibilities for the role of literature in facilitating critical thinking and critical consciousness in third level students.

Chapter 2 examines the literature pertaining to my understanding of critical thinking, critical pedagogy and critical consciousness. It focuses primarily on the work of Freire, Greene and hooks whilst also outlining commonalities in the work of Foucault, Habermas and Freire. This chapter seeks to position my work within the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1 whilst identifying what my research can contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed to carry out this study, it evaluates other models of research and provides a rationale for the choice of Critical-Constructivist Action Research. The chapter outlines my epistemological perspective, the role of reflexivity in this research, the research design and the research methods used in data collection. It also highlights the ethical issues pertaining to this research, the limitations inherent in this research and the steps taken to overcome them.

Chapter 4 analyses and discusses the findings of this research study. It includes data gathered throughout the term from the tutorials and literature circles, and the data gathered at the end of the term from the critical reviews and interviews. The data is described, analysed and interpreted within the context of the literature review and the stated research objectives. This chapter also includes reflections on student growth as well as reflections on my own practice as a critically reflexive practitioner.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of this research, and discusses how the research has confirmed the role of modern literature in fostering critical thinking and developing critical consciousness in third level students. It considers the limitations of this research and outlines recommendations moving forward in the pursuit of best practice.

1.9 Conclusion

For me, the key implications of this research are embodied in the following three elements; the value of teaching for thinking, the contribution such teaching can make to education, and the possibilities this research contains for teaching tolerance and understanding. The value of teaching for thinking and educating for critical consciousness lies in the cultivation of character, the development of a moral sense of identity, and the fostering of responsibility and agency in the student. It is about creating a space for our students outside the competing demands of the knowledge economy. Every piece of research seeks to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge and the stalactites omnipresent in the foreground of the above picture highlight an important aspect of my research approach, namely that small, gradual but cumulative changes over time lead to transformative results. For me the contribution this research makes is the centralising of a humane, intellectually driven and culturally oriented model of education that seeks to counter the encroachment of a technocratic curriculum with a system of fosterage that implies a person at its centre rather than a code of rules. A key aspect of fostering critical consciousness in students is to enable them to contribute effectively in the development of a more equitable and tolerant society. Social life is reflexive, that is, it has the capacity to change as our knowledge and thinking changes, thus fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness through literature has the capacity to exert an influence on social life and effect change. Therefore, I think this thesis has a particular relevance to professional practice in contemporary education.

The introduction has outlined the background and objectives of this research study, the approach taken and the key concepts that inform this approach. This thesis examines the role of literature in enabling students to think for themselves and progress through the levels of critical consciousness. Literature is presented throughout this thesis as a gateway to understanding and critical awareness. Exposing students to literature in the form of novels, poetry and drama that deal with topics related to course content can be a useful method of instruction and at the same time meet pedagogical desires to place students in an environment theoretically rich for learning and questioning the society in which they live. The concepts under consideration in courses take on greater meaning and students develop insights and

empathy. Students have a common reference point with their peers and may become more motivated to learn by studying together in order to master the material. Additionally, the students may broaden their perspectives and better understand the lives of others who are different from themselves and their own family experiences.

My goal is not to create one idealised curriculum or one true representation of social class. But I do wish to show how every representation leaves something out, how every struggle to tell a story is also a struggle to displace a story. Most importantly, I hope to engage my students in processes that will lead them to understand and analyse the nature of social class today, to understand that they live the lives they do because other people have to clean their classrooms, grow their food, build their houses, and sew their clothes under conditions they do not control for rewards that increasingly do not allow them to meet their own basic needs. I hope to show that identities of race and gender always intersect with class, that unlikely coalitions across identity categories have succeeded in the past, but only when people honestly acknowledged the things that divided them and created actual practices and structures of inclusion rather than just abstract calls for unity.

And, as Maxine Greene observes, imagination is above all what makes this empathy possible; ‘it is what enables us to cross the empty space between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” for many years.....of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities’ (1995, p.13). In releasing the pedagogical potential of modern literature, we release the imagination and teach our students to think, reflect and act whilst imagining the world that could be created by such change. The key finding of this research is that modern literature can provide a gateway to understanding, through which students can learn to think critically and become more critically conscious citizens. Greene views literature as a culture’s *secular scripture*, an inexhaustible source of multiple perspectives on the human condition and ways to live more fully in the world, with a special capacity to arouse *wide-awakeness* or living in awareness. My research supports the study of imaginative literature as one way in which we can assist in our students’ existential quest to understand and construct a meaningful life.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire

W.B. Yeats

2.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to establish the relationship between literature and critical thinking as a theoretical framework for facilitating critical thinking and critical consciousness at third-level. This research thus seeks to resolve the question of how to teach students critical thinking by offering literature as a gateway into theory and deeper learning through which students can learn how to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information, that is, to think critically whilst developing as critically conscious citizens. This framework is underpinned primarily by the theoretical perspectives espoused by Maxine Greene, Paulo Freire and bell hooks, and aligned with the interpretivist paradigm.

Ultimately, this framework endeavours to show that the domains of the theorists outlined share many commonalities. They all focus on learners' self-reflection and they are all rooted in constructivist theory. This research aims to appropriate the key concepts of these theoretical perspectives and extend the existing knowledge base to include learning through literature as a keystone of critical thinking and imaginative transformation. This chapter offers an interpretation and synthesis of existing research to provide a context for my work and lay the foundations for my own study. This thesis will examine the literature on critical thinking and critical consciousness as it pertains to educational objectives and transformational learning. Ultimately, this thesis hopes to establish a place for literature in facilitating critical thinking and imaginative transformation within third level curricula.

2.2 Critical Thinking

This section moves beyond the definition of critical thinking outlined in the introduction; it draws on the professional literature surrounding the discourse on critical thinking and how critical thinking is facilitated with particular reference to Bloom's taxonomy and the Capacities for Imaginative Learning outlined by Maxine Greene, it discusses the motives for teaching critical thinking, and addresses the relationship between knowledge and application. Brookfield's (1987) work describes critical thinking in relation to pedagogical issues and how the development of critical thinking is facilitated in the classroom. He asserts that 'phrases such as critical thinking ...are exhortatory, heady and conveniently vague' (p.11) and that 'trying to force people to analyse crucially the assumptions under which they have been thinking and living is likely to serve no function other than intimidating them to the point where resistance builds up against the process' (p.11). He advocates processes of 'trying to awaken, prompt, nurture and encourage this process' (p.11). Meyers (1986) also focuses on how to enable learners to think critically with a specific focus on young college students which is particularly relevant to this research study. Like Brookfield, Meyers suggests that critical thinking should be fostered through engagement of student's interests and motivation in a facilitatory environment. This is what I have endeavoured to do with this literature based approach, using literature to engage students rather than forcing students to change their mode of thinking can help students find their way along the continuum from absolute knowing to contextual knowing without fear or uncertainty.

This approach aligns with the mixed approach outlined by Ennis (1989). Ennis has classified the approaches to instruction in critical thinking into four types. These are the general, infusion, immersion and mixed approaches. General approaches have the primary purpose of teaching critical thinking skills and are not taught within a content area. General approaches to teaching critical thinking are those which might be taught as an add-on to a course in school. Infusion is deep, thoughtful subject matter instruction in which students are explicitly taught critical thinking skills and are given a content and context in which to use them. Immersion differs from the infusion approach, in that, while students are offered the same rich content and context, they are not explicitly taught critical thinking principles. The mixed approach, favored by Ennis, consists of a combination of the general approach with either the infusion or the immersion approach. In this approach, students are involved in subject-specific critical thinking instruction and are explicitly taught critical thinking principles. My

approach is akin to the infusion approach in that it requires deep, thoughtful engagement with the subject matter. However, I would argue that my approach is most similar to the mixed approach outlined by Ennis as the modern literature used in this study encompasses a wide range of social issues that require students to read not only the text but to read the world surrounding the text (Freire 2005).

The importance of critical thinking to the academic, professional and personal growth of students was acknowledged nearly a century ago with Dewey's (1916, p. 188) assertion that students do not begin to think until they have engaged in the process of 'wrestling with the conditions of the problem first hand' , and 'seeking and finding their own way out'. Four decades after Dewey (1916), Bloom and Krathwohl (1956, p, 14) offered educators a way to classify and communicate the way students 'find their way out'. Bloom's taxonomy was developed to clarify the task of writing educational objectives and student learning outcomes. Bloom, Madeus, and Hastings (1981, p. 5) describe education as:

A process which changes the learners. Given this view, we expect each program, course and unit of education to bring about some significant change or changes in the students. Students should be different at the end of a unit from what they were before it. Students who have completed a unit of education should be different from those who have not had it.

My objective to enhance student performance in critical thinking builds upon this premise. Echoing Bloom's (1964) principle, my objective is that 'each unit of education will bring about some significant change or changes in the student'. While Bloom's and Krathwohl's (1956) foundational research proved useful in formalising and establishing the process for a critical thinking module, I found more applicable conceptual support in my approach to building the structure for a critical thinking programme in Anderson's and Krathwohl's (2001) revised version of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy which is more compatible with describing student learning as an ongoing and active process of learning and thus more closely aligned with the emergent, iterative approach of action research.

2.2.1 Maxine Greene: Critical Thinking and Aesthetic Education

The Lincoln Institute, where Maxine Greene was philosopher-in-residence for over 25 years and whose philosophy greatly informs this research, has, for many years, explored ways of weaving aesthetic education into the curriculum to foster critical thinking. Drawing on the history of philosophy and practice in aesthetic education, the Institute developed what are called the capacities for imaginative learning. These are:

- Noticing Deeply
- Embodying
- Questioning
- Identifying Patterns
- Making connections
- Exhibiting Empathy
- Living with Ambiguity
- Creating Meaning
- Taking Action
- Reflecting/Assessing

(Lincoln Center Institute 2011)

This approach emphasizes the use of different kinds of entry points to intellectual exploration which aligns with my goal of using literature as an entry point to theory or gateway to a deeper understanding of course material. The first three capacities, noticing deeply, embodying and asking questions are precursors for the other six but, unlike Bloom's Taxonomy they develop in a non-linear fashion and the combination of these three capacities in recursive ways enhances all of them and creates a scaffolding effect. This scaffolding effect is something I have attempted to achieve with the literature circles. When exploring a novel for example, the literature circles provide a forum for noticing and questioning and allow scaffolding to occur in a meaningful way that promotes collective and individual inquiry. These capacities may be aligned with the interpretation stages of Bloom's taxonomy, however, the key to imaginative learning occurs in the 'noticing deeply' which is, for Maxine Greene, the 'doorway for imagination'. It is the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise (Greene 1995).

The second group of capacities includes making connections, seeing patterns and exhibiting empathy, all of which are crucial to developing critical thinking and engaging in perspective transformation. This transformation cannot occur without the use of the imagination. Indeed, Greene reminds us of the importance of the imagination if empathy is to exist. She speaks of the imagination as the cognitive capacity that enables us to give credence to alternative realities, to grasp another's world. Furthermore, for Greene, a specific kind of imagination growing out of empathy – the social imagination – is 'the capacity of inventing visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society' (Greene 1995, p.35). These capacities may be aligned with the analysis and application stages of Bloom's taxonomy, however, they extend further to include the role of the imagination and the importance of empathy in the learning process.

The third group of capacities includes living with ambiguity, creating meaning and taking action. Within this group of capacities, recursiveness and scaffolding also occur. Students might notice deeply and ask questions over and over again as they see patterns, make connections and exhibit empathy. This can also occur as students live with the ambiguity that arises when they attempt to create meaning and take action. The kind of actions student take may be personal, social or political, or the creation of a new idea. Ultimately it is an imaginative experience or, as Dewey describes it, 'it is what happens when varied materials of sense quality, emotion and meaning come together in a union that makes a new birth in the world' (Dewey 1934, p.41).

The last of the capacities for imaginative learning is reflecting/ assessing. This is described as the most recursive of all, having applicability throughout the imaginative process. Reflection and assessment occur constantly in the first group of capacities as one notices deeply, asks questions, embodies and goes through the process again. The same is true for making connections, seeing patterns and exhibiting empathy. And, in order to create meaning and take action, one has to reflect, assess and do so again. Again, the capacities incorporate the key elements of Bloom's taxonomy, synthesis and evaluation. However, the capacities for imaginative learning extend the framework to focus on the role of the imagination in developing critical thinking and the central place of aesthetic education in fostering learning across the curriculum. Like Greene, I think that engaging with literature is an activity that releases students for informed encounters and fosters the ability to think critically, reflect deeply and engage with multiple perspectives. These capacities also play a crucial role in

preparing students for critical democratic participation, that is, critical consciousness. Understanding subject matter knowledge means learning to think critically about what we believe we know and to be able to imagine alternative explanations. Living in a democracy to me means making good judgments through critical thinking. Thinking critically is thus important in grasping life opportunities and central to the quality of life. The goal of this research is to articulate a curricular pathway for a new model of embedding literature and establishing connections with content that foster the imagination and critical thinking no matter what the subject being covered.

2.2.2 bell hooks: Critical Thinking and Education as the Practice of Freedom

Profoundly influenced by the work of Freire, bell hooks espouses a pedagogy focused on freedom, self-actualization, and student empowerment, that is, an engaged pedagogy. An engaged pedagogy stands in opposition to that perpetrated by the dominant culture, the banking system of education referred to by Freire where “memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date” following set agendas (hooks, 1994, p.5). Such a system dictates an atmosphere of boredom, disinterest and apathy. As a result, boundaries are created, which neither students nor teachers are allowed to transgress. In this context, only the teacher is responsible for classroom dynamics and is held accountable to the larger institutional structures. Recognizing the political nature of teaching and learning, hooks’ engaged pedagogy requires the interrogation of culture, oppression, and committed action. Early in life, hooks came to the knowledge that education was fundamental to liberation. This is a central theme of Freire’s work, and provided an almost instant spark of connection when hooks first encountered Freire’s writings. Because of the close affinity between hooks’ work and that of Freire, many parallels exist between hooks’ pedagogy as described in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) and Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks responds to Freire and relates his ideas to the experiences and situations that are central to her work - feminist theory and practice, and critical consciousness with respect to race, class, and their respective ‘isms’ (1994, p.5). The title *Teaching to Transgress* refers to transgressing the boundaries that these concepts have placed on theory, classroom discourse, teaching, and learning.

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) and *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003) hooks posits that traditional modes of instruction reflect societal norms of hierarchical structures that value white male epistemological assumptions and realities. For instance, in educational settings when ‘controversial’ subjects are considered, it is often in the form of a “panel” discussion where the ‘experts’ on either side of an issue make a presentation and discussion among themselves with very little time left for conversation with and among the assigned learners. Even times of ‘question and answer’ are postured as a novice asking the expert his or her opinion and very little real possibility of change is assumed in the ensuing exchange. Moreover, sources of knowledge are ranked in accordance of validity with the ‘personal’, either in terms of experience or anecdotal, often devalued to the point of derision. These configurations of proclamation and direct instructional methodology reinforce the Subject/Object relationship and constitute what Freire refers to as a form of oppressive dehumanization.

hooks employs Freire’s theory as the foundation for her work of engaged pedagogy and envisions an engaged pedagogy as more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. She asserts that engaged pedagogy emphasizes wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. Equivalently, students should be seen as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge. Furthermore, sharing personal narratives in academic discussions of abstract constructs is a very helpful approach employed in engaged pedagogy. It allows students to claim a knowledge base from which to speak and fosters critical thinking as well. It shows how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. But hooks stresses the fact that both the engaged teacher and her students should be willing to share their stories and not the students alone. In the practice of engaged pedagogy, both the teacher and the students must be able to critically listen and hear one another respectfully. The learning process becomes then one that engages everyone. This way the privileged voice of authority will be deconstructed by collective critical practice. Emphasizing the place of the experience of oppression, which can be either of victimization or of resistance, in the learning process, hooks argues that experience can be a way to know and can inform how we know what we know.

Like Maxine Greene, bell hooks considers the role of imagination as central to the ability to see things from perspectives other than our own. While most critical thinking curricula

have little to say about imagination, even denigrating it as irrational, for hooks it figures essentially to “illuminate those spaces not covered by data, facts, and proven information” (hooks 2009,p.59). Imagination, she notes, carries us beyond routine and static possibilities; it synthesizes things that were previously disconnected, creating new pathways and new possibilities. Recalling how in the 1960s African Americans began the ‘black is beautiful’ movement to combat the continual onslaught of negative representations of blackness, hooks sees imagination as the lynchpin of the traditions of critical thinking and critical theory, representing ‘one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited groups can and douse’ (p.61). Since what we cannot imagine we cannot bring into being, stripped of the capacity to imagine, people remain muted in their social positions, unable to challenge what she refers to as the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal biases” (p.105) of the dominant culture. It is through acts of imagination that the ideological hegemony of dominant groups may be disturbed, and the minds of marginalized and exploited groups decolonized.

The work of bell hooks particularly resonates with me and the goals of this research because hooks believes that one of the most important issues for English teachers is to build critical thinking skills through reading. At first, when she began to let students know she reads a book a day, she worried it might be "an immodest sharing." But, on the other hand, she wanted to impress upon her students that reading promotes growth beyond the consuming of a text. She urges them to see that "the thoughts and ideas that engage you when you think critically can be something that you go back to throughout your lifetime’ (1994, p.34). It is this profound connection between critical thinking and literature that I hope to forge in my students. hooks observes that it is this connection that makes the study of literature ‘incredibly different from any other field of study. Students come into an English class and as they grapple with reading and ideas, life-transforming information takes place there. I think that so often when you talk to people about their high school and college years, English teachers come up as the people who deeply affected them because books were not just read, but were discussed in a manner that engaged transformative learning. I think that's the real issue for the future, that radical openness of being willing to read and inquire and talk’ (1994, p.35). Literature thus has the potential to transform as well as inform and it this emancipatory possibility which informs my research approach.

In the chapter of *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) that deals with stories, hooks points out that

the sharing of narratives engages students in critical thinking by exposing them to the think descriptions of personal realities, preparing them to hear points of view previously inconceivable. The multidimensional character of stories she claims, requires for its full comprehension a nuanced understanding of a host of personal information that pertains to the story-teller. Connecting to what Lars Lovlie (1997) has written about the “epiphanic power” of moral examples, hooks makes the point that stories provide the framework for a contextual awareness that ‘engage[s] the complexities of conflict and paradox’ (hooks 2009, p.52). Far from being passive, the creative acts of deep listening establishes “a ritual of communion that opens our minds and hearts,” (p.51) helping individuals to relate to and understand each other better. Critical thinking, on this account, serves to engender a continual process of negotiation and translation between a series of individual and cultural positions. This can lead to perspective transformation for students and the development of critical consciousness which can decolonize minds and imaginations, and ‘can be and is a powerful site for intervention, challenge, and change’ (2006, p.3).

Like Freire, hooks is passionately committed to praxis, the active manifestation of learning as social justice oriented change in the world. She enthusiastically writes about the intertwined relationships of learning and empowerment. hooks also extends Freire’s work by exploring the importance of love and joy in learning, even in classroom environments. The students should evolve as independent critical thinkers. In this regard, the classroom should be an exciting place, where instituted boundaries are transgressed. The setup is flexible and non-conventional. For example, students and teachers sit in circles where they can see each other; this is one of the aspects of literature circles which is particularly useful as such a set-up helps make sustained conversation among students and between students and teacher possible. Agendas are flexible to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction for the purpose of deeper and more engaged learning and problem solving. This flexibility is, I think, essential when trying to develop critical consciousness in students as they evaluate problems from different perspectives and learn to understand their positionality and look beyond it. For hooks, learning in the classroom extends beyond learning a content knowledge to a process of deliberately nurturing affective inclinations, emotions, and passions that surface out during intense dialogues. The classroom that hooks advocates is that which challenges patriarchy and transcends the bourgeois biases of class, colour, and gender and thus moves toward humanization of individuals equally and collectively. In such a classroom, mono-cultural instruction is transformed into more inquiry-based exploratory experiences delineating

trajectories of ethnic growth, asserting a mentality of equity and opening up spaces for participation and inclusiveness.

In discussing the importance of conversation and dialogue, for example, she highlights how these allow individuals to consider and reconsider their own positions and values, particularly as they take place across “the very different locations within the hierarchies of race, class, and gender,” (hooks 2009, p.38). Dialogue and conversation potentially enable individuals to transcend boundaries and address social issues from diverse and multiple perspectives, so that ‘we also identify what we share that is common to us’ p.38). Thus, instead of the highly dialectical and adversarial approach epitomized in the Socratic method, and often employed in critical thinking pedagogy, the idea of dialogue hooks appeals to creates not scepticism but trusting communities, the achievement of “solidarity across differences.” (p.40) Classroom relationships built on trust, hooks reminds us, figure centrally in any critical thinking curriculum, creating safe spaces for students to engage in open discussions over controversial and sensitive issues.

In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) hooks, reflecting on her reading of Michel Foucault, observes the way power as domination reproduces itself in different locations, employing similar apparatuses, strategies and mechanisms of control (1992, p. 115). Foucault describes domination in terms of ‘relations of power’ as part of an effort to challenge the assumption that ‘power is a system of domination which controls everything’ and leaves little room for the possibility of freedom. Foucault emphatically states that in all relations of power there is necessarily the possibility of resistance and, pre-empting hooks, invites the critical thinker to search those places where agency can be found. In relation to power in the classroom hooks argues that while authority in learning environments is necessary to a certain degree, the current interpretation of authority; how authority is played out in practice, does little to foster an empowering experience for students and teachers. Hooks is aware of the necessity of authority, and claims that, as long as an individual professor is the only person who evaluates the work of students and grades, our status in the classroom is never that of equals. However this does not mean that professors must be authoritarian. It does mean that as teachers we must always be willing to acknowledge our power in the classroom. We should not engage in false notions that all our voices carry equal weight. The problem arises when the value of authority is emphasized at the expense of the teacher’s own realization that there is much to be learned from the students they teach, and at the expense of

an engaged pedagogical relationship between teachers and students. Hooks argues that the current interpretation of the value of authority leaves teachers in a position where they feel the need to always be right, that they are, or have to be, the only source of knowledge in the classroom. This practice can leave students insecure about the value of their own assertions or contributions to the material being studied, and, as a result, promote passivity on the part of the student.

For hooks learning is most powerful when it liberates. Education as the practice of freedom is for hooks 'that quality of education that is enabling and empowering and that allows us to grow' (1994). She adds 'the heart of education as a practice of freedom is to promote growth. It's very much an act of love, in that sense of love as something that promotes our spiritual and mental growth' (1994). Pedagogy as freedom is an approach to teaching that builds community through an engaged voice by communicating in a compelling manner the hope of transcendence. We can, through our choice of instructional methodologies and the tone with which we communicate with students, create environments for learning that perpetuate injustice and those that dismantle it. hooks, in *Teaching Community* (2003), seeks to manifest a 'classroom that is life sustaining' (2003, p.5). It is a place where everyone present feels a sense of responsibility for contributing to the community of learning. For hooks, this authentic endeavour generates a kinship of understanding, an intimacy of community that does not ignore differences yet refuses to allow them to keep us apart. The engaged voice is not a fixed voice of absolutes but rather one of invitation to ponder and explore. The teacher is not the 'subject' and the learner the 'object'. hooks reminds us that 'it is possible to learn liberating ideas in a context that was established to socialize us to accept domination, to accept one's place'. Hence it is absolutely essential that we discover ways to teach that propel us toward liberation in both practice and purpose as we 'find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of dominations' (2003, P.8).

This focus on the emancipatory possibility of education parallels Freire's pedagogy of liberation and conception of cultural action. It also shares commonalities with Habermas, evident in his preoccupation with a theory of communicative action, moral development, and emancipatory reason. Although hooks acknowledges the limitations of an education system not yet free from the reins of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy she remains hopeful that the emancipatory possibilities inherent in education will lead to decolonization as we

learn to critically interrogate our locations and the identities and allegiances that inform our lives, grow in critical awareness and acknowledge the truth of our reality which hooks argues is necessary for personal and political growth (2006, p. 248) and embrace education as the practice of freedom:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.
(hooks, 1994, p.207).

2.2.3 Critical Thinking and Epistemological Development

A common criticism of the literature surrounding critical thinking is that it does not consider epistemological development to be an issue either in a student's ability to think critically or in pedagogy (Moon 2005). Moon suggests broadening our approach to incorporate the influence of the student's conception of knowledge in her ability to think critically and viewing the capacity for critical thinking as a developmental process. This concept of epistemological development is illustrated in the work of Baxter-Magolda (1992) who identifies four stages of development. The first stage is 'absolute knowing' wherein knowledge is seen as certain or absolute and formal learning is a matter of seeking and absorbing the knowledge of those who know. The second stage is 'transitional knowing' in which there are doubts about the certainty of knowledge, a sense that there is both partial certainty and partial uncertainty as well as absolute knowledge. The third stage is 'independent knowing' when learners recognize the uncertainty of knowledge and deal with this by taking the position that everyone has a right to his or her beliefs. The final stage is that of 'contextual knowing' in which knowledge is seen as constructed, and understood in relation to the effective deployment of evidence that best fits a given context.

Baxter-Magolda's research is consolidated by the developmental model of critical thinking outlined by Kuhn (1998). Kuhn's model moves from an absolutist epistemology to a multiplist epistemological stance which becomes prevalent at adolescence and recognizes the uncertainty that exists in relation to knowledge. In contrast to Baxter-Magolda's theory of development which outlines a progression, albeit haphazard at times, Kuhn argues that only a minority progress to an evaluative epistemology, in which all opinions are not equal and knowing is understood as a process that entails judgment, evaluation, and argument. According to Kuhn, people often remain multiplists for life and conceive of no basis for judging the strength of an argument, except possibly its power to persuade. The core dimension underlying the progression in epistemological understanding is the coordination of the subjective and objective components of knowing. The absolutist sees knowledge in largely objective terms. The multiplist becomes aware of the subjective component of knowing but to such an extent that it overpowers any objective standard that would provide a basis for comparison or evaluation of opinions. Only the evaluator is successful in integrating and coordinating the two, by acknowledging uncertainty without forsaking evaluation.

Baxter-Magolda's relativist position is supported by Kember (2001) who argues that 'critical thinking is only possible if relativism is recognized' (p.97), therefore, students need to be able to recognize relativism in order fully to engage with critical thinking. The fully developed capacity to think critically relies on an understanding of knowledge as constructed and related to its context (relativistic) and it is not possible if knowledge is viewed only in an absolute manner. For Kuhn, epistemological understanding is central to critical thinking because critical thinking by definition involves reflecting on what is known and how that knowledge is justified. If knowledge is objective as the absolutist conceives or entirely subjective as the multiplist conceives then critical thinking is redundant. Kuhn and Baxter-Magolda are united in their belief that critical thinking in higher education is actually a reference to epistemological development and not just to the cognitive process. It is a means of representing the need to shift learners from absolute conceptions of knowledge towards contextual or evaluative knowing. The research of Kuhn (1998) and Baxter-Magolda (1992) signifies the need to consider critical thinking in relation to the progression of learning and thinking of students and find ways of working with students on the development of critical thinking. This research has exerted a significant influence on my practice and on my research as I have strived to find ways to move students along the continuum from absolute to

evaluative knowing. As Moon (2005) observes, we cannot expect first year students to understand what to do if we ask for critical thinking, it is therefore important to integrate activities in the classroom that will foster the development of epistemological understanding and consequently, critical thinking. I have endeavored to foster this understanding through the use of modern, accessible literature that I think students will respond to and asking them to evaluate the literature from multiple perspectives using a critical lens approach. As they progress, so the fostering activities can progress, for example I can ask students to choose the most appropriate lens with which to view a particular text and provide justification for their choice. For now though, as the students engaged in this research were in their first term of first year, moving from an absolutist position to an evaluative position that asks them to engage with the text from multiple perspectives is enough.

2.3 Critical Pedagogy

Critical theory asserts that Western democracies are unequal societies among race, class, and economic levels that are maintained through the dissemination of dominant ideology (Brookfield 2005). The chief function of the ideology is to convince all participants that it is for the good of society, even if in reality it is a mechanism for control. Max Horkheimer described a theory as critical insofar as it seeks 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (1982, p.244). The point of theory is to generate change that will not just interpret, but change the world. In this way, Horkheimer argues, critical theory is transformative and thus proves a worthy starting point for any emancipatory action. This research seeks to create critical awareness among students of the structures that enslave them, unknowingly or not, and is particularly influenced by the critical theory framework outlined by Habermas and Foucault and the critical pedagogical framework detailed by Freire.

Critical Pedagogy gives primary importance to raising people's consciousness of the social and political contradictions in which they find themselves, particularly when their circumstances are characterised by domination and disempowerment. It emphasises the importance of being self-reflective, of being able to challenge dominant views and articulate counter views. It is this consciousness-raising activity that I hoped to create in my tutorials and the work of Foucault, Habermas and Freire provided the scaffolding for this activity. Foucault's writing on power relations informs the work of Freire and Habermas and I have looked at each theorist in this section before drawing together the communalities inherent in their approaches.

2.3.1 Habermas and Emancipatory Knowledge

For Habermas, critical theory is ultimately a form of hermeneutics, that is, knowledge via interpretation to understand the meaning of human texts and symbolic expressions. Habermas's approach is characterised by an orientation towards self-reflection and emancipation which aligns with the goals of my research. Habermas sees critical theory as a way to recognize the *telos* of society and to normatively evaluate society's current state as it relates to the fulfilment of that *telos*. For Habermas, this *telos* is the end of coercion and the attainment of autonomy through reason, the end of alienation through a consensual harmony

of interests, and the end of injustice and poverty through the rational administration of justice (Braaten 1991). Central to Habermasian critical theory is the concept of the ideal speech situation which defines the conditions under which rational agents would be able to find a consensus by using the exchange of arguments (Habermas 1974). These conditions are; nobody can be excluded from the discourse, everybody has the same chance to contribute, participants must mean what they say, and the communication must be free of internal and external constraints. Literature provides an ideal platform for students to question existing assumptions, values and perspectives, as learning which is threatening to the self, for example new attitudes or perspectives, is more easily assimilated when external threats are at a minimum, such threats are minimised in the safety of the classroom. While Habermas's ideal speech situation is oft dismissed as a utopian ideal, it does highlight the genuinely communicative use of language to attain common goals, in this case to facilitate critical reflection and perspective transformation, a mode of utopian thinking that 'refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order' (Greene 1995, p. 71).

Habermas conceives of his project as an attempt to develop a theory of society with a practical intention: the self-emancipation of people from domination. For the purpose of this project I will use Marcuse's definition of domination which seems to me consistent with Habermas's position (notwithstanding his use of the male personal pronoun):

Domination is in effect whenever the individual's goals and purposes and the means of striving for and attaining them are prescribed to him and performed by him as something prescribed. Domination can be exercised by men, by nature, by things – it can also be internal, exercised by the individual on himself [sic], and appear in the form of autonomy.

(1971, p. 2)

Habermas's critical theory aims to further the self-understanding of social groups capable of transforming society. He examines the way the significance of the epistemic subject, and the capacity for reflection by the subject on his or her activities, has been gradually eclipsed. Today, he argues, if emancipation from domination is to remain a project of humanity, it is essential to counter this tendency and to reaffirm the necessity of self-reflection for self-understanding. In his theory of cognitive interests, as developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Habermas argues that all speech is oriented to the idea of a genuine

consensus which is rarely realized. The analysis of consensus, he claims, shows this notion to involve a normative dimension, which is formalised in the concept of the aforementioned 'ideal speech situation'. A consensus attained in this situation, referred to as a 'rational consensus' is, in Habermas's opinion, the ultimate criterion of the truth of a statement or of the correctness of norms (Held 1980). The teleological conclusion of this argument is that the very structure of speech is held to involve the anticipation of a form of life in which truth, freedom and justice are possible. On Habermas's account, the critical theory of society makes this its starting point. Critical theory is, therefore, grounded in a normative standard that is not arbitrary, but 'inherent in the very structure of social action and language' (Habermas 1971). It is Habermas's contention that in every communicative situation in which a consensus is established under coercion or under other similar types of condition, we are likely to confronting instances of systematically distorted communication (1971). This is, in his view, the contemporary foundation of ideology. In this understanding, ideology is 'those belief systems which can maintain their legitimacy despite the fact that they could not be validated if subjected to rational discourse' (Schroyer 1973). The process of emancipation, then, entails the transcendence of such systems of distorted communication. This process, in turn, requires engaging in critical reflection and criticism. It is only through reflection that domination, in its many forms, can be unmasked. It is of the utmost importance, then, to foster a path of critical reflection in the classroom if we are to adequately prepare our students for the road ahead.

A reconstruction of communicative competence is thus needed for self-reflection and criticism. Human beings' capacity for freedom is dependent, according to Habermas, on cumulative learning in theoretical and practical activity. Through such learning, knowledge is generated that makes possible the technical mastery of the natural and social world and the organisation and alteration of social relations, that is, the expansion of the sphere of practice (Held 1980). Habermas analyses practice as a complex consisting of two key parts – work (instrumental action) and interaction (communicative interaction). He also sometimes refers to a third type of action - strategic action - which is both instrumental and bound to a context of interaction. My objective is to incorporate this framework into the action research study outlined in this thesis; work being the rational decision procedures employed in the critical review and interaction provided in the literature circles guided by the principle of 'discursive will-formation' wherein students can 'confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish

their opinions' (1971, p. 53). The discursive will formation creates an intersubjective ethics that decentres the ego. Habermas calls it communicative action that leads to a competence in the domains of public and private life such that the two are not alienated from each other and attain an ethical unity in truth prevailing over error, signified in the saying: 'let the unforced force of the best argument prevail in the marketplace of ideas' (1971, p. 57). This discursive will formation resulted in the creation of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987). Essentially, Habermas created a counterfactual world where there are no longer masters and slaves, but only subject/subject or self/other relations where an equality of individuals pertains. There is the ability to empathise with the other and meet his/her needs and he/she meets your needs such that a participatory democracy can be an attainable end. So, the possibilities lie within language itself as instruments to enlighten the engaged parties. When language makes people transparent to each other, there no longer will felt to be the need to deceive in order to dominate. This resonates with Freire's concept of language as a tool that is capable of cultivating either dominance or freedom. Indeed, dialogue enables people to name the world and, therefore, to impel social transformation and liberation, as Freire observes: 'to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it' (1998, p.69). Such communicative power as outlined by Habermas would end what Freire called the 'culture of silence' in which the socially dispossessed internalize the negative images of themselves created and propagated by the oppressor. It is my hope that this research will encourage students to communicate freely and engage critically whilst enabling them to make meaningful connections between theory and practice and develop greater self-understanding.

I want this research project to awaken a sense of agency in my students and a desire for emancipation from the forces of domination within and without. Emancipation for Habermas is an ongoing struggle for reflective understanding. Critical thinking is viewed in this sense as emancipatory, facilitating the self-emancipation of people from structures of domination such that humanity may create its own history in a self-aware manner. In order to investigate capacities for the eradication of barriers to self-reflection and communication Habermas aimed to elaborate both a general model of individual development and model of the development of forms of social integration. He hoped to establish an integrated framework for the analysis of communicative competence and, thus, for the analysis of the conditions and possibilities of individual and social development. It is only in such a framework, he believes, that systematic answers can be given to questions concerning human capabilities.

Besides the technical interest in controlling objects in the environment and the practical interest in furthering mutual, intersubjective understanding, human beings have, Habermas argues, an emancipatory interest in securing freedom from domination and conditions of distorted communication. This interest is rooted in their capacity to act rationally, to self-consciously reason, and to make decisions in light of available knowledge, rules and needs (Held 1980). The human species self-formative process is, potentially, a process in which history is made with will and consciousness. But once it is acknowledged that history embodies domination, repression and the ideological framing of action, it becomes apparent that self-understanding is often limited by unacknowledged conditions. If the rational capabilities of human beings are to be released, a particular type of knowledge becomes necessary to guide the elucidation and abolition of these conditions. The form of knowledge most appropriate for this is self-knowledge generated through self-reflection:

Self-reflection brings to consciousness those determinates of a self-formative process of cultivation and self-formation (Bildung) which ideologically determine a contemporary practice and conception of the world...It leads to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner rich in consequences,; analytic insights intervene in life.

(Habermas 1974, p. 123)

By bringing to consciousness the determinants of the self-formative process, structures of distortion can be revealed, isolated, and, under the proper, specifiable conditions, eradicated (Held 1980). The impetus to achieve self-understanding and autonomy of action is identified with the emancipatory interest in knowledge; it is in human beings' ability to reflect on their own development and, as a consequence, to act with greater consciousness and autonomy that the basis of the emancipatory interest can be uncovered. The interest is an interest in reason, in human beings' capacity to be self-reflective and self-determining:

In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a moment of emancipation. Reason is at the same time subject to the interest in reason. We can say that it obeys an emancipatory cognitive interest, which aims at the pursuit of reflection.

(Habermas 1974, p.198)

Through self-reflection, individuals can become aware of forces which have exerted a hitherto unacknowledged influence over them. Thus, the act of knowing coincides with the act which achieves the goal of the interest, namely emancipation. Furthermore, it is only through the act of reflection on the self-formative process of the species that human beings, Habermas claims, can become aware of the connection between knowledge and interest. The true unity of knowledge and interest is only achieved in the emancipatory interest, 'it is in accomplishing self-reflection that reason grasps itself as interested' (Habermas 1971, p. 211).

Habermasian theory has been instrumental in developing a theoretical framework for this research. The growth of self-knowledge occurs at the individual level and Habermas in particular has generalised this paradigm to the collective enterprise of the growth of knowledge in the social or human sciences. Revealing the underlying social forces or causes of non-liberation requires criticism grounded in the emancipatory interest. At the social level, bringing previously unknown causal forces that hinder greater self-understanding at a social level, into consciousness will take the form of a critique of ideologies. Bringing previously hidden social forces into consciousness transforms them into matters of deliberation; that is, they are converted into reasons, and are thereby made not to function causally (Habermas 1971). It is important to note, however, that the bringing of previously hidden causes in to consciousness does not necessarily neutralise or destroy the original cause, neither is that my objective. Rather, the purpose of teaching students to think critically, reflect and evaluate competing perspectives is to create greater awareness, to foster critical consciousness, that is, the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society.

2.3.2 Foucault on Education and Power

Critical theory is concerned with how schools, as generators of an historically specific discourse, operate as sites in which certain validations and exclusions are generated. Foucault is specifically concerned with the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects, that is, the objectification of the subject by processes of classification and division. Much of Freire's philosophy of education is also based on an analysis and critique of student alienation or objectification. This deformation of the subject into an object in all spheres of everyday life has been the crucial phenomenon of critical theory and is the crux of

the imperative for revolutionary transformation. The key concepts in Foucault's exploration of the problem of the Subject are those of power and knowledge, or more accurately, that of power-knowledge, which Foucault believes to be a single, inseparable configuration of ideas and practices that constitute a discourse. Discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot as well as what can be said. These exclusions and inclusions stand in antagonistic relationship to other discourses, other possible meanings, other claims, rights, and positions. This is Foucault's principle of discontinuity:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

(Foucault 1988, p.101)

Michael Apple argues that the study of educational knowledge is a study in ideology, the investigation of what is considered legitimate knowledge by specific social groups and classes, in specific institutions, at specific historical moments (Apple 1990). Control of knowledge is a form of oppression, that is, only certain groups have access to certain knowledge. Those in positions of power are responsible for the assumptions that underlie the selection and organization of knowledge in society. The task for the educator is to discover the patterns and distributions of power that influence how a society selects, classifies, transmits, and evaluates the knowledge it considers to be public. Foucault's work includes the concept of hegemony through consent, a wide range of institutions, and the media and culture. Much of the hegemony occurs through social practices and beliefs which neither the oppressors nor the oppressed are aware of, thus the necessity for the raising of the consciousness of the people as a prerequisite for true freedom. An important objective of critical research therefore, is to create awareness and understanding of the various forms of social domination, so that people can act to eliminate them.

For Foucault, knowledge is inextricably linked with power. Foucault saw fields of knowledge as types of 'discourse' which consist of theories, attitudes, practices and habits. People internalise these discourses, which means that they generally do not have to be coerced into thinking and acting in socially acceptable ways. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault shows how nineteenth century discourses on deviancy led to the creation of specific forms of social control, such as the 'panopticon'. For Foucault, the key feature of the panopticon was that prisoners could never know when they were being watched so they were more likely to

behave according to the rules and then internalise those rules. He also argued that psychiatry developed as a means of containment and control of the mentally abnormal, and that the nineteenth-century development of statistics contributed to governmental knowledge and control of populations. For Foucault, social knowledge is always politically charged, a claim which he shares with Freire.

For the purpose of this research, I want to focus on the implications for contemporary educational practices of a model of education as a 'block of capacity-communication-power'. Over a comparatively short time, modern schooling has socialised students into accepting and tolerating steadily increasing degrees of subjection. These institutions form what Foucault called 'blocks of capacity-communication-power'. These 'regulated and concerted systems' fuse together the human capacity to manipulate words, things and people, adjusting abilities and inculcating behaviour via 'regulated communications' and 'power processes' and in the process structuring how teaching and learning takes place. What distinguishes educational institutions from prisons, armies and hospitals is that the former emphasise 'communication' above 'capacity' and 'power' (Foucault 1982, p. 218-219).

Universities, like schools, are multifaceted amalgamations of economic, political, judicial and epistemological relations of power, which still reflect the exclusionary and inclusionary binaries of their origins (Deacon 2006). Within university walls, students are expected to absorb socially desirable models of behaviour, and Foucault predicted that universities will become increasingly important politically as way of reinforcing the status quo. At the heart of the practice of teaching, Foucault argues, is the act of surveillance. This essential element of hierarchical observation is present in every teaching environment, and those who exercise power in the school are subjected by its functions just as much as those over whom power is exercised. What particularly intrigued Foucault was the problem of knowing how, in the typical pedagogical relationship, to avoid the effects of domination (Foucault 1987, p.129). Whilst domination can be avoided or minimised by counteracting practices of power and by practices of liberty, relations of power are inextricably intertwined with pedagogical effects of guilt, obligation and verification, and assumptions about degrees of ignorance, dependence on others, legitimate compulsion, and achievement. Foucault sheds more light on pedagogical power relationships by contrasting the two most prominent forms of instruction: the lecture and the seminar (Foucault 1971, p.199). He argues that the lecture, that apparently non-reciprocal and unequal power relationship, is more honest and less devious than the seminar

about the relationships of power which inevitably invest each of them.

A lecture which is tentative about its truth-claims and which exposes itself to criticism might neutralise power relations by rendering them more visible; whereas the ostensible freedom and reciprocity of the seminar may disguise power relations to the extent that students uncritically absorb what is only the informed opinion of the teacher. On this basis, Foucault felt that seminars, whilst necessary, might be better suited for training in methods than for the development of free and critical thinking. This is of significant relevance to me because it is in the tutorials that I hoped to facilitate critical thinking and develop critical consciousness in my students. I consider the tutorials to be better suited to this goal than lectures as it is my experience thus far that students contribute more effectively in smaller group settings. Also, the use of literature circles creates a community of understanding that promotes equal participation rather than domination by a few.

The application of Foucauldian analysis to education offers one way of unmasking the politics that underlie some of the apparent neutrality of educational reform for, as Freire asserts, education is never a neutral process. However, I would argue that tutorial politics depend heavily on personal qualities, amicable interaction and firm commitments and, whilst they may not be well-suited to every learner, students are more likely to critically engage in a tutorial capacity than in lectures which often rely on students uncritically absorbing information in a rote-learning capacity. Tutorials foster dialogue and creating a collaborative learning environment and ongoing dialogue (inside and outside of the classroom) is an essential component of my praxis. Furthermore, Gore (1998) identified and documented several techniques of power (surveillance, normalization regulation) across four different pedagogical sites and concluded that these techniques, premised on inequalities of one form or another, are relatively continuous and present in all sites, regardless of content, level and methodology. Grounded in the work of Freire (1970), I attempted to create a classroom environment where the polarity of the teacher-student contradiction is reconciled. Within this model, the teacher maintains a hierarchical role in facilitating the learning process while engaging in mutual exchange and dialogue.

2.3.3 Freire's Critical Pedagogy Framework

The heart of Freire's liberatory literacy framework is found in his problem posing, dialogical approach. Freire (2003) problematized what he termed "a banking concept of education," in which teachers simply deposited information into the minds of students (p. 72). In this sense, he argued that typical classroom teachers viewed their students as blank slates and as such, they felt their job was to "deposit" rather than "draw out" knowledge. This approach ignores students' prior knowledge, skills, and interests and constitutes a form of oppressive dehumanization, according to Freire. Oppression was evidenced in an educational setting by marginalized people's tendency to subjugate their own experiences to the privileged responses that held value in the eyes of the dominant class that governed the educational system (Freire, 2003). Freire disliked the way in which the banking model positions learners as passive because this reinforces dominant ideologies and social structures. Similarly, he objected to the separation of teacher and student roles, which he felt reinforced conventional power relations, and he argued that the relationship should be much more democratic and reciprocal. This is what I have endeavoured to achieve in the participatory action approach used in tutorials.

Some teachers, in Freire's view, represented the cultural hegemony of the dominant society. The hegemonic dominance of the privileged class's way of being, thinking, and doing was seen as a problem that Freire was seeking to resolve through a problem-posing methodology, which "is the antithesis of the technocrat's 'problem solving' stance" (Goulet, 2002, p. ix). In other words, teachers are taught not to profess to possess answers, but to look within the students and their lived experiences to pose problems for the students to solve. Another key aspect of this approach is that educators should have the utmost deference to and respect for the existential situation of their students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire stresses the need for a new kind of education for oppressed peoples which would not be merely an imposition of the coloniser's culture but which would allow people to see how their individual circumstances were in fact a product of that culture. This could lead to a form of 'praxis' in which people's knowledge of their situation develops in tandem with their actions within it and upon it, as they seek to change it (Hamilton 2002, p.18).

The problem-posing method, according to Freire, allows teachers to move their students toward *consientização*—a critical consciousness which is not only a goal, but also a method

which serves to humanize both the oppressed and the oppressor by providing both with a more democratic and liberating method of exchanging knowledge. Students who possess this critical consciousness possess the ability to not only “read the word,” but they can also “read the world” through a critical lens (Freire, 1998). This critical education, in which the learner becomes an active participant in the appropriation of knowledge in relation to lived experience is the key to Freire’s pedagogical framework.

2.3.4 Communalities in the work of Freire, Habermas and Foucault

Despite significant differences in foci, Freire and Habermas may both be viewed as working within a shared critical theory of the dialogical and developmental subject. Their approach presumes a dialogical subject because it rejects a monological theory of the subject, that is, one based on an abstract, metaphysical “I” that individualistically “knows” the world. Instead, they locate selfhood and identity formation in contexts of intersubjective communication. Their strategy is developmental because it argues that identity formation has, despite variable cultural contents, potential for growth that can be fully realized only under optimal conditions of socialization. In relation to Habermas, such concerns are most apparent in his preoccupation with a theory of communicative action, moral development, and emancipatory reason. In the case of Freire, similar concerns can be observed in terms of what has come to be called his pedagogy of liberation and conception of cultural action (Morrow and Torres, 2002).

Morrow and Torres (2002) offer a comparison of the shared approaches of Freire and Habermas based on the identification of four shared themes: a meta-theoretical framework oriented towards emancipatory possibilities; a theory of society as a system of social and cultural reproduction that identifies contradictions that create possibilities for transformation; a critical social psychological understanding of the social subject as constructed in relation to universal developmental possibilities that are thwarted by historical forms of domination but potentially challenged through critique and practice; and a conception of individual and collective learning that is suggestive of strategies for rethinking the relations between education and transformative change (p. 15).

Ultimately, the work of Freire, Habermas and Foucault share many commonalities, namely they are all committed to the emancipatory potential of education, to the extent that education

is about more than the transmission of content and culture but involves an interest in fostering independence and autonomy. As a critical theory of education, the emancipatory interest of critical pedagogies focuses on the analysis of oppressive structures, practices, and theories. Like Freire, Habermas and Foucault assert that there can be no individual emancipation without wider societal transformation, and emancipation can be brought about if people gain an adequate insight into the power relations that constitute their situation. Although the Foucault–Habermas debate concerning whether Foucault's ideas of power analytics or Jürgen Habermas's ideas of "communicative rationality" provide a better critique of the nature of *power* within society continues, ultimately they are united in their commitment to resisting dominant ideologies to liberate thinking from hegemonic structures. Foucault's (1980) concept of governmentality explains how we are produced by power even as we resist it; power and resistance are mutually constituted. Reflection and disruption are linked by Habermas in relation to reflection as a form of self-construction that emancipated as it releases the subject from dysfunctional belief (Habermas, cited in Mezirow 2000). Finally, Freire's (1970) emphasis on dialogue as a way of learning and knowing emerges as significant in the development of reflection and critical thinking at third level. Ultimately, these critical theorists argue that emancipation through education is possible but this has to involve the active participation and critical forces of the oppressed themselves, an 'education of equals' based on 'an active, dialogical, critical and criticism-stimulating method' (Freire, 1974, p.45) and as Freire outlines, this has to occur in a learner-centred and grounded way through dialogic pedagogy and critical transitivity.

2.4 Freire and Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. Freire stresses the suppression of critical consciousness as the defining characteristic of oppression (1973), therefore, whilst the concept is most often applied to oppressed communities, it is, in fact, relevant to anyone living in a state of false consciousness. In *Education and Critical Consciousness*, Freire describes the development of critical consciousness as a five-part model. The first stage is a 'semi-transitive state', in which individuals are pre-occupied entirely with survival. The next stage in the model of progression is that of 'transitivity of consciousness', which at this point individuals are able to reflect on themselves and their

roles and responsibilities, thus allowing them to dialogue with others and with society at large. In communicating with others, people are initially in the third stage, a state of 'naïve transitivity', which can be most commonly characterized by an oversimplification of problems, both personal and social. If an individual does progress further in the model, he or she will reach the level of 'critical transitivity', which results in a more in-depth analysis of problems and an increase in agency. Agency in this case refers to the state of being in action. It is worth noting, however, that this progression is not automatic in any sense and may in fact never be achieved. If an individual does not progress beyond this level, the result will be that of moving into a 'fanaticized consciousness'; a reactionary state wrought by sectarianism, a narrow-minded adherence to a particular viewpoint. In the final stage, an individual ultimately moves into the state of 'critical consciousness'; the awakening of critical awareness resulting from educational efforts and favourable historical conditions (Freire 1973, p.237).

This process is the heart of liberatory education. The stages of critical consciousness are aligned with the stages of epistemological development required to facilitate critical thinking, namely students move along a continuum towards the level of contextual knowing (Baxter-Magolda 1990) or an evaluative epistemology (Kuhn 1997) which is necessary for students to be able to engage in critical consciousness. Like the progression outlined by Freire, not all students progress to the final stage with many students remaining at the level of multiplist knowing or what Freire would call a naïve transitivity and some not progressing beyond absolutist knowing.

Critical consciousness differs from 'consciousness-raising' in that the latter may involve transmission of preselected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness—in particular, awareness of oppression, being an object of others' will rather than a self-determining subject. The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world (Goldbard 2006). Critical consciousness thus functions as a socio-political educative tool that engages learners in questioning the nature of their historical and social situation, which Freire addressed as 'reading the world' (1987, p.13). The goal of critical consciousness, according to Freire, should be acting as subjects in the creation of democratic society. Freire has moved others to identify their own commitments, to take reflective action on the grounds of their own lived situations in the

human worlds they share. Through practice, people can acquire a critical awareness of their own condition and the aim of this research is to consolidate the framework espoused by Freire, utilising his concept of reading the world to enable students to engage with literature as a means of interpreting the world around them and employ literature as a tool for fostering critical reflection and identity formation. For example, in an interview with literacy specialist David Reis, Freire carefully spells out how his position on literacy leads to critical consciousness which leads to liberation. By discovering the truth and overcoming the oppression of cultural silence, people become superior to the myths which have chained them, overcome irrationality, and make their own liberation (Mackie 1981).

Freire insisted that if teachers help students from oppressed communities read the word but do not also teach them to read the world, students might become literate in a technical sense but will remain passive objects of history rather than active subjects. According to Freire 'subjects' are those who know and act, 'objects' are those who are known and acted upon (Freire 1994). Critical literacy, then, is learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations. Freire's concept of critical literacy supports Habermas's rejection of a technocratic consciousness:

From the beginning, we rejected the hypothesis of a purely mechanistic literacy program and considered the problem of teaching adults how to read in relation to the awakening of their consciousness. We wished to design a project in which we would attempt to move from naïveté to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading. We wanted a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men as its subjects rather than as patient.

(Freire 1973, p.38)

Greene reflects on the difficulty of this transition to critical literacy and the enduring appeal of the familiar as we struggle to break free:

Still, caught in the turmoil of interrogation, in what Buber called the pain, I am likely to feel the pull of my old search for certainty. I find myself now and then yearning after the laws and norms and formulations, even though I know how many of them were constructed in the interests of those in power. Their appeal to me was due to my marginality: I wanted so much to be accepted in the great world of wood-panelled libraries, authoritative intellectuals, sophisticated urban cafes....

(Greene 1995 p.114)

In times of political and economic uncertainty, many of us yearn for predictability and the assurances of a standard driven educational system. On an individual level, the desire for change is often at odds with the desire for acceptance. Returning to her affinity for literature, Greene (1988) notes that American literature is replete with works that explore the corrupting influences of many of the traditional forces associated with America; the irony is that these works are the core of the traditional American literature canon, speaking against the very system that schools tacitly support. Through these paradoxes, Greene recognizes that schools in the U.S. practice ‘the long tradition of socialization through schooling’ (p. 56). She also uncovers the disconnection between the artistic expression that students study and the broader messages of that socialization, that is, ideal students in the traditional context can simultaneously explain the themes addressing the corrupted American Dream in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) while also filling their transcripts with all the right data in order to go to the best colleges to land the best jobs make the most money, and fulfil the American Dream, the same American Dream challenged by the novels studied in those advanced classes that bolster their efforts to succeed within the system of schooling that leads to a promising career.

Inherent in the quest for certainty in education is the risk of falling prey to the fatalism Freire (1994) warns against and supplanting the opportunities Fitzgerald offers students and teachers to confront the assumptions of American ideals through critical considerations of the text that prompts the students to reread and rewrite their lives:

One of the violences perpetuated by illiteracy is the suffocation of the consciousness and the expressiveness of men and women who are forbidden from reading and writing, thus limiting their capacity to write about their reading of the world so they can rethink about their original reading of it.

(Freire, 2005, p. 2)

Teachers assign novels in order to address standards that will be assessed on tests used to hold schools accountable, while students passively complete assignments in order to fulfil the bank of coursework in order to graduate as gateways to careers. In a perverse cycle, *The Great Gatsby* serves as a conduit for students to enter the exact system about which Fitzgerald sought to warn his readers.

Effective socialisation demands an affirmative approach to the culture white male scholars tend to create, one that has:

functioned in relation to women, the lower classes, and some white races analogously to the way in which imperialism functioned for colonized people. At worst, it denied the values of all others and imposed itself as an absolute standard... As a set of techniques, literacy has often silenced persons and disempowered them. Our obligation today is to find ways of enabling the young to find their voices, to open their spaces, to reclaim their histories in all their variety and discontinuity. Attention has to be paid to those on the margins....

(Freire 1970, p.120)

Critical literacy therefore requires of us, as educators, a commitment to challenging the discourse of conformity and developing an engaged pedagogy. It offers a way for students to create bridges between what they read and the world, to apprehend subjectivity and objectivity in their dialectical relationship and, in doing so, develop critical consciousness.

The pedagogy of bell hooks is heavily influenced by the writings of Freire and her theory of engaged pedagogy further informs this research. For hooks, literacy is essential to the future of the feminist movement because the lack of reading, writing and critical skills serves to exclude many women and men from feminist consciousness. Not only that, it excludes many from the political process and the labour market. She regards literacy as more than being able to read and write, however. For hooks, it allows people, particularly those who are marginalized and discriminated against in society to acquire a critical consciousness. Freire's concept of critical consciousness has been particularly important to her work. She also promotes a notion of practice in a similar way to Freire, that is, a combination of reflection and action, and regards her notion of 'engaged pedagogy' as one which requires practice on the part of not only students but also teachers. Teachers must be aware of themselves as practitioners and as human beings if they wish to teach students in a non-threatening, anti-discriminatory way. Self-actualisation should be the goal of the teacher as well as the students. Although much of her criticism of the educational world is aimed at the traditional educationalist and what Freire refers to as the banking concept of education (1970), bell hooks is also very aware that much of the ideology of modern society arises from the mass media. She is particularly scathing about the power and the effect of television on the American public:

No one, no matter how intelligent and skilful at critical thinking, is protected against the subliminal suggestions that imprint themselves on our unconscious brain if we are watching hours and hours of television.

(hooks 2003, p.11).

Reflecting on students' fear of alternative ways of thinking, hooks maintains that it is vital to challenge all the misinformation that is constantly directed at people and poses as objective unbiased knowledge. Hooks sees this as an essential educational task and refers in her writing to the importance of the 'decolonisation of ways of knowing' (hooks 2003, p.3) if we are to create new and exciting representations of the world. hooks makes the point that what is needed are mass-based political movements calling on citizens to uphold democracy and the rights of everyone to be educated, to work on behalf of ending domination in all of its forms – to work for justice, changing the educational system so that schooling is not the site where students are indoctrinated to support what she refers to as 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (p.7) or any ideology, but rather where they learn to open their minds, to engage in rigorous study and to think critically.

According to bell hooks, communication and literacy (the ability to read, write, and think critically) are crucial to developing healthy communities and relationships that are not marred by race, class, or gender inequalities. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks investigated the classroom as a source of constraint but also a potential source of liberation. She argued that teachers' use of control and power over students dulls the students' enthusiasm and teaches obedience to authority, 'confining each student to a rote assembly-line approach to learning'. She advocated that universities encourage students and teachers to transgress, and sought ways to use collaboration to make learning more relaxing and exciting. She described teaching as 'a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged' (1994, p.12). bell hooks argued for a progressive, holistic education, an engaged pedagogy:

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

(hooks 1994, p. 13)

hooks stresses the demands this places upon educators in terms of authenticity and commitment. Progressive, holistic education, engaged pedagogy is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively involved committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (hooks 1994, p. 15). I like to remember that she also said 'it is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite' (1994, p.15).

Critical consciousness represents the capacity to both critically reflect upon and act upon one's socio-political environment. Researchers have studied critical consciousness development addressing three broad areas: racism, sexism, and social injustice (Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, and Hsieh 2006), I have therefore aimed to focus on these three areas in relation to the literature chosen for this study. However, learning always takes place within a particular socio-historical context so I have invariably drawn from what is going on for students in their life-world namely, the tumult taking place within the Catholic Church, racist and sexist encounters, and identity issues as students complete the transition between second and third level. Findings suggest that young people's perception of support from their family, community, and peers in challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice has been found to have a significant impact on the reflection component of their critical consciousness (Diemer et al 2006). Family, community, and peers have been defined as key social actors in the lives of urban adolescents (Diemer et al 2006). The teacher should also be added to this category of key social actors due to research findings suggesting that more formally structured intervention programmes can lead young people to challenge injustices (Campbell and McPhail 2002). The critical thinking classroom offers a programme through which students may potentially engage in peer driven or instructor driven social interactions, dialogue, and assignments about racism, sexism, and other social injustices. Focusing on students' critical consciousness development in the classroom provides an opportunity for teaching critical thinking to undergraduates.

Developing students' critical consciousness also has positive implications for students' career development. The study carried out by Diemer et al (2006) explored the role of critical consciousness as a key factor in predicting progress in career development among urban high

school students. Results indicated a statistically significant relationship between critical consciousness and progress in career development. Participants with greater levels of critical consciousness had greater clarity regarding their vocational identity, were more committed to their future careers, and viewed work as a larger part of their future lives. These results suggest that young adults, particularly the third level students who are the focus of this study, may best engage the career development process by maintaining a critical awareness of socio-political inequity and situating their individual agency within this critical ‘reading’ of the opportunity structure.

Critical consciousness development has been measured in this study by focusing on action and reflection components. The action component of critical consciousness involves the degree to which persons move from being objects of oppression, to being subjects that act upon their socio-political environment. The reflection component measures thoughts during the process of developing critical consciousness. Specifically, this aspect of critical consciousness represents the capacity for critical reflection and the capacity for questioning inequities. Within this critical thinking module, growth in the reflection component can be evaluated by noting students’ increased depth of thought and questions about bias in critical reviews and literature circles.

In 2003, a commission of the American Psychological Association (APA) produced a report that relates to critical consciousness development in college students (Trimble, Stevenson, and Worell 2003). The report details the manner in which introductory psychology textbooks should be infused with diversity throughout, suggesting that introduction to psychology texts should incorporate substantive material on aging, disability, culture/race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in each chapter (Trimble et al 2003). Suggestions for teaching gender and multicultural awareness have also been specifically outlined for academic psychologists of various subspecialties (Bronstein and Quina 2003), with attention given to social justice issues. It is clear that developing students’ critical consciousness through teaching about socio-political injustices and diversity is significant in contemporary teaching in the domain of psychology. I would argue for its significance not only in the domain of psychology but across the curriculum if we are to achieve the aim of developing autonomous, self-aware critically thinking students. In order to answer the question ‘what does it mean to teach critical thinking’ it is imperative that educators acknowledge the significance of teaching critical consciousness, the cultural context in which the learning takes place, and the variety

of types of learners; this is especially important in the ever increasing world of globalization and its social challenges (Haydon 2006). Teaching literature from a critical consciousness framework provides students with not just a basic knowledge of literature, but also tools for greater reflection and taking action to address applied social problems.

Freire has linked the acquisition of formal education to the ability to see one's world as the object of reflection and change. In Freire's opinion, education can foster the act of entering into one's world. Many students now come to college in need of this kind of *fostering* education. Lunsford has contributed to our understanding of where students are, intellectually, with a comparative study of essays by 'basic writers' and skilled writers. She concludes:

The basic writers I have been quoting, then, seem to represent the egocentric stage of cognitive development and the conventional stage of moral development, to conceptualize and generalize with great difficulty, and, most of all, to lack confidence.

(1979, p.134)

According to Lunsford, the basic writers display 'the egocentric stage of cognitive development' by their frequent use of the personal pronoun and of evidence drawn from personal experience. Their 'conventional stage of moral development' is apparent in their reliance, when asked to make a judgment, on maxims received uncritically from authority. Their inability to 'conceptualize and generalize' seems to be a function of their personal focus, in that they rarely try to reason out connections between their personal experiences and the lives of others. Lunsford sees that they 'lack confidence' when they describe themselves primarily as victims of social forces and divulge many personal fears and anxieties. Although Lunsford asserts that the 'basic writers' prose is more vital, more engaging and more true to their own experience than the impersonal, strangely disengaged prose often produced by our more skilled students' she believes that 'the real challenge lies in helping our students become more proficient at abstracting and conceptualizing and hence at producing acceptable academic discourse, without losing the directness many of them now possess' (Lunsford 1979, p.137).

It seems to me that Lunsford's observation can be meaningfully reinterpreted in light of Freire's analysis. Lunsford's reliance on psychology to explain the basic writers' essays obscures their social dimensions. Basic writers are very much like Freire's peasants. The

basic writers cling to a personal perspective because ‘they feel more *part* of their world than transformers of the world’. They rely on maxims because they have been subject to what Freire refers to as a ‘banking education’ (1970, p.77), as mentioned earlier, in which knowledge has been deposited by authorities in their passive minds. When seeing themselves as more or less helpless victims of advertising, for example, these students are not necessarily revealing a need for psychological intervention, but rather their emerging consciousness of the attempts made to control them by dominant social groups.

It is unlikely that the vivid sense of a surrounding world that Lunsford values in the basic writers’ essays can be preserved if their teacher sees abstracting and conceptualizing as the skills necessary to produce academic discourse. Instead of making the necessary movement to critical consciousness of their world, students are more likely to leave their directedness aside in an attempt to reach supposedly higher levels of cognitive development. This is the insight upon which Shaughnessy’s *Error and Expectation* is based; her pedagogical goal is to give students some control over the process to which they are submitting themselves by making themselves aware of it. For the unaware, however, as Bartholomae (2003) has shown, slavish imitation of academic discourse is a potent source of confusion in writing, and academic discourse itself comes to seem an obstacle to critical consciousness. Academic discourse can thus only escape being judged as jargon that students must imitate and perpetuate if learning academic discourse can give access to real knowledge, as Freire has described it in *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Knowing, whatever its level, is not the act by which a:

subject, transformed into an object, docilely and passively accepts the contents others give or impose on him or her. Knowledge, on the contrary, necessitates the curious presence of subjects confronted with the world. It requires their transforming action on reality. It demands a constant searching. It implies invention and reinvention. It claims from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing. It must be a reflection which recognizes the knowing process, and in this recognition becomes aware of the ‘raison d’être’ behind the knowing and the conditioning to which that process is subject

(Freire 1973 p.100-101)

It is toward this kind of knowing that Freire wants to move people who are beginning to make the separation between self and world. Of the academic community that would achieve this kind of knowing, Freire states ‘thus, in a situation of knowing, teacher and student must

take on the role of conscious subjects, mediated by the knowable object that they seek to know' (1973, p.101). Academic discourse must be taught and learned so as to foster this kind of knowledge and this kind of community if its teaching and learning are to foster critical consciousness.

Freire's introduction of the terms dominant ideology and oppositional ideologies in Chapter 1 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be applied, respectively, to the concepts of banking education and problem-posing education in Chapter 2. I think his metaphor of banking grasps with clarity the traditional school classroom or lecture hall; teachers lecture, students memorize, and students regurgitate the facts/information/opinions through oral recitations and through written tests. Students are not processing information, thinking for themselves, applying concepts to their lives, or questioning the information that is projected at them at school or university. This is clearly illustrated in the comparative analysis outlined in Table 4 (p. 85). In order to engage cognitively, students cannot be forced into the hegemonic cycle of being dominated or 'force-fed' information by teachers. Like Freire, I advocate a reform of the education system so that students are neither subordinate to teachers nor robotic machines receiving information. Students and teachers must exchange information, ideas, and questions, which utilise student's cognitive and creative abilities. This point is highlighted in the following passage from Chapter 2:

Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition while unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers.

(Freire 1970, p.12)

His juxtaposition in this excerpt is useful for a discussion about the benefits of the problem-posing education and pre-empt's bell hooks' work, *Teaching Critical Thinking*. bell hooks asserted in Chapter 8 that conversation was crucial for establishing the share of power and knowledge; she also added that 'without conversation in the classroom, argument and negative contestation arise' and that 'conversation opens our minds' (1989, p.32). When there is no conversation or dialogue in the classroom, the teachers are abiding by the hegemonic ideal of suppressing the students. Like bell hooks, Freire promotes critical thinking and argues that 'dialogue is indispensable to the act of cognition, which unveils reality' (Freire

1970, p.12). I support both bell hooks and Freire's ideas about dialogue in the classroom; dialogue is a significant contributor to creating a progressive classroom, this is something I facilitate in tutorials with the use of literature circles to foster discussion and cognitive engagement.

In order for education to meet its most important goals of empowerment and critical thinking, the making of meaning must not be a non-process of one-way transmission from teacher to student, but a collaborative effort in which the teacher, or 'expert', brings a certain set of knowledge the students (student-teachers) can explore, discuss, relate to their own experiences, and thus come to a fuller understanding. Meaning is personal, and it is also collaborative; it is more profound than any one student or teacher or expert could formulate on her own. In this reclamation of meaning making, the student and the teacher, who have been reduced to 'student' and 'teacher', not thinker or even human being, can become the student-teachers and teacher-students that Freire advocates:

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking.

(Freire 1970, p.6)

In the problem-posing model of education, learning is always cognitive, not merely narrative, which only entails the passing of facts. Freire observes that 'in problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (Freire 1970, p. 12). This model of education is in keeping with what Dewey identifies as progressive education, which heavily incorporates a well thought-out philosophy of the social factors that operate in the constitution of personal experience.

2.5 Teaching Critical Thinking through Literature

The possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination

Emily Dickinson

The value of literature according to Eisner (2001) lies in the way that it displays the universal in the particular. Authors draw attention to particulars, slowing down perception and inviting exploration (Dewey 1934). This is perhaps best exemplified by James Joyce whose universe was primarily Dublin, but Joyce believed that the universal can be found in the particular. 'I always write about Dublin' he said to Arthur Power, 'because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world' (Joyce, cited in Ellmann 1982, p.505). In his article about *Pride and Prejudice*, Thornton writes 'Jane Austen is a novelist with an extremely narrow focus that extends, surprisingly, into a wide range of concerns. Her books can be viewed most simply as eerily good romance novels, more broadly as sharp critiques of nineteenth-century vanity, cruelty and folly, and--broadest of all--as an indictment of a social system and economic system dedicated to the marginalization and commodification of a full half of the human experience' (2008, p.1).

I think that Austen's intention lies not simply in portraying society but in critiquing social mores and exposing the social inequalities of the time. Likewise, Joyce did not simply create a portrait of Dublin as a city but critiqued Dublin society, exploring the paralysis which he believed constricted contemporary Ireland and the oppression of the human spirit within the metanarrative of Catholicism. Each book represents a specific, localised narrative which 'throws off the grand narrative by bringing into focus the singular event' (Lyotard 1979, p.53). Such texts attempt to replace metanarratives by focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of human experience. They therefore argue for the existence of a 'multiplicity of theoretical standpoints' rather than grand, all-encompassing theories (1979, p.54) which aligns with the objectives of this research, namely to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness in third level education through increased engagement with divergent standpoints through the medium of modern literature (examples of this engagement are provided in Appendix 1.4). A grand narrative or meta-narrative may be defined as a trans-historical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture and reinforced by power structures. The role of literature in this action research project is to deliberately disturb the

formulaic expectations such cultural codes provide leading to a possible revision of the social code as students construct their own vision of a progressive politics that is grounded in the cohabitation of a range of diverse perspectives. This universalising of the particular thus constitutes a distinct narrative mode of understanding that can contribute to a keen and critical mind. By stimulating attention to dilemmas, alternative human possibilities, and the complexity of the human situation, literature provides the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible (Bruner 1986) and is therefore a legitimate form of research into the human condition and one way in which we can learn to think more critically and more consciously.

In a recent survey carried out in Stanford University students said they weren't getting the big picture of English literature (Haven 2011). This view was reinforced by Roland Greene, a professor of English literature in Stanford who compared the current pedagogical model with its focus on 'distributive requirements' to 'moving from a close-up to wide-angle shot, back and forth– dizzying, without being enlightening'. The department responded with a course that embeds literature within the cultural, political, historical and religious context of England, America and the English-speaking nations. It also considers how texts, genres and literary movements develop as part of a very long, sometimes contentious conversation. 'It's a work in progress' said Greene, 'It's been pretty successful this year' (Greene, cited in Haven 2011, p.2).

This suggests that this research is not taking place within a vacuum; rather this thesis is tapping in to the zeitgeist in identifying the shortcomings of the current pedagogical model. Education which teaches students the dispositions or inclination to look at the world through a critical lens is not only possible but a work-in-progress for educators who want to develop in students a critical perspective, precipitating a paradigm shift in educational policy. Ethnographic classroom studies have provided evidence that students learn qualitatively different habits of the mind and heart in context when teachers mediate discussion of texts from multiple cultural and critical perspectives and students carry these ways of thinking into meaning-making contexts in other school subjects (Miller 1990). I believe this research will therefore make an original and meaningful contribution to academic remodelling that will focus on critical thinking, evaluation and establishing meaningful connections between theory and practice.

We live in a digital age where the click of a mouse will provide answers with an immediacy not to be found with a text, this may prove a conceptual challenge to harnessing the pedagogical potential of literature. Marshall McLuhan speaks of technologies as extensions of the human body or mind that modify one or more of our physical or mental abilities. For example, the automobile is an extension of the feet and mobility, the telephone is an extension of the voice and the ear. McLuhan also points out that every extension creates an amputation. The extension of a technology like the automobile amputates the need for a highly developed walking culture, which in turn causes cities and countries to develop in different ways. The telephone extends the voice, but also amputates the art of penmanship gained through regular correspondence. Similarly, social media have extended accessibility to and immediacy of information and ideas but amputated the art of reading and skill of critical reflection. If every technological extension has its amputative counterpart, then we need to be aware of and reactive to such a scenario. This thesis seeks neither to diminish nor focus on new technologies. The objective is to better understand the relationship between our extensions and amputations and promote a pedagogical model that embraces new technologies without neglecting core intellectual skills. Reading and critical reflection are key to developing students understanding and thinking and thus need to be relevantly integrated into the curriculum to avoid the amputation of literacy and critical perspective.

‘Every book we read is a potential teacher’ observed Paul and Elder (2002) and reading is a systematic process for learning the essential meanings of that teacher. When we become good readers, we can learn the essential meanings of an unlimited number of teachers whose teachings live on, ever available, in the books they have written. When we take the core ideas of those teachings into our minds through careful reading, we can productively use them in our lives. Reading is an important cultural practice for many people. However, a significant cohort of students do not read for pleasure but only do so when they are completing assignments; a problem that can affect students’ future learning and academic success (Sullivan 2002). Students who do not read fail to understand themselves and become more alike in their thinking and actions due to a lack of awareness that what is might be otherwise. As Allan Bloom observes ‘the failure to read good books both enfeebles the vision and strengthens our most fatal tendency – the belief that the here and now is all there is’ (Bloom 1987, p.57). It is literature in particular that educates the imagination and instils both the means and the desire to understand human existence differently. To neglect the arts and humanities, therefore, is to neglect to ‘foster’ the student.

David Hirsch, in his exploration of cultural literacy, called the idea that the content of education is arbitrary ‘educational formalism’ (1987, p.23) and he made a convincing case for the proposition that defining the goals of education in terms of skills without teaching a specific body of knowledge is a mistake that has had devastating effects, especially on the ability to read. Reading, which is that basic skill, is not a general skill that can be developed in the abstract, or *in vacuo*, if it is to be critical. Being able to read differs from text to text and requires specific background knowledge that writers assume readers have. Writers in our culture do not identify Jesus or Plato but should identify, for example, Jacques Derrida when writing for the general public. Jesus and Plato are part of the background knowledge writers expect readers to have; Derrida is not. Schools that want their graduates to be literate should teach the shared background knowledge that literate people in our culture possess. This is the inherited body of knowledge on which the culture is based, and transmitting it to the younger generation has been the purpose of education in all cultures, ancient and modern (Hirsch 1987). This study hopes to engage students in the collective body of knowledge that constitutes the canon in modern literature and, in doing so, encourage students not only to read but to read the world (Freire 1970).

Encouraging students to read is about more than simply transmitting our literary cultural heritage, it is about helping young people to think critically about the social, political and cultural contexts that shape their lives (Hirsch 1987). Reading the world is a concept most powerfully articulated by Paulo Freire (1970). He writes:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...This movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say the reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means, of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process.

(Freire and Macedo 1987, p.35)

Central to the literacy process is the ability to read and think critically, to become ‘enlightened witnesses’ as bell hooks (2003) puts it. It is my contention that being an enlightened witness, that is, possessing multiple ways of seeing, can be facilitated by helping students view literary texts through multiple critical lenses; to inhabit a variety of perspectives, to have the ability to understand the point of view and perspective of others, the

ability to read resistantly, whether it's the textual or actual worlds, and the ability to become the kind of 'enlightened witness' that bell hooks describes, that is, to be critically vigilant about both what is being told to us and how we respond to what is being told. For hooks, there are two major factors of intervention, critical thinking and the capacity to read and write:

Because so much enlightened information comes through the printed page, so if people are not able to read and write they already don't have access to those forms of enlightenment.
(hooks 1997, p.8)

A greater level of literacy is thus required if we are to foster a sense of agency in our students. Furthermore, it is not enough to be literate for there are degrees of literacy which determine what we see, how we see, how we interpret it and what it means for our lives. This is, I think what Freire means when he talk about 'reading the world' and what bell hooks reinforces with her call for us to be 'enlightened witnesses'. And this is what I hope to foster with the critical lens approach outlined in this thesis.

Thomas Jefferson first declared literacy to be the key to citizenship and cited a direct correlation between literacy, citizenship and successful self-government (Jefferson, cited in Gilreath 1999). With literacy came knowledge and discernment and with these came the means of safeguarding self-government and independence. Jefferson hypothesized that literacy and self-government work hand in hand and was a key component to self-preservation. The basis for Jefferson's belief system on the merits of literacy was derived from his own personal experiences related to reading in the pursuit of knowledge. Reading paved the way for self-discipline, self-governance, and self-efficacy. Jefferson viewed the link between literacy and successful citizenship as unambiguous and direct. He saw literacy as a liberating and transforming force, the equalizer for the masses and the essential mechanism necessary for human liberation. Jefferson's view pre-empts Freire's vision of education as a liberating force and supports my belief that literature can be used not only in the pursuit of knowledge but in the development of critical consciousness and active citizenship.

An on-going issue for many educators is motivating their students to learn, particularly to engage in reading beyond the course material. Students seem to be particularly unmotivated to read material that appears uninteresting to them or unrelated to their own life experience. A

way to counter this lack of motivation is to prioritise students' responsibility for their own learning and elicit interesting sources of material from students that at the same time will elucidate the course content, thus satisfying pedagogical requirements. This research encourages students to forge their own connections between course content and a novel or other literature. A person is more in control and more vested in their learning if they are internally motivated. Choosing a novel and establishing connections between the novel and course material enables the student to feel intrinsically satisfied as they decide for themselves how they will engage in the learning process. Once they do, their learning takes on a more personal meaning and may become more important to them.

This research will ask students to link topical material from their lectures to the story-line or characters in a chosen novel. The process in itself may motivate students to learn and promote critical thinking and empathy for others outside of their own experiences. These linkage assignments require students to apply the theory learned in class to the 'real-life' situations that are happening in the story-line of the novel. It is hoped that this research will encourage students to read whilst enabling them to make meaningful connections between theory and practice. Ultimately it is hoped that the use of literature as a pedagogical tool will enable students to engage in critical reflection and navigate pathways for transformative action, lighting the slow fuse of possibility, connecting ideation and manifestation, possibility and realization. This process takes patience and determination for the fuse is a slow one and it takes fire –the essence of an active mind- the imagination. But, as bell hooks asserts, even when faced with the harshest of realities, we must have hope (2005).

Virginia Woolf wrote in her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* in 1924: 'on or about December 1910 human nature changed. All human relations shifted and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature' (Woolf, cited in Schulkind 1985, p.56). Literature thus responds symbiotically with social and political movements and is therefore a useful entry point to the social, political and ideological frameworks in which we operate. For example, *Union Atlantic* by Adam Haslett, a social novel on American Capitalism, provides an in-depth look at the Capitalist mentality that preceded the banking crisis. Haslett finished the book the week the Lehmann Brothers collapsed highlighting the mimetic function of literature. This is further reflected in the shifting nature of the literary canon and the ongoing production of new canonicity to accommodate the changing world in which we live.

In order to understand the society in which we live, I believe, like Freire, students must engage in innovative thinking about social agency and structure in a global world if they are to be conscientious citizens. The question is how. One way I think students can engage in thinking critically about the world around them is through literature. But, can a work of fiction have realistic, referential content? Is a novel sometimes an empirical statement? Can a fictional character truthfully represent aspect of what it is like to be Muslim in America, or gay in a small town in Ireland? One possible answer is that fiction is always fiction, and normally does not have empirical validity. If we want to make empirical statements about social relations, class attitudes, or typical social values of specific groups, we need to do so based on valid methods of social research: surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations of behaviour. And we need to analyse the data we collect according to valid methods of aggregation and inference. That is what is required in order to arrive at knowledge about the social world.

Another very different response is that novelists are sometimes skilled social observers, and some of these are also skilled painters or evokers of what they have seen, think of Joyce's description of Dublin in *Ulysses*. A great novelist can pull together insights and observations into a powerful description of a fictional world or experience that captures an important sociological truth about the society depicted. So these novelists do in fact gain knowledge of social life through observation, and they represent that knowledge through the fiction they produce. Both parts of this epistemic process are subject to criticism; but I would argue that both are valid knowledge practices. The epistemic location of the novelist is actually not the point, for the point is not whether the novel is right or wrong, the point is exploring our relationship with the world through the novel and, in doing so, gaining real knowledge about the social world. Seen in this way, a novelist is somewhat akin to an ethnographer, trying to make sense of a complex system of behaviours and meanings and expressing the findings in a way that is truthful to the social reality observed. Nietzsche wrote that Dostoevsky was 'the only psychologist from whom I have something to learn: he belongs to the happiest windfalls of my life, happier even than the discovery of Stendhal' (1998, p.104).

This brings us back to the question of linkage between literature, critical thinking and critical consciousness. If we think, for example, novels like *Animal Farm* offer insights into the socio-political framework of the time or novels like *The Bell Jar* or *Running with Scissors* express some important truth about the nature of mental illness and the effects of mental

illness on the family unit, this suggests the possibility of framing other sorts of social-science investigations to probe the extent and variation of these characteristics on the ground. In other words, there is a simple kind of synergy that can exist between novelists, sociologists, and historians among others, when it comes to framing interpretations and explanations of a complex social reality, and designing further empirical studies to evaluate and qualify these findings. I have attempted to explore these social realities in tutorials, examples of which are included in the methodology (Section 3.11), and to evaluate these findings in the Critical Review (Appendix 1) used as part of this action research, the findings will be discussed in Chapter Four of the thesis. The tutorials explicitly aim to parallel the process of *decodification* outlined by Freire as a reading of social dynamics, of forces of reaction or change, of why the world is as it is, and how it might be made different (1970). Decodification is therefore the attempt to ‘read the world’ with the same kind of perspicacity with which one is learning to read the word coupled with a drive to bring people to recognize the way things are (Freire and Macedo 1987, p.17).

The approach that I have taken and decisions I have made about how best to foster student learning reflect my theoretical orientation and beliefs about the ultimate purpose for teaching literature. Transmission theories frame learning in terms of knowledge acquisition, the primary focus in terms of teaching is how to best impart knowledge to students assumed to be empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled up with the knowledge provided through lectures. Student-centred theories derive from the Progressive Movement in education that challenged the teacher-centred model, arguing that students should be able to make their own choices for what and how they would learn. While it is certainly important to provide students with choices, I think student-centred approaches fail to recognize that learning is inherently social, that we learn through participation in social networks or communities. A third theory of teaching is based on socio-cultural learning that posits that learning is primarily social. Based on the work of Vygotsky (1978) it argues that we learn to acquire certain practices and tools that serve certain purposes in social groups or communities. Socio-cultural learning theory therefore emphasises the importance of creating a social community that supports learning literature.

As a literature teacher you are socialising students into what could be called a literary community of practice reflected in the practices of a highly engaged book club (Edelsky, Smith and Wolfe 2002). In this community of practice, students assume the identities of

Careful readers who acquire various practices involved in interpreting and producing literature. Another central tenet of socio-cultural learning theory is the importance of engagement in learning (Smith and Wilhelm 2002). People are more likely to be engaged in an activity when they assume some responsibility for planning and participating in that activity. My methodology clearly draws on socio-cultural learning in that I want students to perceive some relationship between their lives and the literature they are reading. This is the purpose inherent in the use of literature circles in tutorials.

2.6 Literature Circles and Collaborative Learning

Literature circles and discussion play an important role in developing critical thinking skills and deepening understanding in learners and their use draws heavily on the scaffolding teaching strategy espoused by Vygotsky as well as ZPD theory. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the zone of proximal development can be determined by comparing what a student can do alone and what she can do during ‘problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (p.86). Engaging in discussion in which multiple perspectives on texts are invited can provide students with opportunities to examine individual interpretation in conversation with others. In the socio-cultural approach to mind, thinking originates in such collaborative dialogues, which are internalised as ‘inner speech’ enabling children to do later in ‘verbal thought’ what they could at first only do in conversation with supportive adults or more knowledgeable peers (Vygotsky 1986). Vygotsky applied this idea to literature teaching in *Psychology of Art* (1971), where he argues that the effects of literature excite the individual reader aesthetically, but that the teacher must aim, further, to form reflective consciousness through ‘intelligent social activity’ that extends the ‘narrow sphere of individual perception’ (1971, p.41). This thesis asserts that constructivist literature study, such as that facilitated by literature circles, can shape students’ knowing and thinking and play a central role in developing students’ critical faculties.

Literature circles have been identified as one means of providing a collaborative educational experience (Pitton 2005). As well as a focus on student engagement in discussions of reading, literature circles engage students in the higher order skills outlined by Bloom of critical analysis and evaluation. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively echoing Mezirow’s ideal of communicative learning. Students have a common reference point (the story in the

novel) with their peers and may become more motivated to learn by studying together in order to master the material. Additionally, the students may broaden their perspectives and better understand the lives of others who are different from themselves or their own family experiences. This communality draws on the educational concepts of firstly, scaffolding as students learn from each other, and secondly, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as students work collaboratively to identify key concepts and analyse content, thus advancing individual learning.

Collaborative discourse involves an exclusive focus on the content - deliberately weighing the evidence, assessing arguments or reasons advanced in support or opposition, examining alternative viewpoints and on critically examining assumptions in order to reach a best judgment on the justification of a belief (Mezirow 2007). Discourse is more effective when participants share a sense of what Habermas calls empathetic solidarity, this aligns the literature circles with the focus on empathy in the introduction to this thesis. The resulting consensual judgments are contingent, that is, judgments are useful until we encounter new and more persuasive perspectives, evidence or arguments that subsequent discourse establishes as yielding better judgments. While students may not always arrive at consensus, through collaborative discourse students can better understand or find a synthesis of opposing views. This renegotiation of meaning perspectives is the crux of critical consciousness, enabling students to evaluate a range of perspectives in order to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the world. Furthermore, a recent study on campus culture and critical thinking, successful development of students' critical thinking skills was linked to an emphasis on cooperative exploration of knowledge and divergent thinking (Tsui 2000).

In literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth. The discussion is guided by students' response to what they have read. Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books. Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. Students reshape and add onto their understanding as they construct meaning with other readers. Finally, literature circles guide students to deeper understanding of what they read through structured discussion and extended written and artistic response (Schlick and Johnson 1999). The use of role sheets is an appealing model of literature circles for many teachers (examples of role sheets are available in Appendix 1). Building on cooperative learning theory, this model assigns each group member a specific task so that all take responsibility for the successful

functioning of the group. Role sheets also provide a measure of structure to the activity and are a good starting point for introducing this learning strategy to students. One of the most basic strategies for reading comprehension is making connections to what is already known, in order to provide a context for reading and a structure for comprehension. Literature circles teach students to make connections to their personal experience, to what has been read before, and to larger issues around them. For example, the ‘connector’ role reminds readers to make those connections. Role Sheets help to accommodate different learning styles and interests. The visual learner may enjoy his or her turn at the Illustrator role; the analytic thinker may prefer to look for specific details. However, Harvey Daniels, who developed this model, reminds us that the role sheets are intended only as temporary scaffolds to encourage readers to examine a piece of literature from a variety of aspects (2001). The ultimate goal of a literature circle is to have a natural discussion about the text. When educators over-rely on the role sheets, they limit students’ thinking and teach them to rely on external questions to focus their reading. Instead, the students should focus on the aspects of the text that are important to them and take charge of their own learning, thus fostering their development as autonomous learners and critical thinkers.

Collaborative learning is thus a central preoccupation of this research as critical reflection takes place not only in the self but also in the interaction of the self with the other. This collaboration leads intuitively to what are known as communities of practice in the classroom. Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour (Wenger 2001). Wenger outlines three characteristics of communities of practice, as distinct from a more generalised understanding of communities.

These are:

- *The domain:* A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership thus implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
- *The community:* In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

- *The practice:* A community of practice is not merely a community of interest--people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

Moreover, through their work with collaborative groups of adults, Tinsley and Lebak (2009) identified the ‘Zone of Reflective Capacity’. This zone shares the theoretical attributes of the ZPD, but is a more specifically defined construct helpful in describing and understanding the way in which an adult's capacity for reflection can expand when he or she collaborates over an extended period with other adults who have similar goals. Tinsley and Lebak found that, as adults shared their feedback, analysis, and evaluation of one another's work during collaboration, their potential for critical reflection expanded. The zone of reflective capacity expanded as trust and mutual understanding among the peers grew. The zone of reflective capacity is constructed through the interaction between participants engaged in a common activity and expands when it is mediated by positive interactions with other participants.

Evaluation plans should help community leaders and key members determine to what extent the following effects are evident:

- The community is serving its intended purpose and audience.
- Knowledge is shared around a domain and related practice emerging.
- Members’ interactions have continuity and depth. (Are members engaged in productive, ongoing, interactions?)
- Collaborative activities are emerging.
- Documents, tools, resources, or other artefacts are created and utilized. (How are these useful to the members?)
- The community provides value for its sponsors.
- Participants’ involvement in the community affects their professional practices and student learning. (This question goes beyond improving the community functioning to its external impact, so is generally not addressed until there is evidence that participants are actively engaged in the community’s resources, activities, and interactions.)

In many cases, a *combination* of evaluation methods is required to elicit answers to questions like these. For the purpose of this research, evaluation methods included documents, observation and interviews. The communities of practice formed as part of this research were connected by their shared interest in literature, they engaged in active discussion, and developed a shared repertoire of resources, facilitated by the use of alternated role sheets to guide discussion and enable critical thinking. Using literature that the students found relevant and interesting was the cornerstone of this study.

The use of literature circles also draws on a programme of research referred to as *Fostering Communities of Learning* (FCL), designed to encourage adolescents to think deeply about serious matters (Brown 1997). Bruner (1996) singled out four crucial ideas underlying FCL; agency, reflection, collaboration and culture. The first of these is the idea of agency, taking personal control of mental activity. The second is reflection which is making sense of your learning for practice does not make perfect in the absence of understanding. The third is collaboration which is the purpose of using literature circles. And the fourth is culture, the way of life and thought that we construct, negotiate, institutionalise and ultimately call reality. I have endeavoured to incorporate these four ideas into the approach I have outlined in this thesis, firstly students carry out the reading autonomously and of their own volition, secondly, students are asked to reflect on the text, thirdly, they discuss the text and their responses in literature circles, and finally students are asked to think about their culture and how it shapes their response. The overarching goal is to awaken students to the multiplicity of experiences inherent in the diverse cultures that constitute human experience whilst thinking critically about serious issues.

Literature circles help the development of critical thinking in the classroom through the deliberate encouragement of interaction between students. Critical thinking is a social activity because the agreement that knowledge is acceptable is a social process (Moon 2005). An 'agreement' holds within a social and cultural context or community of practice at that particular time (Moon 2005, p.17). A more practical reason why literature circles are important in the process of critical thinking relates to the need to understand that there can be different perspectives, different views of the same idea. The exposure to the different perspectives that occur even within a class of students can facilitate the shift from absolutist thinking to evaluative or contextual knowing and thus facilitate critical consciousness. Mezirow (1997) describes a transformative learning environment as one in which those

participating have full information, are free from coercion, have equal opportunity to assume various roles, can become critically reflective of assumptions, are empathetic and good listeners, and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view. I have tried to foster these conditions in my classroom through open and democratic discussion of texts from multiple perspectives in the literature circles to stimulate critical thinking and critical reflection, and create opportunities for perspective transformation and developing critical consciousness.

2.7 Competing Perspectives

One of the central practices involved in learning literature is the ability to adopt different perspectives of characters. This is a challenge for students who often assume that their perspective is the only perspective, what David Elkind (1998, p.25) described as ‘adolescent egocentricity’. They have difficulty recognising that others may perceive the world differently than themselves. By adopting character’s perspectives, students assume the voices of others whose perspective differs from their own in terms of race, class, gender, age or historical period and arrive at a deeper understanding of the other. In responding to literature, students are constructing text worlds as social worlds. In constructing these worlds, they are defining the roles, norms, beliefs, traditions and purposes constituting the meaning of character’s actions based on their knowledge of the historical and cultural forces shaping a world (Beach and Myers 2001). One might question the viability of such a task given the digital age in which we live. However, given the popularity of computer games such as Sims, students are accustomed to the notion of participating in alternative virtual worlds and learning what it means to be successful in those worlds based on the rules of the game (Gee 2007). As a literature teacher, my role then, is to help students to transfer that ability to enter virtual social worlds into entering the social worlds of a particular text, for example, the world of the rural small town in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Or they construct a text world based on knowledge of the class structure and women’s roles in early nineteenth-century England in constructing the world of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

One way to enter into different perspectives is by employing literature circles as described earlier. Another practice involves critically analysing texts by applying different critical lenses to texts - reader-response, feminist/gender, Marxist/social class, archetypal,

deconstructionist, postmodern and so forth. For example when students read *The Great Gatsby* students are able to see how different theoretical lenses refract different aspects of the novel. For example, the feminist/gender lens brings the portrayal of Daisy into painfully sharp relief, while the Marxist/social class lens sheds light on the relentlessly classist structure of Jay Gatsby's world and the dreams and aspirations of America's nouveau riche in the 1920's. In applying these lenses to critically analyse texts, students are analysing larger aspects of cultural and institutional themes of power, hierarchy and control. They are thinking critically, evaluating perspectives and engaging in critical reflection. This practice reflects a larger critical pedagogy approach that values critical analysis of the beliefs and ideologies portrayed in texts and in institutions shaping their lives, what Freire referred to as reading the world (1987). In this approach, the teacher's role is to demonstrate ways to not only interrogate beliefs and ideologies associated with institutions portrayed in texts, but to also link that interrogation to addressing and acting on injustices inherent in these situations - this aligns with the higher levels of the insight dimension of the NQA framework.

Literary fictions employ the same cognitive structures involved in metaphorical construal, and they can also manipulate those structures in order to transfigure our existing concepts. The simplest way in which fictions can alter our understanding of the real world arises as a direct result of the pretence itself: one might, for instance, gain a more intimate appreciation for the anguish of orphanhood, or for the attractions of gambling, or being a bully, by empathising with characters who experience these emotions (Currie 1997). For Currie, the value of fiction is that it enables us to 'get inside the head' of an alternate personality (1997, P.453), to experience in an intimate, first-person way what it's like for someone else to meet the world around them. By broadening our range of experience, fiction can provoke us to notice and respond empathetically to similar people and situations as we encounter them in real life; and this awareness may in turn lead us to reconfigure our moral and psychological theories more generally. Here, art is functioning as a metaphor for life, allowing us to acquire experiential knowledge without the pain, risk, and time investment—and sometimes, metaphysical impossibility—that this normally entails.

Most theorists would accept that fictions can alter our sense of reality by expanding the range of contents we have available to reflect upon. But fictions can also change our minds in a more systematic way as well. Moran (1994, p.86) contrasts 'imagination' in the sense of make-believe about fictional truths, with 'imaginativeness' understood as 'the ability to make

connections between various things, to notice and respond to the network of associations that make up the mood or emotional tone of a work'. Actual literary fiction requires more than just pretending that certain propositions are true, in either a cognitive or perceptual modality. An author or narrator also presents the facts of the fictional world from a certain perspective; this experience may end up altering our own perspective on the real world. What begins as a temporary exercise in perspective shifting may unwittingly cause a modification of our ongoing dispositions to notice, interpret, and respond to related situations as we encounter them in reality. Indeed, authors often intend for us to 'export' the fiction's perspective back to the real world (Gendler 2000). Tolstoy, for instance, doesn't just want us to pity Anna Karenina for the duration of our engagement with the novel; he also wants us to sympathise with the challenge of reconciling personal passion with societal expectation in the real world, and to accept the difficulty, perhaps even the futility, of satisfying one's deepest desires. Thus, complex literary fictions can produce conceptual transfiguration. They can enable us to see the world in a new light, shifting our sense of what is important, what sorts of people and possibilities are out there, and how we ought to respond to them.

In 1994, a group of ten scholars met in New London, New Hampshire for the purpose of redefining literacy pedagogy. The New London Group created the concept of 'multiliteracies' or the notion that a multitude of literacies are needed for participation in today's global economy and rapidly expanding universe of technological change. In defining a pedagogy of multiliteracies, the New London Group (1996) noted two primary goals for students: 'creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment' (1996, p.60). The New London Group argued against the old, monocultural, nationalistic sense of 'civic' and proposed 'a new sense of civic pluralism in which differences are used as a productive resource and in which differences are the norm' (1996, p.69)

As young adults were reading dime novels and series books, the mood of the nation was shifting towards a view of literacy and learning as a form of cultural access. From 1900 to 1930's, the Progressive movement espoused a view of the reader as a productive citizen, promoting the idea that all students, regardless of ability, social class, or career path, should have access to an education that would prepare them for their roles as successful members of democratic society. John Dewey, the leading proponent of Progressivism in America, argued

passionately that children were not empty vessels but curious, active learners who should be given access to meaningful real-life learning activities, in order to prepare them for the important tasks they would face as citizens of a democracy. Dewey's ideas would emerge in the field of English education almost thirty years later, as the newly-formed Progressive Education Association commissioned Louise Rosenblatt to write the landmark *Literature as Exploration* (1978). Rosenblatt's theories became a literary animation of Dewey's theory of progressive education and prioritised response-centred teaching as opposed to the idea of one correct interpretation of a literary text. This in turn inspired reader-response teachers to create independent reading programmes where students could respond in personal ways to texts of their choosing. The perspective of literature as *cultural ideal* (see Table 5, p.116) continues to assert itself, however there have been a number of additions by women and minorities reflecting the shifting nature of canonicity, moreover, modern initiatives like *World Book Night* are committed to the ideal of cultural access. Jeanette Winterson, one of the 25 authors chosen for *World Book Night* in 2013 asserted 'the more I read the more I fought against the assumption that literature is for the minority – of a particular education or class. Books were my birth-right too' (World Book Night 2013).

Table 5: Competing Perspectives in the Literature Classroom (Beach et al 2006)

| Literature as Cultural Ideal | Literature as Cultural Access |
|--|--|
| Role of literature: Promoting and preserving a cultural statement or ideal. | Role of literature: Engaging students in developmentally appropriate reading practices, and promoting access to a broad array of texts and cultural perspectives. |
| View of texts: Emphasis on a fairly fixed canon of classic literature, representing the pinnacle of western culture. | View of texts: Emphasis on literature's potential in developing the cognitive, aesthetic, social and political capabilities of readers. |
| View of readers: Readers are subordinate to the larger ideal of preserving the timeless cultural values of classical literature. As they understand and gain familiarity with a prescribed set of texts in the traditional literary canon, readers are inculcated into the dominating culture and carry its traditions to the next generation. | View of readers: Readers are active meaning makers whose skills and personalities develop throughout a lifetime. As readers encounter and engage with literature, they develop the necessary cognitive, linguistic, aesthetic, and critical skills for participation in a democratic society and the larger global community. |
| View of reading: Based upon an implicit argument that reading classics works of literature develops rigour and mental discipline. | View of reading: Based upon a view of literary texts as agents of transformation in the lives of readers and they assume full participation in the larger world. |
| View of assessment: Standardised tests on knowledge of classic literary works, genre characteristics, literary techniques, and literal or inferential comprehension of a prescribed canon of literary texts. | View of assessment: Authentic, contextualised assessments focused upon multiple dimensions of literary reading (comprehension, aesthetic response, reading behaviours and strategies) within various social contexts (solitary reading, large and small group discussion, teacher and peer conferences, dramatic enactments, and so on). |

Moving forward to the 1960's, Holt, Kozol and Leonard, the romantic critics of education, launched scathing attacks on American schools as sites of oppressive, meaningless, decontextualized learning. Dixon (1967), influenced by the developmental theories of Piaget and a progressivist view of the child as active, creative learner, joined a group of educators from the United Kingdom in creating the language and learning movement, which promoted informal, expressive language and student choice in writing topics and reading materials. This learner-centred perspective re-defined the earlier progressivist view of the reader as productive citizen to a psychological view of the reader as active meaning maker.

There was thus a strong tension between those who held a *cultural access* perspective (all students should have access to engaging, developmentally appropriate literature) and those who espoused a view of literature as *cultural ideal* (the literature curriculum was deteriorating into mindlessness). The appearance of adolescent literature would prove extremely threatening to those who held a view of literature as *cultural ideal*. Slowly, teachers began to introduce young adult fiction into their classrooms and creating classroom libraries of books for independent reading (Beach et al 2006). The various learner-centred movements of the 1960's have promoted a vision of the reader as *personal authority*. In choosing their own topics, students were given authority over their writing; in choosing their own literature and responding in highly personal ways, they become authorities over their own reading.

In the 1970's a genre of young adult literature called the 'problem novel' emerged. *Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous), the controversial story of a young girl's struggle with mental illness was published in 1971. A new view of the reader as personal authority was emerging and taking precedence. Advocates of what became known as the 'personal growth' movement argued that readers should be given access to popular texts and provided with learning experiences, tailored to their unique personalities and preferences. Around the same time, Louise Rosenblatt espoused her transactional theory of literary reading (1978). Rosenblatt argued that the meaning of a text lay not in the text or the reader, but in the transaction between the two. Most reading in school was what Rosenblatt called 'efferent' or informational reading, focused on gathering information to be used in demonstrating knowledge to teachers. Reading literature, she argued, should be a process of immersing oneself in the moment-to-moment experience of the text, or what she referred to as the aesthetic stance. Aesthetic

literature, according to Rosenblatt, rarely occurred in the classroom. Rosenblatt's transactional theory continues to influence literature teachers, including myself, who allow students time for private independent reading, choice in the literature they read, and space in the classroom for reading as an engaging, aesthetic process. The reader-response lens also forms part of the tutorial framework employed in this research. Following in this trend, Goodman published *What's Whole in Whole Language* (1986). The Whole Language movement promoted the belief that, in learning to read, students should be given whole texts of culturally diverse, high quality literature. A year later, Nancie Atwell published *In the Middle: New Understanding about Reading, Writing and Learning* (1987) which popularised the idea of reading and writing workshops in which students meet regularly to talk about self-chosen books, engage in authentic reading for real-world purposes, and publish their own writing for a classroom audience.

At the same time as The New London Group was redefining the reader's role in a global society, a wealth of critical theories were becoming available for use in the literature classroom (Appleman 2009). Through the influence of movements such as formalism, deconstruction, gender studies, Marxism, and historical criticism, students were urged to become more sensitive to the ways in which issues like race, class, gender and other socio-political factors influence the literacy practices of students. Appleman argues:

We may not be able to name our theories, nor are we always aware of how our ideologies become internalised and may in fact prevent us from understanding worlds and perspectives different from our own. We also may not be able to recognize an oppressive ideology when we are confronted with it, whether it's a textbook, a tracking system in a high school, or in the workplace

(p.133)

Paralleling the growth of contemporary critical perspectives, terms like 'social justice', 'anti-racist', 'anti-bias', or 'service learning' have entered what was once thought of as the apolitical sphere of the classroom (Allen 1999, p.12). When literature teaching is viewed as a socio-political practice, it is not enough to simply include multicultural literature or promote tolerance or others in the classroom. At the dawn of the millennium, the view of the reader again shifted from the socio-linguistic perspective of reader as personal authority to a more socio-political view of readers as transformative agents, who not only negotiate, but transform the world they inhabit. Through engaging with and critically exploring texts from multiple perspectives, readers are challenged to move beyond the literary text and the

literature classroom, actively opposing issues like racism and helping to create a world that is more socially just and equitable. In this new view, as readers become more acquainted with literature's transformative potential, they gain access to an increasingly global sphere and become active change agents in their own futures.

By narrative, we are referring to a text that tells a story in time. Narratives serve as simulations of everyday life in a manner that provides some understanding of the complexities of life (Mar and Oatley 2008). Readers draw on their experience of constructing characters to create simulations as models of others' inaccessible mental states so that readers can infer others' thoughts or feelings. And, simulations provide models for how to interact within certain complex social worlds or systems:

Literary fiction provides simulations of social complexes as they unfold, as characters interact with each other and react to the repercussions of plans and the intrusions of accidents. These intricate interpersonal situations, such as a person being tempted to retaliate in complicated ways against someone he or she loves, is the kind of material that constitutes narrative fiction of the sort that we find fascinating.

(Mar and Oatley 2008, p. 175)

Literary versions of social worlds are not replications, but abstractions and generalizations that simplify and select those certain details most relevant for creating models of social interactions. In contrast to expository essays, readers experience first-hand the simulations through uses of sensory images that evokes readers' imaginative construction of experience, leading to the emotional experience of empathy for characters' experiences, for example 'feeling pleased when someone we like is doing well (Mar and Oatley 2008, p.181). Moreover, experiencing these simulations provides readers with social knowledge about how to cope with interpersonal interactions and conflicts.

Readers acquire these abstractions and generalizations from experiencing characters from an ironic stance in which they both adopt characters' perspectives while at the same time perceiving the limitations of those perspectives, limitations that lead to generalizations about the limitations of those perspectives, and enhanced understanding about one's own perspectives. Students may then respond to the ways in which, in explaining characters' actions, they need to consider alternative characters' perspectives – how different characters

will have different explanations or versions of the same actions in ways that are similar to their own experience of competing perspectives on events in their own lives. To infer differences in characters' perspectives, students engage in what Zunshine (2006) calls 'mind-reading' or 'our ability to explain people's behaviour in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires' (p.6). For example, in responding to a story in the detective genre, readers engage in 'mind-reading' of the detective's thinking processes in sifting through various clues. Students are also reflecting on how characters' values influence their perspectives (Haertling-Thein 2007). In doing so, students learn to adopt what Hunt and Vipond (1992) define as a point-driven stance, they can read narratives for the purpose of inferring generalizations or their underlying point. In doing so, they are moving beyond efferent reading towards an aesthetic stance.

Before the separation of words in written texts, which began in the early Middle Ages, books were written in what palaeography refers to as *scriptura continua*, that is, without any spaces between words (Saenger 1997). Reading aloud was thus the only way for the reader to make sense of where a word ended and a new one begun. This need for an oral manipulation of the text entailed a particular way of reading, from a cognitive perspective. As Saenger (1997) explains, different modes of reading entail different cognitive processes: Furthermore, different languages with different transcription systems require different cognitive abilities and mechanisms for the text to be decoded. Such differences are indeed reflected in differences in language pedagogy in different cultures. The Japanese written language, for example, has no word separation, and this is why group oral recitations in class have a crucial place in children's language education (Saenger 1997). Some books make more sense when read aloud with attention to style, syntax and tone, indeed, many Joycean scholars have commented that *Ulysses*, widely considered the greatest novel of the twentieth century, begs to be read aloud. This research has significant implications for my own research on the importance of reading as the multicultural society in which we teach demands an approach that incorporates a differentiated teaching model. A differentiated teaching model is one that accommodates the multiple intelligences outlined by Gardner, it is about synthesis and inclusion, not segregation, and reading aloud may reasonably lay claim to a means of implementing this model.

The differentiated teaching model is aptly illustrated by Trevor Wright who applied the Gardner model to teaching the iambic pentameter (2005). The iambic pentameter is the line

about the Holocaust in Junior Certificate History and underlining names and dates in my book with my highlighter as I understood this would be the key to exam success. I remember the following summer, with exams a distant memory, reading a book one summer's evening and grasping with chilling clarity the horror of the Holocaust. The book was Primo Levi's *If Not Now, When*, the scene was a concentration camp in Buna. Levi heard the man on the bunk above him having a nightmare. His first instinct was to wake him, then, he realized there was no good in waking him because, whatever the content of his perilous dream, it couldn't be worse than the reality awaiting him. And, for the first time I understood, an understanding that I would argue, eludes an efferent reading strategy. Interestingly, Hannah Arendt, when covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann for war crimes in New York, observed:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected to his inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.

(1963, p. 49)

This observation, for me, highlights the obligation to teach our students to think critically, to think from the standpoint of somebody else and to feel compassion for others. Arendt concluded about Eichmann that it was a lack of thinking, rather than an innate evilness or stupidity that resulted in his complicit behaviour. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, I share the Hegelian assumption that human beings shape or determine the world around them through their intellectual and manual labour. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the 20th century social world is the result of the actions of human beings, whose faculty of reason has atrophied to a mere calculus of the most efficient means to an end. The increasing mathematization and objectification of nature has led to the demise of mythical and religious world views. At the same time the concepts by which human beings come to know their world arise from specific historical and social circumstances. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that institutional life is increasingly formed by science and technology, that is, by instrumental rationality. Modern forms of sociality give rise in their turn to instrumental concepts, representations and ways of thinking about the world: they generate a scientific, calculating and functional mind-set. A vicious spiral ensues in which instrumental rationality becomes exclusive and total. While I'm not suggesting that literature is a panacea for preventing evil, I would argue that fostering critical thinking, reflection and empathy in students leads to better self-understanding and communion with others which can surely only have positive consequences for humanity. Indeed, Arendt mentions, as a case in point,

Denmark (the rescue of the Danish Jews):

One is tempted to recommend the story as required reading in political science for all students who wish to learn something about the enormous power potential inherent in non-violent action and in resistance to an opponent possessing vastly superior means of violence. It was not just that the people of Denmark refused to assist in implementing the Final Solution, as the peoples of so many other conquered nations had been persuaded to do (or had been eager to do) — but also, that when the Reich cracked down and decided to do the job itself it found that its own personnel in Denmark had been infected by this and were unable to overcome their human aversion with the appropriate ruthlessness, as their peers in more cooperative areas had.

(1963, p.136)

This example illustrates the role that critical consciousness plays in maintaining a society based on social justice and equality. More importantly, it highlights the need to teach these skills to young adults if they are to critically engage in society and question rather than blindly accept the diktats of the dominant ideology. Reviewing the relevant literature from the fields of education, critical thinking and literature, it is clear they share many commonalities, namely, fostering critical thinking and facilitating a growth in critical consciousness in the learner. This research hopes to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by integrating literature into the third level curriculum in a way that promotes critical thinking and critical consciousness in the reader whilst exerting a demonstrable impact on literacy skills and academic performance.

2.8 Conclusion

In her posthumously published novel *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen draws attention to the gendered nature of literature or what counts as literature when she ironically describes the reactions to the question, ‘And what are you reading, Miss?’ which takes the form of ‘Oh! It is only a novel’. Austen satirises the prevailing attitude of the time, that novels are written by men and read by women, and thus to be dismissed as being inferior to books written by and read by men. Austen accentuates the ironic work of the word ‘only’ by remarking that the novel is ‘in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language’ (Austen 1803). The use of fiction, then, has a propaedeutic or instructional value whereby texts may be used as educational resources to illustrate a theoretical point; it is thus not ‘only’ a novel but a novel with something pertinent to say about an issue or topic. This thesis thus seeks to harness the pedagogical potential of fiction for teaching students to think, reflect and enact change. According to Maxine Greene, the knowledge and skills that are worth learning are those which have the potential to awaken, to move people to see, to hear, and to feel often in unexpected ways. Greene espoused the re-reading of texts from our own perspectives and asserted that the world was a text that was always being re-written and newly read.

Exposing students to literature that deals with topics related to course content can be a useful educational tool in enabling students to think, reflect and arrive at a reasoned perspective. Students may be more motivated to learn if they become involved in the issues under consideration in the classroom thereby potentially meeting pedagogical desires to place students in an environment rich for learning. Students may seek and enjoy stimuli that differ from their expectations, like reading a novel in a psychology course instead of a literature course. The next step is to ask students to ‘link’ topical material from a course textbook or lectures to the story line or characters in the novel. The process in itself may motivate students to learn as questions requiring deeper processing can make studying and learning more interesting. This process also facilitates the movement of students from surface learning to deep learning as students focus on what is signified rather than on the sign, they relate previous knowledge to new knowledge and relate theoretical ideas to everyday experience. Students moving from second level to third level often have difficulty incorporating the

higher order skills of synthesis and evaluation outlined by Bloom (1956) into their assessments. They tend to classify learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge gained through acquiring facts, skills and memorising information (Säljö 1997). The objective of this research is to facilitate a perspective change in students' conception of learning that views learning as a qualitative increase in knowledge; making sense or abstracting meaning, interpreting and understanding reality in a different way, and comprehending the world by re-interpreting knowledge.

Reflecting on the theorists outlined thus far, it is clear that they share many commonalities, namely, they all highlight the importance of moving people to critical awareness, a sense of moral agency and a conscious engagement with the world. This thesis seeks to consolidate this theoretical framework and, further, argue that narrative understanding is a key to instilling critical awareness and engagement. This argument echoes Bruner's (1986, p.41) assertion that 'we need narratives to constitute the psychological and cultural reality in which the participants in history actually live to understand the "life stuff" of history' and is consistent with Freire's notion that, in learning to read texts critically, students also learn to read the world (1998).

The narrative strategy for understanding human action posits literature as an 'instrument for freedom' (Bruner 1986, p.41) enabling students to situate texts within their socio-historical contexts and, by narrative analogy, within larger contexts of human intention and action. In a culture predicated upon comparison wherein students are ranked and assigned to league tables (Eisner 2001) in the race toward a knowledge economy this assistive social space is critically important in making education meaningful, opening students to multiple possibilities and constituting a narrative stance toward understanding, rather than linear analysis toward one fixed idea. Ultimately, as educators, we need to facilitate students in learning how to enter into larger cultural conversations with critical habits of mind and social habits of heart. Literature can thus serve as a precursor to perspective growth and transformation, helping students to discover profound personal and cultural meanings, without which education risks remaining in what Jim Wertsch (1990, p.2) calls 'decontextualised rationality'. Literature teaches values with emotional force. To take an example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is at once a condemnation of America, and a celebration of an archetypal American hero: the man who stands up to defy his whole community in defence of what's right. Khaled Hosseini does something similar in *A Thousand Splendid*

Suns when Mariam stands up to accept her death in defence of her co-wife and her co-wife's children. Students need to feel the force of such events for values to have importance in their lives. Literature has the power to change destructive ways of thinking on many levels. When George Gabori, a former political prisoner in Stalinist Hungary, was in solitary confinement, he exercised his mind by trying to remember all the poetry he ever knew. He concluded that by the time of his release, he could recite for eight hours at a stretch without repeating himself. That is how important literature is (1981, p. 73) Literature is about reality and offers a mirror to the society in which we live, indeed, Shelley called poets the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. The function of a legislator is to lay down the law, a settled course of action that men may follow. Poetry and literature do so quietly and unobtrusively. Novels are known to have changed the direction of the human mind and set in motion movements that have altered our ways of life, examples of such novels were referred to earlier. Moreover, as C.S. Lewis gently observes:

Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.

(1963, p.2)

In literature we find impatience with tradition and a restless searching for ever greater and more finely nuanced explorations of the human condition. A whole genre, the aptly named novel, was invented partly as a vehicle for examining the fluid complexities of human psychology and social relations, a complexity ignored in the stock characters and plots of traditional romance. In this sense Western literature has been the creation of what Lionel Trilling (1955, p.4) called 'opposing selves', all those dissidents who, like Socrates, are driven to examine the human condition and probe beyond the traditional answers. For all the reasons thus outlined, it has become my quest to foster the role of literature in education to support better learning in literacy and moreover, to enable our students to become critical thinkers, engaged with the world around them. The programme I have outlined therefore encompasses a socio-cultural orientation that focuses on literacy as a social practice and emphasises a critical awareness of oneself, of others and of the world in which we live. It is my deeply held belief that education should aim for the inculcation of critical consciousness as this impulse is expressed in the best works of literature. A list of works is included in the appendix but, needless to say, any list of works I make would resemble closely the traditional

canon of great works, for over time the literature that endures, in most cases, comprises the poems and novels and plays that at some level display critical consciousness. An education centred on such works, then, will *foster* in students the curiosity to know what Matthew Arnold called ‘the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever’ (Arnold, cited in Super 1965, p.113).

The spirit of liberal education thus should be Socratic in nature, a process of raising important questions and examining critically the tradition of answers, as this examination is embodied in works of enduring excellence. The ultimate goal will be the freedom of the mind, a freedom underwritten by a habit of critical thinking that is not satisfied with the easy or emotionally gratifying answers and the received wisdom promulgated by the various economic or political interests of society. The alternative to a liberal education of this sort will necessarily be some form of indoctrination that imprisons the mind in the shackles of ideology, race, gender, or ethnicity. The role of liberal education in training citizens for democratic freedom is what is under siege today from many sides, for a free mind is the greatest enemy of what George Orwell called the ‘smelly little orthodoxies’(1940, p.2). The most important goal, then, as defined by Cardinal Newman, is ‘the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versatility of intellect, the command over our own powers, the instinctive just estimate of things as they pass before us’ (1996, p.13).

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature and outlined the communalities shared by the key theorists whose work informs this research and frames my inquiry. It also discusses the role of literature in fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness thus far and argues for a more systematic use of literature in the classroom in the quest to provide a complete education. The following chapter will outline the methodology employed in this quest.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Education is not in need of research to find out how it works. It is in need of creative invention to make it work better.

(Ebel 1982)

3.1 Introduction

Methodology implies so much more than the methods used to collect data. I believe that research should not be methodologically led; rather that methodological choice should be consequential to the researcher's philosophical stance and the social science phenomenon to be investigated. In this research, my choice of a critical constructivist action research approach is a direct result of the dynamic reality that I am investigating. Such a reality necessitates the use of qualitative research which seeks not just to interpret this social construction of reality but to transform how educational aims are related to social divisions and power differentials, herein lies the critical intent of my research.

This chapter provides an overview of qualitative research and the epistemologies which inform it. I have outlined my epistemological stance within this context, specifically my chosen method of critical constructivist action research. I have discussed my reflexive journey; the insights, the frustrations and the structuring effects of reflexivity on my teaching. Data collection techniques are discussed as well as data analysis. The research design is outlined in detail to include the tutorial handbook which outlined and guided my in-class research. This chapter is a lengthy chapter, but necessarily so. The unique methodological approach entails the inclusion of the detailed setting out of the methods employed to gather the data, that is, the specifically designed tutorials, to ensure that the reader understands how they work to facilitate student movement along the path to critical consciousness. I have also included the pilot study which informed the design. Finally, ethical issues and limitations of the research are evaluated.

Researchers come to their task with particular world views, not least about how knowledge is created. This is made explicit so that readers' expectations can be informed by the researcher's position. Based on my initial and continuing teacher education endeavours, I believe that knowledge involves active construction by the individual. Human relationships and contexts for learning exert an impact on our ability to know and to generate knowledge. Because of our unique learning situations and dispositions, each of us will construct and use our knowledge in different ways, although there may also be shared knowledge. Each of us also contains the ability to be critical and to use knowledge to reflect on our positionality, oppose objectification and effect change.

Action research is critical in that it aims to help people recover, and release themselves, from the constraints embedded in the social structures within which they operate and the social media through which they interact. It is reflexive in that it aims to help people investigate reality in order to change it and, Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) add, it helps people to change reality in order to investigate it, by changing their practices through a spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection. The critical action research approach taken in this research emerges from dissatisfaction with classroom action research, which typically does not take a broad view of the relationship between education and social change. Critical action research has a strong commitment to participation as well as to the social analyses in the critical social science tradition that reveal the disempowerment and injustice create in industrialized societies. It further endeavours to take account of disadvantage attributable to gender and ethnicity as well as to social class (Carr and Kemmis 1985).

Critical constructivist teachers and researchers seek to expose what constitutes reality for themselves and for the participants in educational situations (Steinberg 2012). Inspired by the work of Steinberg and Kincheloe, I have endeavoured in this research to produce a more complex understanding of the social, cultural, political and pedagogical landscape that my students and I inhabit, the ways in which we construct knowledge and the ways these processes privilege some people and marginalize others. In doing so, I have to think about how my own perspectives came to be constructed and how the social values, ideologies and information they encounter shape my worldview which is intimately connected to my teaching. This is a complex process but a necessary process because, as an action researcher, I want to produce democratic knowledge, and as a critical constructivist, I want to become an action researcher of new ways of seeing and constructing the world. The most interesting

aspect of critical constructivist action research for me is the focus on moving beyond conventional ways of seeing and knowing, or banking knowledge, to an understanding of the world that acknowledges the social construction of reality and asks us to rethink and reconceptualise the questions we ask (Kincheloe 2008). I firmly believe that as teachers we need to foster such critical perspectives in education if we are to prepare our students for the active role of citizens who participate in the further democratization of their own society and other societies, as well as preparation for life in a diverse world full of uncertainties.

3.2 Research Methodologies

Research methods have variously been classified as objective versus subjective (Burrell and Morgan 1979), as being concerned with the discovery of general laws (nomothetic) versus being concerned with the uniqueness of each particular situation (idiographic), as aimed at prediction and control versus aimed at explanation and understanding, as taking an outsider (etic) versus taking an insider (emic) perspective, and so on. However, the most common distinction is between qualitative and quantitative research methods and this distinction informs my approach and my decision to use qualitative research.

Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena. Quantitative research is ‘explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that is analysed using mathematically based methods’ (Aliaga and Gunderson 2000, p.1) Examples of quantitative methods now well accepted in the social sciences include survey methods, laboratory experiments, formal methods (e.g. econometrics) and numerical methods such as mathematical modelling. Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. According to Creswell ‘a qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting’ (1997, p.15). Examples of qualitative methods are action research, case study research and ethnography. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions (Myers 2009). In effect, quantitative research can be described as a cause-effect relationship, searching for standardisation, reproducibility, and measurability whilst qualitative research aims at

understanding and interpreting behaviours, contexts, and interrelations.

I chose qualitative research methods because I'm dealing with a dynamic reality. Research can only give at best a partial view of any individual's reality. The motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from the observation that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is our ability to communicate. Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data is quantified. Ultimately, research is a dialectical interaction between the researcher and the social world through question and answer. The views of the researcher form the underlying premise for such a dynamic engagement with the social world; how to perceive it ontologically, how to understand it epistemologically, and hence how to establish an identified role of theory in relation to research. Any theory that attempts to improve social problems needs to be dynamic, able to change and evolve. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness in third level students. Using action research enables me to adapt and evolve with the research and the use of a critical approach acknowledges the deficit inherent in traditional definitions of knowledge and engages its subjects in a process of active self-understanding to effect change.

3.3 Epistemology

All research is based on some underlying assumptions about what constitutes valid research and which research methods are appropriate. In order to conduct and evaluate qualitative research, it is therefore important to know what these assumptions are. For the purposes of my research, the most pertinent philosophical assumptions are those which relate to the underlying epistemology which guides the research. Epistemology is 'the study of how people or systems of people know things and how they think they know things' (Keeney 1983, p.11). It is a theory of knowledge concerned with what constitutes knowledge, its scope and validity, and how it can be generated and acquired. Research is a process, the goal of which is to contribute something new to the existing body of knowledge. Epistemology and

research are thus entwined in a mutually interactive dialectic and it is imperative to have a clear concept of one before attempting to elucidate the other.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest four underlying paradigms for qualitative research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), following Chua (1986), suggest three categories, based on the underlying research epistemology: positivist, interpretive and critical. This three-fold classification is the one that is adopted here, that is, qualitative research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical (see Figure 1). It follows from this that the choice of a specific qualitative research method is independent of the underlying philosophical position adopted. For example, action research can be positivist (Clark 1972), interpretive (Elden and Chisholm 1993) or critical (Carr and Kemmis 1985). These three epistemologies are evaluated below and my rationale for choosing critical research is outlined.

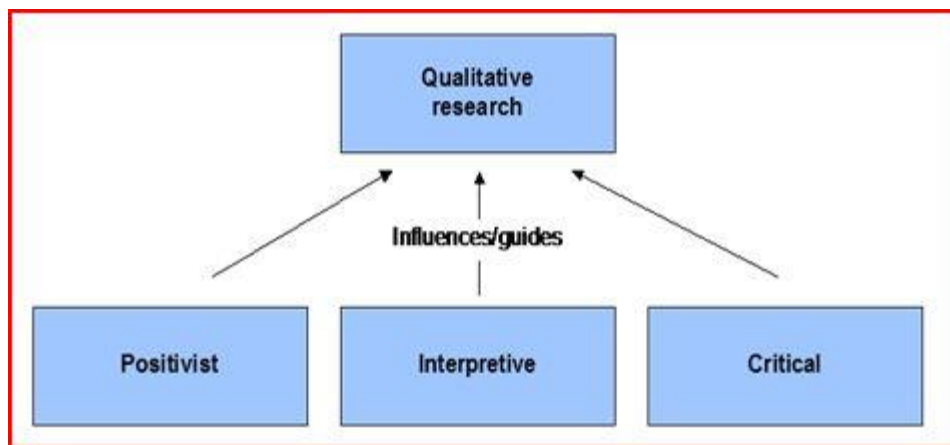


Figure 1 - Underlying philosophical assumptions

3.3.1 Positivist Research

Hughes (2001) explains that the positivist paradigm sees the world as being based on unchanging, universal laws and the view that everything that occurs around us can be explained by knowledge of these universal laws. The positivist position is thus grounded in the theoretical belief that there is an objective reality that can be known to the researcher, if she or he uses the correct methods and applies those methods in a correct manner. Positivist studies generally attempt to test theory, in an attempt to increase the predictive understanding

of phenomena. A positivist paradigm views truth as something which can be unearthed through rigorous research. This view is incompatible with my aims which are more aligned with the postmodern assertion that there is, in fact, no truth, but a plurality of perspectives. Opposition to positivist epistemologies has come from feminism, post structuralism, critical psychology, anthropology, ethnography and developments in qualitative research which have emphasised the shortcomings inherent in dualistic thinking and reinforced Freire's assertion that there is no neutral knowledge (Ryan, cited in Antonesa et al 2006). The best we can hope for then is not an absolute truth but consensus. The positivist paradigm lends itself to the use of quantitative methodology which aims to measure, quantify or find the extent of a phenomenon, as opposed to qualitative methodology, which is usually more concerned with describing experiences, emphasising meaning and exploring the nature of an issue (Coolican 2004). My research thus falls into the constructivist paradigm which provides the contextual framework for most interpretive research.

3.3.2 Interpretive Research

An alternative viewpoint to the positivist assumption of a universal truth is that each individual interprets and understands the world around them differently, influenced by their social and cultural context and that there may be multiple explanations for actions (Hughes 2001). This point of view belongs to the interpretivist paradigm; interpretive researchers start out with the assumption that access to reality, given or socially constructed, is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense-making as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell 1994).

A fundamental distinction between the interpretive and positivist world views is the former's primary presumption of social constructionism. Interpretivism asserts that reality is a social product and hence incapable of being understood independent of the social actors (including the researchers) that construct and make sense of that reality. The world is not conceived of as a fixed constitution of objects, but rather as 'an emergent social process-as an extension of human consciousness and subjective experience' (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. 253). The aim of all interpretive research is to understand how members of a social group, through their participation in social processes, enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning, and to show how these meanings, beliefs and intentions of the members help to constitute their social action. The interpretive perspective attempts 'to understand the intersubjective meanings embedded in social life [and hence] to explain why people act the way they do' (Gibbons 1987, p. 3).

3.3.3 Critical Research

Critical researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people. Although people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognize that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. The main task of critical research is seen as being one of social critique, whereby the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light. Critical research focuses on the oppositions,

conflicts and contradictions inherent in contemporary society, and seeks to be emancipatory, that is, it should help to eliminate the causes of alienation and domination. Cannella and Lincoln (2009, p.54) identify two foundational questions in critical perspectives:

- Who/what is helped/privileged/legitimated?
- Who/what is harmed/opposed/disqualified?

They indicate that critical perspectives seek not only to research the historical origins of 'taken for granted' social and political structures but seek 'to understand how victims of such social arrangements come to accept and even collaborate in maintaining oppressive aspects of the system' (p.55). Therefore, critical research is taken to mean research which aims at understanding, uncovering, illuminating, and transforming how educational aims, dilemmas, tensions and hopes are related to social divisions and power differentials. Indeed, Mertens (2005) prefers to use the term 'transformative' research, which she sees as encompassing a wide range of approaches including critical theory, neo-Marxist and feminist perspectives, critical race theory, disability and gender issues, participatory and emancipatory approaches. An important distinction of the critical research philosophy is its evaluative dimension. More than the positivist or the interpretive research perspectives, the critical researcher attempts to critically evaluate and transform the social reality under investigation. Where the other two research perspectives are content to predict or explain the status quo, the critical perspective is concerned with critiquing existing social systems and revealing any contradictions and conflicts that may inhere within their structures. Through fostering this type of self-consciousness and understanding of existing social conditions, critical researchers believe they can help to overcome oppressive social relations (Bernstein 1978, p. 181).

The research outcomes of critical research differ from interpretive research on two levels. The first difference deals with the role of knowledge in human affairs, the second, with the relationship between theory and practice. On the level of knowledge, critical researchers do not aim to only give a recounting or interpretation of how participants perceive, understand, and act towards various phenomena. As with interpretive researchers, critical researchers believe they need to understand the language of the humans they are studying, an understanding that is necessarily temporally and spatially bound. However, critical researchers depart from their interpretive colleagues, in that they believe interpretation of the social world is not enough. The material conditions of domination need also to be understood

and critiqued, and these are typically not accessible by merely asking participants, who often are unable to perceive and penetrate the circumstances that shape and constrain them. Thus researchers working in this tradition do not merely accept the self-understanding of participants, but also critically analyse it through the particular theoretical framework which they adopt to conduct their work.

The critical research philosophy towards the relationship between theory and practice is that the role of the researcher is to bring to consciousness the restrictive conditions of the status quo, thereby initiating change in the social relations and practices, and helping to eliminate the bases of alienation and domination. In this light, social research and social theory are understood as social critique. Benson observes that critical theory must be ‘reflexive, critical, and emancipatory, thus transcending alienated theorizing’ (1983, p. 53) while Burawoy writes that the nature and direction of this transcendence is suggested by the assumptions and theories that guide the research: ‘a theoretical framework also leads us beyond what is, beyond verification, to what could be’ (1985, p. 18).

The central idea within critical philosophy is the belief that social reality is historically constituted, and hence that human beings, organizations, and societies are not confined to existing in a particular state (Chua 1986, p. 619). Everything possesses an unfulfilled potentiality, and people, by recognizing these possibilities, can act to change their material and social circumstances. Despite this belief, the critical perspective recognizes that the capacity to enact change is constrained, because humans become alienated from their potential by prevailing systems of economic, political, and cultural authority (Frymer 2005). The alienation and anomic disengagement of youth has been a major source of concern in the United States since World War II, generating continual media discourse and public concern. It is interesting to note that this period coincides with the emergence of action research as a research approach following World War II (Lewin 1947). Indeed, as Kemmis asserts in his retrospective analysis of action research:

The Second World War is crucial as a factor in understanding the rise of action research. The war raged around truly ideological themes: democracy and totalitarianism, egalitarianism and racial supremacy, the coexistence of and subordination of peoples. It galvanised views about democratic decision – making processes and participation in those processes by those affected by the decisions, about the rights of individuals and cultural and ethnic minorities to have

their views heard and their special needs considered, and about tolerance for different views.

(Kemmis 1990, p.31)

Tolerance for different views is a principle echoed by Freire and a key aspect of fostering critical consciousness in students is to enable them to contribute effectively in the development of a more equitable and tolerant society. There is thus a commonality of intent between critical action research and the critical pedagogy outlined by Freire, both share an interest in conscientization and an interest in ‘liberating communities of inquirers from the dictates of tradition, habit, bureaucratic systemisation and individual expectations’ (Kemmis 1990, p.36).

Much of Freire’s philosophy of education is also based on an analysis and critique of student alienation or objectification. This deformation of the subject into an object in all spheres of everyday life has been the crucial phenomenon of critical theory and is the crux of the imperative for revolutionary transformation. In light of this alienation, an important objective of critical research is to create awareness and understanding of the various forms of social domination, so that people can act to eliminate them. The tutorials used in this action research highlight themes such as alienation (*The Bell Jar*, *The Great Gatsby*) and anomie (*Lord of the Flies*). Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed is specifically concerned with the transcendence of alienation and oppression through the development of a critical literacy with revolutionary intent. However, unlike most contemporary traditions of critical theorizing, Freire’s pedagogy, with its roots in Marx, is based on praxis, explicitly combining theory and practice in its pedagogical programme. This is what I have aimed to achieve with my research, combining tutorials with literature circle discussions to foster critical thinking and promote conscious awareness to effect change and help each student to fill their potential as full subjects actively participating in society.

The potential for reflective, thought-infusing activity is a crucial aspect of what Freire terms the ontological vocation of being human (1970). For Freire, to be human in any meaningful sense is to be a subject—a conscious social actor who has the ability, the desire, and the opportunity to participate in social and political life. However, a subject is not just a citizen who performs tasks in a formal democracy. Rather, a full subject is an intellectual who continuously reads the world as she or he simultaneously reads the word. For Freire, alienation resides in the separation of the subject from her ontological vocation of active

human participation in the world. The oppressed, submerged in conditions of existential violence, do not exercise their human capacities. They do not reflect on their lives, their experiences, their misery, or the reasons they find themselves among the dominated. Therefore, the ultimate significance of social and economic domination is the establishment of a class of dehumanized and alienated objects.

Objectification of potential subjects is a form of violence for Freire, since it is a process that violates the human essence at all levels of its being and expression: psychological, existential, political, and ontological. Thus, the oppressed are turned from potentially active subjects to dominated objects; from critically reflective actors, who participate in society democratically, to passive instruments of elite authoritarian control. The goal of this research, echoing Freire, is to turn objects into subjects. Revolution for Freire is fundamentally an educational project; the oppressed must develop a critical consciousness of their objective situation and simultaneously struggle to become subjects capable of creating a free society. Education for liberation cannot be imposed on or imparted to the oppressed; it can only be created with them, herein is contained the reasoning for the action research approach of this research. Freire argues that a liberatory pedagogy must recognize that students can learn to think actively, and with intentionality and purpose, in other words, with a critical consciousness. Corresponding to this unique feature of human being, Freire advocates a critical and dialogical education that poses problems for students. Teacher and students work together as equals to actively solve problems about the nature of social reality and, in the process, to change it.

3.4 My Reflexive Journey: Experiencing Myself as a Living Contradiction

Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) focus on two dichotomies that have divided approaches to the human and social sciences, firstly; the division between approaches that see human and social life primarily in individualistic terms and approaches that place human and social life primarily in the social realm, and secondly; the division between approaches that conceive of problems and methods in objective terms and approaches that conceive of problems in subjective terms. Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) use these distinctions as a basis for a taxonomy of different approaches to the study of practice and ultimately advocate a move from thinking in dichotomies to thinking in dialectical terms, that is, as seeing the two sides

of the dichotomies as mutually constitutive aspects of one another. This reflexive view of practice is the approach most clearly aligned with my research goals.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) view of practice as reflexive understands that to study practice is to change it, that the process of studying it is also political and that its own standpoint is liable to change through the process of action. It is therefore critical in its approach and embraces the teleological aim of action research, to effect change. Furthermore, this view of practice challenges the dichotomies that separate the four perspectives outlined above from each other, thus it sees the individual and the social, and the objective and the subjective, as related aspects of human life and practice, to be understood dialectically. This view of the relationship between the objective and the subjective is described by Kemmis and McTaggart as reflexive because changing the objective conditions changes the way in which a situation is interpretively understood, which in turn changes how people act on the objective world which means that what they do and is understood and interpreted differently, and that others also act differently (2003, p.354). This process of reflection and self-reflection gives human action its reflexive character. In this view of practice, practitioners regard research as a process of learning from action and history and conducted within action and history.

The reflexive-dialectical perspective on practice thus attempts to find a place for the four previous perspectives outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2004) with a broader framework of historical, social and discursive construction and reconstruction. Research from this perspective is likely to adopt methods that are reflexive. They are reflexive in the sense that they engage participants in a collaborative process of social transformation in which they learn from, and change the way they engage in, the process of transformation. Research conducted from this perspective adopts an emancipatory view of the point and purpose of the research, in which participants attempt to overcome distortions and contradictions in their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs about the world. This research regards educational events as reflexive, changing as the knowledge of participants changes, as both products and producers of historical and social states of affairs and interactions (Carr and Kemmis 2002). It focuses on participants and their perspectives but uses the tools of language and strategic action to change educational situations and enlighten participants about the nature and consequences of different practices. Social life is reflexive, that is, it has the capacity to change as our knowledge and thinking changes, thus fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness in

the classroom through literature has the capacity to exert an influence on social life and effect change.

Paulo Freire emphasises that those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. Reflexivity is an act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others and foster a more profound awareness of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave. So, I committed to a reflexive approach to my work and noting moments where I experienced myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead 1989) as I grappled with my own beliefs and values.

I am committed to embracing a more holistic model of teaching and learning that fosters the student but sometimes I find it so hard to leave behind the transmission model that has shaped my learning. I have been at times frustrated by students' choices, for example, choosing popular fiction over the classics and have really had to restrain myself from suggesting a 'better' choice because it is this rejection of autonomy that shuts down critical thinking and suppresses free and critical thinking. For example, when students suggested using a Dan Brown model to illustrate key religious concepts my initial response was one of disappointment because this is not one of the texts that I would have chosen. And then I have to remind myself that this is research that emphasizes participation and action. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it collaboratively and following reflection. And I remind myself what a great thing it is that my students are working with me and thinking about these things rather than uncritically accepting my choices which, after all, are shaped and formed by my beliefs and values. And, if I am to be true to my goals in this research I have to examine my own conceptual baggage constructed from my own subjective and discursively formed social environment.

I think what is most interesting to me as a lecturer and a researcher is the way in which students befriend a text. I tell my students that you have to befriend a text not so you can get through it but so that it can get through to you. If you can't befriend the text, let it go and leave it to the kinder ministrations of others. Sometimes, students will say 'Christa, none of these texts work for me' and I'll ask them to choose another, then the question of what constitutes good literature poses itself. For me, the value of the literature chosen for this research should lie in its capacity for telling its readers the truth, however disagreeable that

may sometimes be. In this way it equips readers for dealing with the realities of impending adulthood and for assuming the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. By giving readers such a frame of reference, it also helps them to find role models, to make sense of the world they inhabit, to develop a personal philosophy of being, to determine what is right and, equally, what is wrong, and to cultivate a personal sensibility (ALA 2007). To, in other words, become critically conscious citizens.

So, when a student asked me ‘can I use Harry Potter?’ my innate response was no because, to my mind, this is not good literature. It really is in moments like these that I experience myself as a living contradiction because I really am committed to student autonomy, I am committed to shifting canonicity as a way to confront plurality and multiplicity but yet, I still am resistant to moving outside the canon. When I look at my responses through the lens of my educational values I feel I am not living through my values and I remind myself of Freire’s warning not to confine my questions to teaching methodologies alone but also to be aware of power, oppression and culture in many aspects of education. And I realize that I have been socialised into my understanding of good literature as the ‘great white canon’ and that is something I have to work on. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998, p. 273) stated that research is ‘conditioned by the way it is framed’ and is ‘dependent upon the researcher’s own ideological assumptions’. So, it was really important for me to examine the discursive construction of my inner thoughts and I challenged them and checked them. I did not realize that, as Youngman (1986) notes, I had internalized many aspects of the dominant ideology and this was being displayed in my ideas, values, and actions. In relation to Harry Potter I asked the student to look at the guidelines and convince me of the value of Harry Potter. And he wrote this amazing review entitled ‘Harry Potter as a Gateway Drug to Hard Literature’. And it changed my perspective and made me wary of Foucault’s warning that the ostensible freedom and reciprocity of the seminar or tutorial may disguise power relations to the extent that students uncritically absorb what is only the informed opinion of the teacher (Foucault 1971 p. 199).

In saying that, if the literature is to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness there have to be some criteria for judgement, and these are discussed on page 136. What I have learned is that when a student suggests a text that does not satisfy these criteria you have to affirm yourself but without disaffirming your student. For example, another student asked me if she could use the erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Gray* by E.L. James. I don’t have a problem with the content, I have yet to meet a student on the cusp of adulthood who is not

interested in sexual identity. The problem is that it is content without context. I suggested that she look at *Kelly and Victor*, a novel by Niall Griffiths that deals also deals with sexuality, focusing on themes of submission and domination. The difference is that the context deepens students' understanding and perspective. Both of the dynamic characters in the novel seek to transcend their quotidian selves and the moment of consummation in the novel functions as a gateway moment opening up startling avenues of possibility for the characters. The context is important in understanding the story. Kelly is seeking refuge from a dysfunctional family life and Victor is representative of the grim reality of a post-industrialist economy, he is working in a shipyard with scant opportunities for more. The story helps students see the world from the perspective of the oppressed, those in a state of semi-intransitive consciousness focused on their sphere of biological necessity and why these people seek relief in alcohol, drugs and sexual transgression because their realm of possibility doesn't stretch beyond a focus on survival. In this way, the literature fosters a more profound awareness of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave, this awareness is an essential element in moving students towards a deeper understanding of themselves and others and facilitates the development of critical consciousness.

These were critical moment for me as they challenged my frame of reference and I learned that the best way to approach these critical moments is with a sense of humour. Wheeler (2001) explores the importance of having a sense of humour in those critical moments when the conversation between parties threatens to fall apart, to escalate or degenerate, or to turn towards such mutual suspicion or recrimination that all hope of mutual agreement appears lost. Having a sense of humour requires the ability to respond to others in the moment and being sensitive to others' experiences. I tried to harness this ability when dealing with the student who wanted to explore Harry Potter and I think it worked. The other students seemed to appreciate the compromise and the resulting review was enjoyed by all the students for its hilarity but also its profound insights. Having a sense of humour also involves the ability to show another person several angles of vision all at once and I tried to this with the student who wanted to use the novel *Fifty Shades of Gray*. I asked the students, as a group, to think about what the novel could teach us about the complexities of human relationships and the human condition and we had great fun evaluating this idea with the general consensus being nothing at all. Humorous comments like 'it teaches us that some people have more money than sense' or 'it teaches us that you can make millions by coming up with a totalizing sex fantasy that methodically strokes every single stereotype for the average woman' made the

discussion enjoyable and reciprocal. This was a relief for me as it took the responsibility for vetoing the novel from my shoulders and shared it squarely with the group. I think ultimately, that both the students and I felt engaged in a democratic process that valued all their contributions.

Reflexivity also refers to the capacity of an agent to recognize forces of socialization. A low level of reflexivity would result in an individual shaped largely by their environment. A high level of social reflexivity would be defined by an individual shaping their own beliefs. As well as reflecting on the changes in my own beliefs, it was interesting to observe how the students changed and moved with the material we explored in class.

There were moments, particularly at the beginning, where students rejected change. For example, when exploring the racial oppression inherent in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, some students rejected outright the idea of white privilege with comments like:

'I'm not racist but I think the concept of white privilege is really just about conforming to the norms of society and if black people did that there wouldn't be any problem'

(Student 4, September 12 2012)

'I don't have any privileges because I'm white, I'm on a grant and life isn't any easier for me because I'm white'

(Student 7, September 12 2012)

I consider these students to be at a stage of magical consciousness, lacking a sense of life on a more historic plane (Freire 1973). It was my goal, over the course of the term to move these students towards a deeper interpretation of problems and an acknowledgement of their own positionality.

Some students were aware of injustices but failed to acknowledge their role in the perpetuation of oppressive regimes, typical responses included:

'I know racism exists but it's not my fault. I'm not racist so I just don't see how I can be held accountable for other people's actions'

(Student 8, September 12 2012)

These students seem to me to be at a stage of naïve consciousness, characterised by a lack of interest in investigating their circumstances fully and to see connections between their lives and the lives of others. Many students are generally unaware of the strong correlation between poverty and race that directly contributes to the achievement gap that exists between minority students and their dominantly Caucasian counterparts. The result is a shift of power and privilege to the dominant group and the marginalization of many students, first by social class, and secondarily by race (Berliner 2006). Whereas Freire identifies urban Brazilians who are undergoing economic change as being at the naive transitivity stage of consciousness, Keefe (1980) suggests that "the middle-class Americans of the 1960s who began to reawaken to the social needs of this country" (p. 391) also fit this description., I think this description is also apt for my students. In both cases, although some social consciousness was developing, many people wished for simple solutions. This wish is, I think, for many students, based on a fear of change and a reluctance to acknowledge their own part in, for example, systemic racism or sexism or other oppressive systems.

Fear of change is a major hurdle for critical pedagogy since many students, and teachers, reject change. It is always easier to accept the values of the oppressors than it is to challenge and overthrow them. Human beings face structural forces, through ideology and other forms of oppression, that deny their ontological need to criticise and change the world that leads to a fear of freedom. This fear replaces existential hope with a form of resignation and thus hinders social transformation. I have learned that it is not uncommon for students to 'resist a curriculum that challenges the status quo' (Ng, 1993, p. 197). Similarly, 'resistance, resentment, and confusion are evident at various stages in the critical thinking process' (Brookfield, 1987, p. 7). Overcoming this fear takes time – and tolerance. There was an important lesson for me here too. Freire has long asserted the importance of tolerance but honestly, I found it difficult at times to tolerate the total lack of awareness in some students of their positionality, many of whom were completely unaware of the privileges accorded them because of their race, gender and socio-cultural position. I really wanted to wake them up. But the more I thought about it, the more I reasoned that it's not their fault. They have been socialised into a success oriented model that is not interested in the creation of knowledge, but rather the commodification of knowledge and to me they are two very different conceptualisations of knowledge. One conceives of knowledge as process, the other conceives of knowledge as product. And, I think as long as this understanding of knowledge

as utility and instrument exists it inexorably leads to a results-driven model that is deeply damaging to the idea of a humane education. Instead of fostering individual growth, it actually undermines self-formation. So, I learned to tolerate the moments of frustration, for me and the students and hope that changes would take place for, as bell hooks observes, education is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness.

Freire described hope as an ontological need that should be anchored in practice in order to become historical concreteness and I endeavoured to do this with my research. Class discussions showed that students were earnestly struggling to internalize and apply the concepts of power, privilege, oppression, and empowerment provided throughout the lessons. Many students expressed evidence that they were moving away from magical or naïve consciousness towards critical consciousness in their comments though there was some frustration involved in becoming more reflexive. For example one student said when looking at *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

Why is this the first time that we are really talking about critical consciousness, and white privilege in class, I have 14 years of schooling behind me and I've never discussed these things before and I feel like I'm so clueless about how the world works.

(Student 1, September 12 2012)

Another student commented as the term progressed:

I never saw myself as an oppressor before.

(Student 6, November 7 2012)

As the term progressed there was some frustration too amongst some of the students as they realized how much they have yet to learn as they grow towards critical consciousness. One student observed:

Uncovering my personal role in oppression was like being shown the great amount of limitations that I have, like the amount of growth that needs to take place, which made me feel really incompetent sometimes because there is such a gap between where I am now and where I want to be.

(Student 11, November 14 2012)

This was challenging for me as I really wanted students to see this awakening as an opportunity rather than a failing and I worried that their frustration might devolve into apathy and thwart the learning process. I asked students to challenge the notion that frustration is

immobilizing and that agency only comes out of pleasure. Instead, I suggested that frustration can empower and build solidarity among us by challenging us into action. And I asked students to think about what they could do to change the status quo. They came up with some fantastic ideas to promote student awareness which were not implementable in the course of one semester but which I hoped they would follow through on as they continued their growth towards critical consciousness. I tried to reassure students that developing critical consciousness and challenging their privileges are a lifelong process and that everyone begins at the beginning. The move from transitive consciousness to critically transitive consciousness is not without personal struggle for all of us. Freire explains critical consciousness as a socio-political educative tool that engages learners in questioning their socio-historical situation, which he addressed as *reading the world*. The following student comment illustrates the movement towards critical consciousness after exploring the text *Animal Farm* in our tutorial in Week 11:

As a result of this course, I have read more about Marxist theory, started to ask more questions, and have actively listened whenever Marxist theory and perspectives are being presented. As a result, I am evaluating my own thinking and reasoning abilities regarding capitalism and examining my personal biases.

(Student 15, December 5 2012)

These comments are immensely affirming for me as they reassure that I'm doing something right despite the rejection, frustration and apathy that sometimes manifested itself in the classroom. There were also quotidian frustrations that exerted an impact on student progression, for example, classes on a Wednesday afternoon when students are weary and cranky after 4 or 5 hours of lectures and really didn't feel like being critical. I understood their apathy, I sometimes felt the same way myself. Taking on this research meant collapsing my teaching into 4 days to accommodate travelling to course lectures. This led to 4 jam-packed days and by Wednesday I had 15 hours of teaching behind me, and the exhaustion at times made it difficult to tolerate students' resistance.

The first thing to do in such circumstances I found is to acknowledge these frustrations and accept that, while we are all in agreement that the work we are doing is worthwhile, we don't always feel like doing it. On days like this, work progressed more slowly. I gave students some time to chat at the beginning of class and relax, and then started by asking them about

their day. I then asked them to offer one thought about the reading for that day. This was usually enough to stimulate conversation and critically engage students. However, I remember one particular week coming up to midterm. We were looking at the short story *Lottery* by Shirley Jackson (October 24 2012). This is the time of year when students typically start to feel the pressure of mounting coursework and exams looming. Everyone was tired and I really had to think about how to progress that Wednesday afternoon. I observed one student intently working on a piece of assessment for another class. Another student was sneaking a peek at her mobile phone every so often and then quickly looking back in my direction. I really had to think about the best way to critically engage the students. Literature circles, as discussed in page 88 of this thesis, are a fantastic tool for stimulating discussion and dialogue but they can also turn in to student play sessions on days when motivation is low. So, I asked all the students to move from their chair and sit with a new group of people that day. This simple movement created a little confusion but facilitated great energy in the classroom. The new group setting encouraged students I think to participate more and share their ideas with a new audience and I found that motivation greatly increased amongst the student. It was a day where I found it necessary to be present as a leader rather than a facilitator and I appointed each student in the groups one of the roles outlined in the Literature Circle Role Sheets (Appendix 1). I was worried that I was moving backwards rather than forwards by being so didactic in my approach but, reflecting on my action after class, I reasoned that sometimes students are motivated and ready to take the initiative in the classroom and sometimes they need scaffolding and part of my role is to know when to let go of the reins and when to pull gently, I'm still working on this part because it is so much easier just to take charge and allocate roles and activities then letting classes develop organically and this is something I have struggled with but I am learning the value of letting go of the reins as it the moment of consciousness-raising activity in the classroom are worth more than a whole semester of rote. A student said to me on the last day of term:

Before this course I had never heard of critical consciousness and now I feel like I am so much more aware of the world around me and why things are the way they are and what I can do as person to change these things. I think the critical thinking course with literature has given me an insight that I didn't have before.

(Student 13, December 5 2012)

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These insights have not just helped my students; they have brought about significant

epistemological changes in me which have influenced my practice such that it has now transformed into the form of praxis outlined by Kincheloe (1991), that is, action that is informed by reflection with the aim to emancipate (p.177).

3.5 Critical Constructivism

A constructivist approach to education is one in which learners actively create, interpret, and reorganize knowledge in individual ways (Gordon 2009). According to Windschitl (1999), ‘these fluid intellectual transformations occur when students reconcile formal instructional experiences with their existing knowledge, with the cultural and social contexts in which ideas occur, and with a host of other influences that serve to mediate understanding’ (1999, p. 752). In this view, teaching should promote experiences that require students to become active, scholarly participators in the learning process. Windschitl goes on to note that ‘such experiences include problem-based learning, inquiry activities, dialogues with peers and teachers that encourage making sense of the subject matter, exposure to multiple sources of information, and opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding in diverse ways’ (1999, p. 752). Gordon argues that in recent decades, ‘a constructivist discourse has emerged as a very powerful model for explaining how knowledge is produced in the world, as well as how students learn’ (2009, p. 39). However, Fenwick asserted that ‘all views share one central premise: a learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world’ (2000, p. 4).

Constructivism focuses on how people ‘develop narratives and explanations which enable them not only to operate viably in their everyday lives, but also to participate in the habits and customs of the group they are members of’ (Larochelle 1999, p.6). The meanings constructed early in life influence later interpretations, and thus the prior knowledge of a student influences her learning (Ausubel 1968). As Watts observes ‘we come to understand things in terms of what we already understand; if we cannot lock new ideas into the ideas we have already generated, then new experiences become somewhat meaningless’ (1991, p. 54). Thus, in relation to learning, prior knowledge can be as obstructive as it can be facilitative (Osborne and Freyberg 1985). Some students may be robust and resistant to change through instruction, while others may be quite open to change (Watts 1991). As knowledge is constructed, initial understandings may be fragmentary and incoherent (di Sessa 1988) or conceptual coherence may proceed in leaps of insight as information is assimilated into a framework. Thus cognitive development is stimulated by reflection and inquiry. An insight or the resolution of a conflict can lead to a completely reorganized conceptual world for students.

Baviskar, Hartle and Whitney (2009) have outlined four criteria required to designate a methodology as constructivist. The first criterion is eliciting prior knowledge. Constructivism presupposes that all knowledge is acquired in relation to the prior knowledge of the learner (Sewell 2002). If the educator does not have a mechanism for eliciting the prior knowledge of the students, the new knowledge cannot be gainfully presented in a way that can be incorporated into the learner's construct. Prior knowledge can be elicited simply by asking informal questions at the beginning of class which is the approach I took when carrying out this research. The second criterion is creating cognitive dissonance. The learner must be made aware of a difference between his/her prior knowledge and the new knowledge (Sewell 2002). Wheatley states that 'in preparation for a class, a teacher selects tasks which have a high probability of being problematical for students—tasks which may cause students to find a problem' (1991, p.15). The third criterion is application of the knowledge with feedback (Vermette et al 2001). Application of the new construct could be in the form of literature circles where the students compare their individual constructs with their cohorts' or with novel situations. The fourth criterion is reflection on learning. Once the student has acquired the new knowledge and verified it, the student needs to be made aware of the learning that has taken place (Windschitl 2002). Constructivist lessons provide the student with an opportunity to express what he or she has learned. Reflection could be attained using traditional assessment techniques such as presentations, papers, or examinations, if the questions on the examinations fostered reflection on the learning process (Saunders 1992). Activities that are more meta-cognitive in nature might include a reflexive paper such as the critical review completed by students participating in this research. The focus on reflection and application of new knowledge is particularly relevant as the explicit goal of this research is to foster critical thinking which involves reflection on learning, and facilitate critical consciousness which involves the application of new knowledge to effect change.

The educational implications of constructivism are derived largely from the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. Vygotsky recognized that while both biological and social forces play a role in knowledge building, learning is essentially an interactive, social process that involves the use of language. In the social constructivist view, community has priority over the individual and individual rationality is considered a by-product of communication and social life. The social plane is primary and meaning is first socio-cultural, to be internalised by the subject's regulation within discursive practices. Critical-constructivism, a form of social constructivism, emphasizes the social and political consequences of reifying and de-

contextualising knowledge. Critical constructivists acknowledge the social nature of all knowledge construction and therefore value the cultivation of critical communities of inquiry and the achievement of a democratic social order. Critical-constructivists are interested in illuminating all aspects of the production, justification, and ownership of knowledge in society, and in particular, scientific knowledge (Bennett 2003).

Critical constructivism is an epistemological position that examines the process by which knowledge is socially constructed. Critical constructivism is grounded on constructivism. Constructivism asserts that nothing represents a neutral perspective, nothing exists before consciousness shapes it into something perceptible (Steinberg 2011). Critical constructivism refers to a theoretical stance in education related to developing in students an understanding and disposition about knowledge that furthers democratic living. Kincheloe (1993) describes critical constructivism as follows:

Critical constructivists ask what are the forces which construct the consciousness, the ways of seeing of the actors who live in it. Critical constructivism concerns the attempt to move beyond the formal style of thinking which emerges from empiricism and rationalism, a form of cognition that solves problems framed by the dominant paradigm, the conventional way of seeing.

(p. 110).

Kincheloe and Steinberg (2007) argue that culture has to be viewed as a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always contested. In particular, Kincheloe emphasizes the influence of political and cultural power in the construction of knowledge, consciousness, and views of reality. Critical constructivist teaching transcends concerns simply with the teaching of content knowledge: a key feature is a manifest concern for students' independent critical thinking. In broad terms, teaching such as this is seen as an agent of social change, as having emancipatory potential (Gilbert 1994). This stance concurs with the stance espoused by Eisner (2003), namely that 'the function of schools is surely not primarily to enable students to do well on tests, or even to do well in school itself' (2003, p. 651). Rather the purpose of critical constructivism is to bring about a greater personal and social consciousness in our students and 'to enable students to become the architects of their own education so that they can invent themselves during the course of their lives' (2003, p.652).

Bentley advocates a critical constructivist pedagogy that enables students to shape and reshape their own conceptual biographies through the development of intellectual tools and attitudes about the social basis of knowledge, a pedagogy that enables students to better understand society's official knowledge as it relates to their own indigenous knowledge, thus developing a new a relationship with knowledge (Bentley 2003). This relationship with knowledge is understood as a 'relation of meaning, and thus of value, between an individual (or group) and the processes or product to knowledge production' (Charlot, Bautier and Rochex 1992, p. 29). Bentley asserts that the relationship to knowledge constructed by students has much to do with the production and reproduction of social power structures in society:

The critical awareness that accompanies this new relationship with knowledge is intellectually liberating but also fosters ethical sensitivity, leading students to become more "response-able" for democracy.

(Bentley 2003, p.2)

The common thread is that education is a socio-political endeavour and teaching, as Freire asserted, is a political act that is never neutral. Every day, in the planning and enacting of the classroom curriculum, the teacher is faced with moral, social, and political questions.

Critical constructivism calls into question three idols of thinking prevalent in today's standards-based educational reform, namely, reification, decontextualisation and technocratisation. Reification is the presenting of contingent and mutable socially constructed forms of knowledge as necessary and unalterable. Decontextualisation refers to reformulating knowledge such that the complexities and contingencies of the social practices that produced the knowledge are concealed. Technocratisation refers to knowledge employed to service bureaucratization (Bennett 2003). Decontextualised, reified, or technocratised knowledge is regulated and distributed in ways that hide issues of power and control circulating in all forms of knowledge as Foucault has emphasized (1975), and has a number of pedagogical, social, and political consequences. For the teacher, learning is centred on the transmission of knowledge or banking model (Freire 1970). For the student the curriculum is dominated by and organized around reified and decontextualized categories of knowledge with the treatment of subject matter often concealing rather than illuminating socio-epistemological processes of backing and warranting knowledge claims as well as the processes by which they have been standardized. In countering these consequences, critical constructivism can have a potential emancipatory effect in education. Within the critical constructivist

classroom, learners reflect on the lives they lead and ask questions to discover meanings and values. Their learning experiences include a self-reflective dimension around themes from daily life (Watts and Jofili 2007). With dialogic reflection among their peers, they gain critical distance from their conditions and can consider how to transform them (McLaren and Leonard 1993). The overarching goal is to facilitate students in becoming active participants in shaping the economic, social and cultural environment in which they live.

3.6 Qualitative Research Methods

Just as there are various epistemologies which can inform qualitative research, so there are various qualitative research methods. A research method is a strategy of inquiry which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to research design and data collection. The choice of research method influences the way in which the researcher collects data. Specific research methods also involve different skills, assumptions and research practices. Following is an outline of the research methods I evaluated for my research including case study research, ethnography, grounded theory and action research as well as my rationale for taking an action research approach.

3.6.1 Case Study Research

Yin (2002) defines the scope of a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2002). Case study research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical, depending upon the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher. Both case-study research and action research are concerned with the researcher's gaining an in-depth understanding of particular phenomena in real-world settings. However, although both case-study research and action research deal with context-bound knowledge, action research offers a greater role to the participants in defining the issues to be addressed. In the words of Argyris and Schön 'action research takes its cues--its questions, puzzles, and problems--from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts' (1991, p. 86). Moreover, a case study begins with the researcher's interest in a particular set of phenomena, whereas an action research project begins mostly with the issues and concerns within some practical situation, with which the action researcher interacts. Thus, action researchers are confronted with the dilemma inherent in doing research

that should both answer a research question *and* fulfil a practical need (Rapoport 1970). Therefore, action research is characterised by ‘the active and deliberate self-involvement of the researcher in the context of his/her investigation’ (McKay and Marshall 2001, p. 49). On the other hand, case researchers mostly draw on the participants in order to investigate phenomena specified by the researcher prior to doing the study. Consequently, collaboration between the researcher and the participants seems more critical to the success of an action research endeavour than it is for case-study research, which relies more on the participants as sources of evidence.

3.6.2 Ethnography

Ethnographic research comes from the discipline of social and cultural anthropology where an ethnographer is required to spend a significant amount of time in the field. Ethnographers immerse themselves in the lives of the people they study (Lewis 1985, p. 380) and seek to place the phenomena studied in their social and cultural context. This method requires the researcher's prolonged engagement in the setting as well as the requirement to maintain an outside perspective. This differs significantly from the purpose of action research which seeks to bring about change as it investigates the phenomena studied. While ethnographic studies offer rich insights into the phenomena studied, they lack the transformative potential of action research which is a key focus of this research. Action research leads to transformation of the circumstances but, in the process, the participant researchers are also transformed. Increase in self-confidence and self-awareness, improvement in problem solving ability and development of a desire and capacity for lifelong learning (Zuber-Skerrit 2011) are all outcomes that have been ascribed to participation in an action research process. Hope and a growing agency to take control of their situations are also noted in the research literature (Schoen 2007).

Transformation is thus enhanced on three levels:

- Practical outcomes: transformation in social circumstances/improvement in educational concern;
- Epistemological outcomes: transformation in how people think about research, about knowledge creation and what counts as valid educational theory;
- Ontological outcomes: transformation of ways of living, how we interact with

others, how we see our position in the world.

Action research is aimed at improving lives by ‘bringing scholarship and praxis back together ... our immodest aim is to change the relationship between knowledge and practice ... usually practised by scholar-practitioners who care deeply about making a positive change in the world’ (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p.12). The aim, then, is to bring about social, educational and personal improvement. For research to make a real difference, to contribute to continual and growth-enhancing learning in our own lives and in the lives of those we influence, we need to continually self-reflect on what we are doing, and why we are doing it, and adapt accordingly.

3.6.3 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a research method that seeks to develop theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. According to Martin and Turner (1986), grounded theory is ‘an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data’ (p.13). The major difference between grounded theory and other methods is its specific approach to theory development - grounded theory suggests that there should be a continuous interplay between data collection and analysis. Grounded theory and action research share some commonalities, namely, they are emergent - in both, the understanding and the research process are shaped incrementally through an iterative process. In both, data analysis and interpretation and theory building occur at the same time as data collection. However, action research is action oriented and usually participative. In grounded theory the researcher alone does the theorising. The actions are left to the people in the research situation. Furthermore, action research is usually described in terms of the relationship between researcher and participants, or as a cycle. Grounded theory is described more in terms of the different operations carried out; the cyclic nature is thus left implicit (Dick 2003).

3.6.4. Action Research

Key attributes separate action research from other types of research. Unlike in other disciplines, the researcher makes no attempt to remain objective, but openly acknowledges their bias to the other participants. Methods which facilitate detailed inquiry into unique social situations, such as grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, and action research, offer researcher the opportunity to gain insight into social phenomena. Action research distinguishes itself from the other methods in that it seeks to satisfy two aims, namely addressing or solving a 'real world issue' or problem and contributing to the development of theory (Lewin 1944).

Among the above-mentioned methods, action research is especially suited to studying change processes in social contexts as well as facilitating change. Lewin emphasised *change* and *investigation of change* (Hendry 1996) as key contributions of action research. According to Lewin, emphasising action (facilitating change) enables researchers not only to suggest appropriate lines of action, but also to investigate the actual effects of such actions. Contemporary action research approaches have expanded the action research continuum to range 'from more traditional, consultant-directed, linear applications toward increasingly collaborative, systemic, transformational change processes' (Newman and Fitzgerald 2001 p. 37). Nonetheless, across the entire spectrum of action research, the notion of change still occupies a prominent position. Thus, action research is a means to investigate changes and their effects while overcoming researchers' 'self-imposed distance from the world of action' (Dash 1999, p. 479).

3.7 Rationale for Action Research Approach

There are numerous definitions of action research, however one of the most widely cited is that of Rapoport's, who defines action research in the following way:

Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.

(Rapoport 1970, p. 499)

This definition draws attention to the collaborative aspect of action research and to possible ethical dilemmas which arise from its use. It also makes clear, as Clark (1972) emphasises, that action research is concerned to enlarge the stock of knowledge of the social science community. It is this aspect of action research that distinguishes it from applied social science, where the goal is simply to apply social scientific knowledge but not to add to the body of knowledge. Action research may be seen to rest on John Dewey's belief that intellectual inquiry begins with a problematic situation (Susman 1989). Lewin (1947) and most subsequent researchers have conceived of action research as a cyclical inquiry process that involves diagnosing a problem situation, planning action steps, and implementing and evaluating outcomes. Evaluation leads to diagnosing the situation anew based on learnings from the previous activities cycle. Action research aims at producing new knowledge that contributes both to practical solutions to immediate problems and to general knowledge, this aim is aligned with the aims of my research, namely, to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness in third level students.

Action research, as outlined in Section 3.3.3, developed out of the profound social changes that followed World War II. Lewin (1947) developed the method in order to study social psychology within the framework of social theory. At about the same time, Collier (1945) called attention to the need for developing an approach to generate action-oriented knowledge to understand and improve American Indian affairs. Corey (1953) had similar ideas in education. A distinctive action research thrust also developed in parallel in Great Britain immediately after World War II (Wilson, Trist and Curie 1952). The early action research work cited above grew from a desire of researchers to discover ways of dealing with important social problems. These included racial prejudice, improved relationships with

American Indians, and repatriating British prisoners of war. My use of action research seeks to harness this early use of the method to explore social problems and raise critical consciousness through the medium of literature. For example, the tutorial on *How to Kill a Mockingbird* explores themes of racial prejudice, the tutorial on *Animal Farm* explores the dangers of ideology and the tutorial on *Lord of the Flies* explores the concept of anomie, or a society without order. This action research approach takes the social construction of reality seriously. The emphasis is on possibility rather than prediction. From a constructivist perspective, such research can contribute to people realizing their values, envisaging a preferred future and organizing effectively to achieve it. In short, action researchers rather than being value neutral, select problems to solve that would contribute to both general knowledge and practice solutions concerning democratic, humanistic values. An action researcher has some vision of how society or organizations could be improved and uses the research process to help bring this desired future state into existence. Action research is change oriented and seeks to bring about change that has positive social value (Elden and Chisholm 1993).

Action Research is an iterative research process that capitalizes on learning by both researchers and subjects within the context of the subjects' social system. Moreover, action research holds transformative possibilities for the teacher and the learner. Critical reflection on my values, practice and the context of my work is central to the process. Indeed McNiff's (2000) living theory approach views action research as a systematic attempt to reconcile practice with values. Action research is based on the Aristotelian principle of practice; developing understanding and practice hand in hand. It is also rigorous for without rigour it is not action research just good practice. This rigour must apply to every stage of the process; from the articulation of the concern and the values underpinning this concern to the formulation of the plan for intervention, the collection and analysis of data, the testing of conclusions and the accounting of the process. Validation in action research is a continuous process; it involves justifying the relevance of the work within the professional knowledge available through other's research and then testing it out in dialogue with professional colleagues and with the literature. According to Whitehead (1998):

The strength of the action research approach to professional development rests upon a creative and critical dialogue between members of a community which includes teachers, academics, parents, industrialists, and politicians. We move ahead through creative leaps of

imagination. We learn from our mistakes in detailed criticisms of our positions.

(Whitehead 1998, p.2)

Action research highlights the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process. It aims to turn the people involved in the process into researchers too. It is my experience that students learn best and more willingly apply learning when they do it themselves. This observation is supported by Knowles (1978) theory of andragogy and the belief that adults are motivated to learn when they see value in the learning for everyday life situations:

Andragogy assumes that the point at which an individual achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he psychologically becomes adult. A very critical thing happens when this occurs: the individual develops a deep psychological need to be perceived by others as being self-directing.

(Knowles 1978, p.56)

An explicit goal of this research is to initiate a cyclical and generative inquiry; that students will see the value of this mode of learning and continue to apply it in their studies to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness. People do action research as a way of helping them understand how they can influence social change. This commitment is contained in Marx's idea that it is not enough only to understand the world; the intent is to change it for the better. This intent reflects the 'sharp shift... in the constructivist and participatory phenomenological models with a step beyond interpretation and understanding towards social action' (Guba and Lincoln 2005, p.21). Within this paradigm, it is clear that the purpose of research is, as Marx outlined, not just to describe the world but to change it. Ultimately, this study is critical in nature, with the explicit goal of fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness to enable students to move beyond socially prescribed codes of behaviour and beliefs to a greater understanding of humanity and acceptance of the diversity of human experience. Action research promotes democracy and abolishes the notion of the all-knowing, all-powerful academic "expert" through the recognition that knowledge is context-bound, created in collaboration with others and that interpretations are fluid and changing (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Participants are regarded as practitioner-researchers, perfectly capable of finding workable ways to improve their own educational situations. The role of the academic researcher is therefore to guide the participants to take responsibility for their own

thinking, attitudes and actions (Wood, Morar and Mostert 2008) since shifts on a cognitive, affective and behavioural level are more likely to be sustained as they become part of the personal and professional identity of the participant (Batagiannis 2011). Action research has been described as being more concerned with practice than theory (Townsend 2010), but, I think action research also allows for the creation of unique and personal ‘living theories’(Whitehead 1989, p. 43) that generate knowledge that can influence educational practice and research in a significant way. I hope that this research will generate knowledge that will have a small but significant effect on how we teach students to think.

3.8 Critical Constructivist Action Research

Critical constructivist action research is based on a critical theoretical qualitative framework which acknowledges that our knowledge of the world is socially constructed and all knowers are historical and social subjects (Steinberg 2011). The aim of critical constructivist action research is not to transmit a universal truth or grand narrative but rather to engage participants in research production and the transmission of local narratives. Critical constructivists reiterate the notion that knowledge is not a substance that can be deposited like money in a bank (Freire 1970). Interpretations cannot be separated from the interpreter's location in the web of reality; one's interpretive facility involves understanding how historical, indigenous, social, cultural, economic and political contexts construct our perspectives on the world, self and other (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1993).

According to Watts, Jofili and Bezerra (1997) critical constructivism leads to a form of professional problem solving, entailing the devolution of responsibility for learning to the learner. This, in turn, leads to the use of action research and action learning (Pedler 1983), formative in helping teachers shape their thinking about classroom practices. Action research can provide teachers with the opportunity to test hypotheses and, consequently, to search for improvement in their own teaching. Critical constructivism provides teachers with the opportunity to contextualise that thinking within a broader social, historical and political context. Critical constructivism enacted through teachers' action research is an attempt to tackle human purposes, paying attention to human dignity, freedom, authority, and social responsibility. Kincheloe (1991) observes of the critical action researcher:

Never content with what they have constructed, never certain of the system's appropriateness, always concerned with the expansion of self-awareness and consciousness, the critical action researcher engages in a running meta-dialogue, a constant conversation with self, a perpetual reconceptualisation of his or her system of meaning.

(1991, p. 114)

The focus of this action research is not just the raising of awareness in students but also a raising of consciousness of their circumstances and conditions, as well as the development of critical thinking. As Kincheloe (1993) notes:

In this process critical constructivist teachers set up conditions that encourage student self-awareness and reflection, hoping to facilitate further growth through individual awareness of

the nature of prior growth.

(p. 125)

My role in this action research was influenced by the research of Watt, Jofili and Bezerra (1997) who have evaluated the role of critical constructivist action research specifically as it pertains to science education. Their pedagogical focus, however, is similar to my own, that is, the fostering of critical thinking and the externalisation of that process. Jofili (1997) has outlined a four-step model of teacher movement towards eliciting critical thinking: developing reflection, fostering awareness, encouraging a search for change and promoting effective change. I have used the tutorials and literature circles to foster awareness in students, develop and deepen reflection, and encourage critical consciousness.

3.9 Pilot Study and Learning Curves

Before undertaking this research I carried out a pilot study to identify and eliminate weaknesses inherent in the model. The pilot project proved central to my approach and how I adapted my research design. The group I focused on were first year Arts students in Waterford Institute of Technology, hereafter referred to as WIT, majoring in one of the following subjects: Psychology, Sociology and Religious Studies. I chose this sample as I had six contact hours a week with the group in both a lecturing and tutorial capacity, teaching a Critical Thinking Module. I believe this is an appropriate forum for introducing my research as the module focuses on moving students away from surface learning towards deeper learning that is, moving from a basic comprehension of a given topic to evaluation and synthesis of that topic. It was hoped that by the end of the module, students would have an understanding of the higher order skills involved in third level education as opposed to the banking model often used at second level and I used Bloom's taxonomy to illustrate the difference. The students were asked to complete a critical review at the end of term (Appendix 5):

- Question 1 asked the students to respond to the novel using verbs that ensured answers reach the level of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis outlined by Bloom;
- Question 2 asked them to define the key concepts and illustrate how they are developed in the novel;

- Question 3 focused on making meaningful connections between theory and practice;
- Question 4 asked the students to identify any perspective changes that have taken place since reading the novel;
- Question 5 elicited feedback from the students to inform and improve my research moving forward.

Overall, the group found the assignment interesting and felt it enabled them to make meaningful connections between theory and practice. Several students stated that the novel kept them interested in course material and helped them see another perspective on life. Some students found the novel encouraging and they looked forward to reading further so they could apply the story-line to the course material and apply it to their own lives. Students' subjective experiences constitute the data, in light of which I adjusted and modified the emerging curriculum map and indeed there were key aspects of the process that needed modification.

I allowed students to choose their own novel to illuminate key concepts of their course. My reasoning in doing so was to facilitate students in making autonomous choices and become more personally involved with their course content. This was problematic on a number of levels. Firstly, it meant that out of a cohort of 62 students there were in total 38 novels chosen, which I had to read if I were to evaluate their reviews authentically; while this might be a pleasurable duty it is not prudent due to the time constraints inherent in a semesterised curriculum. Secondly, many students chose a novel individually, thus precluding their inclusion in literature circles to discuss their choice of novel with their peers. I found this disappointing as collaborative discussion and scaffolding were key aspects of the process for me. I hoped that the literature circles would enable less competent students to master key concepts with help from more skilful peers (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976). Nevertheless, I was glad of the opportunity to resolve these issues before embarking on my research and the books chosen by the students enabled me to see issues from multiple perspectives and connect meaningfully with my students. Also, I realized I need to include specific questions in the assignment brief pertaining to the role of the literature circle in facilitating understanding to encourage students to collaborate effectively.

Thirdly, a more nebulous issue, that of literary merit. Literary merit, as Lamarque reminds us, is not something intrinsic to a work of literature but something that is conferred upon it by

the cultural establishment of the epoch, is rooted in its prevalent aesthetic values, and is ratified through inclusion in a constantly shifting canon (1996). Elevation to the literary canon can thus hardly be taken as a reliable indicator of a novel's literary merit or possible impact on its readers. However, while I was resistant to placing value judgments on students' choice of material or displaying bias, selecting relevant materials is an essential part of action research. Since all research is affected by the social and political position of the researcher, making this position clear is one way of avoiding bias:

Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgment help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research.

(Griffith 1998, p.133)

Moreover, complex material requires complex engagement and it is part of my duty of care to facilitate students in developing the cognitive capacities necessary to engage actively in third level discourse. Moreover, admitting to such complexity is, I think, a crucial step towards real progress in researching the social impact of literature and its ability to foster critical reflection and perspective transformation. As Derrida observes:

One shouldn't complicate things for the pleasure of complicating things, but one should also never simplify or pretend to be sure of simplicity when there is none. If things were simple, word would have gotten out, as you say in English.

(Derrida 1998, p.119)

A good starting point for me was the set of criteria developed by six pilot groups of teens for the Teen's Top Ten Books survey by the American Literature Association (ALA 2007). This was a useful resource for me because my participants were a cohort of 62 first year BA students in WIT majoring in Psychology, Sociology and Religion. 59 of these students would be classified as young adults (there were three mature students in the cohort, however, all works chosen took account of the value for all students and the final list was comprised of works with established literary value). The goals espoused by the ALA were positively aligned with the goals of my research, namely, that the value of the literature chosen for this research should lie in its capacity for telling its readers the truth, however disagreeable that

may sometimes be. In this way it equips readers for dealing with the realities of impending adulthood and for assuming the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. By giving readers such a frame of reference, it also helps them to find role models, to make sense of the world they inhabit, to develop a personal philosophy of being, to determine what is right and, equally, what is wrong, to cultivate a personal sensibility (ALA 2007). To, in other words, become critically conscious citizens. Following are the criteria outlined by the ALA in determining the value of literature for young adult readers:

1. *Appeal and Involvement* - Books should have a lasting and universal appeal, an attractive cover and a high degree of personal, emotional involvement. This would help to foster emotional understanding and empathy in my students.
2. *Literary Quality* – Books should be substantive and not ‘fluffy’. They should offer unique perspectives and ways of thinking, thus enabling students to engage in critical thinking and view situations from multiple perspectives.
3. *Characters* – Characters should be old enough to understand the problems and concerns of young adults. They should be realistic, compelling and distinctive.
4. *Content and Style* – The subject matter should be relevant to young adults, with good descriptions, vivid imagery, and an appropriate (not condescending) tone. The material should not be didactic; rather students should arrive at a new awareness or understanding by themselves.
5. *Plot* – The plot should have a good blend of action and description with a satisfying (not necessarily happy) ending.
6. *Genres* – The final list should contain many different genres on topics that appeal to a variety of young adult readers.

Finally, considering the myriad of controversial issues in contemporary literature, a pressing concern was that students might face issues they aren't prepared for or they will encounter

provocative or hurtful material. For example, a popular choice amongst Sociology Students was *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. While I acknowledged the literary merit of the text, I worried about some of the issues expressed in the text, notably Hassan's rape. However, in grappling with the ethical dilemmas associated with text selection, it is important not to lose sight of the larger purposes for using these texts – to help students to become more aware of diverse cultural and political perspectives. The harrowing images of Hassan's rape in Chapter 7 of *The Kite Runner* are not gratuitous, rather they are instrumental in conveying the challenge and importance of doing what is right, and metaphorically, they illustrate the rape of Afghanistan's powerless by those who have power. In this sense, the images serve a gateway to understanding the power of ideology and the nature of oppression in Afghanistan. Barbara Kingsolver (2003) writes:

If there is a fatal notion on this earth it's the notion that wider horizons will be fatal. Difficult, troublesome, scary – yes, all that. But the wounds for a sturdy child will not be mortal. When I read Doris Lessing at seventeen, I was shocked to wake up from my placid colour blind coma into the racially segregated town I called my home. I saw I had been a fatuous participant in a horrible thing. I bit my nails to the quick, cast nets of rage over all I loved for a time, and quaked to think of all I had - still have – to learn. But if I hadn't made that reckoning, I would have lived a smaller, meaner life'.

(Kingsolver 2003, p. 53)

It is therefore important to know when to allow discord and discomfort into the classroom while at the same time providing a safe haven within which students can take risks. It is also important that students recognize how literature connects them to larger social responsibilities.

After resolving the issues in my pilot project I approached my research with more confidence and a better understanding of the action research process. The feedback from the pilot project was instrumental in refining my research position and clarifying my research goals. As the curriculum map unfolded and was pedagogically validated in retrospect, it enabled me to anticipate future possibilities and provided me with a sense of direction without prescribing a fixed agenda for the curriculum is always in the process of becoming. Furthermore, in action research, a single loop of planning, acting, observing and reflecting can be regarded only as a beginning. If what is learned in one cycle is not applied judiciously in future cycles of

modifying plans, implementing them, monitoring the amended action, and reflecting again, then the action research process disintegrates into mere problem solving or what Grundy and Kemmis refer to as 'arrested action research' (p.323). Most importantly, the pilot project deepened my understanding of action research as an iterative process. Understanding of the situation can grow bit by bit as a study proceeds. As understanding accumulates, the research process can be modified to capitalise on that understanding. In other words, in action research both the content (the growing theory) and the process (the research methods that are being used) can be emergent.

3.10 Research Design

In a qualitative study ‘research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p. 24), that is, the activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, and elaborating or refocusing the research questions are usually going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others. One of the intellectual goals for which qualitative studies are especially useful according to Maxwell (2006) is the goal of understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts they give. In a qualitative study, the focus is not only on the physical events and behaviour taking place, but also in how the participants in the study make sense of these and how their understandings influence their behaviour. The perspectives on events and actions held by the people involved in them are not simply their accounts of these events and actions, to be assessed in terms of truth or falsity; they are part of the reality that the researcher is trying to understand, and a major influence on their behaviour (Maxwell 2004). This focus on meaning is central to the constructivist approach. The aim of action research is to affect and change reality and the aim of this research is to explore the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness in third level students. Marshall (2006) concluded that qualitative research typically relies on four methods for gathering information:

- Participating in the setting (*tutorials and literature circles*)
- Observing directly (*field notes*)
- Analyzing documents and material culture (*critical reviews*)
- Interviewing in depth (*interviews*)

How the researcher plans to use these methods, however, depends on several considerations. Marshall discusses the selection of methods using Brantlinger’s (1997) summary of seven categories of crucial assumptions for qualitative inquiry.

- The first concerns the researcher’s views of the nature of the research: Is the inquiry technical and neutral, intending to conform to traditional research within her discipline, or is it controversial and critical, with an explicit political agenda?
- The second concern relates to the researcher’s positioning relative to the participants:

Does she view herself as distant and objective or intimately involved in their lives? Thirdly, the “direction of her ‘gaze’ ” must be considered: Is it outward, toward others—externalizing the research problem—or does it include explicit inner contemplation?

- Fourth, what is the purpose of the research: Does she assume that the primary purpose of the study is professional and essentially private or is it intended to be useful and informative to the participants or the site?
- Related to the fourth category is the fifth: Who is the intended audience of the study—the scholarly community or the participants themselves?
- Sixth, what is the researcher’s political positioning: Does she view the research as neutral or does she claim a politically explicit agenda?
- Finally, the seventh assumption has to do with how she views the exercise of agency: Does she see herself and the participants as essentially passive or as “engaged in local praxis”?

(Brantlinger 1997, p. 4)

Assumptions made in these seven categories shape how the specific research methods are conceived and implemented throughout this study. The chosen methodology of this study is Critical Constructivist Action Research because it brings with it a democratic imperative to challenge oppression and nurture and sustain social justice. It is a methodology grounded in the values and culture of its participant-researchers and hence it is flexible in local agency (Somekh and Zeichner 2009). It is critical constructivist research because it acknowledges that the world is socially constructed and all knowers are historical and social subjects (Steinberg 2011). It is critical because of its intention to change and to empower and its acknowledgement that there is no neutrality in human practice (Freire 1970).

The research design utilized tutorials and literature circles to create a setting that would foster critical thinking in the classroom and facilitate critical consciousness. The tutorials emphasize the important process of coming to personal awareness about contemporary issues through critical engagement and personal exploration. The critical lens approach taken in the tutorials enables the students to destabilize and deconstruct traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Feminist Lens), and interrogate privilege through analyzing the ways in which privileged groups benefit from such membership and emphasizing how privilege can be utilized in shifting cultural norms (Marxist Lens). The critical lens approach further invites students to

question their perspectives and positionalities (Reader Response Lens) and finally, students are encouraged to approach the texts without connection to the socio-historical context. The literature circles centralize critical dialogue for consciousness-raising, community-building, and cultural norm-shifting; this process seeks individual change as a path to systemic change. The two-fold approach of the weekly tutorials and literature circles constitutes a problem-posing approach, akin to the pedagogical method outlined by Freire, focused upon reflection and analysis of the sociopolitical environment. In this method, students are encouraged to ask questions about issues that affect their lives and develop the critical literacy to ‘read’ social conditions that perpetuate injustice and marginalization among the oppressed, such as the inequitable distribution of resources and access to opportunity. Freire sees great potential for student empowerment in such a method:

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to the challenge. Because they respond to this as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed.

(Freire 1970, p. 62)

The formation of critical consciousness allows students to question the nature of their historical and social situation—to read their world—with the goal of acting as subjects in the creation of a democratic society. As a teacher, I am guided by Bell’s description of a constructivist curriculum (1991). Bell (1993) describes four forms of constructivist relationship between teacher and student—power-on, power-off, power-for and power-with. Power-on relates to traditional teaching (didactic instruction). Power-off is also traditional in that the teacher ignores constructivist learning opportunities and maintains his or her own frameworks for classroom interaction. In power-for and power-with, Bell provides a model of enabling teaching, where the teacher works alongside the student either guiding and structuring or democratically learning together with the student. Bell’s guide provides a range of strategies for teachers to achieve these latter forms and to change their general approaches to teaching and learning. She suggests that, too often, facilitators act as experts with good advice to give, thus ‘reinforcing the expert-novice dichotomy’ (1993, p. 9) teaching for empowerment, in contrast, must act to diminish expert-novice dependencies.

This cyclical process of tutorials and literature circles over the course of the semester is the crux of action research; the steps are repeated in sequence as work progresses, creating an upward spiral of improved practice. My approach thus preserves the Lewinian notion of the spiral in the notions of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Literature was used in each tutorial as a gateway into complex theories and course material (Appendix 4) and student explorations took place in literature circles. This is an inductive approach guided by the ‘problem-posing’ method outlined by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) as opposed to the banking model of education. The literature excerpts are objects of reflection for both teacher and student. This approach incorporates Maxine Greene’s belief that the study of works of art is always incomplete and artworks themselves are inexhaustible resources for learning, for the truths they tell must be seen as located in particular historical circumstances and social contexts. They therefore have the capacity to change as our knowledge and thinking changes, and education theories must cope with this reflexivity.

3.10.1 Tutorials

What is important for the improvement of schooling, as Eisner (1995) emphasized, is ‘paying attention to the importance of building a culture of schooling that is genuinely intellectual in character, that values questions and ideas at least as much as getting right answers’ (p. 764). There are pedagogical practices that are compatible with the epistemological stance of critical constructivism. In the social studies, an issue-centred approach has been recommended as an alternative to traditional curriculum and instruction (Engle and Ochoa 1988). Carter (1991) encourages more use of the problem-posing education of Paulo Freire (1989) wherein students undertake a study of both personal and social values, beliefs, and assumptions involved in an issue, so that they come to see the world less as a given and more ‘a reality in the process of transformation’ (Freire, cited in Carter 1991, p. 278) and this is what I wanted to achieve with the tutorials.

In 1994, noted author and scholar bell hooks wrote *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. In this work, hooks expresses that educators should directly and consistently educate students to critically discuss sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, and cultural respect (hooks 1994). The crux of her text is applicable to any academic discipline;

however, it is particularly relevant to the teaching of critical thinking. Researchers have studied critical consciousness development addressing three broad areas: racism, sexism, and social injustice (Diemer et al 2006). Each of these areas is represented in the tutorial materials that form part of this research.

Busching and Slesinger (2002) explicate that literature is a vehicle by which students can explore their world by focusing on issues and concerns, such as identity, discrimination, sexuality, environmental issues, and war and violence. Furthermore, McDaniel (2004) posits that when students read and experience the controversial topics explored in diverse texts, they become aware of the injustices in the textual world, the real world, and work toward changing their world to benefit mankind. Experts in the field of reading agree that one salient aspect of reader response is to connect students' life experiences to texts (Sandman and Gruhler 2007). However, a response to literature requires connections beyond personal experiences. Critical literacy builds a foundation for students to engage in reader response activities that require them to read, analyse, question, and challenge all forms of text (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 2004). It is an active approach to reading that focuses on issues of power and social inequality. Teachers who practice critical literacy engage their students in various activities designed to give them opportunities to interrogate texts, view multiple perspectives, create alternative versions of reality (Lewison, Leland and Harste 2000), and then take action to put the new versions of reality into effect (Behrman 2006). Accordingly, readers are taught to question authors' assumptions and beliefs, to question the voices heard and the voices that are silenced, and to find alternative ways to improve their world (Au 2009).

The framework employed in this research draws on the work of Ciardiello (2004) who presented a framework of four themes: examining multiple perspectives, finding an authentic voice, recognizing social barriers, and finding one's identity to promote a participatory democratic classroom. The theme of multiple perspectives is an important aspect of critical literacy because it teaches students that texts can have multiple meanings based on various viewpoints, beliefs, and values. In tutorials, students were asked to examine the power differential in each of the pieces of literature used as part of tutorial study and to reflect on whose voices seemed to dominate the discussions, or whose voices were discounted or ignored. More importantly, I ask them to reflect on how they felt if perhaps the voice that had been marginalized or silenced had belonged to one of them, and I ask them if they had ever

thought to question why. My goal is to raise their critical awareness by teaching them to question why their perspective was silenced, what role did power play, what affect did power have on their perspective, and what action could they have taken to change the outcome (Bean and Moni 2003). By using questions such as these, Lewison et al (2008) would posit that I am purposely teaching my students to ‘question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyse popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice...’ (p.3). Ultimately, I am providing the foundation for my students to begin to view the classroom as a society from which dialogue creates a space for constructing critical conversations about issues of social injustice.

Ciardello (2004) tells readers that the theme of finding one’s authentic voice in critical literacy is closely connected to the theme of multiple perspectives. In other words, as students learn that texts often silence alternative perspectives, then students begin to understand there are voices missing behind those silenced perspectives. Critical literacy is a pedagogical tool that can encourage students to question issues of power and to challenge the forces that shape inequality and oppression in their world (Beck 2005). For young adolescents to use their words to rethink their worlds, it is important to understand the power of dialogue and the need to create experiences whereby students can interrogate societal issues and attempt to solve social injustices in their world. This need is further met by the use of literature circles which will be discussed later in this chapter. I engage my students in reading texts that address issues of democracy, freedom, equity, and social justice, whereby critical conversations about silenced voices and marginalized groups can grow into sharper focus. I further develop lessons based on dialogue in order for my students to participate in critical conversations that examine the injustices of privileging one group over another because of social status, race, ethnicity, and religion, and how membership in one cultural group often defines opportunities or a lack thereof. While reading, I ask them to question whose voices are heard, whose voices are missing, why the author chose to favour or reject some characters, and how could they change the social conditions to give voice to the voiceless (Bean and Moni 2003; McLaughlin and DeVogd 2004). These crucial conversations provide opportunities for my students to assume a critical stance, discover their voices, and more importantly, to foster a critical consciousness.

Ciardiello's (2004) third theme recognizes that harmful assumptions, negative stereotypes, and hurtful labels build social barriers that are divisive and counterintuitive to building a positive classroom culture. The theme of recognizing social barriers calls on teachers to bring students together by knocking down walls that separate, creating learning spaces where students can present different beliefs, values, and perspectives, and nurturing respect as caring participants in democracy. To expand on the importance of this theme, I introduce my students to literature that intentionally demonstrates how acceptance is often determined by cultural, ethnic, or class privilege. The focus is to examine how prejudice is enacted by the dominant group.

Ciardiello's final theme relates to finding one's identity. Gee (2002) offered that identity is shaped in a situated context whereby individuals manifest certain beliefs, values, and behaviours in order to be a member of a social group. Many students struggle to form their true identities. Separated by differences in language, ethnicity, culture, and social status from the mainstream norm, many students are often marginalized in a classroom society (Gay 2002). Nevertheless, Bishop's (1992) seminal study offered that literature can do more; 'literature can act as a mechanism for the discussion and social transaction that will affect how children think about the world and children's response to literature can either validate or challenge their own ideology and world view' (p. 43), I think this applies to young adults too. From this stance, I view literature to be an agent of socialization; it is a mechanism whereby my students can examine their implicit beliefs, attitudes, and identities while developing the knowledge of what a more just society would look like. The goal is for my students to understand that a learning context is a society. Moreover, it must be an environment of trust that encourages identity development by signifying that each student is a significant and valued member of the classroom society.

The tutorial process begins on the first day of classes when the course is introduced to the students. I provide an overview of topics to be covered in tutorials and relate a few of them to my own family of origin. The students are exposed to how the tutorials could illuminate and illustrate their course material through the use of literature. Each student is provided with a tutorial handbook (3.12) and students are asked to read the text before coming to class for the rest of the term so they are ready to share their responses. Students respond to the text in tutorials using a critical lens approach. A critical lens is an approach to a text based upon a critical knowledge or theory. This technique enables students to evaluate a text from multiple

perspectives thus facilitating multiple ways of knowing and opens up a horizon of dissensus that undermines the idea of a single, unifying narrative with which to characterise the human experience. Students are introduced to the use of critical lenses to engage with course literature at the beginning of term (a detailed explanation of the critical lens approach can be found in Appendix 3). They evaluate the text from a Marxist perspective, Feminist perspective, New Critical Perspective and Reader Response Perspective. There were a number of different perspectives worthy of consideration but the perspectives I chose allowed the students, over the course of the semester, to analyse structures of power, issues of gender and question their own interpretations and perspective. The tutorial handbook is contained in the Section 3.12 and contains all 12 tutorials and scaffolds for the term including an outline of each of the critical perspectives employed in tutorials.

3.10.2. List of Books related to course content

Psychology

| |
|--|
| The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath |
| Running with Scissors by Augusten Burroughs |
| Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger |
| The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon |
| Room by Emma Donoghue |

Sociology

| |
|--|
| Animal Farm by George Orwell |
| Lord of the Flies by William Golding |
| One flew over the Cuckoo's nest by Ken Kesey |
| The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini |
| To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee |
| The Country Girls by Edna O'Brien |

Religion

| |
|--------------------------------------|
| The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown |
| The Testament of Mary by Colm Toibin |
| The Life of Jesus by J.M. Coetzee |

3.10.3 Literature Circles

Students were asked to form literature circles in tutorial groups where they could collaboratively identify and analyse key concepts, thus advancing individual learning whilst enabling scaffolding to take place. The literature circles required students to take one of four roles (literature role sheets are contained in Appendix 1) and these roles were varied each week. This allowed students to learn from each other and encouraged them to evaluate texts from multiple perspectives. The literature circles reinforced the importance of dialogue and discussion in critical thinking and fostering critical consciousness.

The four roles given to students included:

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a summary of the reading. Don't tell the whole story, just focus on the important parts. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give them a quick statement that tells about the story (the summary), and the key points.

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the novel, poem or short story you are reading and the outside world. This means connecting what you read with your own life, to what happens at college or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, or to other people or problems. Once you have shared your connection to this section of the reading, each member of your group will also relate their own connection to the reading, although they may refer to a different passage.

Discussion Director: Your job is to write a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the novel, poem or short story. The best questions will come from your own thoughts, feelings, and ideas about this section of the book. You also need to write your own answers to these questions.

Literary Luminary: Your job is to choose a paragraph or sentences from the novel, poem or short story to discuss with your group. Your purpose is to help other students by spotlighting something interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important from the text. You can read parts aloud yourself, or ask another group member to read them. Include your reasons for picking the paragraphs or sections you did. Please record the page number and paragraph.

In summary, students were given a tutorial handbook at the beginning of term clearly explaining the critical lens approach and outlining the procedure used in tutorials. There were 12 tutorials in total, each exploring a different text. The reading material used in tutorials was also outlined in advance and provided in class or on Moodle (the online teaching and learning forum used in WIT).

Students read the material and responded to the texts using the critical lens framework. The purpose of this activity was to engage students in critical thinking as they explored different perspectives and to foster critical consciousness as they reflected on how things were and how they could or should be. The purpose of the literature circles was to engage students in discussion that allowed them to evaluate other perspectives and in turn, reflect on their own beliefs and any bias therein. The literature circles were an important part of the research process. I used the literature circles during weekly tutorials to allow students to engage in discussion about the literature they were reading, evaluate multiple perspectives and understand difference. This social interaction plays a key role in critical consciousness development. Indeed, Freire's 'pedagogical circle' method involved participatory and collaborative discussion among members of oppressed groups to 'problematize' or generate reflectiveness about one's socio-political environment and the capacity to act upon that socio-political environment. Critical consciousness theory emphasizes the role of one's peers in critical consciousness development (Freire 1973) and the literature circles consolidated the Freirean framework wherein an important goal of peer education is to provide a context for the development of young people's critical consciousness.

According to Freire, the transition from naïve to critical consciousness involves an 'active, dialogic educational programme' (1973, p.19) where learners are actively involved in formulating critical analyses, and generating scenarios of alternate ways of being in the world. My aim, with the tutorials and literature circles, was to stimulate insights into the way in which our positionality affects our being in the world, and also stimulate development of the belief that existing norms can be changed, as well as scenarios for alternative ways of being. Ultimately, my hope is that the educational programme I have designed should promote a context within which young adults can collectively develop the belief and confidence to resist dominant norms and effect change.

3.10.4 Sampling

The sampling technique employed is a crucial element of the overall sampling strategy. This qualitative study employs a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling refers to samples chosen for a particular purpose and is a technique often employed in qualitative investigation. With a purposive non-random sample the number of people interviewed is less

important than the criteria used to select them. The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of selection, most often chosen to reflect the diversity and breadth of the sample population. Purposeful sampling is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices (Patton 2002). It groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. Sampling strategies should therefore always be determined by the purpose of the research project. Probability sampling, for example, is inappropriate for qualitative research as members of the research population are chosen at random and have a known probability of selection. Groups are represented in the sample in their true proportions; or, where unequal probabilities are used the data are reweighted back to the true proportions (Wilmott 2009). The aim is to produce a statistically representative sample, suitable for hypothesis testing. Qualitative research, on the other hand, uses non-probability sampling as it does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample or draw statistical inference. Indeed, a phenomenon need only appear once in the sample (Wilmott 2009).

As the purpose of this research is to inquire into the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness in their level students, the setting for the research reported here lies in critical thinking education at third level, specifically in WIT. This sample is chosen to be representative of the total population of first year students in WIT all of whom share a commonality; they are taking a first year core module in Critical Thinking. I considered my sample to be representative because of the high response rate. The response rate refers to the proportion of people actually included in a sample, relative to the number of people that were attempted to be included and the refusal rate refers to the number of people that refuse participation in a study. Out of a cohort of 38 students in my first year Critical Thinking tutorial group, all agreed to participate in the research. This was instrumental to the success of my study because, as an action researcher I accept that transformations of social reality cannot be achieved without engaging the understanding of the social actors involved. Although not a sufficient basis alone for achieving transformation, understanding the way people construe their practices and their situations is a crucial element in transforming education (Carr and Kemmis 1985).

The sample I focused on was a cohort of 38 first year ARTS students in WIT taking a module in Critical Thinking, all of whom had to be 18 years of age or older to participate in this

research. Bernard (2000) states that most studies are based on samples of between 30-60 participants while Bertaux (1981) asserts that fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample for qualitative research. The average age within the sample was 19 with students ranging in age from 18 to 61 (there were 3 mature students out of the cohort of 38 students). This sample was chosen for a particular purpose; to investigate the potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness within the students. This research took place over the course of the college semester from September 2012. This involved 12 weeks of hourly tutorials incorporating literature circle discussions and reflections. All students were majoring in Psychology, Sociology or Religion and required to take Critical Thinking as a core module in their first year of study. I chose this sample from the resources available to me because, as students of Critical Thinking, the cohort was aligned with the purpose of my research; to foster critical thinking and critical consciousness and I could align my research to the semesterised curriculum. The sample were required to participate in tutorials and literature circles to enable me to evaluate the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness through observations and document analysis.

The interviews carried out as part of this research further incorporated purposive, representative sampling. The sample group of 38 students contained three subgroups, that is, students majoring in three different subjects, Psychology, Sociology and Religion. I therefore interviewed one student representing each major studied, three interviews in total. A feature of qualitative sampling is this fact that the number of cases sampled is often small. This is because, as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) have outlined, a phenomenon only need appear once to be of value. There is no need for scale as there is no need for estimates of statistical significance. Furthermore, because qualitative investigation aims for depth as well as breadth, the analysis of large numbers of in-depth interviews would simply be unmanageable because of a researcher's ability to effectively analyse large quantities of qualitative data. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) carried out a systematic analysis of their own data from a study of sixty women, involving reproductive health care in Africa. They examined the codes developed from their sixty interviews, in an attempt to assess at which point their data were returning no new codes, and were therefore saturated. Their findings suggested that data saturation had occurred at a very early stage. Of the thirty six codes developed for their study, thirty four were developed from their first six interviews, and thirty five were developed after twelve. Guest et al concluded that for studies with a high level of homogeneity among the

population 'a sample of six interviews [out of sixty] may be sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations' (2006 p.78). As there was a high level of homogeneity in my study I concluded that 3 interviews out of a sample of 38 was sufficient to yield rich data. Qualitative researchers sample until they reach what is called data saturation, that is, until no new information emerges. Researchers typically begin with a planned sample size, they then adjust this size as they collect the data, adjusting the size up if they determine they need more information, and adjusting down if they determine they are reaching saturation earlier than expected. I quickly reached data saturation with the interviews and adjusted my research accordingly.

3.11 Tutorial Handbook for Students

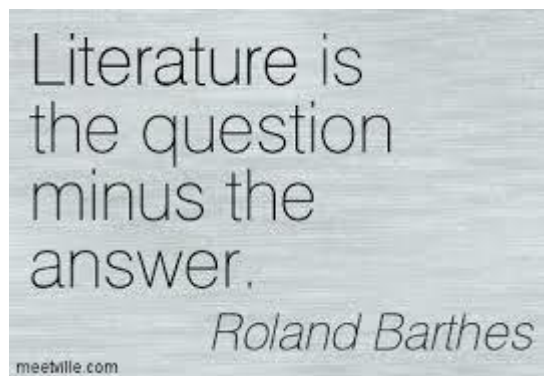
The tutorial handbook is a critical component of this research. As outlined in Section 3.11, the handbook was given to students at the beginning of term to provide an overview of the topics we would be exploring, the lenses we would be using to explore these topics and the types of questions we would use to explore the selected literary texts. It was important for me to give students all this information before we entered into the research so that they knew exactly what they were committing too and could make an informed decision about their participation.

I have included the handbook in full in my methodology because I think it is necessary, if potential readers and researchers are to fully understand my research approach. The unique methodological approach entails the inclusion of the detailed setting out of the methods employed to gather the data, that is, the specifically designed tutorials, to ensure that the reader understands how they work to facilitate student movement along the path to critical consciousness. Reading the tutorial handbook will thus act as a guide to potential researchers, outlining clearly what kind of texts were employed, what perspectives were used to facilitate critical development, and what kinds of questions were asked to prompt this development.

Qualitative research typically engages the target audience in an open-ended, exploratory discussion using tools like focus groups or in-depth interviews. The handbook is a research tool that I think also facilitates exploratory discussion and can easily be adapted by other researchers and used to facilitate further research in the field. Through techniques like the handbook as well as effective moderating, as teachers we can encourage our students to go beyond superficial, knee-jerk responses to uncover their true opinions and behaviours. Effective moderation is critical to the success of qualitative research and I think the tutorial handbook will give potential researchers an insight into what worked for me, over a period of 12 weeks, to elicit critical responses for my students. I hope the tutorial handbook will benefit other researchers hoping to develop criticality in their students and that is why I have included the outline for all 12 tutorials in my methodology.

BA ARTS YEAR 1

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH LITERATURE



MODULE: CRITICAL THINKING
TUTOR: CHRISTA DE BRUN

Introduction to Literature for Students

More than two thousand years ago, the Roman poet Horace claimed that literature is ‘sweet’ and ‘useful’. Since then, literature has been traditionally understood, at least in Western cultures, as having the dual purpose of entertaining and educating its audience. Literary texts are constructed in effect as objects of beauty, sources of pleasure and as conveyors of messages and information. While authors often claim no practical purpose for their works, all literature constitutes an attempt at persuasively conveying certain values and ideas. The entertaining and beautiful aspect of literary works acts in reality as part of the appeal and attractiveness which the work tries to attach to the ideas which it seeks to convey. The beauty of literature is therefore a part of its rhetoric, a device intended to strengthen the overall persuasiveness and influence of the work on its audience. While the entertaining aspect of literature may be rather obvious, understanding the ideas or values which a text advances is not always a simple task. Part of the problem is the fact that the ideas of a literary text are almost always presented in indirect or "symbolic" form. Take for example the following very simple narrative:

The Dog and the Piece of Meat



A dog carrying a piece of meat in his mouth was crossing a river when he suddenly saw his own reflection in the water. Mistaking the image for another dog, he dropped his meat and jumped to the attack. His piece of meat fell in the water and was carried away by the current. And so the dog lost both what he had and what he didn't have.

In itself an amusing story, we know nevertheless that one of the purposes of this fable of Aesop--a Greek storyteller of the 6th century B.C.--is to teach a point about the dangers of greed and the importance of being happy with what we have. Although those points are not literally or explicitly made in the story, they are embedded in its symbolism. In this story, the animal and his actions are not to be taken literally but instead are to be understood as symbolic representations of certain kinds of human character and behaviour. An important guide in literary study is the idea that one must always strive to go beyond the literal or the mere appearances of things and search instead for the "meat" of the story. Unlike the dog of Aesop's fable, we should not allow ourselves to be fooled by false appearances. In the reading you will do in this course, you will be engaging in a constant search for the ideas and values which, although often not explicitly mentioned in the texts, constitute the substance of literary works. We will explore the following texts using a critical lens approach which enables us to analyse and evaluate texts from multiple perspectives thus facilitating multiple ways of knowing.

The literature referred to in these tutorials incorporates novellas, short stories and poems. All texts are short, easily accessible, widely known in the public domain and available on ebrary from WIT libraries or on Moodle.

Introduction to Critical Consciousness for Students

Critical consciousness focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. Critical consciousness thus functions as a socio-political educative tool that engages you as a student in questioning the nature of your historical and social situation which Freire addressed as "reading the world". The goal of critical consciousness, according to Freire, should be acting as subjects in the creation of democratic society. Freire has moved others to identify their own commitments, to take reflective action on the grounds of their own lived situations in the human worlds they share.

Through practice, people can acquire a critical awareness of their own condition and the aim of these tutorials is to consolidate the framework espoused by Freire, utilising his concept of reading the world to enable you to engage with literature as a means of interpreting the world around you and employ literature as a tool for fostering critical reflection and identity formation.

According to Freire, reading is 'not just to walk on the words, and it is not flying over the words either. Reading is re-writing what we are reading. Reading is to discover the connections between the text, and the context of the text, and also how to connect the text/context with my context, the context of the reader' (Freire, 1987, p.11).

So, go forth and read! And don't forget to bring all your thoughts to your literature circle discussion on Wednesday...

A Critical Lens Approach for Students

A critical lens is an approach of a text based upon a critical knowledge or theory. This technique enables us to evaluate a text from multiple perspectives thus facilitating multiple ways of knowing and a horizon of dissensus that undermines the idea of a single, unifying narrative with which to characterise the human experience.



- ▶ Marxist Lens
- ▶ Feminist Lens
- ▶ Formalist Lens
- ▶ Reader-Response Lens

MARXIST/SOCIAL CLASS



Examines how socioeconomic factors influence the characters/text

Examines the economic and political elements of literature

Marx believed that humans set up classes (lower, working class, blue collar jobs, etc.).

People are convinced to follow their “social order” and tend to work for the system.

Look for themes:

Individual versus exploitative system

Oppressive culture

Individual as dehumanized

We all know where the ‘other side of the tracks is’...but who decided where to put the tracks?

Questions to ask when reading:

- Where are the poor/rich situated in these novels/ short stories?
- How do the social classes interact with each other?
- Do any characters climb the social ladder? Why? How?
- Is a system oppressive to its members? Does the system exploit its members?
- Are characters given more/less freedom by their class?
- Who has access to ‘the finer things in life’? Who is deprived of these things?
- Who makes the rules?

FEMINIST/GENDER



Analyses literature in terms of gender roles and stereotypes attached to gender.
Assumes civilization has been historically 'patriarchal', or 'ruled by the father'
...thus male-centred and controlled.

Feminists attempt to correct the imbalance of this patriarchal society.

Often examines how females are represented in literature by male authors.

Raises the question of whether differences between men and women are socially or biologically constructed.

Questions to ask when reading:

- What roles are most often assigned to women and men?
- What attributes are tied to certain behaviours or types of women/men?
- How and why do female/male characters succeed/fail?
- How are femininity and masculinity defined?
- What are the social expectations/norms of men and women in this text?

NEW CRITICISM/FORMALIST



All the elements necessary for understanding the work are contained within the work itself.

Looks at *literary elements*: style, structure, tone, imagery, metaphors, similes, personification, alliteration, assonance, paradox, point of view, syntax, rhyme, setting, character, irony

Does not care about author's life, psychology, social background, history

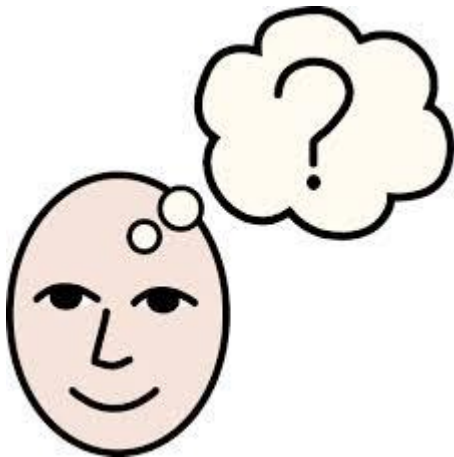
Piece of literature is in a "vacuum"

Requires very "close reading"

Questions to ask when reading:

- How does each small part connect to other small parts, and subsequently to the whole?
- How do the form, characters, setting, point of view, etc. contribute to the central, unifying theme?
- How can I make meaning based only on what is on this page?

READER-RESPONSE



Meaning is made by the mind of the reader, rather than simply what's "on the page"

Views reading as a creative process

Texts do not "contain meaning"...meaning is constructed by reader

Two readers may derive completely different meanings

Emphasizes how religious, cultural, and social values affect readings

Questions to ask when reading:

- How can I relate to this text?
 - What experiences in my past help me make meaning of this text?
 - How am I feeling when I read this?
 - Does this remind me of anything in my life?
-

Upon Seeing an Apple



Feminist/Gender Theory Asks:

What possibilities are available to a woman who eats this apple? To a man?

New Critic/Formalist Asks:

What shape and diameter is the apple?

Marxist Asks:

Who owns the apple? Who gets to eat the apple?

Reader-Response Asks:

What does the apple taste like to me?
What does the apple remind me of?

Tutorials 1-12

Tutorial 1: Racism: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee)

Tutorial 2: Identity: *Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger)

Tutorial 3: Religion: *First Confession* (Frank O'Connor)

Tutorial 4: Feminism: *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Charlotte Perkins Gilman)

Tutorial 5: Depression: *The Bell Jar* (Sylvia Plath)

Tutorial 6: Oppression: *South Dublin Literacy Class* (Paula Meehan)

Tutorial 7: Capitalism: *The Great Gatsby* (F Scott Fitzgerald)

Tutorial 8: Tradition and Conformity: *The Lottery* (Shirley Jackson)

Tutorial 9: Resistance: *The Use of Force* (William Carlos Williams)

Tutorial 10: Anomie: *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding)

Tutorial 11: Ideology: *Animal Farm* (George Orwell)

Tutorial 12: Ideological Wars and Political Violence: *Wreaths* (Michael Longley)

Tutorial 1: To Kill a Mockingbird

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a critical lens

To Kill a Mockingbird



Christa de Brun

“First of all . . . if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

To kill a Mockingbird was written in 1960 by Harper Lee. The primary themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* involve racial injustice and the destruction of innocence. Lee also addresses issues of class, courage, compassion, and gender roles in the American Deep South.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore social inequality and racial injustice and to question the factors in the hegemonic control of society by White America in the early 20th century.

Marxist Lens

“No book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.”

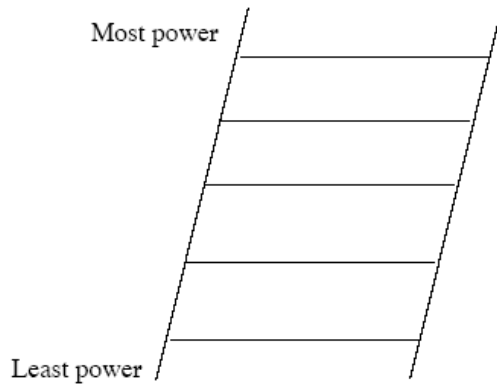
George Orwell

Like all communities, we operate under a variety of beliefs called ideologies. Ideology refers to a set of ideas which produce a partial and selective view of reality. This in turn serves the interest of those with power in society. It has its roots in the nineteenth century writings of Karl Marx, who argued that the property-owning classes were able to rule by ideas which represented as natural the class relationships of society, therefore justifying their own wealth and privilege. Thus the notion of ideology entails widely held ideas or beliefs, which may often be seen as ‘common sense’, legitimising or making widely acceptable certain forms of social inequality. In so doing, ideologies are able to disguise or suppress the real structure of domination and exploitation which exists in society.

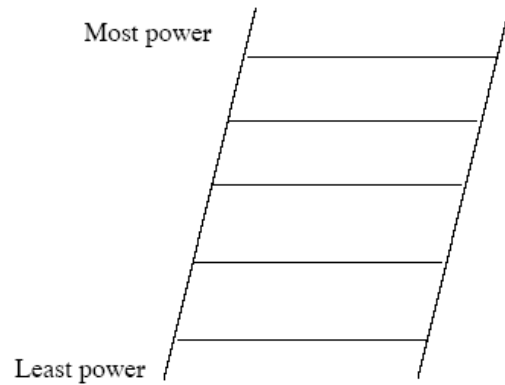
In America, typical ideologies are: “Freedom,” “Equality,” “Democracy,” Describe the ideologies upheld in *Mockingbird*:

2. In addition, Irish society, like all communities, operates in a particular social structure. This refers to different social groups that possess different levels of power in a community. Those groups with the most power are at the top of the social ladder. Those with the least power are at the bottom. Try plotting some groups from the following communities / societies on the social ladder graphs below:

AMERICAN SOCIETY



IRISH SOCIETY



3. When we look at literature through this lens, we analyse the ideology and the social structure of the community / society in the story.

Characteristics of the “Marxist Lens”:

4. In order to understand *Mockingbird* from a Marxist perspective, we need to know something about life in the South during the 1930s. Based on our class discussions of life in Maycomb, summarise what you know.

5. Remember, an ideology is a set of beliefs by which individuals or groups of people live their lives. Think of some of the major events that have occurred in *Mockingbird*. Then, identify some ideologies that are represented in the novel, and give an example of an event in the story that illustrates that ideology.

| Ideology in <i>Mockingbird</i> | Example |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

‘Well how do you know we ain't Negroes?’

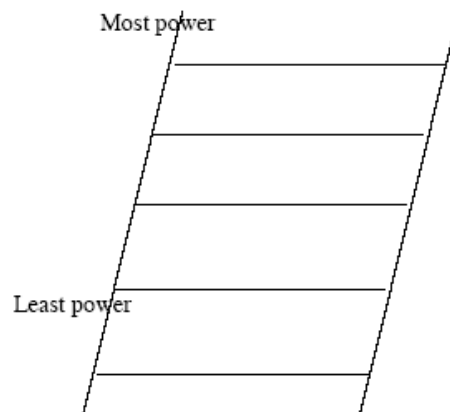
‘Uncle Jack Finch says we really don't know. He says as far as he can trace back the Finches we ain't, but for all he knows we mighta come straight out of Ethiopia durin' the Old Testament’.

‘Well if we came out durin' the Old Testament it's too long ago to matter’.

‘That's what I thought’ said Jem, ‘but around here once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black’

- Who holds the power in the novel?
- Outline how social class is defined by race in the novel.
- How are the class divisions normalised in Maycomb society?
- Does Tom Robinson receive a fair trial under the law? Why or why not? Would having an all-black jury have resulted in a different verdict?
- According to the novel, is it ever justified to act outside the law in order to ensure justice? If so, when is it justified? If not, what do you do when the law allows injustice?

6. The Marxist perspective pays a lot of attention to the social structures that give power to different groups in a community. Identify some of the social groups that are represented in *Mockingbird*. Plot some of the characters (who represent these groups) on the social ladder graph below.

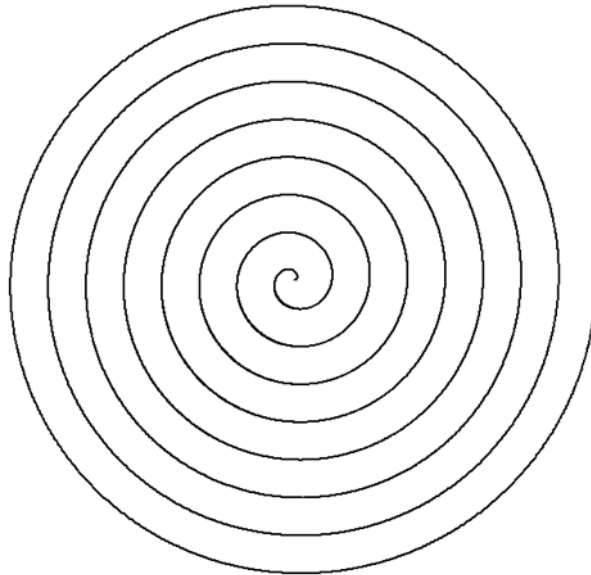


7. In *Mockingbird*, there are many power struggles between pairs of characters. Identify some of these characters in conflict. Who has the power and who doesn't?

Conflict between:

| Has Power | Has No Power | Is this a class conflict? |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------|
| a. | | |
| b. | | |
| c. | | |

8. When we look at a story through the “Marxist Lens,” we pay attention to class conflicts, power struggles, and where we see ourselves in a particular social structure. On the diagram below, place an “X” where you see yourself in relation to the centre of power and money. (#1 is the closest to the centre of power and money; #5 is the most distant.)



9. To what degree do you think the location you cited above may have affected your reading of *Mockingbird*? Explain.

The Feminist Lens

"Scout, I'm tellin' you for the last time, shut your trap or go home—I declare to the Lord you're gettin' more like a girl every day!" With that, I had no option but to join them.

Why does Scout take being called a girl as an insult? Would she have felt differently if she had an older sister instead of a brother? Why are there no other little girls in the novel?

What effect does not having a mother have on Jem and Scout? Is Calpurnia a female role model for Scout, or does Scout just see her as "black" rather than as a woman?

Why does being a lady require different skills than being a gentleman?

Apply the "Traditional" vs. "Feminist" lens to characters in *Mockingbird*.

| Female Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Scout | | |
| Miss Caroline | | |
| Miss Maudie | | |

| Male Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Jem | | |
| Burris Ewell | | |
| Atticus | | |
| Boo Radley | | |

How does being a female or a male affect your reading of the novel? How might the opposite sex approach the reading of this novel differently?

Tutorial 2: Catcher in the Rye

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a different lens



The Catcher in the Rye is a novel by J. D. Salinger. First published in the United States in 1951, the novel has been a frequently challenged book in the US for its liberal use of profanity and portrayal of sexuality and teenage angst. The novel covers 48 hours in the life of Holden Caulfield, a tall, skinny, highly critical and depressed teenager who academically flunked out of Pencey Prep, a boarding school. Holden is 17 when he tells the story; he was 16 when the events occurred. Because he is so critical of others, and points out their faults only to exhibit them himself later, Holden is widely considered to be an unreliable narrator and the details and events of his story are apt to be distorted by his point of view.

The purpose of this tutorial is to examine the issue of identity and particularly sexual identity in the novel, and the isolation that often accompanies self-growth.

Identity and Society

I'm just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they? (2. 15)

- Discuss the novel as a coming-of-age story. Who is Holden Caulfield? How does Holden's character change during the course of the novel?

. . . I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. (22.37)

- Why does Holden want to be the catcher in the rye? Does the image of the catcher in the rye help you to understand how Holden feels?
- How is Holden's behaviour viewed by other characters and by society at large?

Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behaviour. You're by no means alone on that score you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry. (24.62)

- Mr. Antolini tells Holden that education is important because it'll make him feel less alone. Is there solace to be found in literature? Discuss in your literature circle and use examples to strengthen your response.

Holden narrates the story of *The Catcher in the Rye* while he is recovering from his breakdown. Do you think the promise of recovery that Holden experiences as he watches the carousel at the end of the novel has been fulfilled? Specifically, has Holden gained a more mature perspective on the events that he narrates?

The Feminist Lens

All of a sudden, this lady got on at Trenton and sat down next to me. Practically the whole car was empty, because it was pretty late and all, but she sat down next to me, instead of an empty seat, because she had this big bag with her and I was sitting in the front seat. She stuck the bag right out in the middle of the aisle, where the conductor and everybody could trip over it. She had these orchids on, like she'd just been to a big party or something. She was around forty or forty-five, I guess, but she was very good looking. Women kill me. They really do. I don't mean I'm oversexed or anything like that – although I am quite sexy. I just like them, I mean. They're always leaving their goddam bags out in the middle of the aisle.

- What does Holden identify as feminine attributes? What does this tell us about his understanding of sexuality?
- What attributes are tied to certain behaviours or types of women/men?
- What are the social expectations of women in this text?



That's the thing about girls. Every time they do something pretty, even if they're not much to look at, or even if they're sort of stupid, you fall in love with them, and then you never know where the hell you are. Girls. Jesus Christ. They can drive you crazy. They really can. Last year I made a rule that I was going to quit horsing around with girls that, deep down, gave me a pain in the ass. I broke it, though, the same week I made it – the same night, as a matter of fact. I spent the whole night necking with a terrible phony named Anne Louise Sherman. Sex is something I just don't understand. I swear to God I don't. (9.14-15)

- What do these quote s reveal about Holden's attitude towards women and sexuality?

Apply the 'Traditional' vs 'Feminist' lens to characters in *Catcher in the Rye*.

| Male Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Holden Caulfield | | |
| Ackley | | |
| Stradlater | | |
| Mr Antolini | | |

Now apply the lens to the female characters in the novel.

| Female Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Jane Gallagher | | |
| Phoebe Caulfield | | |
| Sally Hayes | | |
| Sunny | | |

How does being a male or a female affect your reading of the novel? How might the opposite sex approach the reading of this novel differently?

The New Critical Lens

The new critical approach asserts that all the elements necessary for understanding the work are contained within the work itself. Let's start with the first paragraph of the novel and focus on style, structure, tone and imagery:

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO HEAR about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two haemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all I'm not saying that-but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddamn autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my brother and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crummy place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end. He's going to drive me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those lithe English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't use to. He used to be just a regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.

1. Describe Holden's writing style. Is it slangy or accomplished? How does it affect your response to the novel?
2. Why do you think Holden uses qualifiers such as "if you want to know the truth," "I know what I'm talking about," or "I'm not kidding"?
3. What does Holden's use of exaggeration tell you about his character?
4. Holden's tone ranges from cynical and judgmental to compassionate, from humorous to depressing. Find examples of each and discuss how the tone contributes to your understanding of the text.

The Reader Response Lens

The reader response approach prioritises the response of you, the reader. Meaning is made by the mind of the reader and two readers may derive completely different readings from the same text, religious, cultural and social values may also affect your 'reading' of the text. Remember what Freire said 'in reading the word, we read the world'.

Questions to ask when reading:

- How can I relate to this text?
- What experiences in my past help me make meaning of this text?
- How am I feeling when I read this?
- Does this remind me of anything in my life?

Think about how you responded to this text, using the above questions to prompt you, and discuss your response within your literature circle, noting the different readings within your circle.

Tutorial 3: First Confession

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the story through a different lens



First Confession is a short story by Frank O'Connor written in 1939. It tells the story of Jackie, a seven-year old boy going for his first confession, a religious practice prescribed by the Roman Catholic Church that requires you to tell your sins to a priest in order to be forgiven by God.

The purpose of this tutorial is to examine how much we are shaped by our beliefs and experiences and to discuss the implicit faith in the Catholic Church that characterised Irish society in the early 20th century.

Marxist Lens

Then, to crown my misfortunes, I had to make my first confession and communion. It was an old woman called Ryan who prepared us for these. She was about the one age with Gran; she was well-to-do, lived in a big house on Montenotte, wore a black cloak and bonnet, and came every day to school at three o'clock when we should have been going home, and talked to us of hell. She may have mentioned the other place as well, but that could only have been by accident, for hell had the first place in her heart.

Frank O'Connor's short story illustrates the implicit faith that characterised Irish society in the early 20th century and Jackie's fear of damnation serves as a reminder of how powerfully the meta-narrative of Catholicism was reinforced.

- What was life like in 1930's Ireland shaped by the Catholic Church?
- Why do you think this doctrine was accepted without question? How do hegemonic discourses stifle dissent?
- Compare and contrast the characters of Gran and the old woman called Ryan. What does this tell us about the power structure in Irish society?
- 'I was scared to death of confession' Discuss how fear is used as a tool to perpetuate the dominant ideology.

New Critical Lens

- How is Jackie's childishness conveyed in the story?
- Highlight lines in the text that elicit admiration or sympathy for Jackie.
- How does the colloquial writing style and use of the Irish vernacular affect your reading of the story?
-

She lit a candle, took out a new half-crown, and offered it to the first boy who would hold one finger, only one finger! - in the flame for five minutes by the school clock. Being always very ambitious I was tempted to volunteer, but I thought it might look greedy. Then she asked were we afraid of holding one finger-only one finger! - in a little candle flame for five minutes and not afraid of burning all over in roasting hot furnaces for all eternity. All eternity! Just think of that!

Another day she said she knew a priest who woke one night to find a fellow he didn't recognize leaning over the end of his bed. The priest was a bit frightened, naturally enough but he asked the fellow what he wanted, and the fellow said in a deep, husky voice that he wanted to go to confession. The priest said it was an awkward time and wouldn't it do in the morning, but the fellow said that last time he went to confession, there was one sin he kept back, being ashamed to mention it, and now it was always on his mind. Then the priest knew it was a bad case, because the fellow was after making a bad confession and committing a mortal sin. He got up to dress, and just then the cock crew in the yard outside, and lo and behold! - when the priest looked round there was no sign of the fellow, only a smell of burning timber, and when the priest looked at his bed didn't he see the print of two hands burned in it? That was because the fellow had made a bad confession. This story made a shocking impression on me.

Why do you think the religious imagery has such a profound effect upon Jackie?

Reader Response Lens

- Can you relate to this text?
- What experiences in your past help you make meaning of this text? Discuss your responses in your literature circle.
- How did you feel when you read this story?
- Did reading this story remind you of your own experiences of first confession?²

Discuss your experience of your first confession in your literature circle, how was it similar to Jackie's experience, in what way did it differ?

How does being Catholic affect your reading of the story? How might readers with different religious backgrounds and different cultural backgrounds read this story differently?

² The student cohort consisted entirely of Irish Catholics. However, this tutorial could be easily modified to accommodate a more diverse student group.

Tutorial 4: The Yellow Wallpaper

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the story through a different lens



The Yellow Wallpaper is a short story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1892. The story depicts the effect of confinement on the narrator's mental health and her descent into psychosis. It is regarded as an important early work of American feminist literature, illustrating attitudes in the 19th century toward women's physical and mental health.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore the social construction of feminism and the masculine culture that governed the ethic of mental health in the nineteenth century.

We will begin the tutorial with a conceptual interpretation of the text, available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifXNSp81iQ4>.

Marxist Lens



I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus — but John says the very worst thing I can do is think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. So I will let it alone and talk about the house (p.234).

- What power relations exist between men and women in the text?
- Who holds the power in this text? Why?
- In what way does the narrator's creativity and John's rationality represent gender inequality in the text?
- Discuss the ways in which the narrator is oppressed by society?
- How does nineteenth century normalise a woman's place in the domestic sphere? How do you think society would react to a woman's refusal of this role?
- Discuss how the rigid rules of a patriarchal society, couple with the beliefs of a male-dominated medical profession, contribute to the narrator's mental illness.
- Why does the wallpaper give the narrator a perceived sense of empowerment?

Feminist Lens



If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas . . .

- What is the role of women in the text?
- How are mothers represented?
- What about single/independent women?
- Do you think the narrator's descent into mental illness is a result of 'temporary nervous depression' or an effect of the role allotted to women in the nineteenth century?
- What role did women play in nineteenth century society?
- Why do you think the word of the doctor (male) and husband was not questioned?
- What are the social expectations/norms of men and women in this text?
- How is the wallpaper representative of the domestic sphere?

New Critical Lens



What is important about the title, *The Yellow Wallpaper*?

Could the wallpaper have been any other colour?

How would a change in colour have changed the story?

How does the colour yellow affect you?

Do you like (or dislike) it?

What are the psychological implications of the colour yellow?

How would a different colour change the story?

Why does the narrator say ‘what can one do’? How does that statement represent her state of mind?

Could the story have taken place in a different place (or at a different time)? Why does the narrator live in a colonial mansion?

What does the setting mean? Is it important?

Reader Response Lens



Why do you think Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*?

Do you care about the characters? Do you like (or dislike) them? How *real* (or well-developed) do they seem to you?

Can you relate to the text?

Why do you think *The Yellow Wallpaper* is considered essential reading in Feminist Literature?

Tutorial 5: The Bell Jar

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a different lens



The Bell Jar is American writer and poet Sylvia Plath's only novel, published in 1963. The novel is semi-autobiographical with the names of places and people changed. The book is often regarded as a roman à clef, with the protagonist's descent into mental illness paralleling Plath's own experiences with what may have been clinical depression. Plath committed suicide a month after its first UK publication.

The purpose of this tutorial is to examine the impact and portrayal of mental illness in literature and to encourage you to further develop your ideas about mental health through the arts.

Madness and Society

The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence. (2.37)

Answer the following questions as you read the timeline outlining the representation of madness in society throughout the 20th century

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/thenandnow/humbeh.html>:

- Describe the character of Esther as revealed in the novel.
- What evidence is given suggesting a mental disorder in the character of Esther?
- Depression is often defined as anger turned inwards. Do you think Esther was angry? If so, why?
- Does the image of the bell jar help you to understand how Esther feels? How/why?
- How was Esther's behaviour viewed by other characters and by society at large?
- Would that behaviour be regarded in the same way today? Why or why not?
- What can we learn from literature about how mental health is viewed in a particular time and place?
- In what ways can the arts further our understanding of madness in different periods?

The Marxist Lens

I knew something was wrong with me that summer ...all the little successes I'd totted up so happily at college fizzled to nothing outside the slick marble and plate-glass fronts along Madison Avenue. I was supposed to be having the time of my life. (1.5-6)

Plath's novel offers a cynical take on the complacency of middle-class American society in the 1950s. All the markers of American prosperity – consumerism, the baby boom, global supremacy – are viewed as suffocating and stifling. The enormous pressure to conform to social standards – of femininity, for example – results in the suppression of individuality. Characters who do conform are often portrayed as unfeeling, ‘numb’ automatons, and the similarities between the mentally ill and ‘normal’ people are often remarked. Esther's feeling of being confined under a bell jar not only describes her depression, but also serves as a general metaphor for a society muffled into uniformity by its own norms and conventions.

1. How is 1950s American society presented in the novel? What are the differences between city life, as exemplified in New York City, and suburban life, as exemplified in Esther's hometown? (You can take a quick look at our "Setting" if you need a refresher on the time period.)
2. What are some of the reasons why Esther feels that she doesn't fit in society? Consider the role that her background, her family circumstances, and her attitude toward wealth factor into her feelings.
3. Esther uses the bell jar to describe her feelings of being trapped, not just by her mental illness, but also by social expectations. In what sense are the other characters trapped under bell jars of their own? Consider, for example, how both male and female characters can be trapped by gender roles.

The Feminist Lens

This hotel – the Amazon – was for women only, and they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents [...] and they were all going to posh secretarial schools like Katy Gibbs, where they had to wear hats and stockings and gloves to class, or they had just graduated from places like Katy Gibbs and were secretaries to executives and junior executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other. (1.15)

1. Looking at *The Bell Jar* from a different perspective: the ‘Feminist Lens’

Characteristics of the feminist perspective:

2. Apply the “Traditional” vs. “Feminist” lens to characters in *The Bell Jar*.

| Female Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Esther Greenwood | | |
| Mrs Greenwood | | |
| Mrs Willard | | |
| Doreen | | |
| Philomena Guinea | | |
| Jaycee | | |

| Male Characters | Traditional Perspective | Feminist Perspective |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Buddy | | |
| Dr. Nolan | | |
| Dr. Gordon | | |
| Marco | | |

3. Now apply the lens to the male characters in the novel.

4. How does being a female or a male affect your reading of the novel? How might the opposite sex approach the reading of this novel differently?

Tutorial 6: South Dublin Literacy Class

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the poem through a critical lens



South Dublin Literacy Class is a poem written by the Irish poet Paula Meehan in 2000. The poem recalls the oppressive regime of a Catholic school in the 1950's through the memories of three women and how they overcame the oppression through the act of creation. The overarching theme is one of liberation from the ideology that oppressed them.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore the theme of oppression, how it is normalised and how a dominant ideology is reinforced.

The Marxist Lens



One remembers welts festering on her palm
She'd spelt 'sacrament' wrong. Seven years of age,
preparing for Holy Communion.

- Discuss how the poem illustrates the power of cultural hegemony.
- Why was Catholicism privileged by the Irish government?
- Why did the Irish Free (sic) State legally guarantee the legitimate right of the Catholic Church to regulate cultural values in state schools?
- Outline the ideological web that pervaded Irish society in the 1950's.
- Who held the power?
- Why did people consent to Catholic ways of thinking and acting?
- How does the poem uphold liberal humanism in the face of worldly chaos?

Reader Response Lens



Another swears she was punch drunk
most her schooldays – clattered about the ears, made to say

*I am stupid; my head's a sieve. I don't know how to think.
I don't deserve to live.*

How did you feel after reading this poem?

Why do you think Paula Meehan wrote this poem?

Do you think this would happen now? Why/ why not?

New Criticism Lens



We bend each evening in scarves and coats to the work
of mending what is broken in us. Without tricks,
without wiles, with no time to waste now, we plant
words on these blank fields. It is an unmapped world
and we are pioneering agronomists launched onto this strange planet,
the sad flag of the home place newly furled.

What is the significance of the title of the poem?

How does the imagery used in the poem convey the oppression/liberation of the characters?

What do you think is the purpose of the shifting narration from first to third person to omniscient narrator?

Why do you think the author adapts a calm rather than angry tone?

How is the crossing of the boundary from pain to recovery realized in the language of the poem?

Tutorial 7: The Great Gatsby

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a critical lens



The Great Gatsby is a novel written in 1925 by F. Scott Fitzgerald that follows a cast of characters living in the fictional town of West Egg on prosperous Long Island in the summer of 1922. The novel explores themes of decadence, idealism, resistance to change, social upheaval, and excess, creating a portrait of the Jazz Age that has been described as a cautionary tale regarding the American Dream:

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore the ideology of capitalism, the distribution of wealth and the effects of such an ideology on society and the individual.

Marxist Lens



It's a lot easier to be morally upright when you're not pinching and scraping to make a living... which makes the immorality of the wealthy even more unforgivable. Every advantage in the world, and they can't even be nice people?

- In *The Great Gatsby*, what role does wealth play in people's life expectations? Could Gatsby have achieved his childhood goals without wealth? That is, did he really care about the money, or just about the things?
- Does money bring happiness in *The Great Gatsby*, destroy happiness, or have no effect?
- What does Gatsby mean when he says that Daisy's voice is "full of money?" Does he mean this negatively? Why does Nick agree with him? Does this comment say more about Daisy or Gatsby?

I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth. (1.3)

- In *The Great Gatsby*, does wealth alone decide which class a character belongs to?
- What are the various markings of the upper class in the novel? What distinguishes it from the other classes?
- Is Gatsby in the same class as Wilson? If not, is he closer to Wilson's class, or to Tom's? Where does Meyer Wolfsheim stand in all of this?
- Does Gatsby love Daisy, or does he love the lifestyle she represents? Is she only his ticket to the upper classes? If so, does Gatsby realize this?

Feminist Lens

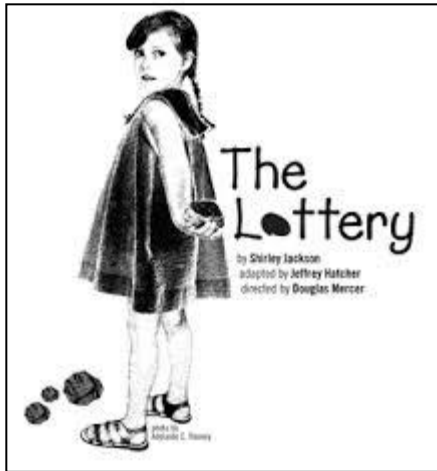


"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)

- How does class affect the expectations for male and female behaviour?
- What is "work life" like for men of Tom's class, Nick's class, and George Wilson's class?
- How do men treat women in *The Great Gatsby*? How does Tom treat his wife Daisy and his mistress Myrtle? How does Nick treat Jordan? How does Gatsby treat Daisy? How does George Wilson treat his wife Myrtle? And how does the way that a man treats a woman comment on his character in this text?
- How do women behave at Gatsby's parties? Is this behaviour "normal" or induced by alcohol?
- Does Daisy represent the 'ideal woman' of the upper class? Why or why not?
- What do women want from men in *The Great Gatsby*? Is it different for different women? What do men want from women?

Tutorial 8: The Lottery

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a critical lens



The Lottery is a short story by Shirley Jackson, first published in 1948. It is ranked today as one of the most famous short stories in the history of American literature. It has been described as ‘a chilling tale of conformity gone mad’.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore themes of ritual, conformity and tradition, the power of collective mentality, and to question why customs provoke such blind conformity and bypass critical thinking and critical consciousness.

Marxist Lens



Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box.

- Who holds the power in the lottery? Who might want to stop it? What kinds of arguments are produced for and against the lottery?
- Is there any evidence indicating why the villagers might participate in the lottery?
- How would you characterize the village's society?
- What kinds of values do the townspeople seem to hold about the social roles of men and women? Do these roles have any connection to the lottery?
- Why are the children of the village – specifically the boys – being the first to stockpile stones? What, if anything, is Jackson trying to suggest about children?
- Discuss your responses in your literature circles and relate them to our previous discussions on dominant ideology and cultural hegemony. How does the story illuminate these concepts?

New Critical Lens



The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix-- the villagers pronounced this name "Dellacroy"--eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.

Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed.

- Were you surprised by the ending of the story? If not, at what point did you know what was going to happen? How does Jackson start to foreshadow the ending in paragraphs 2 and 3? Conversely, how does Jackson lull us into thinking that this is just an ordinary story with an ordinary town?
- Where does the story take place? In what way does the setting affect the story? Does it make you more or less likely to anticipate the ending?
- In what ways are the characters differentiated from one another? Looking back at the story, can you see why Tessie Hutchinson is singled out as the ‘winner’?
- What are some examples of irony in this story? For example, why might the title *The Lottery* or the opening description in paragraph one, be considered ironic?
- How does the detached narrator underline the shocking ending of the story?

Tutorial 9: The Use of Force

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the story through a critical lens



The Use of Force is a short story by William Carlos Williams written in 1938. The overall theme of the story revolves around power and submission and the doctor's unnerved feeling following the forceful encounter.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore the issues of authority, self-control and dignity, and question whether it is ethical to hurt someone for his own good.

Marxist Lens



Aw come on, I coaxed, just open your mouth wide and let me take a look.”

- Who holds the power in this narrative?
- What happens when social roles and personal impulses intertwine?
- Why is the doctor met with resistance by the girl?
- Do you think the use of force is justified in the narrative?
- Who should have the authority to determine when is it justifiable to use force against another to protect someone from his or her ‘own idiocy’? Who should have the authority to justify the use of force as a case of "social necessity"?

My wife has given her things, you know, like people do, but it don't do no good. And there's been a lot of sickness around. So we tho't you'd better look her over and tell us what is the matter.

- How is the class difference between the doctor and the parents conveyed?
- If the parents believe the doctor can tell them ‘what is the matter’ why do they simultaneously distrust him?

New Critical Lens



Why do you think the story is told in the first person?

Why do you think the dialogue is not distinguished from the narrator's comments?

What does the straightforward simplicity of the narration have to do with the emotional effect of the story?

Reader Response Lens

How did you feel after reading this story? Did you find it unsettling?

Do you think the use of force for benevolent purpose is ethical and justifiable? If so, provide examples for analysis and evaluation by your discussion group.

Tutorial 10: Lord of the Flies

Critical thinking through literature: Looking at the novel through a critical lens.



Lord of the Flies is a novel written by William Golding in 1954 about a group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves with disastrous results.

The purpose of the tutorial is to explore Durkheim's concept of anomie which provides us with a different perspective of social life, contrasting Marxist ideas of social life and the idea that people are innocent by nature.

Marxist Lens

Anomie, as Durkheim explains it, is the under-regulation or the lack of social norms like rules and regulations. Unlike Marx who believes that over regulation will lead to anomie under-regulation for Durkheim is what leads to anomie which in turn leads to the erosion of the social fabric of society and the breakdown of civilisation.

What do you think? Discuss in your literature circle.



"A fire! Make a fire!"

At once half the boys were on their feet. Jack clamored among them, the conch forgotten.

"Come on! Follow me!"

The space under the palm trees was full of noise and movement. Ralph was on his feet too, shouting for quiet, but no one heard him. All at once the crowd swayed toward the island and was gone—following Jack. (2.120-123)

Who holds the power in the text?

How is Jack's power reinforced in the text?

Discuss the relationship between fear and domination in the text.

Do you think things would have been different if there were girls on the island? Why/Why not?

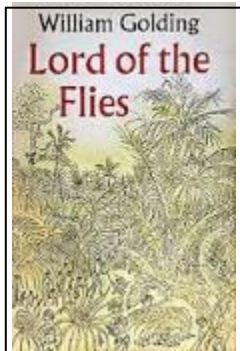
Many critics have read *Lord of the Flies* as a political allegory. In particular, they have considered the novel a commentary on the essential opposition between totalitarianism and liberal democracy. Using two or three concrete examples from the novel, show how the two political ideologies are figured in the novel, and then discuss which of the two you think Golding seems to favour.

Roger and Maurice came out of the forest [...]. Roger led the way straight through the [sand] castles, kicking them over, burying the flowers, scattering the chosen stones. Maurice followed, laughing, and added to the destruction. (4.7-8)

How does the casual violence and savagery of the boys relate to Durheim's concept of anomie?

'*I'm part of you*'. Does the savage impulse exist within each person, regulated by social norms?

Formalist Lens



What textual evidence is there for the suppression or indulgence of the "bestial" side of man? Does Ralph suppress Jack when he tries to indulge his bestial side in hunting? Does it appear from the text that an imposition of stricter law and order would have prevented the breakdown? Is the dissolution of society in *Lord of the Flies* caused by too strict a suppression of the "bestial" side of man or too little suppression? Support your answer with reference to the text.

Reader Response Lens



How did you feel after reading the novel? Were you shocked by the depravity?

How does your understanding of the concept of anomie affect your reading of the text?

Read the following newspaper excerpt. How does this, if at all, affect your reading of the novel?

Having read the novel, do you think that the savage impulse exists within each individual, despite the heights of civilisation we have reached?

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/6038249/William-Golding-author-of-Lord-of-the-Flies-tried-to-rape-girl-a-15-year-old-girl.htm>

Tutorial 11: Animal Farm

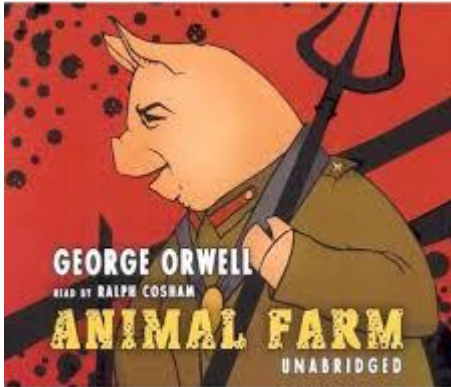
Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the novel through a critical lens



Animal Farm is an allegorical novel written by George Orwell in 1945 and offers a stinging critique of the history and rhetoric of the Russian Revolution. Orwell wrote that *Animal Farm* was the first book in which he had tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, "to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole".

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore themes of ideology, power and specifically the abuse of power, and evaluate the way in which language can be manipulated as an instrument of control.

Marxist Lens



The novel outlines the conflict between Marxist Socialism and Communism. How are these political movements represented in the novel?

Compare and contrast Napoleon and Snowball. What techniques do they use in their struggle for power? Does Snowball represent a morally legitimate political alternative to the corrupt leadership of Napoleon?

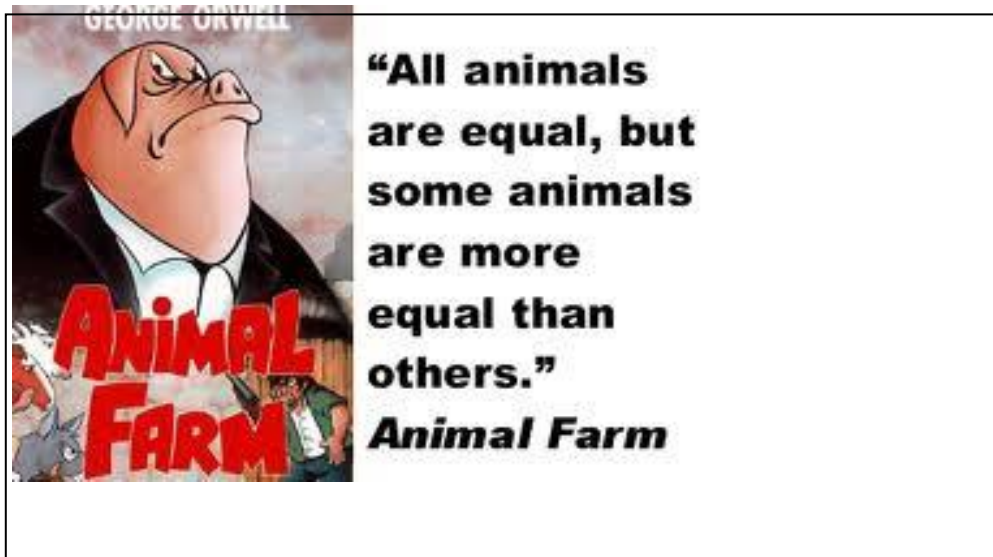
All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

Discuss the ways in which this comment functions as a reflection on society, specifically governmental hypocrisy.

If you have your lower animals to contend with," he said, "we have our lower classes

Explore the conceptual link between the downtrodden animals and the working classes of society.

New Critical Lens



How does Orwell explore the problem of rhetoric in *Animal Farm*?

How is language used as an instrument of control in the novel? Discuss your response using relevant examples from the text.

Why do you think Orwell chose to use a fable in his condemnation of Soviet communism and totalitarianism?

Reader Response Lens

Did you find this novel helped your understanding of ideology and power? If so, how?

Do you think *Animal Farm*'s message would come across effectively to someone who knows nothing about Soviet history or the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky?

Which of the animals or people do you think come closest to achieving Orwell's perspective on *Animal Farm*? Discuss your response in your literature circle. Did you all agree?

Tutorial 12: Wreaths

Critical Thinking through Literature: Looking at the poem through a critical lens.



The poem *Wreaths* by Michael Longley was written in 1972. This poem describes the political violence which devastated Northern Ireland during the troubles and explores the consequences, personally and socially, of the murders carried out in Northern Ireland during the ‘Troubles’.

The purpose of this tutorial is to explore the theme of political violence and how it is rooted in ideological conflict, and to question the possibility of political stability in an increasingly fragmented political landscape.

Marxist Lens



Discuss your understanding of the political conflict in Northern Ireland in your literature circle. Who held the power? Did you achieve consensus when discussing the issue?

The 'Troubles' were characterised by civil disobedience. Do you think withdrawing co-operation with the state is ever justified? Why / Why not?

In what way was the conflict in Northern Ireland an ideological war?

Violence was used to create a climate of fear in Northern Ireland. Do you think this reinforced the dominant ideology or undermined it by creating a culture of resistance?

Who suffered most during the 'Troubles'?

Did anyone benefit?

Discuss the impact of history, gender, social class and ethnic identity on the political experience.

Reader Response Lens



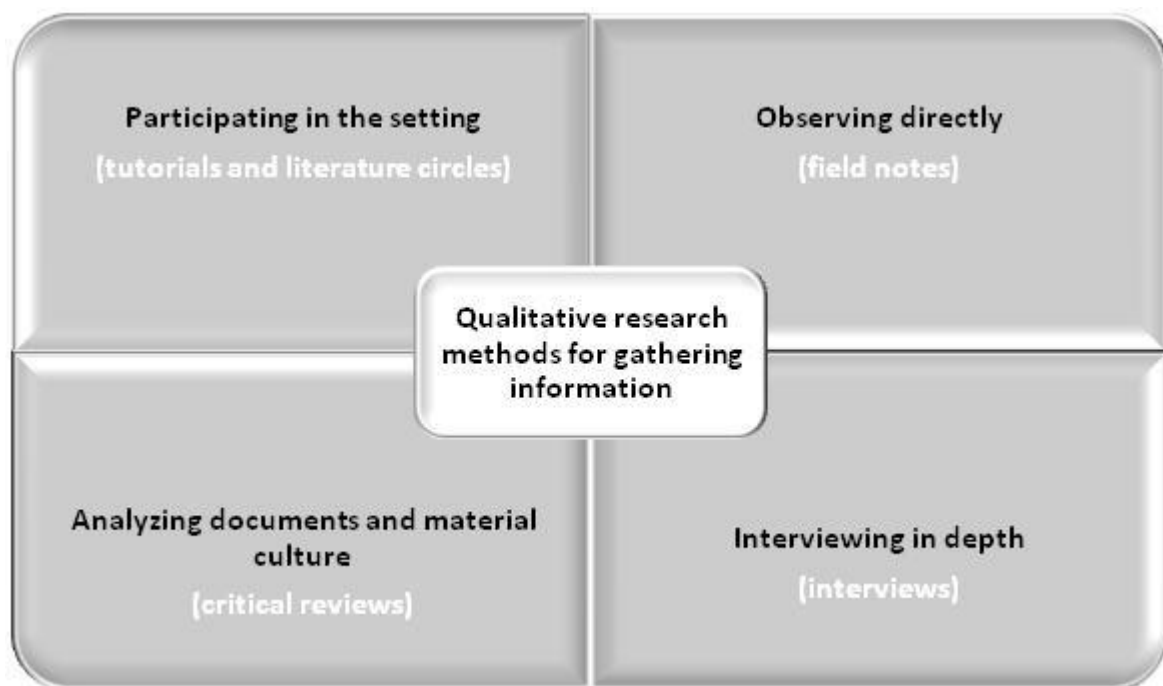
- How did you feel after reading the poem?
- Did you come to any political or moral conclusions after reading the poem?
- Discuss your understanding of the political conflict in Northern Ireland in your literature circle. How is your response shaped by your background/gender/culture/religious beliefs?
- Was your response similar or different to that of your group? Why /Why not?

New Critical Lens

- Why do you think Longley refers to the occupations rather than the names of the murdered victims?
- Why is there no tone of condemnation in the poem?
- What is the significance of the domestic imagery that pervades the poem?
- What effect does the absence of rhyme have on your reading?
- Why do you think Longley uses religious references in the poem?
- Why is there no tone of condemnation in the poem?

3.12 Data Collection Techniques

Action research covers series of actions based on multiple data collection techniques; reflections, theoretical and practical activities aimed at improving practice. This research is a form of disciplined inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practices within and educational setting. Qualitative data was collected through observations, document analysis and interviews.



Adapted from Marshall (2006)

3.12.1 Observations

Observation is a fundamental aspect of qualitative inquiry (Marshall 2006) and entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study (2006, p. 99). The observational record is typically referred to as *field notes*—detailed, non-judgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed. This method assumes that behaviour is purposeful and expressive of deeper values and beliefs. Participant observation is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data-gathering method and requires first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for study. This immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his own experience. Personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group, because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Glesne 1999). De Walt and De Walt (2002) believe that ‘the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method’ (p.92).

Consciousness-raising is an activity that is difficult to evaluate and I grappled with the complexity of capturing the moments of illumination in my classroom wherein I truly experienced students engaging in critical consciousness as a result of critical thinking and reflection using literature as a catalyst to facilitate perspective transformation and transformational learning. To that end, I have included field notes in the qualitative data which I hope will illuminate classroom practice. I have focused on key moments of change or transformation as a result of student engagement with selected texts. These moments of illumination or epiphanies are, I think, a central part of establishing literature as a platform for stimulating critical thinking, reflection and critical consciousness within an ontological context that acknowledges the social construction of reality and the concept of self. Various described as ‘a moment of being’ (Woolf) ‘a moment of vision’ (Conrad), ‘the luminous detail’ (Pound) and ‘ecstasy’ (Yeats) this epiphany is the precursor of perspective transformation:

Listening to a symphony, enjoying a poem, or studying a painting may give a scientist as sudden a flash of insight as reading a scientific report that bears directly on his field of inquiry.

(Shera 1971, p. 79)

Literature study that emphasises the social construction of reality, can shape students' knowing and thinking and play a central role in developing students' critical consciousness. Literature is often described as humanity in print and can thus serve as a catalyst for transformative learning and individuation, encouraging students to explore and evaluate their meaning perspectives to produce a significant impact or paradigm shift in their world views. These moments of illumination or epiphanies are, as outlined earlier, a central part of establishing literature as a platform for stimulating critical reflection and critical consciousness within a context that acknowledges the social construction of reality and the concept of self. They are also aligned with Mezirow's description of transformations as 'a cumulative progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in points of view and leading to a transformation in habits of mind' (2007). This further suggests the centrality of the process of critical reflection on epistemic assumptions. This process is consolidated by the communality engendered if other students are using the same 'real world' experiences (the story in the novel) to try and master the material. The goal is that students will use the results of self-evaluation to influence future approaches to similar situations or experiences.

These moments of illumination resonate with the objectives of the 'insight' dimension of the NQA framework outlined earlier and I think literature can be instrumental in producing these moments of transformative learning. When talking about transformational learning Freire refers to the *gnosiological* cycle, that is, the distinct moments in which we learn. Freire discerns two moments in the cycle that are dialectically related. The first moment of the cycle is the one of *production*, the production of new knowledge. The other moment is the one during which the produced knowledge is *known* or perceived. If we reduce the act of knowing to a mere transference of knowledge from teacher to students then we lose some of the indispensable qualities which are demanded in the production of knowledge as well as in knowing the existing knowledge. Some of those qualities are, for example, action, insight, critical reflection, demanding inquiry and uncertainty, 'all these virtues are indispensable to the cognitive subject, to the person who learns!' (Freire and Macedo 1987, p.8).

3.12.2 Document Analysis

The use of documents often entails the analytic approach called content analysis. The raw material for content analysis may be any form of communication, usually written materials. Marshall (2006) outlines that historically, content analysis was viewed as an objective and neutral way of obtaining a quantitative description of the content of various forms of communication; thus, counting the mention of specific items was important. As it has evolved, however, it is viewed more generously as a method for describing and interpreting the artefacts of a society or social group. The greatest strength of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive; the researcher determines where the emphasis lies after the data have been gathered. Unobtrusive measures are ways of collecting data that do not require the cooperation of the subjects and, in fact, may be invisible to them. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) describe these measures as non-reactive research because the researcher is expected to observe or gather data without interfering in the ongoing flow of everyday events. Unobtrusive measures are particularly useful for triangulation; as a supplement to interviews, non-reactive research provides another perspective on a phenomenon, elaborating its complexity (Marshall 2006).

The Critical Review consisted of 5 open questions, structured to ascertain the effectiveness of literature in developing student understanding of course content, enhancing critical thinking skills, as well as to determine whether the process resulted in any changes in perspective in the learner (Appendix 5). The review was completed by all students in my Critical Thinking class, comprising 38 students in total. Data from the critical reviews was collated and coded, results will be discussed in the following section of the thesis.

The students participating in this research were asked to complete the critical review on a chosen text. The purpose of the critical review was, firstly, to engage students in critical thinking and make connections between theory and practice to deepen understanding of the core concepts examined on their course. This activity built on the tutorial framework which analysed and evaluated a different key concept through the critical lens framework each week. The list of concepts was established in conjunction with students on the pilot study and incorporates topics drawn from the core subjects of students on the Arts programme, namely, Psychology, Sociology and Religious studies although all have universal resonance (the list of core concepts evaluated in tutorials can be found in Appendix 1). Secondly, I hoped to

facilitate critical consciousness with the critical reviews by asking students to evaluate the texts from different perspectives and to reflect on any changes in perspective that occurred during or after reading the text. Finally, while the tutorials and literature circles focused on free and open discussion which is an important part of critical thinking and critical consciousness, I also wanted to engage students in autonomous learning and expressing their thoughts in written format. Writing is central to the development and use of critical thinking in higher education (Moon 2005). Writing is a vehicle for reflection and the writing process encourages the seeking of understanding and interpretation of principles, justifications and meanings (Morrison 1996). This can lead students to perceive a need for change in their world, their relationship and attitude to it, and to seek to change the attitudes of others, thus fostering the critical consciousness central to this study.

Students were given a list of novels that illuminate key concepts from the course content of their core subjects; Psychology, Religion and Sociology (Appendix 5). At the end of term, the students were asked to complete a critical review (Appendix 5) to determine if the novel was helpful in illuminating key concepts, deepening understanding of the concept and evaluating the concept from different perspectives. What separates action research from general practice is the emphasis on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is informed by theoretical considerations. Much time was thus spent on refining the methodological tools to suit the exigencies of the situation. Therefore, while the questions may appear quite general to the student, they are heavily informed by theory and are structured to ensure students' replies incorporate the higher order critical thinking skills outlined by Bloom whilst fostering imaginative learning (Appendix 5).

For this research, students majoring in Sociology were asked to read a non-sociological work whereby the book is substituted for a sociological explanation of phenomena: the book was to be interpreted as a 'microcosm' of a culture and students were asked to identify what the book says about 'the human condition' and 'social structures'. Books included on the list were George Orwell's parable of the development of a communist society *Animal Farm*, William Golding's accounts of anomic conditions in *Lord of the Flies*, the process of becoming institutionalised in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Harper Lee's account of social and racial inequality in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Khaled Hosseini's account of race, class and relationships in *The Kite Runner* and Monica Ali's account of immigration

and assimilation in *Brick Lane*. These books were chosen as they align with key course topics in First Year Sociology, namely, society, social justice and equality.

Similarly, students majoring in Psychology were asked to read a non-psychological work whereby the book is substituted for a psychological explanation of phenomena, the book was to be interpreted as a 'proxy' for psychological description and students were asked to identify what the book says about the condition and society. Books included on the list were Augusten Burrough's account of multiple personality disorder in *Running with Scissors*, Mark Haddon's use of a character with Asperger's syndrome in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Sylvia Plath's account of identity, struggle and coming of age in *The Bell Jar*, Emma Donoghue's account of kidnapping and imprisonment in *Room* and J.D. Salinger's account of identity and alienation in *The Catcher in The Rye*. The feedback from the pilot project was again instrumental in creating a list that reflected student preferences rather than my own.

Finally, students majoring in Religion were asked to read a non-religious work that focuses on religious themes. Students were asked to identify what the book says about religion and society. Books included on the list were *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown which focused on hegemonic structures of control within the church, *The Childhood of Jesus* by J.M. Coetzee, a Kafkaesque retelling of the nativity story that questions the nature of belief and *The Testament of Mary* by Colm Toibin, a feminist retelling of the Crucifixion of Christ. The books were chosen as they align with core modules in First Year Religious Studies, namely, contemporary religious thought, the question of God, and religion in modern society.

3.12.3 Interviews

Qualitative researchers rely quite extensively on in-depth interviewing. Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe interviewing as 'a conversation with a purpose' (p. 149). Patton (2002, pp. 341–347) places interviews into three general categories: the informal, conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized, open-ended interview. Qualitative, in-depth interviews typically are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and

structures the responses. This method is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective). Interviews have the potential to yield rich data and, coupled with observations, allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people (Marshall 2006).

I carried out the interviews after the critical reviews. I interviewed three students, one representing each subject major to ascertain how useful the approach was in developing their critical thinking abilities and facilitating critical consciousness, and to allow me to triangulate the data and confirm results. I thought at length about how many students to interview and I engaged in purposeful sampling. One approach to purposeful sampling is to use homogeneous sampling of individuals who have membership in a subgroup with distinctive characteristics, I chose one student from each Major (Psychology, Sociology and Religion). Rather than selecting a large number of people, I identified three people to provide in depth information. The larger the number of people, the less the amount of detail typically emerging from any one individual and a key purpose of interviewing is to provide detailed views of individuals and the specific contexts in which they hold these views.

One advantage of qualitative methods in exploratory research is that use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are:

- meaningful and culturally salient to the participant
- unanticipated by the researcher
- rich and explanatory in nature

Another advantage of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use probes to encourage them to elaborate on their answers (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

The approach I took was semi-structured interviewing as it is a 'relatively flexible and unstructured approach to questioning so that participants assume more power over the content

of the conversation' (Mills, Bonner and Francis 2006, p.9) and 'offers researchers access to peoples' ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researchers' (Reinharz 1992, p.19). Semi-structured interviews are co-constructed by researcher and participant, and are a way of generating as opposed to discovering data. The interviews are thus more fluid and responsive to the direction taken by the participant, while cognisant of the need to address key topics and themes. The interviews that formed part of this research were carried out with a student from each major. Interviews were coded and organised into thematic categories. Clear themes emerged as interviews and questionnaires were coded and analysed. The thematic categories that emerged supported my belief that literature can be used to facilitate critical thinking and critical consciousness.

3.13 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research involves aiming to uncover and understand a given reality. The analytic challenge for the qualitative researcher is to reduce data, identify categories and connections, develop themes, and offer well-reasoned, reflective conclusions. The qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes and patterns come from the data. The categories that emerge from field notes, documents and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection. A basic principle of qualitative research is that data analysis should be conducted simultaneously with data collection (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p. 2). This allows the researcher to progressively focus observations and interviews and decide how to test emerging conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three main approaches to qualitative data analysis; interpretive approaches, social anthropological approaches and collaborative social research approaches. The collaborative social research approach was most applicable to my research because researchers operating in this research mode work with their subjects in a given setting in order to accomplish some form of change or action (Berg 2007).

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts. Content analysis may be defined as 'any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages

(Holsti 1968 p.608). From this perspective, field notes, critical reviews and interviews are amenable to content analysis. In this research, objective analysis of messages conveyed in the data being analysed is accomplished by means of explicit rules called criteria of selection. The criteria of selection used in any given content analysis must be sufficiently exhaustive to account for each variation of message content and must be consistently applied to enable other researchers to obtain comparable results. This may be considered a kind of reliability of the measures and a validation of eventual results (Selltiz et al 1967). Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose two key criteria for assessing validity in qualitative study; *credibility*, whether the findings are believable and *transferability*, whether the findings apply to other contexts. Content analysis using criteria of selection enables me to satisfy these criteria.

The main categorizing strategy in qualitative research is coding. Bryman (2008) has rightly defined qualitative research as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification. The logic of qualitative research is inductivist; it aims to generate theory, through making new concepts in observing social practices and events in depth, it provides a great amount of descriptive writing, and the reason as Bryman argues, is that it typically emphasizes ‘the importance of the contextual understanding of social behaviour’ (2008, p.387). As Cohen (2009) observes, many open-ended questions are not easily reducible in this way for computer analysis. Content analysis is a means of reducing qualitative data whereby many words of text are classified into much fewer categories and this was the method used to analyse the critical reviews, field notes and interviews. I constructed a coding guide by transcribing individual answers and identifying thematic patterns (the coding guide for the critical reviews can be found in Appendix 4). Each theme was assigned a unique value and all responses were covered by the identified themes. I then transcribed the data from the individual questionnaires using the coding sheets and correlated the data from individual respondents using spread sheets created in Microsoft Excel. Seven major elements in written messages can be counted in content analysis; words, themes, characters, paragraphs, items, concepts and semantics (Selltiz et al 1967). Research may require the use of a combination of several content analytic elements. For example, in my research I used a combination of words, themes and concepts, further details may be found in the results chapter.

3.14 Ethical Issues

Ethics is considered as a critical factor within the research. Ethics refers to the terms of anonymity, confidentiality, trust, willingness, transparency, dignity in the research for gaining the valid, reliable results. Any research which involves other people in some way has ethical implications. Action research in education is deeply embedded in the social world of the school or college within which it takes place. Because education is a social action, data gathering and analysis within action research will inevitably impact on the lives of others in those institutions, be they students or colleagues. I was acutely aware of these implications and took every step necessary to address these concerns.

Formal permission was sought from NUI Maynooth, WIT and the students to carry out this research. A copy of the letter of ethical approval can be found in Appendix 13. Confidentiality was assured. Information sheets and consent forms that were signed by all participants are to be found in Appendix 11 and Appendix 12 respectively. A discussion took place with participants about the nature of the research. The possibility of an unequal power dynamic between researcher and participants was considered. The researcher was in the position of lecturer in WIT which had potential implications for the participants. Every effort was made to ensure equal power relations to ensure that there was no conflict of interest, that the students could not be advantaged or disadvantaged by participating in the study.

Critical Thinking is a first year module in WIT so, although I could not say for certain that I would never be teaching any of the students again in another context, I would not be teaching them Critical Thinking again. The Critical Reviews were not graded and the students were free to withdraw from the research project at any time. The students were interviewed upon completion of the module; therefore, the interviews would not exert any impact on their success in the Critical Thinking module. The students who gave feedback on the Literature Circles and their emotional response to literature were students that I had been teaching all year and with whom I had developed a relationship. None of the submitted work was graded or exerted any impact on their course grades. Data was anonymised and students were free to withdraw from the research project at any time. All participants were assured that they were not in any way being evaluated; rather the focus was on the impact of implementing literature as tool for fostering critical thinking and reflection. It was not anticipated that any sensitive information would emerge to the point that original consent needed to be revisited; however,

there was a readiness to do so if necessary. The study did not go beyond the normal ethical boundaries of classroom interaction.

3.15 Limitations

This research has a number of limitations. Firstly, there is the difficulty of developing robust methodologies to measure the ‘impact’ of literature. As outlined by Belfiore and Bennett (2009) the very notion of an ‘impact study’ appears to be intrinsically flawed as not only do we have no normative understanding of the arts but also the diverse practices that can be applied by this term are not commensurate, it logically follows therefore that the impacts arising from these practices will not be commensurate either. Caution is necessary when making generalised statements about the impact of the arts on societies. This does not mean that the impact of the arts, specifically literature, is unknowable, it does mean, however, that we need to move beyond a narrowly conceived approach to arts impact assessment. This thesis hopes to open up research into the impact of literature and participate in the movement towards a systematic engagement with the study of the effect of literature on critical thinking and critical consciousness.

A further limitation relates to the generalizability of the research. Unlike quantitative research the goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualised, in-depth understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases. Time constraints and cohort size inevitably limited the scope of this study. A longitudinal study carried out across the college or indeed on a wider basis would undoubtedly provide rich results for evaluation and subsequent recommendations.

Some limitations derive from the fact that it is difficult to perpetuate a systematic engagement when, according to Vavrus (2002) even teacher education programmes that emphasise reflection frequently do not incorporate issues of race, ethnic diversity, and social justice in classroom practices. As bell hook observes ‘if we want a beloved community, we must stand for justice, have recognition for difference without attaching difference to privilege’ (hooks 1997, p.12). A need on the part of practitioners to initiate change is a necessary precondition of action research. It is the belief that some aspect of a practice needs to be changed if its aims and values are to be more fully realized, which activates this form of inquiry.

3.16 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated an awareness of research theory and good research practice. It has introduced and discussed the choice of a critical constructivist action research methodology and concluded that it is a suitable research methodology for this study. My research is guided fundamentally by my view that education is not simply a process of adapting or accommodating the mind to structures of knowledge, rather it is a dialectical process wherein the meaning and significance of structures are reconstructed in the historically and socially conditioned consciousness of individuals as they try to make sense of their life world and create a situated knowing. The mind adapts with rather than adapts to structures of knowledge (Elliott 1991). This view of education implies a shift in the concept of learning which in turn shifts the criteria by which it is assessed. Learning is viewed as the active production rather than the passive reproduction of meaning. Its outcomes are no longer to be assessed in terms of the match between inputs and predetermined outputs. When learning is viewed as active production, then it becomes a manifestation of human powers, for example, to synthesise disparate and complex information into coherent patterns, to look at situations from different points of view and to self-monitor personal bias and prejudice. This process fosters student autonomy as well as student learning and is thus significantly more beneficial than standardised testing which measures only reproduction.

Critical thinking and the ensuing development of understanding is the extension of student's natural powers in relation to the things which matter in life. Literature is a medium which requires students to synthesise, analyse and evaluate and therefore offers a gateway to human understanding. The pedagogical framework outlined in this chapter encompasses critical thinking skills and consciousness raising activities to facilitate the development of situational understanding and help students to move from objects to subjects and realize their potential. According to Elliott, if the teaching process is to influence the development of students' intellectual powers in relation to curriculum content, then it must manifest such qualities as 'openness to their questions, ideas and ways of thinking, commitment to free and open discussion, respect for evidence, a concern to foster independent thinking and an interest in the subject matter' (1991, p.13). Teaching mediates students' access to the curriculum and the quality of this mediating process is not insignificant for the quality of learning. This research focuses on teaching as an enabling process. Rather than focusing on

predetermined outcomes of learning, it aims to facilitate an indeterminate dialectical process between public structures of knowledge and individual subjectivities. Its focus is therefore on the process rather than the product of learning. It is directed towards activating, engaging, challenging and stretching the natural powers of the human mind. This chapter has attempted to facilitate the teaching process espoused by Elliott to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness in third level students. Results will be analysed and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The study of how educational interventions work can never be far removed from the task of engineering them to work better.

(Newman, Griffith and Cole 1989, p.37)

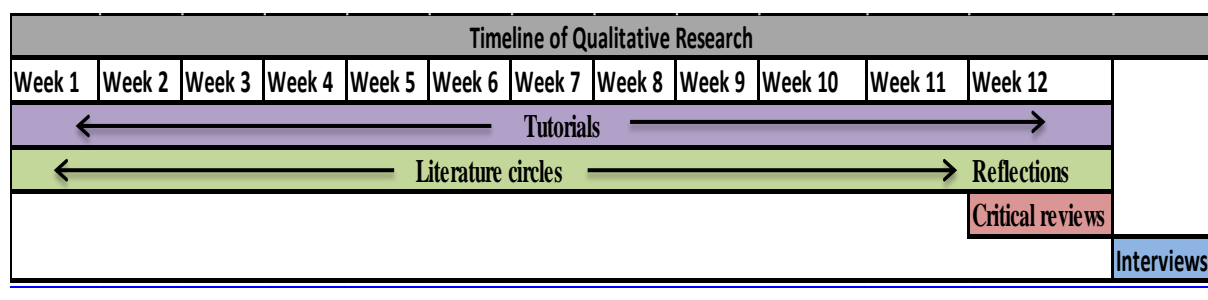
4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the qualitative approach employed in my research study. The data consists of the field notes taken during tutorials and literature circles, including reflections on the role of the literature circles in developing understanding, critical reviews, and interviews. Data analysis involves making sense of the data ‘noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities’ (Cohen 2009, p.13) and I made sense of the qualitative data by identifying thematic patterns. In the case of the field notes and interviews I represented the information using direct quotes to clarify understanding where appropriate. I used tables and charts in my data display to represent the findings of the literature circles and critical reviews and allocated categories to identify recurring trends in the responses.

There is no single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data. The social and educational world is a place full of contradictions and complexity and is thus not easily reducible to the atomisation process inherent in much numerical research. It must be studied in its totality rather than in fragments if a true understanding is to be reached. To that end, I have abided by the principle of fitness for purpose in the choices I have made. I have been further guided by the definition of qualitative research provided by Creswell as ‘an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting’ (1997, p.15). I have used student comments in tutorials to record the ongoing analysis and interpretation by students and create as holistic a picture as I can of a dynamic reality. I analysed the words by identifying patterns and themes. I have included student comments about the literature circles to further enrich the data. I have used critical reviews to engage students in writing critically about their responses and noted any changes in perspectives that have occurred. I have analysed the reviews through coding key words and themes. Finally, I have used interviews to report detailed views, confirm the responses received in the critical reviews, tutorials and

literature circles, and triangulate the data. Ultimately the focus of this data analysis is on participants' perspectives and the changes therein, one of the key characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (1997).

I have adopted a timeline approach in my presentation of the results. The field notes from tutorials and literature circles were ongoing from Weeks 1-12 reflecting the emergent, iterative process that is action research. The literature circle reflections and critical reviews were gathered in Week 12. Interviews took place in Week 13 (the semester consists of a 12 week teaching term with Week 13 allocated as a study week for students).



Wolcott (1994) employs the categories of description, analysis and interpretation to analyse qualitative data and I have applied these categories in the analysis of my results. Description addresses the question ‘What is going on here?’ Analysis addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them. Interpretation addresses processual questions of meanings and contexts (Wolcott 1994, p. 12). My research data has been described through student comments in the hope that the data will ‘speak for itself’ (Wolcott 1994, p.10) whilst acknowledging the selective winnowing that is an inevitable aspect of data reduction in qualitative research. I have expanded on the descriptive account with an analysis that proceeds in a systematic way to identify key themes and words, what Wolcott refers to as the identification of ‘patterned regularities’ in the data (1994, p.26). I have interpreted the data by contextualising it in a broader analytical framework through making connections to the research literature whilst endeavouring to remain self-aware, honest, and reflective about the analytic process.

4.2 Field Notes from tutorials and literature circles

This section contains firstly the field notes from the tutorials, moving chronologically from Week 1 to Week 12, followed firstly by my reflections on student growth, and then my reflections on my practice and how it has changed. In an attempt to capture the moments of illumination in the classroom, the moments when students begin to engage critically with a topic and start to see things from beyond their own perspective, I have included some student comments from my field notes. These remarks illustrate the changes that were taking place in the classroom as students began to think outside prescribed modes of learning, that is, they started thinking for themselves.

The following comments from the tutorials illustrate the growth in critical thinking and critical consciousness as students learn, not only to view the texts from multiple perspectives, but the world too, echoing Freire's assertion that in reading the word we read the world (2005). I have also included some of the shifts in my own thinking as the term progressed as well as details pertaining to classroom dynamics and quotidian struggles, how I managed them and what I learned from them.

4.2.1 Field Notes Weeks 1-12

Week 1 September 12 2012: To Kill a Mockingbird



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore social inequality and racial injustice, and to question the factors in the hegemonic control of society by White America in the early 20th century.

Week 1 began with great enthusiasm; students were really interested in this new approach to critical thinking and were quick to share their thoughts. The choice of text proved to be a good choice as the majority of students had studied the novel for their Junior Cert. This is one of the benefits of having a relatively homogenous group of students, although it is not without its limitations too as homogenization can inhibit questioning, helping to develop uncritical consumers rather than critically transitive citizens. This uncritical acceptance is what I'm hoping to challenge with this tutorial framework.

I was glad that it was a familiar text because we spent about 10 minutes of class getting the room organised for the literature circles and ensuring everyone knew what to do. It's not possible for me to have the room organised in advance as there is a different group of students in the room before us and there are no other classrooms available in the immediate vicinity. I just have to make sure to get there as early as possible and, I think once students are familiar with the set-up things will move more quickly.

Following are some of the comments from Week 1's tutorial:

Student 8: *'I know racism exists but it's not my fault. I'm not racist so I don't see how I can be held accountable for other people's actions'.*

This was a belief shared by a number of students who seemed to me to be at a stage of magical consciousness, that is, they experience themselves as completely impotent to do something about their personal and socio-economic position or about the positionality of the other. On a surface level I could understand their reluctance to acknowledge any part in an oppressive regime but according to Freire, my role as an educator is to foster a process of dialogue and liberation that would enable these students to reach critical consciousness. I hope as the term progresses and we continue to work on critical awareness, that the students develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action and come to understand more fully their part in maintaining structures of inequality.

Student 23: *The story was told in first person perspective, with Scout speaking. I think that this mainly allowed us to follow Scout's personal development; it allowed us to see Scout's thoughts and emotions. For example, in the beginning of the book, Scout enjoyed terrorizing Boo Radley in an attempt to make him get out of his house. Later on, though, she realized that doing this was really just hurting an innocent person. On page 279, Scout finally understood Boo well, and she felt that she had developed so much that "there wasn't much else left [for her] to learn, except possibly algebra." This sort of progress in Scout's character made the story much more interesting for me, and helped me to better recognize the messages that the author was trying to convey. I think that, "To Kill a Mockingbird," is a book that talks about innocence and understanding. It encourages us all to not hurt or oppress the innocent ones, the mockingbirds.*

This student was able to see events from Scout's perspective and, through Scout, she was able to more fully understand the message inherent in the text. This comment, for me, reinforced the role of literature in fostering critical thinking as the student acknowledged that the text as a gateway into deeper learning through which students can learn how to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information, that is, to think critically whilst developing as critically conscious citizens. Most importantly, the student participates in this learning rather than uncritically absorbing information from a didactic lesson.

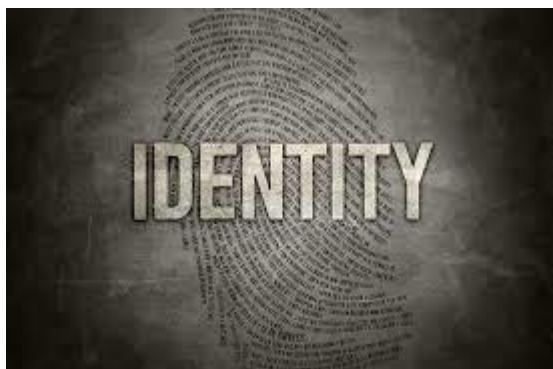
Student 1: *Boo Radley was so frightening at the beginning of the novel, by the end you realize it wasn't him, it was you. Fear comes from ignorance.*

Discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird* September 12 2012

Student 1's realization was that his fear was a result of his meaning perspective. According to Mezirow (1981), as discussed in the literature review, meaning perspectives are acquired passively during childhood and youth, and are the target of the transformation that occurs through experience during adulthood. They operate as perceptual filters that determine how an individual will organize and interpret the meaning of his/her life's experiences. It is these meaning perspectives which Mezirow saw as the raw material of the changes that occur in transformational learning.

It was my hope, embarking on this research, that asking students to reflect on texts that challenge their ways of thinking about the world and engaging in critical discourse in the literature circles would lead to perspective changes. Mezirow (1997) emphasises that transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate, and does not link it exclusively with significant life events of the learner. Through a combination of reflection and discourse, as provided by the texts and the literature circles, the students were able to make a shift in their world view which produced a more inclusive world-view. For Mezirow, one of the benefits of transformational learning was the development of greater autonomy as a person, a defining condition of adulthood (Mezirow 1997) and a prerequisite to developing critical thinking and critical consciousness.

Week 2 September 19 2012: Catcher in the Rye



The purpose of this tutorial was to examine the issue of identity and particularly sexual identity in the novel, and the isolation that often accompanies self-growth.

Week 2 ran smoothly, students knew what to do and organised the room without prompting. They quickly fell into their literature circles and again, the text was familiar to most students. At this stage, the students are reading diligently, I expect this to decrease as the term progresses and gets busier which is why I've approached the longer texts first. The following comments show some evidence of critical transitivity in students although there is much progress yet to be made. Following are some of the comments from the tutorial:

Student 11: *Holden feels like he must according to social norms, like saying 'glad to meet you' to people when he's not and it made me think about all the social structures and rules that we conform to and never question and how sometimes it's hard to know who you are outside of the identity imposed on you and how we accept these things as a given when really they're all arbitrary and most of the time they are good rules for keeping order but sometimes they are rules that just keep things the way they are like in Mockingbird where social rules oppress people rather than liberate them. So, this book really made me think about social norms and who creates them.*

Student 11 showed a growth in critical awareness from Week 1 to Week 2 as he started to question the 'given' and how it is created and maintained. Critical transitivity utilises processes of investigation that do not accept the impervious realities that Maxine Greene (1988) calls the 'givens' of an imposed 'real world' (p.22) and this is evidenced in the student's response.

Student 7: *Although Holden wasn't always likeable, there were moments, like when he's talking to Phoebe or remembering Allie, which revealed a truer side to his personality, which was that of a confused, frightened and alienated young person, unsure of what lies ahead, wanting to escape a bad situation and 'afraid of disappearing' and having been of no use to anybody. These are anxieties familiar to everyone I think because self-growth is isolating and difficult and we all doubt ourselves and the main reason for not disliking Holden is because we all have a little bit of Holden inside of ourselves.*

Student 7 was able to empathise with Holden and recognise the connections between Holden's pattern of experience and her own as well as the universality of the feelings of isolation that often accompany self-growth. This student seems to me to fully grasp the realities of coming-of-age as expressed in the novel and is evolving towards critical transitivity as demonstrated when individuals make, according to Shor (1992) 'broad connections between individual experiences and social issues...In education, teachers and students synthesise personal and social meanings with a specific theme, text or issue' (p.129).

Student 2: *I think this novel is over-rated, the main problem I have with it is that usually in a coming-of-age novel the main character grows and develops and reaches maturity, but Holden is still as immature at the end so I don't think he is a great example and I didn't feel like I learned anything by looking at the world through his eyes.*

Student 2 did not respond positively to the text and I acknowledged his frustrations. A bildungsroman usually follows a dynamic character who changes and grows as the text progresses. However, Holden remains a static character throughout the novel, displaying little evidence of maturity. I asked the students as a group was there anything to be learned from Holden and we concluded that Holden was suspended in a state of semi-intransitivity so, in the end, it was a useful learning experience and perhaps an incentive to keep evolving towards critical transitivity. I utilised Freire's problem-posing methodology, which 'is the antithesis of the technocrat's 'problem solving' stance' (Goulet, 2002, p. ix). In other words, teachers are taught not to profess to possess answers, but to look within the students and their lived experiences to pose problems for the students to solve. This is still new for me as I'm used to providing the answers but I am finding that moving from personal to plenary and posing questions for the group to answer rather than providing them with answers leads to a more democratic and inclusive learning environment.

Week 3 September 26 2012: First Confession



The purpose of this tutorial was to examine how much we are shaped by our beliefs and experiences and to discuss the implicit faith in the Catholic Church that characterised Irish society in the early 20th century.

Week 3 was a good week; the reading material was short and humorous and lent itself easily to discussion. I reflected that short stories are always a popular choice but reasoned that the longer texts still have something significant to offer students. I think they needed a shorter text this week though and appreciated it. The text resonated with my students because a quick poll revealed that every student in the class was Catholic and thus familiar with the rites of First Confession. This again reflects the homogenous nature of the group and I wondered what it would be like to evaluate this text with a more diverse group of students, unfamiliar with the rites of confession. How would the students articulate the experience? Nevertheless, the familiarity ensured easy discussion and it was really interesting to see students respond to the text and the power structures inherent in a patriarchal system like the Catholic Church. Following are some of the comments from the tutorial:

Student 12: *This story really made me laugh and reminded me of my school days. But it also made me realize how much my life is shaped by my experiences even though I don't go to mass anymore and probably wouldn't even call myself a Catholic. But it never leaves you, I suppose it's part of who I am and it made me think about how we are all shaped by the society we live in.*

Student 12 realized that even though this was a doctrine that she no longer lived by, it still had a formative effect on her life and outlook. This was important because, as bell hooks observes, it is only as we learn to critically interrogate our locations and the identities and allegiances that inform our lives, grow in critical awareness and acknowledge the truth of our

reality which hooks argues is necessary for personal and political growth (2006, p. 248) that we begin to embrace education as the practice of freedom.

Student 15: *I suppose the story made me realize that I am such a typical middle class, white, Irish catholic school educated girl. This story could belong to me and any of my friends. And I think I really get what you mean now by 'positionality'.*

We had a really interesting class discussion in the first week of term about positionality with some students reluctant to accept the notion of white privilege and the advantages of their socio-cultural reality. It was really encouraging for me to see this growth in understanding as students began to see how their position relates to their understanding of the world and how that understanding differs depending on their frame of reference.

Student 21: *It was nice to see a positive representation of the Catholic Church with all the negativity surrounding the Church these days. This is how I remember school and I always remember the priest being really kind and just asking me to say a few Hail Mary's for talking back to my mother! The women were actually worse, like the woman in the story, you'd be more afraid of them!*

I consciously included both a positive and negative representation of the Catholic church in my choice of texts to ensure that students didn't uncritically absorb my opinions because I want them to come to their own conclusions based on reasoned judgement if they are to evolve as critically transitive citizens. The comments about women in the church from Student 21 prompted a really interesting discussion amongst the students relating to institutionalised oppression. We talked about concepts of structural oppression and used bell hook's term of white supremacist capitalist patriarch as a lens through which to critique the women in the story. This proved a really insightful tool with student 21 further commenting:

Student 21: *I know what bell hooks means now about the margin and the centre, the women in the church were always in the margins with men at the centre and they never critically interrogated this structure, they just accepted it as a given.*

Week 4 October 3 2012: The Yellow Wallpaper



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore the social construction of feminism and the masculine culture that governed the ethic of mental health in the nineteenth century.

Week 4 was a really constructive week, students were engaged with the course material, the short story by Gilman was by far the text to which students responded most enthusiastically. At this stage, the students are immersed in the tutorials, they know what they are doing and I think they are finding confidence in their opinions and in themselves. They are not yet critically consciousness but certainly growing in personal and political awareness which is a precursor to critical consciousness.

Following are some of the comments from the tutorial:

Student 9: I absolutely loved this story. It just captured so well the way women were systematically oppressed by men. In a way I can't believe things like the rest cure existed, women really were institutionalised and I think the symbol of the wallpaper really captures that idea. I actually think John did love his wife and was trying to do the right thing and, in a way, that makes the story more alarming because it shows how believing in a system can justify any behaviour.

Student 9 shows an awareness of the structures of oppression inherent in the short story but more than that she displays an insight into the way in which oppressive structures are maintained, that is they are represented as natural and given and the oppressed are rendered

powerless. Much of the hegemony occurs through social practices and beliefs which neither the oppressors nor the oppressed are aware of, thus the necessity, as Freire has continually asserted, for the raising of the consciousness of the people as a prerequisite for true freedom. I think students began to understand the woman in the wallpaper as they gained respect for her existential situation and more deeply began to understand bell hook's concept of education as the practice of freedom for it is only through education that we can recognise oppressive structures and take action against them. The purpose of teaching students to think critically is to create greater awareness and foster critical consciousness, that is, the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society.

Student 22: It is interesting the way she is forbidden from writing or expressing her imagination, in case she disrupts the status quo by questioning the diagnosis of the male doctor or her husband.

This is an important insight because it highlights how the patriarchal structure of society positioned the female as incapable of making independent decisions and any resistance was considered an act of defiance and punished. As we learned when reading this story, women were routinely imprisoned or sectioned in the 19th century for challenging the status quo. Gilman's protagonist is denied the opportunity to create and imagine through her pen and paper. Stripped of the capacity to imagine, people remain muted in their social positions, unable to challenge what hook's refers to as the 'imperialist-white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal biases' (p.105) of the dominant culture. It is through acts of imagination that the ideological hegemony of dominant groups may be disturbed, and the minds of marginalized and exploited groups decolonized. And this is why, writing was so forbidden in the story. Student 19 further commented:

Student 19: She actually has all the answers to her questions but it's like she has lost faith in her own voice because of the oppressive forces surrounding her. Maybe she feels safer in the wallpaper.

She has realized that oppression works by legitimising structures that reinforce one group whilst undermining the other. Women, like the protagonist, existed in a society that made it impossible for them to develop positive self-concepts or self-belief and used this distorted

belief to exert power and social control.

The Yellow Wallpaper (1899) was a powerful tool for enabling critical awareness in the classroom as the text facilitated discussions about the social construction of gender, institutionalised oppression and the role of the imagination in critical consciousness for as Maxine Greene observes, imagination is above all what makes our empathy with the existential situation of the woman in the paper possible; ‘it is what enables us to cross the empty space between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” for many years.....of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities’ (1995, p.13).

In releasing the pedagogical potential of modern literature, we release the imagination and teach our students to think, reflect and act whilst imagining the world that could be created by such change. For Greene, a specific kind of imagination growing out of empathy – the social imagination – is ‘the capacity of inventing visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society’ (Greene 1995, p.35).). Imagination, as bell hooks (2009) further notes, carries us beyond routine and static possibilities; it synthesizes things that were previously disconnected, creating new pathways and new possibilities.

Week 5 October 11 2012: The Bell Jar



The purpose of this tutorial was to examine the impact and portrayal of mental illness in literature and to encourage students to further develop their understanding of mental health through the arts.

Week 5 was a challenging week, I think students were genuinely interested in the content and context of the tutorial as mental illness is most prevalent during this turbulent time of transition for students but it is something that is rarely articulated in their discourse and I think difficult for the predominantly female cohort to discuss. Students were also beginning to feel the stress and strain of forthcoming assessment and the timing of the tutorial on a busy Wednesday afternoon after 4-5 lectures, depending on their major, was far from ideal. I think this was the most difficult tutorial for me, I felt unsure of myself and questioned whether I was qualified enough to deal with the issues that might come up when discussing such a personal topic.

I let the students take the lead and started the tutorial with a recording of Sylvia Plath reciting her poem 'Daddy' to make her more present to them and initiate conversation. Usually, discussion begins in the literature circles before moving to plenary. However, there was very little plenary engagement this week; I think students were very conscious of being respectful of the existential situation of each student. Following are some of the responses from the students in relation to their reading of *The Bell Jar*.

Student 17: *I found this book profoundly sad because it was like nothing had changed since The Yellow Wallpaper. It was a really personal story, I felt like I was reading someone's diary and that made it more real than if I was reading a textbook. I think she just needs help finding her way and she is dismissed by the doctors, probably because they saw her as someone with nothing to worry about. They were nearly all male too, like in The Yellow Wallpaper.*

The student's comments indicate that the use of literature as a gateway to understanding is a useful resource as the first-person narration allows immediacy not accessible through a textbook. She compares Esther's response to the woman in the wallpaper thus displaying awareness of and insight into the gendered construction of health and the patriarchal use of power to oppress, represented in the story by the male doctors. These comments show a growth in critical transitivity, characterised by in-depth analysis of issues. This in-depth analysis is further observed in the following student comment:

Student 18: *Esther's suicide is a damning indictment of the patriarchal system that existed in the 1950's. The systems oppressed her, made her question and doubt herself, and ultimately annihilated her.*

This student shows a growing awareness of, and insight into, the connection between personal issues and societal dynamics. Social orders evolve and are reproduced over time and the student accurately highlights the hegemonic control of society by what bell hooks refers to as the 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks 2003, p.7). I'm encouraged by this growth in critical transitivity but I'm aware too that this deepened understanding alone is not enough. Students are reflecting upon established ways of life, criticizing them, what I want to see is my students initiating changes to this established world order. We talked about the emancipatory possibilities in disrupting the status quo and also the fear of initiating such change. Esther provided a really good representation of this conservative tendency particularly amongst females, as one student observed 'she wants to be bold and brave, but she wants to be liked and accepted too' (Student 8). This conservative tendency in Esther is based on a sense of security derived from familiar patterns of life, fear of the unknown, and of untried solutions to existential problems; and a tendency to deal with perceived problems as isolated fragments, by discrete steps, rather than by examining the societal context from which the problems arise and readjusting that context in order to prevent the problems at their

sources. Overall, Esther's dilemma highlighted for students the indivisibility of the personal and social spheres and the importance of challenging ideological hegemony in everyday life. This is a significant step on the road to critical consciousness.

Student 23: *It really highlights that you can never judge a book by its cover because you never know what is going on for a person, Esther looked like she had the perfect life.*

It seems to me from the student responses that the book deepened their understanding of perspective and positionality because they realized that it is your frame of reference that determines your understanding and your actions. Esther's may have looked like she had the perfect life, as Student 23 observed, but it clearly didn't feel that way for her. Looking at Esther's life through her eyes proved interesting for the students as they reached an in-depth understanding of *her* world and respect for her existential situation. This understanding also led many students to question their own perspective as observed by Student 14:

Student 14: *This book really changed my perspective on depression because you think that someone like Esther with everything going for her would have no reason to be depressed and then you realize that there doesn't have to be a reason and that helped me to understand depression more deeply. I was actually reading about her the other day because I really enjoyed her writing and it turns out that her son killed himself too and it made me realize even more that depression is an illness like a disease, I honestly hadn't thought of it like that before.*

This student experienced a change in perspective and a growth in critical consciousness if we consider the characterisation of critical consciousness as the in-depth interpretation of problems. There is certainly personal growth taking place for the student as she makes connections between patterns of experience, however, there is more work to be done if the student is to achieve full transitivity, namely a growth in agency and political growth. This level of critical transitivity is evident in the response of Student 31. She displayed critical transitivity because not only did she experience a change in perspective, she also took action against the oppressive elements illuminated by that understanding:

Student 31: *The novel allowed me to see the world through the eyes of a severely depressed young woman, it gave me a much deeper understanding of mental health, through Esther I was able to see how these symptoms affect an individual's behaviour and how a lot of her*

problems stemmed from her illness and I began to wonder how many girls in my class feel like this and what supports are there for them.

As a result of that group discussion which provided unanimous support for the student's comments, the student cohort presented their concerns to the Students Union, leading to a dedicated Depression Awareness Day in WIT. This outcome strongly underlines the value of socio-cultural learning and the role that literature can play in fostering critical thinking, reflection and moral agency in third-level students. This was also the first evidence of growth in critical consciousness as a result of engaging with literature for this study. The findings indicate that a significant cohort of students have reached the stage of critical transitivity outlined by Freire as the fourth stage of critical consciousness wherein there is a more in-depth analysis of problems and increase in agency leading to action. According to Freire, the emergence of critical transitive consciousness is a central component for generating a notion of collective agency. I was really moved as I observed the waking of consciousness in the students as they proceeded to take action aimed at transformation.

***Student 22:** Why do women always blame themselves? If Esther was a man, she wouldn't even be doubting herself, let alone blaming herself for not getting it right. I think most girls feel this kind of pressure to be all things to everyone, it's no wonder she couldn't take it anymore.*

Student 22 highlighted a critical element of our discussion, namely, that so many women respond to interpersonal distress with self-blame (Simonds 2001), many of the students described feelings of guilt and inadequacy as they entered third level with comments like 'I'm not smart enough to succeed here' or 'I try to be a good daughter, good student, good friend, good girlfriend, all I want to do is crawl under a rock sometimes' (*Literature Circle Discussions, October 11 2012*).

We discussed in small groups how critical consciousness could enable us to perceive the situation differently. An essential skill in becoming empowered in one's life is the ability to critically evaluate interpersonal situations that elicit negative affect, to identify multiple factors that contribute to distress, and to explore effective ways to respond to distressing interpersonal situations (Simonds 2001). Critical consciousness represents an awakened capacity to critically analyse interpersonal situations, to recognise the influence of societal

and systemic contexts of oppression on the individual's sense of self, to cope with emotional reactions in an empowered manner, to take constructive action against oppressive situations and to attend to others' oppressions.

I think the students benefited from our discussion and gained a deeper understanding of why developing critical transitivity is so important for personal and social empowerment. The critically conscious individual no longer responds to events by concluding 'there must be something wrong with me', rather she engages in critical analysis to understand the possible impact of power dynamics in disempowering and distressing interpersonal interactions. I think the students found this reassuring and empowering and I was relieved that we are able to end what was a very emotionally draining class on a positive note.

Although this class focused predominantly on issues relating to female empowerment I reminded the few males (3 in attendance) of their role in maintaining and reproducing societal structures and I pointed out, as bell hooks asserts, sexism hurts men too. I asked them to think about this and their responses indicated in-depth analysis of the issues and a growing transitivity. Responses ranged from 'men feel pressure too' to:

It's harder to be a women these days because you have equality but you still have all the expectations of society from before like to be attractive, a good wife etc. so I can see why girls would feel under pressure.

(Literature Circle Discussions, October 12 2012)

I think this class gave the students much to think about and I felt that we could have continued the conversation all day. Empowerment and critical consciousness doesn't develop in an instant, nor can it develop in a vacuum, but I think today's discussion laid solid foundations for a shift in thinking amongst the students as they developed the active capacity to analyse distressing interpersonal situations through a politicized lens and to take action to improve oppressive situations in their lives.

Week 6 October 18: South Dublin Literacy Class



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore the theme of oppression, how it is normalised and how a dominant ideology is reinforced.

Week 6 of tutorials coincided with the week before midterm. This tends to be a hectic week for students as they rush to complete assignments and I was glad that we were focusing on a poem rather than a longer text. The content of the poem was topical and engaged the students deeply as they discussed the ideological indoctrination by the Catholic Church which led to apparently willing submission and conformity to the demands of dominant classes by exploited and oppressed classes.

At this stage, the students have a strong group dynamic and they are performing well in their literature circles. They know each other and seem comfortable sharing their opinions. It was a rainy, miserable day and a few of the students popped in and out to the canteen for tea and biscuits. I really enjoyed this informal but engaged learning environment and I reflected how this wouldn't have happened in my classes before this term. I think I would have perceived their casual coming-and-going as symptomatic of a lack of control on my part whereas now I see their interaction as evidence of a democratic and inclusive learning environment where the students feel uninhibited. It is in such an environment that creative power can be released and I think I can now fully embrace what Maxine Greene means by releasing the imagination.

Following are some of the student comments from that rainy Wednesday in October.

Student 26: *I never realized before this term that the Catholic Church was an organisation, I thought it just existed.*

A perspective change occurred for Student 26 who, for the first time, questioned his meaning schemes and realized that something he accepted as ‘natural’ was actually a result of the dominant ideology that governed the society he lived in. This acknowledgement that he is rooted in a particular social context is significant for, as bell hooks observes, acknowledgement of one’s lived reality is the precursor to personal and political growth (2006).

Student 5: *I got really upset when I was reading the poem. They were supposed to be protecting children and instead they abused them.*

The poem elicited strong emotional responses from the students. There were only three mature students in the cohort but one of the students left the room for a few minutes as she found the poem really upsetting. I was taken aback by this and I worried about the course of action. I asked the students to continue sharing their thoughts in their literature circles and I went outside to Helen. She said that it was too real for her and I said that if she wanted to leave class for that day that would be fine. I got her a cup of tea and after a few minutes she said she would like to come back in. She didn’t want to share any thoughts with the group but I think her visceral response to the poem created a sense of immediacy in relation to the text and reminded students that it was not so long ago that we lived in a very different society which did not encourage people to think critically about their existential situation but rather to uncritically accept their oppressive conditions.

Student 20: *The poem conveys so clearly the pain and humiliation of the school children*

Student 20 highlighted the link between dehumanization and depression. Freire defined dehumanization as that ‘which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, it is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human....The struggle for humanization is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the

oppressed' (1981, p.23). Recognising the dehumanizing effect of oppression is, I think, crucial to student's understanding of the importance of critical transitivity and the necessity of education as the practice of freedom.

Student 22: I know what you mean now by 'culture of silence', the oppressors the oppressed with their values and norms, which effectively silences people.

According to Freire, the system of dominant social relations creates a culture of silence that instils a negative, silenced and suppressed self-image into the oppressed. The learner must develop a critical consciousness in order to recognize that this culture of silence is created to oppress. Also, a culture of silence can cause the 'dominated individuals to lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture' (1981, p.7) We discussed this culture of silence in tutorials and I think it helped students understand why people don't take action against oppressive condition, often they are unable to see past their biological sphere of necessity. I hope that the discussion illuminates for students the importance of being critically transitive in responding to their world and their circumstances if they are to challenges dominant ideologies and views of social reality that oppress rather than liberate.

Student 15: Why did nobody challenge the Catholic Church? It's difficult to understand how the Church had such power and no one questioned it.

This student's comments displayed a high level of critical transitivity as she questioned the hegemonic control of the Catholic Church and the society that maintained and reproduced this control. Such explorations can facilitate the emergence and expansion of critical consciousness and we discussed how a necessary, though not sufficient condition of fundamental social change is that large segments of a society overcome the ideological hegemony of the established way of life over their consciousness. This is what I hope we are facilitating in tutorials and student responses indicate a growing awareness of inegalitarian patterns and moreover, a desire to change them.

Week 7 October 25 2012: The Great Gatsby



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore the ideology of capitalism, the distribution of wealth and the effects of such an ideology on society and the individual.

Week 7 was the last week before midterm. Attendance was poor as students struggled to get assignments in before the Week 7 deadline. I was a little disappointed because I felt that we had a powerful group dynamic last week but I wasn't surprised because the semesterisation of third level courses from my experience means sporadic attendance at best in weeks 7, 11 and 12 of term. This is partly a result of student procrastination but it is at least partly a result of a consumerist model of education that is deeply damaging to the idea of a humane education. I hope that these tutorials are creating a space for students outside of the results driven curriculum where they can enter into dialogue with each other, experience other perspectives and become more critically aware. I think fostering that criticality is integral to the educational experience. Attendance in Week 7 tells me that this is not happening with the current model of education.

Nevertheless, we progressed with a smaller number of students, at this stage the scaffolding provided by the literature circles is hardly necessary, students pay little attention to the role sheets and enter almost immediately into an in-depth analysis of the issues explored in the text. I am greatly encouraged by this development, it seems to me the students have really embraced the notion of criticality in their engagement with the text. They are also more comfortable expressing their thoughts. Reflecting back to the first tutorial it was unlikely that students would have shared their thoughts in plenary but today there is 12 students and they share their thoughts freely. I have really noted a growth in student confidence, this wasn't something I intended but it is a happy consequence. Following are some of the comments from the tutorial:

Student 17: *I think the contrast between West Egg and the Valley of Ashes is really powerful in light of what we have been discussing over the past few weeks. West Egg represents those who have become rich through capitalism and the Valley of Ashes represents those who have suffered. And it highlights that power is always founded on inequality, someone always suffers.*

Student 17 shows great insight into the inequalities inherent in the social structure portrayed in the text and displays a critical awareness of the existential situation of the characters. Freire used lessons to deepen questions about revolutionary education for egalitarian social justice, it is my hope that the tutorials are moving students towards critical interrogation of their circumstances and those of others, and leading them towards a conscious engagement with society.

Student 8: *I think Daisy is in a stage of magical or naïve consciousness. I'm not really sure which, I think she's not unaware of her positionality but it's easier for her to stay a fool like she says to her daughter. There is just a complete lack of critical awareness in all the characters in West Egg especially Daisy and Tom, they're living this hedonistic but meaningless life.*

Student 8 displays critical transitivity in her character analysis, she has certainly moved beyond a magical or naïve consciousness as she is able to engage in in-depth analysis of problems and look beyond appearances in her apprehension of the situation. Freire proposed that the use of his "see-judge-act" student-centred methods could lead to critical consciousness, that is, an awareness of the necessity to constantly unveil appearances designed to protect injustice which then serve as a foundation for action toward equality and democracy. I am seeing evidence every week of this foundation being laid in the classroom as students read the texts, evaluate issues and map problem, for Freire's geographic literacy involved mapping problems, not memorizing borders.

Student 32: *I think the women in this text are completely oppressed and I think Daisy realizes it in a way but parties to escape thinking about it. The female characters are objectified by the male characters and used as a way to make the men feel better about themselves, there is no equality and the women in the text are all, in one way or another, powerless.*

Student 32's response indicates a movement towards critical consciousness as she is able to substitute causal principles for magical explanations, she is aware that the women in the text

are not 'beautiful fools' but rather instruments of oppression. She highlights the power structures in place in capitalist America that systematically oppress and disempower women. Incorporating a critique of capitalism into her work, hooks also discusses power as it pertains to women and oppression. hooks argues that without changing the dominant perspective of power, the goals of the feminist struggle are jeopardized. Seeking to end oppression requires the acquisition of power. If power is to be understood as domination, the movement does not challenge underlying capitalist structure which perpetuates oppression. Thus, bell hooks demonstrates that seeking an end to sexist oppression cannot necessarily be worked from within the current underlying structures, but rather the structures themselves also need to be challenged. By presenting a different perspective to power, the feminist movement also sees gains in accessibility and can see greater participation from society as a whole. It challenges the notion that it is a singular movement with a singular goal, but rather it is a multifaceted movement with multiple goals that pose a challenge to not only one oppressed group of society, but to all oppressed by a sexist, capitalist structure.

We devoted some time in this tutorial to reading an excerpt from bell hooks second book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) which proved really useful in contextualising the issue of female oppression and moving the students from critical awareness towards action.

Week 8 November 8 2012: The Lottery



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore themes of ritual, conformity and tradition, the power of collective mentality, and to question why customs provoke such blind conformity and bypass critical thinking and critical consciousness.

In Week 8 we were back to full attendance, the pressures of Week 7 had subsided and students were refreshed after the midterm break. They were eager to share their views although it was clear to me very quickly from the shuffling and lack of eye contact when I elicited first impressions of the story that only a few students had carried out the preparatory reading. Luckily, we were focusing on a short story so I suggested the students take 10 minutes to read over (or read for the first time!) the story.

It is really apparent to me as I move forward with the tutorials that students are growing in critical awareness, moving beyond a surface understanding of issues towards a critical understanding of social structures and their positionality. It is also becoming clear to me how important it is to reinforce this criticality in the classroom if we are to effect long term change. Following are some of the comments from Week 8's tutorial.

Student 33: I think it is so frightening what people will do or accept so long as it is normalised by society.

Student 33 highlights the hegemonic ruling of the society in which the villagers lived. The students engaged in a careful analysis of the abundance of social detail that links the lottery to the ordinary social practices of the village and as group we critically interrogated those practices. We concluded that the lottery is an *ideological mechanism*. It serves to reinforce the village's hierarchical social order by instilling the villages with an unconscious fear that if they resist this order they might be selected in the next lottery. In the process of creating this fear, it also reproduces the ideology necessary for the smooth functioning of that social order, despite its inherent inequities. At this stage, students were able to link the social practices outlined in the story with those practiced in society throughout the ages and gain a better understanding of the structures of social control. We talked about how fear inhibits social change and how moving towards critical consciousness requires us to face this fear and overcome it.

Student 34: It is interesting that the three most powerful men who control the town, also happen to administer the lottery.

As a group, we engaged in a Marxist analysis of the power structures inherent in the lottery and sketched five main points of response. First, the lottery's rules of participation reflect and codify a rigid social hierarchy based upon an inequitable social division of labour. Second, the fact that everyone participates in the lottery, and understands *consciously* that its outcome is pure chance, gives it a certain democratic legitimacy that obscures its first codifying function. Third, the villagers believe *unconsciously* that their commitment to a work ethic will grant them some magical immunity from selection (because they are in a state of magical consciousness and lack the critical transitivity to interrogate these beliefs). Fourth, this work ethic prevents them from understanding that the lottery's actual function is not to encourage work but to reinforce an inequitable social division of labour. Finally, Jackson's choice of Tessie Hutchinson as the lottery's victim/scapegoat reveals the lottery to be an ideological mechanism which serves to defuse the average villager's deep, inarticulate dissatisfaction with the social order in which he lives by channelling it into anger directed at the victims of that social order.

We also explored the story through the conceptual lens of what bell hooks terms the 'white

supremacist capitalist patriarchy' which further revealed structures of inequality and the distinctly subordinate position of women in the socio-economic hierarchy of the village. This was perhaps the best example of growth in critical transitivity displayed by the students, their in-depth analysis of the social practices outlined in the text and their ability to link this to conceptual schemes discussed in class revealed a level of awareness that was not apparent at the beginning of term.

Student 8: I was totally shocked by the ending of the story, I didn't expect that it all, and the villagers never question these activities, they just blindly go along with it. I think the story works really well as a mirror of society because sometimes when you look back now you wonder how things, like slavery say, existed but it was just normalised and people accepted it.

The comments from Student 8 highlight the blind conformity of the masses to tradition and how adherence to culture can prevent us from critically interrogating the situation and arriving at a reasoned judgement. The villagers in the story are all in a state of magical consciousness, they adapt themselves defencelessly and passively to the expectations of a superior force: they are not conscious of the socio-economic contradictions within this society: they accept life for what it is and don't question injustices done to their lives. They are silent and docile.

At this stage, I think the students are cognisant of the consequences of such passivity; they were all shocked by the story's ending but were able to grasp the circumstances that created such blind conformity. The story, for me and the students, highlights the importance of living in wide-awakeness (Greene 2007). As Maxine Greene observes 'without the ability to think about yourself, to reflect on your life, there's really no awareness, no consciousness. Consciousness doesn't come automatically; it comes through being alive, awake, curious, and often furious' (Greene 2007, p.31). I find this concept so important and so guiding, literature makes us question our worlds and, in doing so, creates the possibility for "a new dimension of a self-in-the-making" (2007, p.37). It is not about what I deem important to know or understand – but what our lives do.

Week 9 November 15 2012: The Use of Force



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore the issues of authority, self-control and dignity, and question whether it is ethical to hurt someone for his own good.

Week 9 progressed smoothly, the students seem to be really enjoying their critical exploration of the texts and I am continually amazed by the richness of each text and the students' ability to elicit such profound and diverse readings of each text. Attendance has waned a little this week (24 students) and I think students are feeling the encroachment of the end of term and its attendant pressures. Again, I am glad I had a short text selected for this week's tutorial and I must remember that moving forward, students just don't have the time or perhaps the inclination near the end of term to engage in much extra-curricular reading.

Following are some of the comments from students in Week 9's tutorial. At this stage students have become familiar with the metalanguage of this research, for example, they are able to identify different stages of consciousness in the characters of the text which indicates to me a growing critical awareness in themselves.

***Student 19:** The fact that the story is told from the doctor's point of view makes it possible to see the changes that take place in his mind and get an understanding of his perspective which really interested me, I think I would have identified more with the girl otherwise, it really made me think about it.*

The first person narration of the story gave students an insight into the mind of the doctor and most students agreed with the comment of Student 19, that the narration of the story made the events more accessible. This indicates to me the pedagogical potential of literature to foster critical thinking in the classroom and facilitate critical consciousness in students as through reading the words they begin to read the world in new and more complex ways.

***Student 7:** I think this is ultimately a story about power and oppression. At some point the doctor begins to enjoy his power over Mathilda who is totally powerless.*

This narrative is a study of the use of force and of its effects on the individual who uses it and this was quickly perceived by the students. As the story progresses, the doctor degenerates from a reasonable professional concerned with his patient's welfare to an irrational being who takes pleasure in the pure muscular release of forcing the child to submit: "The worst of it was that I too had got beyond reason. I could have torn the child apart in my own fury and enjoyed it. It was a pleasure to attack her. My face was burning with it". The text illustrates the progression from power to abuse of power and as a group we discussed the use and misuse of power and its impact on the oppressed, forced to submit to a superior force. At this stage, the students are able to link the text to concepts discussed in class, in this example we referred to Freire's concept of dehumanization and the objectification of the individual and hooks concept of the 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' as lenses through which we made sense of the story. This is evident in the following comment:

***Student 28:** I think the parents in the story are in a state of magical consciousness because they just blindly trust in the doctor, even when he is clearly hurting their daughter and she is bleeding, they never questions his authority. And I think the doctor is a representation of the white-supremacist-capitalist patriarchy', he is a white male in a position of power and he clearly enjoys his control of the parents and Mathilda.*

The comments of student 28 clearly signify to me a growth in critical transitivity in the student, she is able to engage in an in-depth analysis of problems and critically interrogate the circumstances surrounding them. The students' use of metalanguage conveys a critical understanding of the work of Freire and hooks which underpins this research. It also conveys to me the student's awareness of her own positionality and her understanding of the existential situation of the characters in the story; unable to critically interrogate their circumstances they submit to a superior force.

I think, as the term progresses, the students are realizing the importance of developing the capability for reflection and criticality in their thinking if they are to move from students to critical thinkers to critically conscious citizens. As an educator, I am realizing that consciousness-raising through critical issues requires a deep level of engagement both from students and the teacher. It is crucial that the content be immediate and meaningful to students so that they become aware of both the reproductive nature and the possibility of resistance to problematic content. The students seem at this stage of term to be much more comfortable in questioning and challenging the status quo and it was interesting to me that none of the students accepted the behaviour of the doctor as acceptable practice.

Week 10 November 22 2012: Lord of the Flies



The purpose of the tutorial was to explore Durkheim's concept of anomie which provides us with a different perspective of social life, contrasting Marxist ideas of social life and the idea that people are innocent by nature.

Week 10 was characterised by poor attendance (19 students), late arrivals and a lack of preparation amongst the students. I was frustrated by their apathy and frustrated with myself because I realized, almost immediately that, whilst the selection of texts represented a chronological and meaningful progression in my mind at the beginning of term, the reality is that asking students to read a novel, even a short and familiar text like *Lord of the Flies* in Week 10 of term, is in hindsight probably asking too much.

Moving forward I will focus on short stories and poems in the hectic last few weeks of term. I remind myself of Freire's message of tolerance and keep going, bearing in mind that I have learned something today, namely the ability to move outside of myself and look at this situation from the perspective of the students, and I resolve to learn from the difference.

Following are some of the comments from Week 10's tutorial.

Student 12: *I think this text shows us that even though we are civilised, we are never far from disorder and chaos.*

The conflict between civilisation and savagery is a key aspect of Golding's text and the students were able to discern this easily from the boy's devolvement from moral behaviour to barbaric life in the jungle. Golding implies that the instinct of savagery is far more primal and fundamental to the human psyche than the instinct of civilization. The students expressed different views on this with some arguing, like Golding that moral behaviour is, in many

cases, something that civilization forces upon the individual rather than a natural expression of human individuality and some arguing against this view, championing the innate goodness of the individual. However, all agreed that critical awareness was the key to creating and perpetuating a just and moral society.

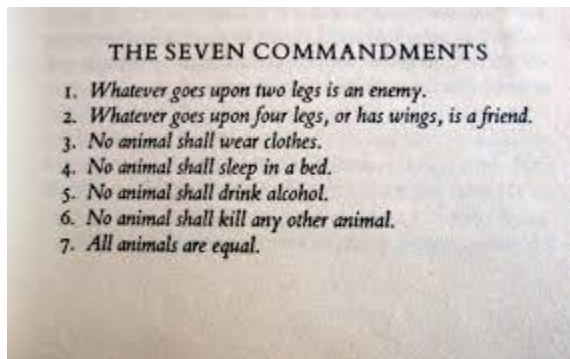
Student 17: I think the reason that social order broke down was because the boys as a group were still in a magical state of consciousness, they accepted the leadership of Ralph and they believed in the conch shell and the fire and they were unable to question anything.

The students recognised that the boys as a group were unable to break through prevailing mythologies and reach new levels of awareness, they readily submitted to a superior force. The text highlights the importance of critical transitivity and the danger inherent in uncritically absorbing information and beliefs. We discussed how different the outcome might have been if the boys had all critically engaged with their existential situation and acted as self-determining subjects rather than the object of others.

Student 3: I found looking at the text from a new critical perspective really interesting because I'm a religious major and the title of Lord of the Flies is a literal translation of Beelzebub, a powerful demon in hell sometimes thought to be the devil himself. This reinforced for me the sow's head as a symbol of the power of evil, and a kind of Satan figure who evokes the beast within each human being.

Student 3 was able to use the new critical perspective outlined in tutorials to explore the biblical parallels in the novel which function as a subtle motif in the novel, adding thematic resonance to the main ideas of the story. This was a new perspective for many of the other students in the class and, when Student 3 shared his perspective, it enabled them to view the story from another perspective. It also highlighted the importance of dialogue which Freire regards as the basic item in the knowledge structure, a process in which the educators and the learners can learn together.

Week 11 November 29 2012: Animal Farm



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore themes of ideology, power and specifically the abuse of power, and evaluate the way in which language can be manipulated as an instrument of control.

Week 11 was a positive week, attendance was good (27 students) and the students were interested in the text and enthusiastic about sharing their opinions. It helps that is a text in the public domain and the content was interesting to the students as they are majoring in Sociology, Psychology or Religion and the thematic strands of the text resonated in myriad ways with each group.

I think the students are familiar and at ease with the tutorial structure by now, they seemed confident sharing their opinions and listened mindfully to other perspectives. There is a palpable sense of excitement in the classroom as the term approaches completion and it takes a while for students to settle down but once in their groups they focus on the text and enter into lively discussion.

Following are some of the comments from Week 11's tutorial.

Student 14: It's like you can never not have an ideology because even if you reject an ideology that's another ideology. You just have to make sure the one you have works for everyone although history tells us this is unlikely!

Student 14's comment was insightful and displayed a growing awareness of societal dynamics. Her comments indicate a movement towards evaluative knowing as she was able to acknowledge uncertainty without foregoing evaluation. Student 7 exhibited a deepened understanding of ideology and hegemony, two of the key concepts explored in tutorials and the student was further able to retrospectively negotiate meaning as she now understood the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, discussed in Week 1 of tutorials, differently:

Student 7: When I thought about what it would be like to be Miss Maudie after reading Animal Farm I understood how hegemony worked, the dominant group make the subordinate group think that this is the way it should be.

Student 7's comments indicated for me a growth in critical transitivity from Week 2 as she now interpreted the same situation differently as a result of her heightened contextual and critical awareness. It seems to me that students are beginning to develop an awareness of the existential experience of others and also a social awareness of the world around them.

Student 16: I think the message of this text is that power leads to corruption and oppression. Even when a revolution is done with the best intentions, all directed toward the greater social good, it can lead to a government which is just as bad, or worse, than the oppressive regime which it replaced.

The comment by Student 16 displays an in-depth understanding of power structures and how they perpetuate inequalities. She also demonstrates the ability to perceived social and political contradictions which is a key aspect of critical consciousness.

Student 12: The new critical perspective is a really useful lens for looking at the text through because the language of the text subtly reveals what's going on, like the changes in the commandments or the slogan 'All animals are equal but some are more equal than others'. You can see how language could be used to oppress people or brainwash them.

The student's comment highlights the destructive potential of dominant discourses hidden in

language and we spent some time discussing the ways in which the animals perpetuated their power through language and how, as critically aware individuals, we could counter them. One of the goals of this critical research is to help students unmask dominant discourses that legitimise processes of oppression and enable them to enter into the dominant syntax because the more they ‘grasp the dominant syntax, the more they can articulate their voices and their speech in their struggle against injustice’ (Freire 2003, p.12). Power does not make any attempts to facilitate communication and, as outlined in the text, those in power tend to value only their own version of language. Their way of speaking is in part how they maintain their hegemony. Teaching this way of speaking empowers students to penetrate those boundaries of rhetoric and deconstruct them. I think our work over the past few months has instilled in students the importance of responding critically to lofty moral rhetoric and critically interrogating discourse to uncover its codifying function. The use of the New Critical lens has helped to consolidate the importance of language awareness and the Marxist lens has helped students uncover the power dynamics inherent in the use of language. It seems to me at this stage that they have made significant progress towards critical consciousness through these consciousness-raising classroom activities.

Week 12 December 6 2012: Wreaths



The purpose of this tutorial was to explore the theme of political violence and how it is rooted in ideological conflict, and to question the possibility of political stability in an increasingly fragmented political landscape.

Week 12 was characterised by good attendance and an enthusiastic audience. The text was short and resonated with the students because of its recent and topical content, given the cohort of Religion, Sociology and Psychology majors. It was a week of revelations as students reflected on what the term meant for them, what they had learned and what they had enjoyed about the term, this took up the first ten minutes of class. Responses elicited in class ranged from the simple and straightforward ‘I wanted to reduce the number of prejudices I have’ and ‘I wanted to be more informed and well read’ to the profound: ‘I think that I am now more critically aware of my existential situation, my perspective has changed and I no longer look at the world as a static reality, I see the world very differently now and I think I’m a better person as a result’. These responses were greatly encouraging to me; I felt that there was significant self-growth amongst the students although I remain cognisant that this is an ongoing process.

Following are some of the comments from the final tutorial. We spent most of the class this day in group discussion about fanaticized consciousness; though the poem was a localised narrative, I think it helped the students achieve a more in-depth understanding of global politics and consolidate the concept of education as the practice of freedom.

Student 13: The poem shows the human effect of sectarian violence and how it destroys ordinary lives, like the greengrocer. The people who commit these crimes are nowhere near critical consciousness, it's not even magical consciousness, it's worse than that. I don't know what you'd call it, inhumane.

Student 13's response precipitated a discussion of what Freire called 'fanaticised consciousness' (1985, p.78), a state in which people are irrational, debased and dehumanized, dominated by others whilst believing themselves to be free. Freire asserts that if a person does not shift from naive to critical consciousness, he or she will fall within the realm of fanaticized consciousness. Fanaticized consciousness is more disengaged from reality; acts more on the basis of emotionality than reason; cannot result in commitment; and tragically leads to irrationality, defeat, objectification, passivity, fear of freedom, and the loss of reflective action among the people (p. 79-80). The students were really interested in this discussion, particularly in the light of the growing incidences of ideological violence on Western soil. They grasped the destruction inherent in fanaticized thinking and our discussion further reinforced the importance of critical awareness if we are to counter destructive ideologies.

Student 9: The formal language of the poem is almost eerie, the verses are factual and emotionless but the content is so horrifying, I think the language of the poem intensifies the horror.

The finest fury is most controlled and it is perhaps the very factualness of the stanzas that convey Longley's great outrage at the murder as Student 9 suggests. The tone of the collective poem is poised between pity, satire and benediction, which is perhaps deliberate in order to suggest the sense of despair present at that time. Longley, discussing the poem in *The Irish Times* in 2010 observed that 'in the context of political violence the deployment of words at their most precise and suggestive remains one of the few antidotes to death-dealing dishonesty'.

It is difficult to imagine a means of surmounting such oppression but for Freire, there is a way forward and it lies in dialogue and critical consciousness. Freire argues that violence is an inevitable by-product of an ideological system that marginalises individuals and suggests that, through critical awareness of their existential situation, the oppressed can empower themselves to look critically at their social situation and take action to transform it. As a

group, we discussed the importance of tolerance and the necessity of practising tolerance if we are to develop as critically conscious citizens. Tolerance for different views is a principle long echoed by Freire and a key aspect of fostering critical consciousness in students is to enable them to contribute effectively in the development of a more equitable and tolerant society. I hope that as we conclude the final tutorial that my students are better placed now to critically engage with society and to take action against the oppressive elements of society and transform them. As the class ended, one of my students observed:

Student 10: Critical consciousness is about opening your eyes to what is really going on in the world, not just for you but for others, it's about not looking the other way, it's about standing up for what is right and just and treating every person with tolerance and respect.

I think if my students leave my class today with this understanding of critical consciousness I will be happy, my hope for them is that they continue this lifelong process beyond the confines of the classroom and engage as critically conscious citizens with the world around them.

4.2.2 Weeks 1-12: Reflections on Student Growth

The student's comments indicate movement from an absolutist epistemology or objective knowing to a multiplist epistemological stance or a subjective understanding. The research of Kuhn (1998) and Baxter-Magolda (1992) outlined in Section 2.24 (p.52) has provided a useful lens with which to evaluate student outcomes and the responses indicate a growth in epistemological development over the term which is a prerequisite to fostering critical thinking in students for you can't teach a student to think critically whilst holding an absolutist viewpoint. It is therefore incumbent upon us, as educators, to provide a catalyst to facilitate students' movement along the continuum from absolutist knowing to evaluative knowing and it is my belief that literature can serve as this catalyst by exposing students to the diversity of human experience and the plurality of perspectives that constitute reality.

Critical consciousness development has typically been measured by focusing on action and reflection components (Diemer et al 2006). The action component of critical consciousness involves the degree to which persons move from being objects of oppression, to being subjects that act upon their socio-political environment. This response further highlighted the pedagogical potential of literature to facilitate critical consciousness as students were moved to effect social change which is, according to Freire, the goal of critical consciousness. The reflection component measures thoughts during the process of developing critical consciousness. Specifically, this aspect of critical consciousness represents the capacity for critical reflection and the capacity for questioning inequities. In the Critical Thinking classroom, growth in the reflection component can be assessed through noting students increased depth of thought and questions about bias in literature. These findings confirmed the research findings of Hatton and Smith (1995) who posited reading a book as one way of fostering critical reflection. The findings also support Mezirow's contention that ideology critique is appropriate for critical reflection of external ideologies (1991) as the literature used in tutorials explicitly focused on social issues. Finally, the findings confirm Murray's understanding of critical reflection as 'the process of analysing, reconsidering and questioning experiences within a broad context of issues' (2005, p.11).

Ultimately, I observed a growth in the epistemological understanding of the students with various levels of progression as students did not progress steadily from domain to domain and often shifted between domains. This aligns with the research carried out by Baxter-Magolda (1992) which found that students shifted somewhat haphazardly between domains and

sometimes worked with different conceptions on different topics at the same time. Kember (2001) further noted that students could hold a range of beliefs that related to the poles of absolute and contextual knowing at the same time. These findings signify for me the need to be cognisant of the epistemological development of students as movement along this continuum is essential if students are to develop as critical thinkers and critical citizens.

4.2.3 Weeks 1 -12: Reflections on my Practice

My practice was continually shifting throughout my study because of my on-going reflection. As I review the evolution of my practice, I note that how I viewed my role and my work with students changed significantly over time. I found signs of this transition in three places: by examining the evolution of my main research question; by reviewing how I directed my study; and from analysing the evolution of a learning community within tutorials.

My earliest research questions focussed on what I could do to influence students' literacy practices and critical thinking but as my study progressed, I began to shift the focus to my practice – what I could do to enhance the relationship literacy and critical thinking. My metamorphosis from practicing an autocratic leadership style that is very evident to me as I look back at the onset of this study to developing one that is more democratic and inclusive is succinctly shown in the progression of my lead research question, from 'The role of literature in Fostering Critical Thinking and Facilitating Critical Consciousness in Third Level Students' to 'An Action Research Inquiry into the Pedagogical Potential of Modern Literature to Foster Critical Thinking and Facilitate Critical Consciousness in Third Level Students'.

For me, the statement has shifted from my directing change outwards (external change) to my focusing on inward change (internal change) with the focus now being on improving my practice while keeping literacy instruction for critical thinking and critical consciousness at the forefront. Using action research as a tool allowed me to make on-going changes to the way I facilitated critical thinking and consciousness development in tutorials. In keeping with action research practices, my action research cycles reviewed my current practice, identified an aspect that I wished to improve and then sought solutions that were tried in practice and re-evaluated (McNiff, et al 2001)

In just these few months, I find myself with a very different understanding towards curriculum. I have been fuelled by the richness of my content area, modern literature, since entering the field of teaching. I have been deeming education in literature and the arts

worthwhile and important and could list many reasons one is taught to advocate for the arts in school with sincerity. Yet I hadn't realized the authentic reasons education and the role of literature in fostering education is so captivating for me. This is not about teaching students the classics or familiarising them with the greatest books of the twentieth century. This is about creating the possibility for "a new dimension of a self-in-the-making" (Greene, 2007). Maxine Greene illustrates that facts are just starting points when approaching history but through imaginative works we can find "the human presences" (Greene, 2007). Greene talks about living wide awake, and that has to start by teaching, learning and modelling wide-awakeness.

4.3 Week 12: Literature Circle Reflections

If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal.

Paul Ricoeur (1991, p.160)

At the end of term, I asked students to reflect on how useful they found the literature circles and I include a selection of responses in the following section (4.3.1, p.199). A copy of the reflection response sheet and coding guide can be found in Appendices 3 and 4 respectively. Braun and Clarke (2006) say that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. I have identified three key themes in these responses through analysis of word-repetitions. Words that occur frequently are often seen as being salient in the minds of respondents. D'Andrade notes that 'perhaps the simplest and most direct indication of schematic organization in naturalistic discourse is the repetition of associative linkages' (1995, p.294). The keywords that emerged in this research were interpretation, understanding and perspective.

Literature circles were established in tutorials according to the novel chosen by the student. Novels were chosen from the list finalised in the pilot study (Appendix 5) and were grouped according to the subject major of each student. The literature circles responses confirmed that the circles played an instrumental part in promoting free and open discussion in the classroom and the student comments further support these findings. There were a total of 24 respondents to the Literature circle reflection. I gathered reflections from students in the last week of term as I felt this would be the best time to ascertain how useful the process had been over a 12 week period. The reduced response rate (24 out of 38 participants) reflects the drop off in attendance that typically occurs in the last couple of weeks of term as students engage in individual study in preparation for final exams or struggle to get assignments in before the end of term deadline. This worrying trend among students highlights for me the importance of engaging students from the very beginning of term in a more formative approach to learning and moving away from a summative approach that encourages rote learning, surface engagement and periodic absenteeism.

According to Elliott, if the teaching process is to influence the development of students' intellectual powers in relation to curriculum content, then it must manifest such qualities as 'openness to their questions, ideas and ways of thinking, commitment to free and open

discussion, respect for evidence, a concern to foster independent thinking and an interest in the subject matter' (1991) and this is what I hoped to foster with the literature circles. The findings indicate that I achieved this aim as all students engaged with the reading material before the tutorial. However, the level of engagement varied from student to student with half of the students saying yes and half saying somewhat in relation to completion of assigned reading (**Question 1**). All students agreed to an extent that they wrote thoughtful and complete responses on their worksheet with 22 students saying yes and two students saying somewhat (**Question 2**). All students asked at least some questions to clarify their understanding of other groups member's ideas with 20 students replying yes and four students replying somewhat (**Question 3**). Most students brought the required material to the tutorial with 15 students saying yes and nine students saying somewhat (**Question 4**).

The majority of students shared excerpts of the literature that were important to them with 18 students saying yes, four students saying somewhat and two students saying no (**Question 5**). All students listened to others in their group and most students gave group members their full attention when speaking with 22 students replying yes and two students replying somewhat (**Question 6**), and all students responded to some extent to other group members' ideas with 19 students saying yes and five students saying somewhat (**Question 7**). Finally, all 24 students replied that they found the literature circles helpful. 11 of the students said it gave them a different perspective, two students replied that it deepened their understanding of key concepts, one student said it broadened her mind, two students found the different roles and shared workload helpful and eight students replied that the close textual analysis allowed them to focus and gain greater insights (**Question 8**). The following page contains a representative selection of comments from the students about the literature circles in response to **Question 8**.

4.3.1 Description of Student Responses

| |
|--|
| Student 1: <i>The literature circles were a great way to see different <u>interpretations</u> of things.</i> |
| Student 2: <i>Other members of the group highlighted things I hadn't noticed.</i> |
| Student 3: <i>Working in the circles allowed me to take others <u>interpretations</u> on boards. It widened and expanded my understanding of the readings and broadened my mind to consider other possible meanings.</i> |
| Student 4: <i>The literature circles made it easier to focus on one area in greater depth.</i> |
| Student 5: <i>It really helped to look at the stories from different <u>perspectives</u>, the different roles made you think more and ask questions you wouldn't usually ask or discuss yourself.</i> |
| Student 6: <i>I found that hearing other points of view and <u>interpretations</u> of the text made me realize aspects of the text that I hadn't considered.</i> |
| Student 7: <i>The different roles helped me to explore the text from different <u>perspectives</u>.</i> |
| Student 8: <i>Switching the roles every week helped to improve skills because it highlighted how others approached the text and it also helped to approach texts from different <u>perspectives</u>.</i> |
| Student 9: <i>Discussing the points and covering different views helped in <u>understanding</u> the themes better.</i> |
| Student 10: <i>Other people opened up new ideas and concepts that enriched my <u>understanding</u>.</i> |
| Student 11: <i>Everyone presented a different view on the text which helped me look at it from different <u>perspectives</u>.</i> |
| Student 12: <i>The circles helped me to look at things in different ways and helped me to gain a better <u>understanding</u> of things.</i> |
| Student 13: <i>The literature circles helped me understand different <u>interpretations</u> of the text.</i> |
| Student 14: <i>Extra <u>perspectives</u> were great in getting a better insight into the stories.</i> |

4.3.2 Analysis of Student Responses

Students **1, 3, 6** and **13** commented on the value of hearing different interpretations of the text in literature circles while students **5, 7,8,11** and **14** commented on the importance of different perspectives on the text in developing understanding. An important part of transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. Through the literature circles, students were exposed to diverse interpretations of texts and perspectives on social issues which enabled them to become more critically aware, and specifically aware of assumptions. For many students, this required a perspective transformation as students moved away from absolutist epistemological understanding towards perspectives which are more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience.

While this movement is difficult to measure or quantify, the student comments confirm that such changes were indeed taking place, this is supported by my own observations of the students who constructed new, more critical perspectives as the term marched on and become more engaged with the world around them. An example of this which I recorded in my field notes is a simple question I asked at the beginning of term in relation to voter apathy: ‘do you think it is important to vote’. Only four students responded by saying yes. Various reasons were given for this social and political apathy with the majority of students indicating that they did not feel their vote made any difference. I asked the same question in week 12 of term and all students said they would vote. Perhaps they were giving me the response they wanted to hear but, on reflection, I consider that justification unlikely given the lively and democratic discussions that had characterised the class during term. I consider the change in student responses to be an example of the growth in critical consciousness over the course of the term. Voting involves active participation by citizens in their society and active citizenship requires critically conscious citizens who have the ability to challenge and evaluate truth claims and dominant narratives. Overall, I conclude that through using literature to engage with the world, foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness, students have not only become more critically aware of social and political contradictions but have become more critically engaged and ready to act on their views and effect change.

Students **3,9,10** and **12** commented on the role of the literature circles in deepening their

understanding of the text and key concepts discussed. An important aspect of fostering critical thinking is moving students from surface to deep learning, that is, moving students away from what Freire referred to as the banking model towards a problem posing model, as discussed in Section 2.4 (p.72). Surface learning is the tacit acceptance of information and memorization as isolated and unlinked facts. It leads to superficial retention of material for examinations and does not promote understanding or long-term retention of knowledge and information. Deep learning involves the critical analysis of new ideas, linking them to already known concepts and principles, and leads to understanding and long-term retention of concepts so that they can be used for problem solving in unfamiliar contexts. This was the approach I took in the tutorials and with the critical reviews. In the tutorials, literature was used to foster understanding of key concepts being studied on the core courses of Sociology, Religious Studies and Psychology. In the critical reviews, students were asked to choose a text that focused on a key concept from their course and evaluate how the text deepened their understanding of the concept. Deep learning promotes understanding and application for life. This is precisely what I want to engender in my students, long- term changes in the way they approach texts and also in the way they approach life.

Furthermore, using cooperative groups such as those fostered in literature circles can significantly increase student learning and foster the deep approaches recommended to engage students in life-long learning (Millis, 2010). A meta-analysis by Springer, Stanne, and Donovan (1999) provides strong evidence that the use of small groups can result in greater academic achievement, more favourable attitudes, and increased persistence. The biological basis of learning also emphasizes the need for student engagement. Zull (2002) identifies the art of teaching as ‘creating conditions that lead to change in a learner’s brain’ (p. 5), and Leamson (1999) defines learning as ‘stabilizing, through repeated use, certain appropriate and desirable synapses in the brain’ (p. 5). As educators, we must teach intentionally, even in large classes where student engagement is more challenging, to involve students in the learning process. We must teach for deep learning, It is important, therefore, to identify what Wiggins and McTighe (2005 p.114) call ‘enduring understanding’, those key aspects of a discipline that students must learn in order to succeed in the next course or, more importantly, to develop as critically conscious students.

Conscientization, as outlined in Section 1.6 (p.32), is the ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness, this means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness—in particular, awareness of oppression, being an ‘object’ of

others' will rather than a self-determining 'subject'. The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world (Freire 2005). Students in literature circles displayed evidence of engaging in conscientization as they engaged in critical discourse about their interpretations of the text through the reader-response framework (Appendix 3). They reached new levels of awareness by breaking through prevailing mythologies from the racism of 1960's *Maycomb* (Appendix 4, Tutorial 1) to the animalism of *Manor Farm* (Appendix 4, Tutorial 12), this was achieved by viewing texts from multiple perspectives including a Marxist perspective and a feminist perspective (Appendix 3) to foster awareness of oppression, domination and the subjugation of the human will. Contradictions were identified through dialogue and different interpretations were analysed and evaluated in the literature circles. The social collaboration and interaction with peers in the literature circles increases students' engagement in critical thinking because they have to share, discuss, debate, and negotiate the content and format of their responses.

Although not all students were at the level of evaluative or contextual knowing by the end of term, all students had certainly progressed beyond an absolutist viewpoint; this was evident from plenary discussions. This is the first step in developing epistemological understanding and the comments from the students indicate that literature is one way in which we can foster this development. All students reported that they found the literature circles helpful in fostering critical thinking and facilitating critical consciousness. The classroom discussions, in literature circles and in plenary, provided opportunities for students to test their ideas and opinions against the ideas and opinions of their peers without fear of ridicule or scorn (rules of engagement may be found in Appendix 8). Students typically offered their opinions in literature circles first and then shared them with the wider group as their confidence grew. The comments included from the field notes demonstrate the development of students' critical thinking capacities as they evaluated events from multiple perspectives and the growth in critical consciousness as students began to think about why the world is constructed the way it is and what they can do to effect change. Critical awareness is made possible through practice which Freire defines as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (1996, p.33), the field notes and student comments provide evidence that such awareness was indeed manifesting itself.

The literature circle reflections confirm the research conducted by Gould (1990) and

consolidate the role of literature in creating awareness and understanding of the other. This ability to view the world from the perspective of the other is also a key tenet of critical thinking (Elder 2004) and one of the essential criteria for wisdom outlined earlier (Baltes and Kunzmann 2004). The discussion of texts from multiple cultural and critical perspectives using a critical lens approach proved to be particularly popular in facilitating discussion and exchange in the classroom. Students highly agreed they benefited from literature circles in developing critical thinking, even when those explorations proved unsettling as evident from the following student comment:

Student 5: *I got really upset when I was reading the poem. They were supposed to be protecting children and instead they abused them.*

Discussion of South Dublin Literacy Class October 17 2012

It is thus evident that literature appeals to the emotions as well as the intellect. This result confirms the potential of literature to elicit empathy in students and is significant because, as outlined in the introduction to this research, empathy is one of the essential intellectual traits for the development of critical thinking (Elder 2004). Indeed it was the reading of *South Dublin Literacy Class* for Tutorial 6 that precipitated for many students a discussion on the hegemonic control of the Catholic Church and for many students it was their first time to question structures of power. Most students reported that they felt more connected to other people while reading literature. This confirms the importance of communities of practice and socio-cultural learning for, as Vygotsky observed, learning is primarily social (1978). This social element was facilitated by the use of literature circles for the duration of this study. All students agreed that they felt they knew the characters when they read literature. These findings correspond to the findings of Oatley (1999). Oatley described the process of reading whereby the reader becomes emotionally involved in literature through identification with the protagonist, developing sympathy for characters, and activating personal emotionally laden memories that resonate with story themes. This engagement with characters is an integral part of the success of this study because this is what kept students motivated to see the project to fruition and engage so wholeheartedly in class discussion.

The communicative learning that took place in the literature circles was instrumental in developing students' critical thinking capacities. Mezirow identifies communicative learning as understanding the meaning of others' values, feelings, decisions, and such abstract concepts of justice, love, democracy and commitment, the literature circles facilitated this understanding and focused on abstract concepts including ideology, racial equality and social justice. Mezirow focuses on achieving coherence rather than exercising more effective

control. Mezirow asserts that perspective transformation occurs in response to ‘a disorienting dilemma: a divorce, death of a loved one, job change, an eye-opening discussion or book’ (2009, p. 14). The literature circles incorporate two of these elements to effect change, namely, books and spirited discussions, both of which were instrumental in facilitating perspective transformation.

Literature circles and discussion play an important role in developing critical thinking skills and deepening understanding in learners and their use drew heavily on the scaffolding teaching strategy espoused by Vygotsky as well as ZPD theory. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the zone of proximal development can be determined by comparing what a student can do alone and what she can do during ‘problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (1978, p.86). Engaging in discussion in which multiple perspectives on texts were invited through using the critical lens approach provided students with opportunities to examine individual interpretation in conversation with others, thus helping to shape students’ knowing and thinking and playing a central role in developing students’ critical faculties. I found that the three mature students in the class were central to the scaffolding process taking place in the classroom as students turned to them for reassurance and their breadth of reading exerted a significance influence on other students, encouraging them to read more so that they could be active participants in the discussions taking place. These finding also consolidate Mezirow’s view that we turn for collaborative discourse to those we believe will be the most informed to assess the justification of the interpretation we are making or our belief. The literature circles highlighted the importance of empathetic solidarity mentioned earlier as there was a reciprocated sense of alliance in the literature circles that pre-empted lively discussion and shared insights.

bell hooks asserts that conversation is crucial for establishing the share of power and knowledge; she also added that ‘without conversation in the classroom, argument and negative contestation arise’ and that ‘conversation opens our minds’ (2004, p.71). When there is no conversation or dialogue in the classroom, the teachers are abiding by the hegemonic ideal of suppressing the students. Like bell hooks, Freire promotes critical thinking and observes that ‘dialogue is indispensable to the act of cognition, which unveils reality’ (2005, p. 12). Dialogue was therefore an important part of this research study and the literature circles ensured that students were engaged in active discussion that prompted them to think critically and aim for an in-depth understanding of the world around them, allowing for the

perception and exposure of social and political contradiction and end the "culture of silence" (Freire) discussed earlier. Finally, the literature circles actively embraced Habermas's principle of discursive will-formation', wherein students can 'confer in an unrestricted fashion, that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions' (1971, p.135). This produces an emancipatory effect and provides a model of liberation for the greater public to create a consensus on the core values of a unified world where all are included in a discourse ethics.

Most students agreed unreservedly with the statements in the literature circle reflections with some expressing a degree of reservation indicated by the response 'somewhat'. These different levels of engagement are inevitable within any student cohort; nevertheless, it signifies that there is still work to be done in relation to engaging all students through the use of modern literature. For bell hooks, 'popular culture is where the pedagogy is' (hooks 1997, p.2) which is one of the reasons that I have focused on modern literature in this research study. One of my students suggested in her response that I incorporate other media such as films and music to develop critical thinking and critical consciousness. I have thought about using film or other media to achieve my pedagogical goals but I chose literature, as discussed in depth in the introduction, for the following reasons. Firstly, it is more practical and accessible in the classroom given the time constraints of a semesterised curriculum and students can engage at their own pace. Secondly, as bell hooks observes, so much enlightening information only comes through the printed page; my students would miss out on so much by focusing solely on the medium of film (although I do occasionally show short films to reinforce reading material, see Appendix 4, Tutorial 4). Finally, an explicit goal of this research is to encourage students to read critically and improve students' ability to write reflectively. Therefore, literature was more suitable for my aims and I was encouraged by the findings of the literature circle reflections. Although I will continue to improve and refine my approach, the evidence indicates that it is working. Students are engaging with the texts and with the discussions and thinking about life through the eyes of the other.

Overall, the students' responses highlighted the importance of choosing texts that students can identify with and engage with, this confirms for me the importance of focusing on modern literature as a gateway to critical thinking and critical consciousness. There is no doubt that the classics also facilitate such engagement, however they are unlikely to incite the same levels of motivation, particularly among first year students. The increase in cultural

awareness as a result of reading literature is a very positive finding in the increasingly multicultural society we inhabit. Finally, the growth in critical thinking and reflection and critical consciousness provides tangible support for my thesis; that releasing the pedagogical potential of modern literature can foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness.

4.4 Week 12: Critical Reviews

An important part of evaluation in action research is to keep records of both the changes in students' responses and the procedures and materials used (Taba and Noel 1957). In action research, success can only be assessed in terms of its effectiveness in producing desired effects in students. The comments included in this section are categorised according to the novel chosen by the student and represent a change in students' responses as they reported increased understanding and changes in perspective as a result of their engagement with this research. The critical reviews were submitted in the last week of term (a copy of the review may be found in Appendix 5, the coding sheet in Appendix 6 and the results in Appendix 6).

As outlined earlier, students choose a novel from the list finalised in the pilot study (Appendix 5) and the list was compiled according to the subject major of the student. For example, Psychology students could choose from *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, *Running with Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon or *Room* by Emma Donoghue. Sociology students had a choice of the following: *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee or *The Country Girls* by Edna O'Brien. Religion students could choose from *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, *The Testament of Mary* by Colm Toibin or *The Life of Jesus* by J.M. Coetzee. Below is a table clarifying the number of students who chose each novel and their subject major.

Table 6: Novels chosen by students

| Novel | Students | Major |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <i>Animal Farm</i> | 8 | Sociology |
| <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> | 7 | Religion |
| <i>The Bell Jar</i> | 12 | Psychology |
| <i>Lord of the Flies</i> | 7 | Sociology |
| <i>The Kite Runner</i> | 4 | Psychology |

Each text focused on a key concept relevant to their course and students were asked to evaluate how the text illuminated that concept. Each book on the list given to students at the

beginning of term reflected engagement with a social issue that was being studied by the students on one of their courses, key concepts that were being analysed and evaluated include ideology, social structures, injustice, mental illness and faith. The goal of the review was to engage students and enable them to think critically or differently about the topic; deepen their understanding; enable them to make meaningful connections between theory and practice, look at a topic or issue from multiple perspectives and perhaps change their perspective on the issue. By the time students completed the review we had already spent a semester critically analysing a range of texts from multiple perspectives (Appendix 4) so students had the necessary toolbox to carry out the assignment. Furthermore, I had arranged students into literature circles according to their major and the text chosen so they could effectively rely on each other as ‘critical friends’.

Again, I have used a thematic approach in analysing the responses; the keywords that emerged were understanding and perspective. Key themes identified in student responses included a greater awareness of dominant ideologies and hegemonic control; a deeper understanding of mental illness and its co-text; and a questioning of implicitly held beliefs and perspectives. This section will start with a description which includes comments from the critical reviews and will be followed by analysis and interpretation of the comments.

4.4.1 Description of Results

Novel: Animal Farm

Student 3: The novel deepened my understanding of how *oppression* can arise not only from the motives and tactics of the oppressors but also from the naïvety of the oppressed who are not in a position to be better informed or educated.

Student 3: The novel highlighted the fact that often *the law is used by the ruling class to maintain control and suppress opposition*. It shows that there are questions to be asked as to who makes the rules and in whose interest they serve.

Student 8: The novel enabled me to evaluate concepts from a different perspective. I had to evaluate the book, this meant re-reading with some research. The first question really made me read the book carefully to identify the key points of the story, then I ended up reading about the Russian revolution to see what happened and understand the story better so I felt I learned a lot.

Student 9: The novel really made me question how politics work. Before I read *Animal Farm* that would never have crossed my mind, now when I sit down to watch the news I'm constantly questioning things, like how were these stories selected before the programme was broadcast, or how might the information have been distorted to reflect the *dominant ideology*.

Student 8: The narrative deepened my understanding of the issue of *social stratification* as you could clearly distinguish between the two classes which may not always be evident in society.

Student 9: This assignment showed me that reading a wide variety of information is an essential part of understanding my course material. It's a good idea to more than one perspective on a subject before forming a conclusion.

Student 35: This assignment has shown me that I shouldn't take material at face value and how I should analyse information more thoroughly. It has also taught me to look at material from different perspectives. Furthermore, the way in which the author explains *communism* through the use of animals really breaks down and simplifies a complex situation.

Student 35: Even though the narrator gave an unbiased view of life on the farm in the story, my perspective changed towards the end when it was clear that Animalism had regressed and was just another *ideology* trying to control and dominate the animals. It really helped my understanding of ideologies and how they work.

Novel: *The Da Vinci Code*

Student 7: The key concept that is illuminated in the book for me is the *conflict between faith and knowledge*, why do we believe in things that we can't prove are true? And why do people want us to believe in them or who wants us to believe in them?

Student 7: Evaluating this novel changed my perspective of Religious Studies and how I viewed the subject. I used to view Religion as a subject that you either liked because you believed in God and all of his miracles or you hated it because you didn't believe any of it but I now see that there are so many different views, theories and evidence that some things are hard to prove but are also hard to disprove so *who is to say who is right or wrong?*

Student 7: I found the novel helped me to understand different religious views and theories and to be more open minded to other people's opinions in the future.

Student 11: After reading this novel and doing the review, my perspective on religion has changed and I'm asking a lot more questions, like I had always considered Mary Magdalene a minor character in the bible but now I have to wonder if she played a larger role, when I researched it I found that she wasn't a prostitute, this was a lie, invented by Pope Gregory I in 597 C.E. *It makes you wonder what is the truth and makes you question everything you were ever taught about religion.*

Student 11: This assignment helped me greatly in understanding my course because the book caused me to question so many of my *beliefs* that I ended up going to the library and reading books on religion to understand what Brown was referring to. I also now find my course way more fascinating after reading *the Da Vinci Code* and I look at Religious Studies in a different light.

Novel: *The Bell Jar*

Student 1: The novel allowed me to see this mental disorder from a different perspective. It helped me realize that when a person begins to suffer from *depression* it affects every little thing in their lives and leads to a lack of motivation and ambition. I think this novel is very powerful at getting across the point that depression is a serious problem.

Student 1: The only way to make the experience of this novel more real would be to have *depression* yourself.

Student 2: By reading this novel I began to understand more about *depression* and the almost sudden occurrence of which it can arise, displaying different ways in which a person is affected. For example, at the start of this novel we can see how Esther is always reading and studying and is a talented writer, but then when depression hits, she is no longer able to read or write, as the words become jumbled on the page.

Student 2: Through this novel I began to understand how it is not only people with terrible lives that suffer from *depression*, even those, like Esther, who seem to have a dream life can become victims of this *mental illness*. As Esther's condition worsened I began to see not only how her thoughts were always centred around suicide, but how nonchalant she became with these disturbing thoughts. It was as though she was planning some monotonous everyday activity that did not really concern or distress her; as though it was not a big deal. This really opened my eyes to the issue of depression through a sufferer's perspective.

Student 2: With regard to my psychology course material, this novel has really enlightened the way I look at mental health in text books, as I now have a more personal approach to how I study the course content, allowing me to be more sensitive and understanding of this mental illness. I also now realize, through the perspective of Esther, that there are many different ways in which *depression* and *mental illness* can transpire and affect people, not only the general stipulations that we read in text books and articles through our academic perspective.

Student 5: Upon completion of the novel and reflecting back on the characters and events, I can

definitely say that the exercise was a worthwhile pursuit. It not only deepened my understanding of the issue of personality disorders in general but through my research on the topic I discovered that a lot of personality disorders are relatively new in the psychological domain so one can just imagine how it must have been for people when there was no awareness of the condition and no treatments available.

Student 5: Reading the novel has heightened my awareness of the difficulties faced by such people and has given me a greater ability to empathise with these individuals. I also have a greater realization of the need for support and resources for this group.

Student 12: I found that reading a novel on a subject matter that I was studying gave me invaluable insights which a text book could not provide. My understanding has evolved greatly and since reading the book I have taken further interest in the condition. I think when topics of an academic nature are put into context they strengthen the individuals understanding and this certainly happened for me after reading the book. I would definitely in future consider, if I had difficulty with a subject matter in college, reading a novel in relation to the topic. I found this assignment not only really helpful but one I thoroughly enjoyed.

Student 38: After reading *The Bell Jar* my personal perspective on *depression* changed considerably. I always imagined those affected by depression were middle aged men and women. I never considered that someone like Esther with everything going for her would suffer from feelings of hopelessness which would lead her to try and take her own life.

Novel: Lord of the Flies

Student 17: The novel emphasised to me the importance of solidarity in society, that we all do need each other.

Student 17: After reading this novel my understanding of sociology has deepened, I understand better the need for society and rules and how dangerous *power* can be when it is misused. It also helped me understand how *fear and domination* can be used to *control* a society and to stop people questioning why things are the way they are.

Student 17: The novel showed me how easily a society can break down without a government.

Student 17: Sometimes things can be explained in a more straightforward way in a novel. To see them in real situations reaffirms what is already understood but now by considering them in real situations brings a different perspective.

Novel: The Kite Runner

Student 6: The narrative deepened my understanding of *social justice* because it illustrates the obvious and undeniable divide between the rich and the poor. This divide exists even when the people involved are as close as family. Baba and Ali grew up together and raised their son's in the same house but Ali still lived in a small hut with Hassan while he was servant to Baba.

Student 18: The novel deepened my understanding of *inequality* due to the treatment of Hassan and his family when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, him and his wife were shot dead in the street for being 'Hazara'.

4.4.2 Analysis and Interpretation

Question 1 confirmed that the critical reviews were completed at the end of the semester by the full cohort of 38 students, 16 Psychology majors, 15 Sociology majors and seven Religion major students. The high response rate indicates that the students were motivated by the linkage of novels to their course material and supports the role of literature in fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness in students at third level. **Question 2** revealed that there were five books in total chosen by students out of a choice of fourteen books. Students were placed in literature circles according to their choice of novel and it was not surprising to me that students gravitated towards the same titles as this offered more opportunity for dialogue and discussion. The books chosen for the critical review were *Animal Farm*, *The Kite Runner*, *The Bell Jar*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Lord of the Flies*.

The results of **Question 2** indicated that the most popular choice for the Psychology students was *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath (12 students), a harrowing account of a teenage girl's nervous breakdown. This choice perhaps reflects the gender composition of the class which was predominantly female. It seems that students do gravitate towards books that they can identify with on some level (none of the other four titles offered were chosen by the students) and books that relate something concrete in popular culture to the theoretical paradigms they are exploring in their course work. As bell hooks observed in her own work with popular culture in the classroom:

People seem to grasp it more and not only that, it would seem to be much more exciting and much more interesting for everybody. Because popular culture has that power in everyday life.

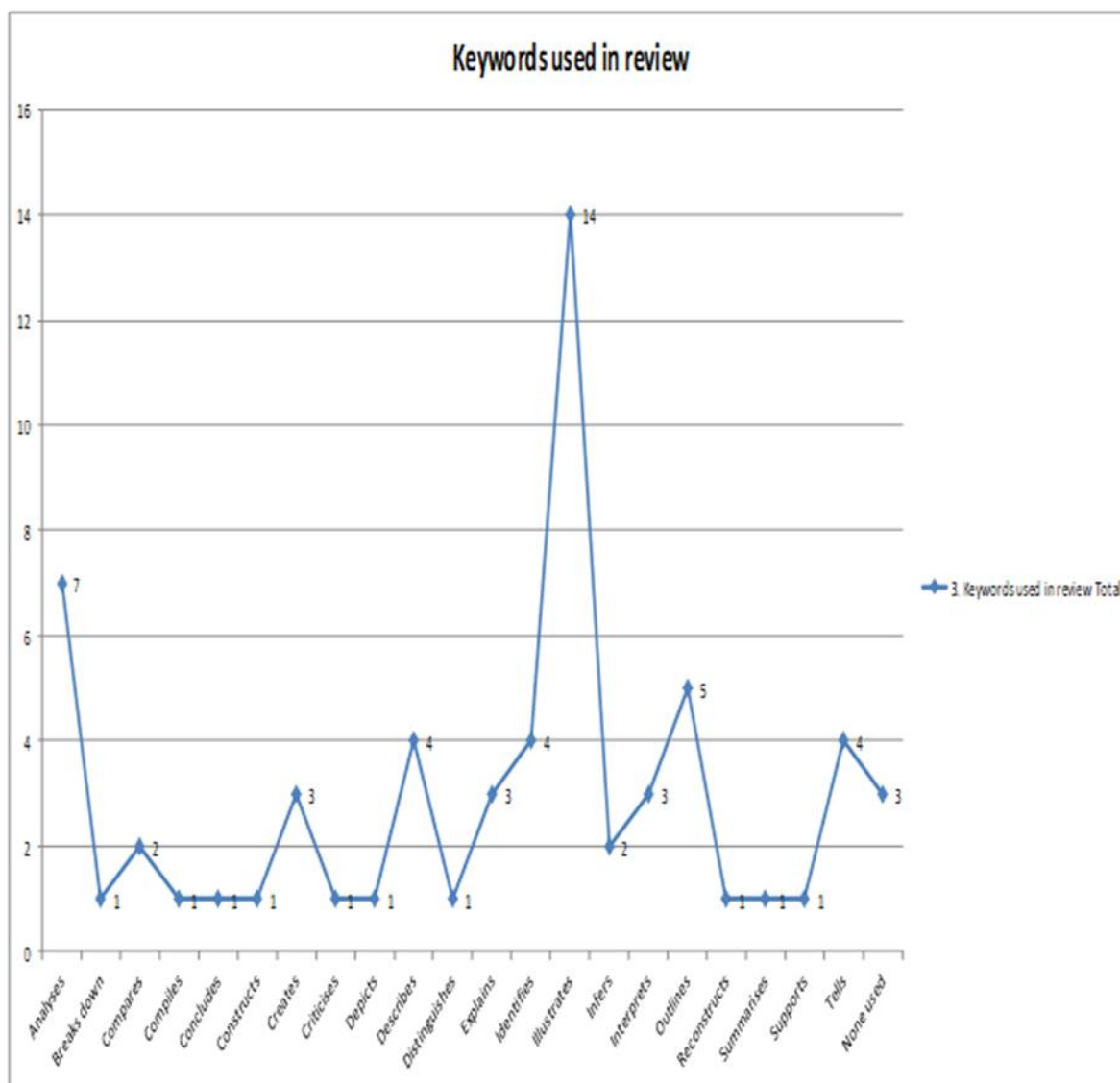
(hooks 1997, p. 2)

It was also ideal for the purposes of this research study that students chose the same novels as it made it much easier to facilitate literature circles and also led to lively and challenging discussions. The most popular choice for the Sociology students was *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (eight students) which didn't surprise me as ideological strife is never far from the news today and, on a more practical note, it's a very short novel and this inevitably was a factor in some students' decision making process. The second most popular choice was *Lord of the Flies* (7 students).

The most popular choice for the Religion students was *The Da Vinci Code*; indeed all of the students majoring in Religion (seven) chose this text out of a choice of three texts. I think this is largely due to the controversial stance of the text which is always exhilarating for young

adults. It is also partly dictated by numbers; with only seven Religion majors it was inevitable that they would gravitate towards one another and make a unified choice. It was thus easy to facilitate literature circles as all students were focused on the same text.

Students were asked in **Question 3** to evaluate the novel using the words outlined. The keywords used by the students are represented in graph form overleaf. It surprised me how few of the students incorporated words reflecting higher order thinking skills into their analysis with 14 of the students using the word ‘illustrate’ as opposed to seven using the word ‘analyse’. This highlights for me the importance of long term engagement with literature as a pedagogical tool and I think a longitudinal study would yield rich results. Unfortunately, such a study was beyond the scope of this research project given the time constraints. However, the field notes and student comments indicated that progress was being made in relation to moving students into more complex areas of engagement and I think sustained engagement would greatly benefit students as critical readers and reflective writers. The time imperatives of the work of teaching inevitably constrain and shape the possibilities of this research. However, the results provide me with an insight not only into what can be achieved over a semester but also what is possible, given the opportunity for sustained engagement.



In **Question 4** all students identified a key concept on their course explored in the chosen literature. These concepts included mental illness, social stratification and religious ideologies. This identification was important as it was essential that students could link their reading of the chosen novel to their course material to evaluate whether the use of literature served a pedagogical function.

In **Question 5** all students made connections between theory and social reality with one student responding each case of mental illness is different, six students gaining a new understanding of mental illness, and five students looking at mental illness from a different angle. Nine of the students reported gaining an insight into how ideologies operate; seven students recognising religion as an ideology; one student gaining an understanding of the role of power and four students gaining an understanding of equality. One student reported

making comparisons between the narrative and real life. These results indicate a significant increase in critical thinking and development in critical consciousness as students have started to evaluate issues from different perspectives and question tacit assumptions.

All of the students agreed in response to **Question 6** that there was a perspective transformation as a result of completing the critical review. That is, they read a book which made them look at an issue differently and as a result, their perspective changed. This is particularly evident in the comments by **Student 11**:

‘My perspective on religion has changed and I’m asking a lot more questions’

Student 35:

‘This assignment has shown me that I shouldn’t take material at face value and how I should analyse information more thoroughly. It has also taught me to look at material from different perspectives’

and **Student 38:**

‘After reading *The Bell Jar* my personal perspective on *depression* changed considerably’

Each of these students reported a perspective transformation through engaging with the chosen literature. This is a very positive result; although clearly more work needs to be done, this result indicates that perspective transformation and growth can be achieved through using literature as a tool to foster such change. These changes in perspective represent the development of critical thinking capacities and critical consciousness in students as they learn to engage with topics in multiple contexts and have a greater understanding of the impact of social issues not only on the self but on society. Four students said they now appreciated the complexity of mental illness as a result of reading a novel related to the topic (*The Bell Jar*) and five students commented that they had a deeper understanding of the impact of mental illness, not only on the sufferers but also those around them. Eight students reported they now understood how this could happen to anyone. These comments reflect the process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action. Freire argues that we all acquire social myths which have a dominant tendency, and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering truths and deconstructing myths. In this transformational instance, dominant myths about mental illness were replaced by a deeper understanding of a complex, multi-layered reality. Students comments like ‘even those, like

Esther, who seem to have a dream life can become victims of this mental illness’ (Student 2), and ‘I never considered that someone like Esther with everything going for her would suffer from feelings of hopelessness which would lead her to try and take her own life’ (Student 38) highlight the students’ growth as a result of their engagement in a dialogue with those whose experiences are different from their own and their unlearning of race, class and gender privileges.

Eight students said they were able to think critically about the topic explored in the novel and thirteen students reported a greater awareness of dominant ideologies and hegemonic control. These results indicate that students are starting to question the world and how it is constructed; the invisible social structures that maintain the status quo; who has the power and why; who is powerless and why; how we see the world and how much of our perspective is shaped by our race, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status. Finally, the critical reviews provide evidence that, through viewing the world through the eyes of another, from Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to Esther in *The Bell Jar* to the greengrocer’s widow in *Wreaths*, we learn to see the world differently and understand how much the world is shaped by structures of power and oppression and the need for social justice and equality. These findings confirm my hypothesis in the introduction to this thesis that literature not only represents to us our world but it also shows us ways in which we can change the world or adapt to changes which have already taken place without our realization. The findings further reinforce my assertion in the Literature Review that complex literary fictions can produce conceptual transfiguration. They can get us to see the world in a new light, shifting our sense of what is important, what sorts of people and possibilities are out there, and how we ought to respond to them.

Question 6 Perspective Transformation

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>Appreciated the complexity of mental illness</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>I was able to think critically about the topic</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Understood how this could happen to anyone</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Understood the concept of power differently</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Understood the impact of mental illness on others</i> | <i>5</i> |

All students reported a change in their understanding of course material in response to **Question 7** as a result of the linkage of novels, relevant to their area of study, to course material. This is a very positive result as it confirms the pedagogical potential of fiction for teaching course subjects. Nine of the students reported that they broadened their perspective as a result of their engagement with the process. 15 of the students referred to the role of the critical reviews in deepening their understanding of a topic. This was my explicit intent, to move students away from surface learning towards a deeper engagement with key issues that requires them to think about and reflect on topics. The results indicate that indeed deeper learning is taking place as a result of students' engagement with the literature. This, I believe, is the first step in developing critically conscious students because students cannot be expected to engage in active citizenship if they don't first stop and think about why things are the way they are and what needs to change. Six of the students said they developed empathy as a result of the process which, as outlined earlier, is one of the essential intellectual traits for the development of critical thinking (Elder 2007). 11 of the students reported that completing the critical review helped them to relate course material to real life which is highly significant because it validates the use of literature in developing not only a critical understanding of course material but also a critical awareness of their positionality and an understanding of the world around them.

Question 7 Understanding of course material

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--|---------------------|
| Broadened my perspective | 9 |
| Deepened my understanding | 15 |
| Developed empathy | 6 |
| Helped me relate course material to real life | 11 |

The findings from the Critical Reviews support many of the views outlined in the Literature

Review, namely, the views of Appleman (2009) who advocates the use of critical theories in literature to enable students to engage critically through multiple perspectives, and Goodman's whole language approach which asserts that students should be given whole texts of culturally diverse, high quality literature (1986) to enable them to read for greater understanding of the world as well as the word, thus echoing Freire's approach to reading and engaging with the world rather than just reading for technical literacy (2005). The findings also reinforce the pedagogy of multiliteracies outlined by the New London Group (1996) who noted two primary goals for students: 'creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment' (p.60). The New London Group argued against 'the old, monocultural, nationalistic sense of 'civic' and proposed 'a new sense of civic pluralism in which differences are used as a productive resource and in which differences are the norm' (p.69). Essentially what this group of scholars were outlining was a theory of literature for social justice to enable students to become more sensitive to the ways in which issues like race, class gender and other socio-political factors influence the literary practices of students. These goals are just as relevant today to meet the demands of the multicultural society that constitutes twenty- first century Ireland rather than settle for goals tied to the market economy as advocated by neo-liberalist approaches to education. While this thesis does not focus exclusively on advancing social justice, as Kincheloe (2003) observes, critical pedagogy is grounded on a social and educational vision of justice and equality, developing critically consciousness citizens is therefore instrumental in developing a fair and just society.

All students found the critical review helpful to their understanding of course material in **Question 8** which was very encouraging and paves the way for further investigations into the pedagogical potential of literature. Analysis of student reflections thus showed that students can develop critical consciousness toward social change if classroom activities consciously and persistently address the issue of power and challenge them to reflect on the structure, language, and context of the service and to articulate their visions and actions for a better community. Some students in the class questioned the dominant adaptation assumptions and how representational discourse is related to distribution of resources. From a strictly critical, social change perspective that emphasises societal transformation through dismantling root problems, the students' reflections may be seen as being critically oriented emergences of critical consciousness.

4.5 Week 13: Interviews

On completion of the 12 week academic programme, I carried out three follow-up interviews with a focused sample of the students, one with a student majoring in Sociology, one with a student majoring in Psychology, and one with a student majoring in Religion. This sample was representative of the student cohort who consisted of 15 Sociology students, 16 Psychology students and 7 Religion students. Comparing the results of the critical reviews and interviews allowed me to establish the validity of my research. I have included key comments from each of the students interviewed which directly relate to the objectives of the study.

Interviews allow the students to reflect and reason on the topic in a different way than surveys and allow me as a researcher to gain a deeper insight in how they think and reflect. All students commented that they had learned significantly from the process. Firstly, they realized that developing critical thinking was useful to their future career or advanced study:

Student 1: I now find myself choosing books which are more focused on what I am studying.

Student 2: It helped to enhance my critical thinking skills by forcing me to identify key concepts from my psychology course within the novel.

Secondly, they acknowledged the importance and necessity to apply critical thinking in different domains of learning:

Student 2: Being able to make this connection between theory and practice furthered my critical thinking skills.

Student 3: The book helped me to make a good connection between theory and practice.

Finally, they acknowledged they became more comfortable with and confident in asking 'why' and 'how'.

Student 2: Critically reviewing the book enabled me to have a greater realization of the need for support and resources for this group, something I perhaps would not have thought about before but now I wondered why we didn't do more as a society and how people coped like during the time of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' when these things weren't really recognized or thought of as serious.

A key finding from these interviews was that students became more assertive with critical thinking. They all agreed that they now felt more confident in asserting their opinions and participating in class discussion. Although socio-cultural learning is a key element of this

research study, autonomous learning is also an integral part of the critical thinking process and the development of critical consciousness so this was a welcome finding for me. Adult learners need to view themselves as being able to learn on their own. Ellsworth (1989) found that ‘confidence was cited as an almost necessary factor in engaging in self-directed learning’ (p. 28). Student 1 articulated the growth in her confidence as the term progressed:

Student 1: Initially, I felt I had very little to add to the lit circle discussions but the more I got into it the more confident I felt about my opinions and by the end of term I felt like I could say what I wanted to say without feeling self-conscious. I was more confident about my thinking because I knew I had really thought about it and looked at it from both sides so I felt stronger when I was stating my position. I had never thought about my ‘positionality’ before I started this course and it really made me look at everything with new eyes, I think I understand better now why the world is such a different place for different people depending on your class, gender and so on. It’s so important to discuss these things but it’s so important to be heard as well, I really appreciated that people listened to what I had to say and I felt more like part of a group then.

All students commented on the importance of being heard which helped them to develop confidence in their own beliefs and opinions and, as Ellsworth observed, growth in confidence will help with their growth as autonomous learners, and I would add, as critically conscious learners too.

Student 3 further outlined the importance of learner autonomy as he chose the book himself and felt a connection with the book:

Student 3: It was very important that I was allowed to choose the book myself to undertake the critical review. I had an immediate connection with the book I chose and I don’t think I would have felt that way if I had been told what to read.

All students claimed they found the use of literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness an enjoyable learning process citing ‘being allowed to choose’ the novel and ‘being able to discuss things in class’ as the key reasons behind their enjoyment

Student 1 outlined the importance of the project in enabling her to make connections between the material she was studying and the application of the content to the social world:

Student 1: This book gave me an insight into sociology at work, it's one thing to read about ideology and hegemony, it's another to read a book like Animal Farm and see it played out, by the end of the book I just totally understood it.

She further asserted that the project had exerted a long term impact on her reading choices as she is now more likely to choose books related to her course content. This highlights the importance of choosing literature that will interest and motivate the students and validated my decision to focus on modern literature:

Student 2: I like that the book wasn't just a text book but that I could relate to it and actually enjoy reading it.

Student 2 asserted that the project enabled her to develop critical thinking skills by encouraging her to identify key concepts from her course, and facilitating empathy by reading a first-person narration of the distress caused by mental illness:

Student 2: The book allowed me to see almost first-hand how a particular disorder can essentially cause great distress for both the person themselves and for the people who have to live with the person. I had never thought about that before. I felt so sorry for Esther's mother in the Bell Jar and I felt like her pain was forgotten about really. Like, what supports are there for her?

It was so interesting for me, from a reader-response perspective, to hear how students were affected by their engagement with different narratives. It seems that narratives written from a third person or omniscient perspective are more useful in giving students a sense of how a particular concept or system operates, for example **Student 1**'s comment above relates how reading *Animal Farm* helped her understand ideology. In contrast, narratives written in the first-person seem to be more useful in giving students an insight into how it feels to be affected by the concept under consideration, for example **Student 2**'s comment above conveys a deeper understanding of the concept of depression as a result of reading *The Bell Jar*.

The project also facilitated critical consciousness in **Student 2** as she began to question the lack of support and resources for mental illness:

Student 2: Critically reviewing the book enabled me to have a greater realization of the need for support and resources for this group, something I perhaps would not have thought about

before.

As outlined in the field notes (Section 4.2, p.192), this engagement with literature did lead to students taking action against the oppressive elements of society and engaging in active citizenship.

The interviews also highlighted the role of empathy in fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness:

Student 1: 'I was able to empathise with the character and to better understand the experience of others'.

Whilst some student seemed initially daunted by the thought of the critical review, the absence of formal assessment and the scaffolding provided by the literature circles provided the supports necessary to overcome uncertainties. I further encouraged student participation by creating rules of engagement in relation to classroom discussion (Appendix 8) and secondly, using a poem to illustrate that engaging in new ways of learning is always disorienting (Appendix 9). Mezirow asserts that perspective transformation occurs in response to 'disorienting dilemma' (2009, p.13). It was my goal to use disorienting dilemmas, which can according to Mezirow be created through reading a book, to engage students in critical reflection and then to perspective transformation. I chose the poem *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home* by Craig Raine because, for me, it accurately captures how unfamiliar the most mundane things can appear through the lens of another. The students responded well to the poem and I think it encouraged them to be more confident in class participation and in their personal reflections:

Student 3: Once I realized that everyone else was feeling more or less the same way as me I relaxed, I just didn't want to look stupid, you know. I came back to college after nearly a decade out of school and even words like 'critical analysis' and 'critical evaluation' make me feel a bit isolated. I actually think this is one of the best things I done (sic) because I'm not intimidated by the language the way I was when I started, I feel like I know what it means to be critical now and I feel like I am a more critical thinker, and I'm more aware of what's going on, we all are really. It's actually so nice just to have people listen to what you have to say.

In order to mitigate any negative effects of disorienting dilemmas on adult learners, educators need to be empathetic and compassionate in their approach, and must provide support for the learners during the process. I was acutely aware of this and students' involvement in choosing the material was one key way that I addressed this issue. I also advised students of the reading material that was going to be discussed a week before covering it to ensure students knew what to expect and I advised students that they were free to choose not to participate. By the end of term, students appeared very comfortable with their roles as critical reflectors and thinkers:

Student 2: 'Though somewhat daunted at the initial work of having to critically review a piece of literature within a psychological framework, the end result was a pleasant surprise, it was mainly that you were so excited about it that gave me confidence that I could do it in the beginning though and the fact that you seemed totally sure we would get to the end, I didn't mind doing the work, it was useful anyway, I just wanted to be sure that I could do it! The discussions were my favourite part of the project because it really helped me to clarify my ideas and sometimes it changed my mind, and I really got to know the group better as well'

These findings confirm my belief that giving students a level of autonomy in the learning process and fostering student engagement through the use of literature circles are integral to creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and engaged citizenship. The process encouraged student experiences that were within their zones of proximal development, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning. They also consolidated the findings of the critical reviews and literature circle reflections thus allowing me to triangulate my data. The comments further highlight the scaffolding that is necessary at the initiation stage of such a project, developing student autonomy is important but students also need to be guided in the learning process and reassured that their goals are attainable.

Overall, the interviews were a viable means of finding out about the critical review process from the students' perspective and highlighted issues not amenable to observations, for example, if the process had any impact on the world views of the research participants. The interviews in many ways embodied the spirit of my research as I evaluated my research study through the eyes of the other, the participants who like me were immersed in this study but from a very different perspective.

4.6 Limitations

A limitation of this study is the time constraints inherent in such an endeavour and a longitudinal study would undoubtedly yield rich results for researchers and students. In relation to the education system in place in Irish society, the question remains whether the system fosters the skills of critical thinking and critical consciousness in our students. Despite the success of this study in a third level environment, it is inevitably limited by the fact that it is incorporated into the curriculum at such a late stage, I strongly believe that these interventions should be taking place at a more formative stage of students' development if there are to be lasting intellectual, moral, emotional and pedagogical changes. According to The Post-Primary Longitudinal Study conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (hereafter referred to as ESRI) in 2011, the second year of second-level education is the crucial one in shaping students' performance. While the first year is turbulent for all students, clear differences in the engagement of students are evident by the second year. This is the year when many students drift and disengage from schoolwork and consequently, find it hard to regain the ground lost and achieve lower grades in the Junior and Leaving Certificate Exams. Failure often stems from difficulties in coping with schoolwork and negative teacher-student interaction. Whilst this research has yielded positive results in developing critical thinking in students at third level, it is essential, moving forward, that we foster this skill at the most formative stage of a student's development. If it is possible to facilitate change over the course of a single semester, the possibilities inherent in implementing a curriculum centred on critical engagement are boundless and bountiful.

According to the ESRI study (2011), students prefer teachers who allow them to have more autonomy in the learning process. This preference was confirmed in my own findings as students outlined the importance of being able to choose the book they reviewed. I acknowledge that the ESRI study focused on second-level students, nevertheless, it is worth noting that the student cohort who participated in this research were in their first year of third level study, and therefore most of them were not far removed from second level education. Given an attrition rate in Institutes of Technology of 22% (HEA 2011), finding ways of increasing student retention is of utmost importance and I would argue that critically engaging students and fostering communities of inquirers are key factor in their progression at third level. As outlined in the results, the students reported that, through participating in this research, they began to question their assumptions, look at issues from different

perspectives, gained a sense of their positionality and developed meaningful connections with other students through the literature circles. I consider these factors to be instrumental in fostering a sense of autonomy and simultaneously a sense of belonging in students at third level, which positively relates to student progression and retention.

The ESRI study further confirmed that second-level students see a strictly teacher-led approach as less helpful. They highlight the importance of interaction in class, with everybody contributing and discussions encouraged. This preference again confirmed my own findings as through literature circles, students engaged in free and open discussion. However, these methods are less evident as second-level students approach the exam, with more time spent on finishing the course, completing homework and practising previous exam papers. These changes appear to further alienate students who were already experiencing difficulties with schoolwork and, as noted in Chapter 3 of this thesis (p.128), if students become alienated from their potential by prevailing systems of economic, political, and cultural authority, the capacity to enact change is constrained. If we are to teach our students to think then we need to move beyond adherence to a prescriptive, results driven curriculum, towards a student-centred curriculum focused on developing critically conscious students. This point is eloquently reinforced by Maxine Greene who argues for a new model of teaching:

We teachers must make an intensified effort to break through the frames of custom and to touch the consciousness of those we teach. It is an argument stemming from a concern about noxious invisible clouds and cover-ups and false consciousness and helplessness. It has to do as well with our need to empower the young to deal with the threat and fear of holocaust, to know and understand enough to make significant choices as they grow. Surely, education today must be conceived as a model of opening the world to critical judgments by the young and their imaginative projections and, in time, to their transformative actions.

(Greene 1995, p. 56)

The ESRI study indicates that the current Leaving Certificate model tends to narrow the range of student learning experiences and to focus teachers and students on covering the course. Many students contrast their classes with the type of active learning that engages them. Based on the results of my research at third level, I believe using modern literature to engage and motivate students would significantly enhance the learning process at post-

primary level. It is clear that active engagement with the learning material is the key and literature is one way in which we can encourage student engagement while fostering student autonomy and critical thinking. Literature circles could be used to create communities of practice and encourage class interaction. Teaching for critical consciousness would further address the issue of student alienation by encouraging them to be active participants in the world around them, echoing Freire's goal for education:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

(Freire 1987, p.43)

Whilst I remain committed to the message of hope embodied in Freire's pedagogy, it is important to acknowledge that this process of change is not an easy one and requires ongoing negotiation by the student if they are to overcome the inevitable stumbling blocks which intervene. Ends are not exogenous and cannot be assumed to be 'givens' in the perspective of action research. Indeed, Mezirow criticised Freire for not giving sufficient cognizance to this aspect of the conscientization process, a view consolidated by Habermas's recognition and articulation of these inherent difficulties:

We are never in a position to know with absolute certainty that critical enlightenment has been effective - that it has liberated us from the ideological frozen constraints of the past, and initiated genuine self-reflection. The complexity, strength and deviousness of the forms of resistance; the inadequacy of mere 'intellectual understanding' to effect a radical transformation; the fact that any claim of enlightened understanding may itself be a deeper and subtler form of self-deception – these obstacles can never be completely discounted in our evaluation of the success or failure of critique.

(Habermas 1974, p.218)

Notwithstanding such obstacles, what is apparent from students' comments and reflections is a new critical sense of agency and a perspective that is sufficiently permeable to allow one access to other perspectives (Mezirow 1981). This makes possible movement to still more inclusive and discriminating perspectives and active participation in society, or in its

reconstruction. Ultimately, the results show that while there is much yet to do, the critical constructivist approach taken in this research has actively engaged students in critical thinking and critical consciousness through the medium of literature.

4.7 Conclusion

Valued research knowledge comes largely from the accumulation of contested and confirmed findings from skilfully conducted studies that are diverse in methodology. This study contributes to research on critical thinking and critical consciousness by expanding the type of approach traditionally taken to investigate this subject. On the whole, research studies on critical thinking have not displayed great variation in research design. There appears to be an overwhelming reliance on quantitative data of a certain sort. More specifically, researchers tend to use standardised multiple-choice tests to measure critical thinking and students' responses on questionnaire surveys to measure classroom and out-of-class experiences. Yet, any single research method is necessarily limited in its capability and by its own particular shortcomings. For example, the common use of such standardised tests as the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal and the Cornell Test of Critical Thinking to measure critical thinking is not without its own weaknesses and limitations (Berger 1985). In this study, I employed qualitative methods to extract multiple sources of data. This led to rich contextual evidence of the types of pedagogy that are associated with the reported enhancement of students' abilities to think critically.

In summary, the findings of this research indicate that modern literature can be used in the classroom to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness; however, engaging in this process requires sustained engagement on the part of the teacher and the learners. The field notes indicate that there are changes taking place in students' thinking and greater engagement with social reality through exploring modern literature using a critical lens approach. The interviews confirmed these findings with all students reporting an increase in critical thinking and the ability to make greater connections between theory and practice. The critical reviews were the most illuminating element of the research process for me as they allowed me to gain insights into how the research study fostered the students' critical thinking skills and facilitated critical consciousness. The literature circle reflections validated the importance of discussion in the classroom to enable perspective transformation, and

facilitating communities of practice to encourage critical thinking and a commitment to social change.

Ultimately, the results of this research highlight the deficits inherent in what Freire refers to as the banking model of education. He argued that the goal of 'banking education' is to demobilize the people within the existing establishment of power by conditioning them to accept the cultural, social, political status quo of the dominant culture. In the banking education model knowledge/education is seen as a gift given to the student by the teacher who considers the learner as marginal, ignorant and resource-less. Freire saw this as false generosity from the dominant group and a way of dominating and controlling the people to improve or maintain their own interests (Freire 1970). The teaching model that I have outlined in this research actively involves students in the learning process, and the results demonstrate that it is working. Students began to think critically about key concepts and issues and develop conscientization (Freire 1970). They started to understand that the world or society is not fixed and is potentially open to transformation. This makes it possible for students to imagine a new and different reality (Freire 1978) and become actively engaged in such transformation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

As I reflect on the road that I have taken, I think about how far I have come since I embarked on this research. In this chapter I reflect on what I have learned and the challenges I have encountered, and I outline a pedagogical road map of possibilities for future educators for critical consciousness. The purpose of this research as stated in Chapter 1 was to release the pedagogical potential of modern literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness. This chapter offers conclusions and outlines possibilities for a curriculum that acknowledges the role of literature in achieving these pedagogical aims. Brookfield (1995) asserted that one way a theory can be judged as useful is the extent that it helps us understand not just how the world is but how it might be changed for the better. I hope that my research satisfied this criterion of theoretical utility and my cohort of students not only understand the world they live in better but that they might be moved to change the world for the better. In relation to the long-term success of this research, as Mezirow observes, ‘verification of the theory is impossible until the social vision it inspires is realized’ (1991, p.29). However, I do believe that as a result of their interaction with this project, my students have moved beyond adherence to the prevailing myths of our time and reached new levels of critical awareness which paves the way for more active engagement in effective forms of social, political and pedagogic action.

Shor (1992) warns that ‘a syllabus without critical questions is not neutral or apolitical, ‘in fact, it supports the status quo by not questioning it’ (p.41). What I wanted to achieve with this research is the development of criticality in my students, that is, the cultivation of a disposition that motivates students to think, reflect, question the status quo and seek alternative possibilities to inequitable situations they encounter in the classroom and outside the classroom. I think the tutorial framework I employed, as outlined in Chapter 3, facilitated this disposition in my student cohort by consciously exploring political issues and drawing attention to the ways in which education can inform or transform us. Drawing on the work of hooks, Freire and Greene as explored in Chapter 2, I endeavoured to create opportunities for dialogue, interaction and reflection, to use literature to awaken the potential of the social imagination, and to instil in my students an understanding of education as the practice of

freedom. In concluding this research I have outlined opportunities to create and maintain this disposition in students which I hope will provide pathways of possibilities for future educators. The main achievement of this research for me lies in creating a space for a humane education at third level, a space where students can enter into transformative encounters with literature. This research has focused on the pedagogical possibilities inherent in such encounters, possibilities for growth, transformation and critically conscious engagement with the world. This research further sought to create communities with a passion for multiple voices and multiple realities as outlined by Maxine Greene and it is my hope that the communities formed will continue to work together in questioning why things are the way they are more importantly thinking about how they could be.

5.2 Pathways and Possibilities: My Reflexive Journey

In positioning myself at the centre of an analysis of the knowledge produced in this research, I realise I have always been a reader. Every picture unearthed from my childhood finds me with a book in my hand and reminds me that social research acts are always constitutive of a researcher's identity. Adopting an honest position in my research, I am aware of my interest in and motivation for creating a programme for developing critical consciousness using literature. Extending beyond myself, I think about the ways in which works of literature explore and reveal the complexity of the human condition, from *How to Kill a Mockingbird* to *The Great Gatsby*. And, while I don't imagine that I have created a passion for reading in every participant in this research, I do think that I have offered this cohort of students a gateway to exploring the social, political and economic forces that surround them and perhaps strengthened their resistance to prevailing commercial forces. I think this research highlighted a number of possibilities for me as a teacher to transform my practice. Moving students from a state of magical or naïve consciousness to one of critical consciousness was my purpose as outlined in Chapter 1 and what I know now is that this transition does not happen automatically, it takes planning, perseverance and patience. If people are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time they are carried along in the wake of change as opposed to living in wide-awakeness and as a teacher, I worked hard to foster critical conversations in the classroom and create a dialogical educational programme concerned with social and political responsibility. It was always a challenge, sometimes exciting, sometimes exhausting, but as I conclude this research I can certainly say it was worthwhile.

This research further highlighted for me the importance of creating opportunities for growth and transformation, of providing a space for our students outside the competing demands of the knowledge economy. To open spaces for learning is, according to Greene, to give learners a sense of absence, of open questions lacking answers, of darkness unexplained. It is in this space that imaginative transformations occur for our students. Indeed, in many ways, I think of the term knowledge economy as an oxymoron; the economy is not interested in the creation of knowledge, the economy is interested in the commodification of knowledge and to me they are two very different conceptualisations of knowledge. One conceives of knowledge as process, the other conceives of knowledge as product. And, I think as long as this understanding of knowledge as utility and instrument exists it inexorably leads to a results-driven, success oriented model that is deeply damaging to the idea of a humane

education. Instead of fostering individual growth, it actually undermines self-formation by offering a consumerist model that creates a mind-set wherein students feel they can reap without sowing, and buy an education rather than earn it. My research has sought to rage against this machine and mechanistic scholasticism, and create a framework that fosters the rich, deep understanding of the human and of human possibilities.

I'm not a Luddite and I appreciate the importance of economically relevant knowledge and scientific advances, but I think Ned Ludd had a point when he resisted consumerism because science and progress don't necessarily go hand in hand. Mary Shelley warned society of that in *Frankenstein* nearly 200 years ago, subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*. Prometheus means forethought and I think it is lacking in the current education model. McLuhan talks about extension and amputation, for me the amputation lies in the education our students are receiving, they're being taught to consume, memorise and store but not to think so they are being carried along in the wake of change rather than living in wide-awakeness. This banking model, so abhorred by Freire, is clearly failing our students and education stands in need of a rejuvenation of its affective function – the impact it has on the emotional, social, moral and personal development of learners (Hyland 2011).

I was profoundly influenced by Maxine Greene, Paulo Freire and bell hooks. For me reading *Releasing the Imagination* was one of those moments that Longinus refers to as being in the presence of the sublime, I read the book from cover to cover and I thought yes, that's exactly what I want to create in my classroom. Sometimes that feeling can provoke what Harold Bloom calls the anxiety of influence but for me it was more of an impetus, the way in which she unearthed a world of possibilities through her emphasis on an aesthetic education and her focus on educational reform and social justice. Greene's integration of literature into her teaching really resonated with me. She positions literature as a space where underprivileged and under-voiced communities can find recognition not accorded them in existing social structures and where possibilities exist for perspective, understanding and compassion. Greene shows, with example after example, how the arts can disrupt one's consciousness and make people aware of possibilities, and how teachers can use the arts in their curriculum to provoke students to break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted and see things anew. Using literature in my curriculum as part of this research has enabled me to not only share my love of literature but more importantly, promote criticality in my students as they learn to see the world anew.

If Maxine Greene was the author who was most inspiring to me, Freire was the most instructive. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provided me with a framework for understanding the myriad perspectives of the cohort of students before me in the classroom and a final vocabulary for articulating the different levels of conscious engagement within the student cohort. Understanding conscientization enabled me not only to differentiate whether students were in a state of magical, naïve or critical consciousness, but also to understand why and more importantly how I could facilitate their movement towards critical consciousness. I think he also fostered in me a more tolerant and humane approach to education, particularly when confronting the apathy of the student deeply embedded in a banking approach to learning. Integrating Freire's approach into my research enabled me to move from frustration to hope as my students learned to move beyond prescribed modes of thinking and to think for themselves.

bell hooks for me is the writer who challenged me to be critical and engaged in my approach to teaching as part of this research, to foster an engaged pedagogy in myself and to enable my students to develop as enlightened witnesses. Although much of her work focuses on critical thinking and popular culture as in *Culture and Transformation*, ultimately she argues that to read is to become a critical thinker, she charts her own intellectual journey in terms of the books he read and she recounts the intellectual development of Malcolm X which my students found really interesting. Reflecting on the commonalities among the three writers who have underpinned this research, they all share a vision of hope but hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice in order to become historical concreteness (Freire 1970) and that is what I have endeavoured to do with my research.

Finally, as I reflect on what I have learned over the course of this research, I realise that nothing can be achieved without the ongoing commitment of teachers who believe in their students and the possibilities, as outlined heretofore, of embracing such a framework; possibilities for growth, for transformation and for a humane education. For, as Freire ultimately concludes, 'it is not possible to be a teacher without loving one's students... It is not possible to be a teacher without loving teaching' (1970, p. 15). I can't say at the end of this semester that I loved every moment of this teaching experience, as outlined in Chapter 4 there were foothills as well as pinnacles along the way. I can say that teaching makes me happy, even if sometimes it is a difficult happiness and, I can say that through exploring

literature as a tool for developing critical thinking and critical consciousness I have contributed something new to the existing body of pedagogical research, that is, a way of promoting criticality in students through reading, questioning and dialogue.

5.3 From Magical Consciousness to Critical Consciousness: My Students' Journey

As discussed in Chapter 1, I see critical thinking as a precursor to critical consciousness because students cannot reach awareness without first coming to an understanding. Therefore, fostering critical thinking in the classroom was an important part of this research. bell hooks observes that 'the heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know-to understand how life works' (2003) and I employed modern literature to illustrate an understanding of how life works and reveal the inequalities that often underpin the social structures that we uncritically accept. For bell hooks, the most enabling resource that we can give our students is the ability to think critically about their lives:

I think thinking critically is at the heart of anybody transforming their life and I really believe that a person who thinks critically, who, you know, may be extraordinarily disadvantaged, materially, can find ways to transform their lives, that can be deeply and profoundly meaningful in the same way that someone who may be incredibly privileged materially and in crisis in their life may remain perpetually unable to resolve their life in any meaningful way if they don't think critically.

(hooks 1997, p.3)

Some of my student cohort embarked on this journey in a stage of magical consciousness as outlined in Chapter 2, adapting themselves passively to the expectations of a superior force: they were not conscious of the socio-economic contradictions within this society: they accepted life as it was and didn't question injustices done to their lives. Many of the students seem to be in a state of naïve consciousness and have no recognition that a neutral position perpetuates power inequalities. Reflecting on the etymology of the word education, the latin 'educere' means to lead out of and presumably towards something. So, I really considered moving my students towards critical consciousness my goal, using literature as a gateway to help lead those who want to go out from their own lives in to another, moving from a position of relative ignorance to intellectual agency. This study affirmed for me the pedagogical potential of literature to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness. Students

were engaged with the literature; they participated in class discussion and evaluated the texts from multiple perspectives which fostered critical thinking as well as developing communities of inquiry. They moved towards a more critically engaged approach to society and social issues as their discussions led to new, more informed ways of thinking about the world and a critical awareness of their positionality. I think the critical lens approach was particularly helpful in fostering Freire's problem-posing approach outlined in Chapter 2, as students learned to question prevailing assumptions and ideologies, and look at the world from different perspectives. This set them on a path of questioning and discovery that paved the way for critical transitivity as they not only experienced self-growth but through encountering inequity in their social worlds, they began to think about what they could do to change their social worlds as I outlined in our discussion of *The Bell Jar* (p.262). I believe that the use of literature to foster critical thinking can, in turn, move people to critical awareness, to a sense of moral agency and to a conscious engagement with the world. However, it is ultimately, the students who must engage in self-growth and self-transformation and move beyond passive acceptance of prevailing myths. I initiated strategies for raising critical awareness in the classroom through the tutorials and the literature circles but it was the students themselves, through reading and sharing different perspectives who raised their own critical awareness.

This research has further sought to facilitate critical consciousness in students by encouraging them to reflect and act on their new, informed ways of thinking about the world, for as Bourdieu observed in the conclusion of *La Misère du Monde*, 'to become aware of the mechanisms which make life painful, even unliveable, does not mean to neutralize them; to bring to light the contradictions does not mean to resolve them' (Bourdieu 1999, p.106). Nothing is less innocent, Bourdieu reminds us, than *laissez faire*, and watching human misery with equanimity while placating the pangs of conscience with passive acceptance of the status quo is complicity. I hope that my students will no longer passively accept the dominant narrative but actively engage in transformation. By learning to think critically and consciously engage with the world, students can become the enlightened witnesses that bell hooks describes with a proactive sense of agency. Overall, this research has consolidated for me the role of literature in fostering this sense of agency in students and active engagement with their socio-political environment.

As outlined in Chapter 2, dialogue and conversation potentially enable individuals to transcend boundaries and address social issues from diverse and multiple perspectives, so that

‘we also identify what we share that is common to us’ (hooks, p.38). This resonates with Freire’s concept of dialogue explored in Chapter 2 as that which enables people to name the world and, therefore, to impel social transformation and liberation, as Freire observes: ‘to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it’ (1998, p.69). Maxine Greene further reminds us that experiential education is really an internal process by which people can wake up and construct a coherent world on one’s own quest for freedom and transformation by integrating a variety of perspectives and vantage points. This process can be accomplished through the coming together in community, through dialogue and the asking of questions, through interfacing with literature. Freire reminds us that to enter into dialogue presupposes equality amongst participants. Each must trust the others; there must be mutual respect and commitment to the dialogic process. Each one must question what he or she knows and realise that through dialogue existing thoughts will change and new knowledge will be created as they learn to read the world differently through encountering different perspectives. Finally hooks notes that to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries (2003).

My experience as I guided students on this quest is that the most significant learning moments took place in literature circles as students shared their perspectives and listened to each other with respect. I think it is important that students feel fostered rather than forsaken, a sense of belonging to counter the alienation that the first year experience sometimes entails. I believe that students learn more and participate more if they feel valued and cared for, a belief echoed by Noddings (1992) who asserted that we should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, we want to instil the belief that they themselves are cared for. I think the literature circles were instrumental in engaging this cohort of students, they enjoyed the communality of the experience and they really valued having someone listen to their opinions (p.225 it’s nice to have someone listen to what you say). I think the level of student autonomy is attractive to students, according to the ESRI study (2011), students prefer teachers who allow them to have more autonomy in the learning process and see a strictly teacher-led approach as less helpful. Ultimately, I think we have to have respect for the agency of our students, through respect students grow into their own agency, their own self-assumption of who they are and how they might influence their conditions.

If we think of dialogue as a vehicle for a process of joint inquiry through which learners construct meaning, then giving students the time to engage in dialogue in each tutorial is

valuable. It is certainly true to say that this means letting go of the reins somewhat, it is difficult to plan class time with any measure of accuracy when progress is contingent upon student participation, however, I would argue that creating time for dialogue in tutorials is worth a whole semester of rote learning if students are to develop as critically aware citizens. The students who participated in this research considered the dialogue the most valuable aspect of their learning with most students reporting that they shared their ideas with the group and listened respectfully to the responses of others as outlined in Section 4.3. They also enjoyed having a space where they could be heard with Student 3 observing ‘it’s actually so nice just to have people listen to what you have to say. I found that, through dialogue, the students took more responsibility for their own learning, and developed a sense of agency and common endeavour. Dialogue is central to the problem-posing education proposed by Freire and, if are to overcome the banking model so prevalent in contemporary education, I think we need to start by letting the students talk, and think, for themselves. I think this research offered a space for students to do so and what I found is that this was often the space where the greatest learning took place as students shared perspectives and sometimes transformed their perspectives.

This research has endeavoured to foster in my students the ability to ‘look at things as if they could be otherwise’ and to use literature as a catalyst to ‘wide-awakeness’ (Greene 1995, p.32). My research has shown that literature can offer a gateway to understanding, through which students can learn to think critically and become more critically conscious citizens. The tutorial framework employed in this research facilitated not only engagement with modern literature but an opportunity for students to engage with multiple perspectives, think deeply about social issues and grapple with the inequalities they encountered such as racism, sexism and capitalism through the medium of literature. In this way, literature functioned as a pedagogical tool through which students learned to deconstruct their fictions about the world they live in and outline new possibilities for the future. . Transformation can occur through pedagogical practices grounded in literature because literature opens vistas of possibility and experience that draw from and move beyond a student’s lived world and allow students to understand and appreciate multiple perspectives. Explorations through literature can lead to a community inspired by a passion for multiplicity and social change.

The literature offered diverse and instructive pedagogical prompts which I think students found persuasive and liberating, affording ample avenues for new discovery—for students

and teachers alike. More important perhaps, the multiple approaches contained in the critical lens approach here have the capacity to capture the interest of someone who might not have considered these texts before reading. Just as Freire encourages us to reject the "banking method" of teaching and its focus on static classroom activities that keep students locked in what contributor Paul Reifenseiser calls an "interpretive prison," (2004, p.112) hooks (1994, p.207) moves beyond identifying the problem, and persuades readers to revision the classroom as an active "location of possibility" where "an openness of mind and heart ... allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress." Her synthesis of Freire's praxis provides important incentive, as well as instruction, for teachers who want to take up the charge and become, in her words, "active participants in learning" (11). It is within this context, then, of both Freire and hooks, that the texts in this tutorial framework - individual locations of possibility - may indeed play an open role in the ongoing charge of what Greene calls transforming the world.

For Freire, reading combined with contextual critique creates an additional transformative dimension to human understanding and I observed this transformation in tutorials as students began to see the world differently and recognise the structures underpinning their perspectives. Reading and understanding the words and the world is the first step in liberation and humanisation. Freire suggested that reading the word and the world uncovers the inhumane situations in which many humans are forced to live. From *The Mocking Bird* to *The Bell Jar*, students moved towards critical awareness as they confronted dehumanisation and began to discover democratic alternatives to transform society. Whilst I think this approach can work with all encounters with art, as bell hooks observes, 'popular culture is where the pedagogy is' (2003, p.2) and for me, modern literature was the most appropriate tool if I was to satisfy my secondary aim of stemming the growing tide of aliteracy amongst third level students. The students participating in this research were engaged with the texts and they provided a powerful platform for fostering critical thinking and raising critical awareness in the classroom. I think the non-didactic approach was instrumental in enabling students to learn independently and become critical thinkers.

Greene suggests that 'for too many individuals in modern society, there is a feeling of being dominated and that feelings of powerlessness are almost inescapable' (1978, p.11). She further suggests that 'such feelings can to a large degree be overcome through conscious endeavour on the part of individuals to keep themselves awake, to think about their condition

in the world, to inquire into the forces that appear to dominate them, to interpret the experiences they are having day by day. Only as they learn to make sense of what is happening, can they feel themselves to be autonomous. Only then can they develop the sense of agency required for living a moral life' (1978, p.11). This sense of agency and conscious endeavour is what I hoped to instil in my students through his research and the results indicate that such changes are taking place. Students are more aware of themselves and the world they live in and have taken positive steps towards self-transformation and the need to respond to, and where necessary to transform, the world in which they live. There are many roads to critical awareness, this research has focused on the use of literature as one way we can assist in our students' existential quest to understand and construct a meaningful life. This research has explored how literature can provide experiential opportunities to see the world from multiple perspectives, helping individuals "wake up" by experiencing empathy with others. In this way, literature can function simultaneously as a mirror to the self and a window to the other, and support students on their quest for freedom. This has proved a valuable quest for my students as they learned to read the world as they read the words (Freire 1970) on their journey towards critical transitivity.

Encountering critical thought and insights of others, in person or through literature, art, and other media, may induce individuals to examine their own experiences and social situation, and may motivate them to join social change oriented movements, which is the ultimate goal of critical consciousness. When spontaneously aroused critical consciousness is reinforced and supported by encounters with the critical thought of others, the likelihood increases for individuals to join movements for social change. Whilst to a certain extent students should come to their own critical understanding, through class discussions students raised their own critical awareness and learned through and from each other. Opportunities to engage with the critical thought of others were created in tutorials through dialogue and literature circles and the responses highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue to facilitate long term change. It is clear that consistent injection of critical thought, which challenges dominant ideologies and views of social reality, is necessary if this criticality is to permeate everyday human encounters in social and occupational spheres.

As conceived here, individual activism in everyday life is intended to facilitate the emergence and spread of critical consciousness. It does so by introducing critical questions and observations, which challenge dominant ideologies and views of social reality, into

conversations in the classroom. This approach derives from the assumption that social orders are maintained and reproduced by people's actions in everyday life and by their consciousness which guides these actions and is, in turn, reinforced by them. Hence, a necessary, though not sufficient condition of fundamental social change, is that large segments of a society overcome the ideological hegemony of the established way of life over their consciousness. A potentially effective means toward such transformation of consciousness could be to confront and challenge prevailing ideologies and modes of thought in human encounters of everyday life. I created opportunities for critical awareness through the medium of literature; however, individuals who choose social change should search consistently for opportunities in everyday situations, at work and in other social settings, to initiate meaningful explorations of personal and social conditions, and of links between personal problems and societal dynamics. Such explorations can facilitate the emergence and expansion of critical consciousness around everyday events and encounters, and can enable people to transcend the usual meaninglessness of polite and superficial social exchanges.

In preparing for social change practice in everyday life, students need to explore, critically and honestly, on their own or jointly with others, their social reality and experience. Such explorations, I have found, are likely to reveal the extent to which the material, biological, psychological, and social needs of many people tend to be frustrated at work, at home, and in other social situations, and how these frustrations are conditioned by the structures and dynamics of the social, economic, political and ideological context in which workplaces, homes and social life are now embedded. They are also likely to discover that their consciousness mirrors prevailing, dominant ideological themes, that they tend to blame themselves for their limited personal achievements and unsatisfactory conditions, and that they assume that the social context which constantly frustrates their basic needs cannot be altered by human action. Our discussion of *The Bell Jar* (p.262) in particular facilitated an in-depth discussion of how critical consciousness could help students to critically evaluate interpersonal situations and to make changes that would lead to personal and social transformation. Such discussions may help others to engage in similar explorations, and are likely to reveal that people are not alone in their frustration and alienation, but that others share similar experiences and feelings, I think this is really important for students to ease the isolation of interpersonal distress.

Gradually, the society in which they live may no longer seem as free, fair, and democratic as claimed, but oppressive, exploiting, and controlling, especially when psychological

dimensions are considered, rather than merely material ones. For people may live in satisfactory conditions in a material sense, but may nevertheless feel alienated, lonely, insecure, and unfulfilled in non-material aspects of their lives. Once one has begun to communicate with family members and others about these issues, one may be ready for a further step: to organize support groups similar to the consciousness-raising groups of the women's liberation movement. Such groups would meet regularly to discuss and analyse experiences and feelings, to help members with efforts to confront and challenge the consciousness and ideology of co-workers and others whom they encounter in everyday life, and help them deal with the conflicts that may result. With support from such groups, individuals may deepen their commitments to social change, and they may take on an identity of social change activist and political organizer in addition to their existing personal and occupational roles. It is important that support groups come to understand social change as being in the interest of everyone whose development and self-actualization are obstructed by the structures, values, and dynamics of the prevailing way of life, and not merely in the interest of materially exploited and deprived classes.

Starting with the assumption that fundamental social change requires that large segments of a population overcome the hegemonic ideologies of the established institutional order, I have sketched a strategy aimed at facilitating the emergence and spread of critical consciousness by means of exploratory encounters through literature. Such encounters are intended to enable students to develop a penetrating analysis of the oppressive dynamics of our present way of life and insights into possible alternatives, based on principles of equality, cooperation, community, freedom and democracy. These encounters should also help students overcome their sense of powerlessness, their tendency to blame themselves for their difficulties, and the fallacious notion that comprehensive social change is impossible. Whether the proposed strategy can work is not known. What is known, however, is that without a fundamental transformation of consciousness, an institutional revolution toward comprehensive human liberation cannot take place. Therefore, we need to experiment with a variety of approaches which may promote the necessary, large-scale transformation of consciousness. Based on my own practice thus far, I think that the approach suggested here can make significant contributions toward that end, provided growing numbers of students will engage in it consistently with a sense of commitment.

'Freedom, according to Maxine [Greene], is a quest, an existential project which means it is a lifetime of confronting walls' (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 89). My students have spent the semester

confronting walls and importantly, thinking about ways to surmount them. The difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that simply strives to reinforce domination is acutely observed by bell hooks in her description of moving to a desegregated school; education as a counter-hegemonic act was replaced by a transmission model of education disengaged from the lived world of conscious experience. Education as the practice of freedom is a concept that rails against this instrumentalization of knowledge; our explorations of modern literature and classroom dialogue throughout the semester questioned and challenged prevailing ideologies and in doing so, facilitated the releasing of the imagination through encounters with literature and freedom from the disembodied logic of the present system through dialogue. This research offered the students a space wherein they could learn to deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world, thus becoming what bell hooks refers to as enlightened witnesses.

Freire believed that all education in the broadest sense is part of a project of freedom and always political because it offered students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life and particular notions of critical agency. This agency and capacity for self-reflection and critical awareness was fostered in the classroom through the use of an engaged pedagogy that nurtured a reflective and critical stance to social realities aimed at student empowerment. Engaged pedagogy does not seek to empower students alone. What I have learned is that any classroom that employs this model of learning will also be a place where teachers experience self-growth, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. When teachers bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as omniscient narrators and creates a shared dialogue amongst teacher and students. In this way, both students and teachers are empowered by the process. Education as the practice of freedom allows both teachers and students to do exactly what bell hooks (1994, p.207) describes ‘...to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries...’.

This research does not offer literature as a panacea; however, it does present literature as a way of fostering critical consciousness in students and in doing so, teaches students to embrace diversity and multiple ways of knowing and in doing so, set themselves free from prescribed ways of knowing and thinking and enable them to embrace, value and support

difference and diversity. The philosophy of teaching that I have embodied in this research is best described by Paulo Freire (1970) as a practice of freedom. I believe that education is a tool for psychological and physical liberation. It allows people to deal critically and creatively with reality. Through education, we discover how to participate in transforming our world. With this research, I endeavoured to create an atmosphere whereby all students participating in this research, regardless of their previous educational experiences and level of consciousness, could develop a framework for learning based on critical engagement with the world around them. I think that I have succeeded in making an insufficient but indispensable contribution to the field of education by outlining the possibilities of embracing such a framework; possibilities for growth, for transformation and for a humane education.

5.4 Limitations



I think we made great strides this semester in creating a democratic classroom that offered a space for student to develop as critical thinkers and engage in critical consciousness. Nevertheless, there were struggles along the way, with some students experiencing difficulty leaving the vacuum of the bell jar behind. I reminded them that truth does not exist in a vacuum, rather there are multiple truths and a plurality of perspectives and we need to move beyond the confines of the bell jar of our lived experience if we are to understand the totality of existence.

For me the key limitation was the rejection of the freedom that this project offered, particularly at the start of the semester. This surprised me at first as I thought students would see the tutorials as a liberating opportunity for them to share their thoughts and feelings without censorship or fear of ridicule, what I realised was that moving towards critical transitivity was not a smooth transition for the students, it required profound changes in perspective that were not always easy for students to embrace. As outlined in some of the student comments in Chapter 4, there was fear and resistance on the part of some of the students involved in this research to commit to change and self-growth. In tutorials, I promoted complex and challenging ways of thinking about social conditions and issues.

These dissonance-arousing experiences were intended to constructively contribute to conceptual growth and critical consciousness but at times substantial tensions stemmed from topics that critically interrogated dominant definitions and norms concerning power and privilege. With freedom comes responsibility and it is really difficult for a student to realise for the first time that they are in any way complicit in the perpetuation of inequalities and hierarchical structures. Moving from the stage of magical or naïve consciousness to critical consciousness can thus be uncomfortable, challenging and at times painful. However, I reminded my students of the Socratic axiom that the unexamined life is not worth living and whilst they might not always have agreed with me, they persevered.

Fear of change is a major hurdle for critical pedagogy. It is always easier to accept the values of the oppressors than it is to challenge and overthrow them. Human beings face structural forces, through ideology and other forms of oppression, that deny their ontological need to criticise and change the world that leads to a fear of freedom. This fear replaces existential hope with a form of resignation and thus hinders social transformation. If students are to move beyond this fear, then we as teachers have a responsibility to establish an emotionally safe learning environment. Such a climate enables students to address constructively the fears they bring to the learning event. This empowers the students to risk change which is essential if they are to reach critical consciousness.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the ability to think critically is a necessary precursor to developing critical consciousness and, as part of this research, the students engaged in critical evaluation of texts from multiple perspectives and they were required to think deeply about the issues explored in them. However, an obvious limitation of this study is the difficulty inherent in measuring students' abilities to think critically. This study cannot conclude causality between the use of specific pedagogical techniques and student improvement in critical thinking because self-assessed growth in critical thinking is not a direct measure of actual growth. Evidence that the two are positively related, however, lends credence to this study's design and validity of findings. According to Bowen (1977), the results of cognitive outcome studies based on objective measures are generally similar to those derived from students' self-reports. Assessing the stability of relationships among self-reports of cognitive abilities and actual test scores, Pike (1996) concluded that self-reports can be justifiably used as general indicators of achievement. The reports of the students who participated in this research clearly indicate that the students feel that they have developed their critical thinking abilities and grown in critical

consciousness as a result of their involvement in this research. It is not enough, however, for us as practitioners to facilitate courageous conversations about racism and social injustices, to appreciate cultural differences, and accept the need to be reflective in our personal beliefs and professional practices. We need to practice actually engaging in critical thinking and critical consciousness. This practice should involve concrete situations, guided assistance, and specific contexts and catalysts, all of which were provided for the purpose of this study through the tutorials, literature circles and modern literature. Real-life experiences make the learning activities more genuine and authentic, and lessen the likelihood that students will escape the intellectual, emotional, psychological, moral, and pedagogical challenges inherent in critical thinking, reflection and critical consciousness. Teaching for critical consciousness should also provide opportunities for teachers to construct tangible results of the ideological reconfigurations that are part of reflection so that they can assess the quality of their efforts and continue to improve them. Turning critical thoughts into transformative instructional actions helps to internalize the process so that it can be replicated in future endeavours. It also is one of the anchors of effective teaching for change.

To teach in the Freirean sense of critical educational practice is to question, to challenge, to become aware of possibilities in life, not to accept the status quo. As Freire states:

Critical educational practice is to make possible the conditions in which the learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love.

(Freire 1998, p. 45)

Teaching has as its goal a desire to summon souls rather than just personas refined for the global production function; a wish to generate connected community rather than hierarchical control; and an understanding of the need to bridge the gap between sensibility and objectivity. O'Quinn and Garrison, reflecting on the occupation of teaching, write 'the joy of the occupation of teaching lies in its ability to reveal wholeness rather than yield to the fragmentation so common in current teaching' (2003, p.31), an important tenet that must be kept in sight for the good of both teacher and student. By insisting on experiencing teaching as an embracing act dependent on giving, receiving, and growing, we can break away from the transitory, limiting, and dividing nature of fixed identity as defined by 'work force' or

‘knowledge worker’, into the boundless and fluid spirit of the self, inherent in a ‘labour of love’(O’Quinn and Garrison 2006 p.127). If we perceive the daily activities of teaching this way, even the most mundane acts maintain something of the transcendent. In the transcendent, we recognize the significance of the mundane; the most trivial, as well as the most formidable of choices, create enduring characters and selves. In naming these choices, teachers influence not only their own identities, but also bear witness to those with whom they routinely transact, the students they foster, the learners on whom they bestow a world of possibilities.

For Freire as explored in Chapter 2, the aim of educational practice is to foster a sense of efficacy and action in students, rather than place them in the position of being the object of a teacher’s work. The students are the centre of learning and learning leads to action in their self-interest, this view contrasts sharply with the traditional paradigm of teacher-centred classrooms, where the teacher practices the banking method of teaching discussed earlier, where students are repositories for teacher content, a classroom where students must answer other people’s questions (Freire 1970). Students are not objects, but subjects who act upon their world and it was my goal in this research to foster this critical intent in my students through engagement with modern literature and the myriad social, historical and political issues explored therein. It is my conclusion that modern literature can serve an important pedagogical function by fostering critical thinking in the student, eliciting empathy, prompting reflection, stimulating discussion and perspective transformation, and creating favourable conditions for growth in critical consciousness.

A further limitation refers to the generalization of this study. On the topic of generalization, I think it is important to remind ourselves that pedagogic situations are always unique and, as Max van Manen (1984) observes ‘what we need more of is theory not consisting of generalizations, which we then have difficulty applying to concrete and ever-changing circumstances, but theory of the unique; that is, theory eminently suitable to deal with this particular pedagogic situation’ (p.13). As I conclude this research study I am wholly aware of the necessity of active participation if the study is to prove worthwhile. I was blessed to have a cohort of students who were willing participants in this action research for without them it would have made no sense. When I asked my students in the last week of term why they agreed to take on the extra work of reading literature for these tutorials they all agreed on three things; they found the project interesting and meaningful, they valued the opportunity to

discuss their ideas within a supportive environment and hear other peoples' views and they were influenced by my enthusiasm for the study. These findings, which were further discussed in the results chapter (p.222), reinforce for me Sanders and McCutcheon's (1984) characterisation of practice, namely, that teaching action is always taken within a complex situation in which a set of factors is present. These factors may influence the consequences resulting when a particular action is taken.

Teaching occurs in a context shaped by interrelated factors such as the nature of the learners, relations among people, psychological factors and social norms, the teacher's personality and ability and so on. Any of these factors may exert significant influence on the consequences of a particular action taken by a teacher. I appreciate this could prove a challenge for future researchers, however, I am confident that if you make students active participants in the learning process and give the learning meaning beyond narrowly prescribed educational outcomes they will respond. As outlined in the results chapter, all students commented on the importance of autonomy in relation to their book choice for the critical review, and the importance of the literature circle discussions in developing confidence in sharing their views. Furthermore, I believe, like Freire, that for meaningful change to take place in the classroom and in the students, we must value our students, respect their knowledge and the conditions that created that knowledge:

Our relationship with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them. To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us.

(Freire 1970, p.58)

It is my experience, as an educator, that students want, above all, someone to listen to them and an opportunity to transmit their identity as learners rather than vessels to be filled with information. Environments that foster open discussion of multiple perspectives are one way in which we can create such learning conditions for our students and facilitate perspective transformation. As Freire further observes:

It is through hearing the learners, a task unacceptable to authoritarian educators, that democratic teachers increasingly prepare themselves to be heard by learners. But by listening to and so learning to talk with learners, democratic teachers teach the learners to listen to

them as well.

(1970, p. 65)

Subjectivity, the human interaction between people, must be predicated upon respect; respect for the agency of the student, and a teacher's respect for herself as a critical practitioner. She cannot view her role as a teacher to impose or to control her students. Rather, she must work with and alongside them, listening to their questions and constructing the learning of topics around those questions. And one can only listen to another if it is grounded in respect for that person. Respect changes all relationships, and is, according to Freire, fundamental to being a critical practitioner, 'the first step toward this respect is the recognition of our identity, the recognition of what we are in the practical activity in which we engage' (Freire 1998, p.71). Through respect, students grow into their own agency, their own self-assumption of who they are and how they might influence their conditions. Reflecting on what I have learned from my students over the course of this research, providing a learning space that respects students by allowing them to think, to talk and to grow is for me, the key to facilitating critical consciousness at third level.

5.5 Recommendations

A number of recommendations for practice are extrapolated from the findings that emerged from my research which I hope will encourage other educators to engage in teaching for thinking, to foster critical thinking in the classroom and facilitate the development of critical consciousness. For me, teaching for critical consciousness has helped me to live the educational philosophy I have espoused in my research and embrace education as the practice of freedom. Engaging in dialogue with my students and providing opportunities for imaginative encounters with literature to help release their imaginations from the constraints of a technocratic curriculum has also released me from the chains of instrumentalized knowledge and revealed to me a new world of pedagogical possibilities.

Firstly, the co-operative classroom practices such as the literature circles employed in this research could be used to promote criticality amongst students as they learn, through dialogue and interaction, to question and challenge prevailing assumptions about their lived world. As teachers, we can foster this spirit of critical inquiry through encouraging students to view the words, and the world, from multiple perspectives, and the critical lens approach employed in my research provided significant scaffolding in bridging students' previous learning experiences with the more holistic modes of thinking embedded in a critically transitive approach.

Secondly, students could be encouraged to think more deeply and reflectively about the connections between their lived experience and the world to foster notions of connectedness and relationality, and enable them to participate in society and engage with others in more meaningful ways. My research used literature as a gateway to this understanding and I think the approach outlined in my tutorial framework could be adapted by other educators to foster critical consciousness in the classroom and outside it. The ability to perceive social and political contradictions and take action against oppressive forces is the ultimate goal of education if we are to fully embrace the notion of education as the practice of freedom. Creating opportunities to develop critical awareness in the classroom is therefore, an essential part of a humane education that fosters intellectual growth.

Ultimately, encouraging students to ponder beliefs and perspectives that differ from, or challenge, their existing beliefs systems, as I did in tutorials, offers students the opportunity

to learn something about themselves. As students critically examine the views and perspectives of others, they also critically reflect on their own beliefs, values and judgements. Through dialogue, and discussing the aspects of their own interpretation of an issue, students might be better positioned to make critical judgments about the relative strengths and limitations of their own judgments. This constitutes a powerful learning experience for students and facilitates their movement towards critical awareness. I think educators interested in fostering this awareness in their students could use the critical lens approach outlined in this research with any number of different texts to encourage students to think deeply about issues and about their own interpretation of these issues. As a result of the readings and discussions which took place in tutorials, my students expressed an increased appreciation of multiple perspectives and diversity, demonstrated the ability to recognise and critically examine more connected ways of learning and being, and moved towards a more critical understanding of self and society. This is surely something that we want to foster in all students engaged in the process of learning and becoming if we are to enable them to develop as critical thinkers capable of critically consciousness engagement with the world around them.

Tolerance for different views is a principle long echoed by Freire and a key aspect of fostering critical consciousness in students is to enable them to contribute effectively in the development of a more equitable and tolerant society. Social life is reflexive, that is, it has the capacity to change as our knowledge and thinking changes, thus fostering critical thinking and critical consciousness through literature has the capacity to exert an influence on social life and effect change. Therefore, I think this thesis has a particular relevance to professional practice in contemporary education. While it is difficult to quantify changes in thinking, it is clear to me that changes are indeed taking place as students are more tolerant of diverse perspectives and willing to challenge the dominant narrative. The cultivation of tolerance in our students is instrumental in their movement forward as critically conscious citizens, for as Freire observed in an interview 'it is through the exercise of tolerance that I discover the rich possibility of doing things and learning different things with different people. Being tolerant is not a question of being naïve. On the contrary, it is a duty to be tolerant, an ethical duty, a historical duty, a political duty' (Literacy.org May 1996). The willingness to challenge is also critical if students are to act as subjects in the creation of a better society. It is clear to me that such change can be initiated but not fully accomplished on an hour-a-week basis over a semester. What is needed is deliberate and sustained engagement in teaching for thinking; in

interrogating the structures that govern our society *with* our students; teaching our students to recognize social, economic and political oppression and to take action against these oppressive elements.

The changes in social structure and intent have resulted in the shifting nature of the literary canon and the on-going production of new canonicity to accommodate the changing world in which we live which is a welcome and significant departure from the 'great, white male' canon which preceded it. However, shifting canonicity is not enough, it must be accompanied by questioning, interrogation and critical analysis. The key issue is how to approach literature and reading in the light of cultural diversity, and the structure of the curriculum in relation to how it is *taught* as opposed to what is *thought*. The goal of education after all is not to passively transmit information to our students as illustrated in the banking model so abhorred by Freire but to socialise and humanise students through the reading and discussing of texts, and these two goals exhibit themselves not only in what is read but the way in which it is read and understood. This research has employed the problem-posing model espoused by Freire to help students construct insights and interpretations of concepts as they emerge, through the tutorials, literature circles and critical reviews. This research has further prioritised the role of dialogue in which students discovers the meaning of humanity from encounters with others. Conscientization requires that an individual change his or her attitudes, perception or beliefs. In other words, individuals must not accept that social reality cannot be questioned and changed (Taylor 1993). According to Freire, dialogue is the means of achieving conscientization and was facilitated in this research by literature circles which promoted free discussion throughout the term.

In trying to foster critical thinking and facilitate critical consciousness through class discussion, as teachers, we first need to seek ways to raise students' confidence in their ability to contribute to class. Strategies employed in this research included the use of literature circles before moving to plenary, establishing rules for engagement (Appendix 8) and illustrating the disorienting dilemma that often precipitates transformative learning through the use of literature (Appendix 9). Finding that peers can exert a substantial influence on students' confidence, and that positive emotional climates occur when students are cooperative and supportive and make friends in class, Fassinger (1995) recommends that instructors might consider developing more assignments using study groups or learning partners. I think this would be a worthwhile endeavour as students are required to consider

multiple perspectives before arriving at consensus which fosters critical thinking and the communality involved is greatly beneficial to the development of critical consciousness as outlined earlier.

As practitioners, we need to guard vigilantly against class discussions where the dominance of a majority perspective silences the expression of minority views. In a series of studies of undergraduate life undertaken by Levine and Cureton (1998), findings revealed that 54% of students feel uncomfortable expressing unpopular or controversial opinions. Educators need to do more to bring about a class atmosphere where students are comfortable voicing a diversity of viewpoints and where they feel safe to question, critique, and disagree. Again, class size matters; classes ought to be small enough to allow each student adequate opportunity to participate meaningfully in discussion. I found the literature circles invaluable in ensuring full and democratic participation by all students. The use of role sheets meant every student had a role to play, how much they engaged after that was self-directed but most students found the process enjoyable and empowering as demonstrated in the findings, and all students agreed that they found the literature circles helpful in developing their critical thinking skills and their ability to articulate their opinions with confidence.

With regard to writing, I believe there is a need to include a greater number of writing assignments in course evaluation, that require students to demonstrate synthesis of material, evaluation of arguments, deduction of conclusions, and so on. Using literature to facilitate this process not only encourages students to think and reflect on social inequalities and injustice, it also consolidates the importance of not just 'reading the world' but 'writing the world' to effect change (Freire and Macedo 1987, p.13). Writing assignments, like the critical review that formed part of this study, also satisfy a secondary aim of this research, namely, improving literacy skills amongst third level students whilst awakening them to the nature of reality.

Lastly, if institutions are truly committed to achieving the widely professed educational objective of instilling critical thinking skills in students, then they need to actively support and guide staff in teaching reform efforts. Seminars, workshops, and training sessions should not be a one-time event but rather a regular component of an institution's ongoing professional development programme for staff. In the new managerialist approach to education there is little room for such initiatives and until the goals of education stop being

tied to the market economy there is likely to be little change. We live in a society wherein pedagogical practices have been effectively colonised by economic imperatives. However, the difficulties of colonisation also invite resistance. The mobilization of communicative reason and action is the counter to colonisation, through such reasoned communication, participants agree to allow the better argument to guide action oriented towards improving social conditions. The better argument is that students who learn to think critically about the world, and question received ideas, will be able to participate as subjects in the creation of a more democratic society, rather than submit to a banking model of education that objectifies them and alienates them from their potentiality. By implementing a problem-posing model through the medium of literature, it is my hope that this research will develop students' potential to become politically and ethically rational citizens in their social world.

5.6 Conclusion: Contribution to Knowledge

Monolithic national cultures like Ireland have been challenged by the influx of new cultural groups, the breaking up of larger polities and the belated recognition of existing but suppressed cultural groups. This presents a significant challenge to not only what we teach, but how we teach it, in modern education. Edward Said observed that:

When our students are taught such things as ‘the humanities’ they are almost always taught that these classic texts embody, express, represent what is best in our, that is, the only tradition. Moreover, they are taught that such fields as the humanities and such subfields as ‘literature’ exist in a relatively neutral political element, that they are to be appreciated and venerated, that they define the limits of what is acceptable, appropriate and legitimate as far as culture is concerned.

(Said 1983, p.21)

However, as Husen (1999) has noted, education is, by its very nature ethnocentric. And, I would argue it is therefore always political, undermining the notion of the apolitical sphere of the classroom and highlighting the importance of teaching with intent. My aim was not only to teach with intent, but to teach for critical consciousness, and I think that I have achieved this aim whilst remaining cognisant that this is just the beginning of what is a lifelong commitment.

I believe that this research has contributed to the existing body of knowledge by establishing a relationship between literature and critical thinking as a theoretical framework for facilitating critical thinking and critical consciousness at third-level. By offering literature as a gateway into theory and deeper learning in this research, students engaged in this research learned how to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information, that is, to think critically whilst developing as critically conscious citizens. I hope that the tutorial framework outlined in Chapter 3 will provide a pathway of possibilities for practitioners interested in developing criticality in their students. Moving students towards critical consciousness as outlined earlier is not a linear process but using literature to engage students as I did in this research, rather than forcing students to change their mode of thinking, helped students find their way along the continuum from absolute knowing to contextual knowing without fear or uncertainty.

I believe this research awakened a sense of agency in my students and a desire for emancipation from the forces of domination within and without. The problem-posing

approach that I used in this research enabled students to perceive, often for the first time, the hegemonic dominance of the privileged class's way of being, thinking, and doing and in doing so, overcome this cultural hegemony and become an active participant in the appropriation of knowledge in relation to lived experience. Critical consciousness represents the capacity to both critically reflect upon and act upon one's socio-political environment and by focusing on literature that reflected the life-world of the students, the tutorials provided a space for students to think critically about racism, sexism and social injustice and, in doing so, to think about ways in which they could participate in change.

In facilitating this change, Freire's (1970) emphasis on dialogue as a way of learning and knowing emerged as significant in the development of reflection and critical thinking at third level. Through dialogue, students learned to consider and reconsider their own perspectives and values, evaluate problems from different perspectives and learn to understand their positionality and look beyond it. Creating space for dialogue in the classroom was an essential component of developing criticality in students as they moved from the solitary activity of reading towards more inquiry-based exploratory experiences delineating trajectories of ethnic growth, asserting a mentality of equity and opening up spaces for participation and inclusiveness. This is for me, my insufficient but indispensable contribution to the field; if students are encouraged to read carefully chosen works of literature that encourage them to read and think, and are then provided with the space to engage in dialogue that allows them to share their perspectives, challenge prevailing assumptions and consider other perspectives, they will develop as critical thinkers and become more critically conscious in their engagement with the world around them.

As an action researcher, I recognize that transformations of social reality cannot be achieved without engaging the understandings of the social actors involved. I'm further aware of the criticism of critical action research as 'a romantic aspiration, overemphasizing people's willingness and capacity to participated in programmes of reform' (Kemmis and McTaggart 2003, p.339). I acknowledge that my research is aspirational but that is qualitatively different to the more general criticisms often levelled at those who attempt to capture the point of view of the interacting subject in the world, namely, that such work is navel gazing or a naïve humanism reproducing what Silverman referred to as 'a Romantic impulse which elevates the experiential to the level of the authentic' (1997, p. 248). This research may be aspirational but it is not naïve, it is a carefully considered, albeit imperfect, piece of research. It is hopeful and

that is not unreasonable given that it is grounded in an educational philosophy that aspires to teach our students to face the world with confidence and hope, drawing on Freire's pedagogy of hope, Greene's pedagogy of imagination and bell hook's engaged pedagogy. After all, Freire observes, 'hope is not just a question of courage, it is an ontological dimension of our human condition' (1998, p.2).

Education is the practice of making ourselves at home in the world through understanding. People learn by example and, as teachers we need to be that example for our students, only then can we create critically conscious students who are at home in the world. Education opens the mind, broadens horizons and interests, connects disparate fields of experience and cultivates habits of contemplation. It draws upon existing curiosities while directing these along lines that are less narrow or parochial thus opening up a larger field of vision. The acculturation that it surely involves extends beyond gaining factual knowledge or learning how to see the world as Homer or Shakespeare did, and includes extending student's acquaintances with the life-world and deepening their understanding of themselves. This thesis took as a starting point that education, as a discipline, would benefit from a sustained engagement with literature and it is my conclusion that literature is an entry point into this space where imaginative transformation occurs. So, in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1837, p.11):

Do not spare to put novels into the hands of young people as an occasional holiday and experiment...If we can touch the imagination, we serve them, and they will never forget it.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature Circle Role Sheets

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a summary of the reading. Don't tell the whole story, just focus on the important parts. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give them a quick statement that tells about the story (the summary), and the key points.

Summary:

Key Points

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the book you are reading and the outside world. This means connecting what you read with your own life, to what happens at college or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, or to other people or problems. Once you have shared your connection to this section of the book, each member of your group will also relate their own connection to the book, although they may refer to a different passage.

Describe the part in the book, and then explain your connection.

5. _____

Sample Questions:

What was going through your mind when you read this?

How did you feel when...?

Can someone summarize this section?

Did anything surprise you about this section of the book?

Predict something about the next section of the book.

Literary Luminary: Your job is to choose a paragraph or sentences from the book to discuss with your group. Your purpose is to help other students by spotlighting something interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important from the text. You can read parts aloud yourself, or ask another group member to read them. Include your reasons for picking the paragraphs or sections you did. Please record the page number and paragraph.

Paragraph and reason for choosing:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Appendix 2: Literature Circle Reflections

Title : _____ Author: _____

| Reflection Statements | Yes | No | Somewhat |
|---|-----|----|----------|
| I completed my assigned reading before the meeting. | | | |
| I wrote thoughtful and complete responses on my role sheet. | | | |
| I asked questions to clarify my understanding of the book and/or to help me better understand other group members' ideas. | | | |
| I brought all required materials to the Literature Circle meeting. (book, role sheet, my brain, etc.) | | | |
| I shared parts of the book that were important to me and explained why they were important. | | | |
| I was a careful and caring listener by giving my complete attention to other group members when they were speaking. | | | |
| I responded to other group members' ideas. | | | |

Did you find the literature circles helpful? If so, please tell me why.

Do you think the literature circles helped your overall understanding of key concepts covered on your course. If so, please tell me why.

Appendix 3: Literature Circle Reflections Coding Guide

Reflection Statements

1. I completed my assigned reading before the meeting.

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Somewhat

9 = Unknown

2. I wrote thoughtful and complete responses on my role sheet.

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Somewhat

9 = Unknown

3. I asked questions to clarify my understanding of the book and/or to help me better understand other group members' ideas.

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Somewhat

9 = Unknown

4. I brought all required materials to the Literature Circle meeting. (book, role sheet, my brain, etc.)

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Somewhat

9 = Unknown

5. I shared parts of the book that were important to me and explained why they were important.

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Somewhat

9 = Unknown

6. I was a careful and caring listener by giving my complete attention to other group members when they were speaking.

1 = Yes

- 2 = No
- 3 = Somewhat
- 9 = Unknown

7. I responded to other group members' ideas.

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Somewhat
- 9 = Unknown

8.1 Did you find the literature circles helpful?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 9 = Unknown

8.2. If so, please tell me why.

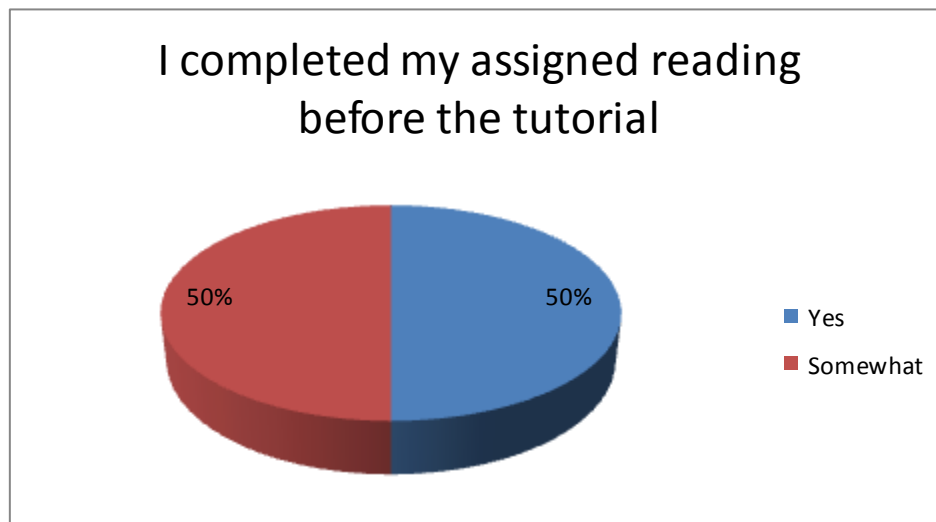
- 1 = Different Perspectives
- 2 = Deepened understanding of key concepts
- 3 = Broaden mind
- 4 = Different roles and shared workload
- 5 = Close textual analysis which allowed me to focus and gain greater insights
- 9 = Unknown

Appendix 4 Results of Literature Circle Reflections

Total respondents: 14

1. I completed my assigned reading before the tutorial

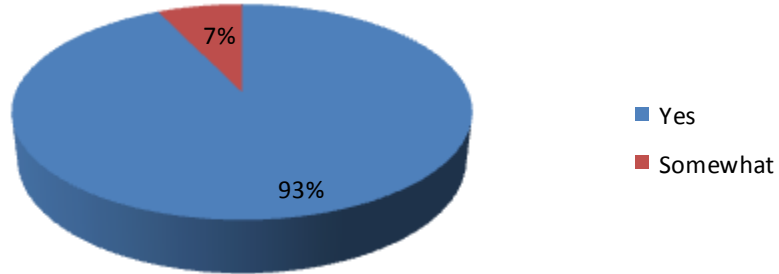
| Response | Total |
|----------|-------|
| Yes | 12 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 12 |



2. I wrote thoughtful and complete responses on my role sheet.

| Response | Total |
|----------|-------|
| Yes | 22 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 1 |

I wrote thoughtful and complete responses on my role sheet.



3. I asked questions to clarify my understanding of the book and/or to help me better understand other group members' ideas.

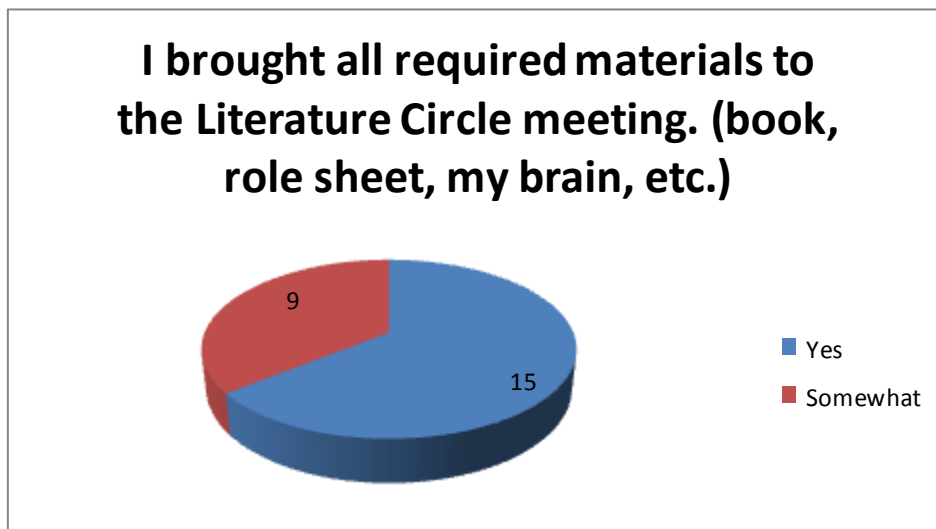
| Response | Total |
|----------|-------|
| Yes | 20 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 4 |

I asked questions to clarify my understanding of the book and/or to help me better understand other group members' ideas.



4. I brought all required materials to the Literature Circle meeting. (book, role sheet, my brain, etc.)

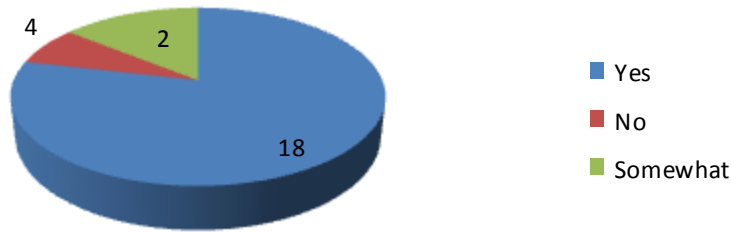
| Response | Total |
|----------|-------|
| Yes | 15 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 9 |



5. I shared parts of the book that were important to me and explained why they were important.

| Response | Total |
|----------|-------|
| Yes | 18 |
| No | 4 |
| Somewhat | 2 |

I shared parts of the book that were important to me and explained why they were important.



6. I was a careful and caring listener by giving my complete attention to other group members when they were speaking.

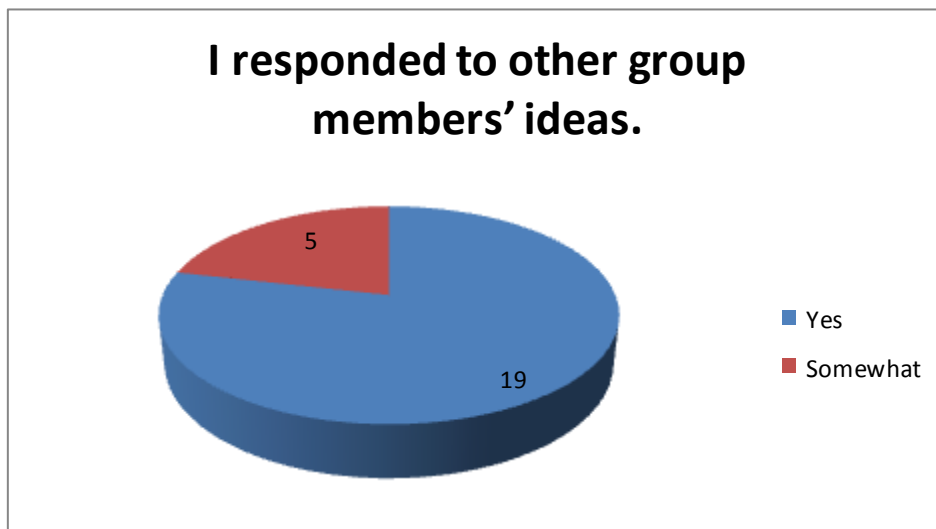
| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes | 23 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 1 |

I was a careful and caring listener by giving my complete attention to other group members when they were speaking.



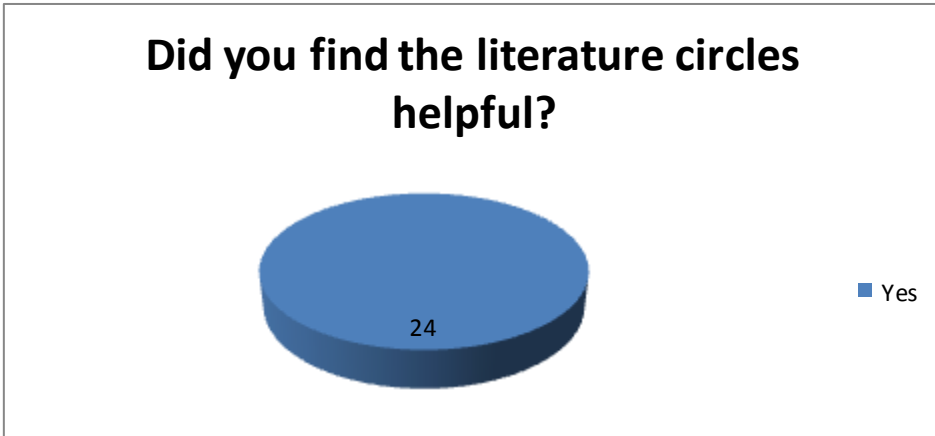
7. I responded to other group members' ideas.

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes | 19 |
| No | 0 |
| Somewhat | 5 |



8.1 Did you find the literature circles helpful?

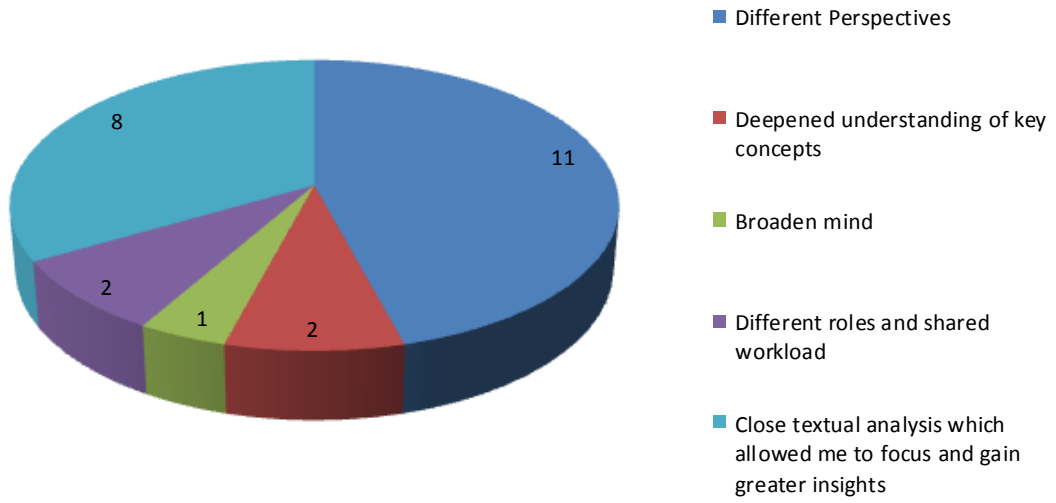
| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes | 24 |
| No | 0 |



8.2. If so, please tell me why.

| Response | Total |
|--|-----------|
| Different Perspectives | 11 |
| Deepened understanding of key concepts | 2 |
| Broaden mind | 1 |
| Different roles and shared workload | 2 |
| Close textual analysis which allowed me to focus and gain greater insights | 8 |

If so, please tell me why.



Appendix 5: Critical Review

1. Major:
2. Book Title and Author:
3. Briefly evaluate the novel using some of the keywords outlined in the prompt text to guide you:

analyses, breaks down, compares, contrasts, diagrams, deconstructs, differentiates, discriminates, distinguishes, identifies, illustrates, infers, outlines, relates, selects, separates

categorizes, combines, compiles, composes, creates, devises, designs, explains, generates, modifies, organizes, plans, rearranges, reconstructs, relates, reorganizes, revises, rewrites, summarizes, tells, writes.

appraises, compares, concludes, contrasts, criticizes, critiques, defends, describes, discriminates, evaluates, explains, interprets, justifies, relates, summarizes, supports

4. What key concepts from your course are illuminated in the novel?
 - Define the concept.
 - Show how it is developed in the novel.
 - Outline briefly how the narrative deepened your understanding of the issue.
 5. Outline in what ways, if any, the novel helped you to make meaningful connections between theory and practice.
 6. Did the novel enable you to evaluate concepts from a different perspective? Outline any changes in your perspective on the issue as a result of reading the novel.
1. Please outline any changes in your understanding of the course material as a result of engaging in the critical review.
 2. Was this review helpful to your understanding of course material?

Appendix 6: Critical Review Coding Sheet

1. *Major*

- 1 = Psychology
- 2 = Sociology
- 3 = Religion

2. *Book used for critical review*

- 1 = A Clockwork Orange
- 2 = Animal Farm
- 3 = Lord of the Flies
- 4 = One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest
- 5 = Running with Scissors
- 6 = The Bell Jar
- 7 = The Country Girls
- 8 = The Da Vinci Code
- 9 = The Kite Runner

3. *Keywords used in review*

- 1 = Depicts
- 2 = Identifies
- 3 = Illustrates
- 4 = Compares
- 5 = Infers
- 6 = Compiles
- 7 = Interprets
- 8 = Tells
- 9 = Analyses
- 10 = Reconstructs
- 11 = Describes
- 12 = Constructs
- 13 = Distinguishes
- 14 = Outlines
- 15 = Creates
- 16 = Summarises
- 17 = Breaks down
- 18 = Concludes
- 19 = Criticises
- 20 = Explains

- 99 = None used

4. *Key Concepts related to course content*

- 1 – Mental Illness
- 2 – Violence
- 3 – Social Stratification
- 4 – Ideology
- 5 – Communism
- 6 – Propaganda
- 7 – Depression
- 8 – Religion
- 9 – Docetism
- 10 - Poverty
- 11 – Inequality
- 12 – Loyalty
- 13 – Betrayal

5. *Connection between theory and practice*

- 1 –New understanding of mental illness
- 2 – Insight into how ideologies operate
- 3 – Role of power
- 4 – Look at mental illness from a different angle
- 5 – Understanding of inequality
- 6 – Each case is different
- 7 – Anybody can suffer from depression
- 8 – Religion as ideology
- 9 – Make comparisons between the narrative and real life

6. *Perspective Transformation*

- 1 – Appreciated the complexity of mental illness
- 2 – Understood how this could happen to anyone
- 3 – Understood the concept of power differently
- 4 – Understood the impact of mental illness on others
- 5 – I was able to think critically about the topic

7. *Understanding of course material*

- 1 – Broadened my perspective
- 2 – Deepened my understanding
- 3 – Developed empathy
- 4 – Helped me relate course material to real life

8. *Was this review helpful to your understanding of course material?*

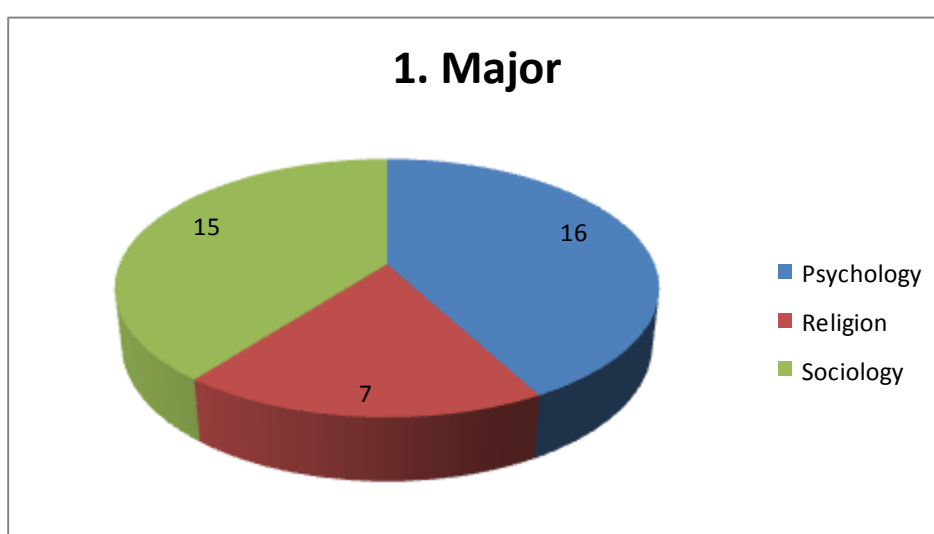
- 1 – Yes
- 2 – No

Appendix 7 Results of Critical Reviews

Total respondents: 38

1. Major

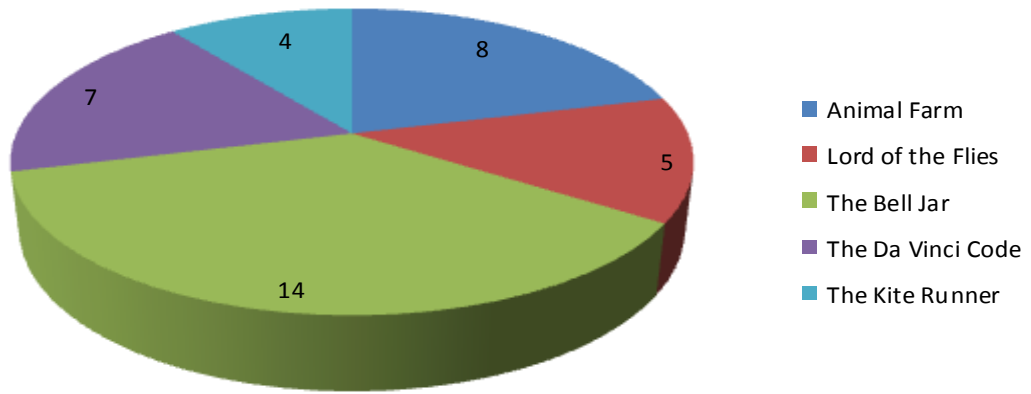
| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Psychology | 16 |
| Religion | 7 |
| Sociology | 15 |



2. Book used for critical review

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Animal Farm | 8 |
| Lord of the Flies | 5 |
| The Bell Jar | 14 |
| The Da Vinci Code | 7 |
| The Kite Runner | 4 |

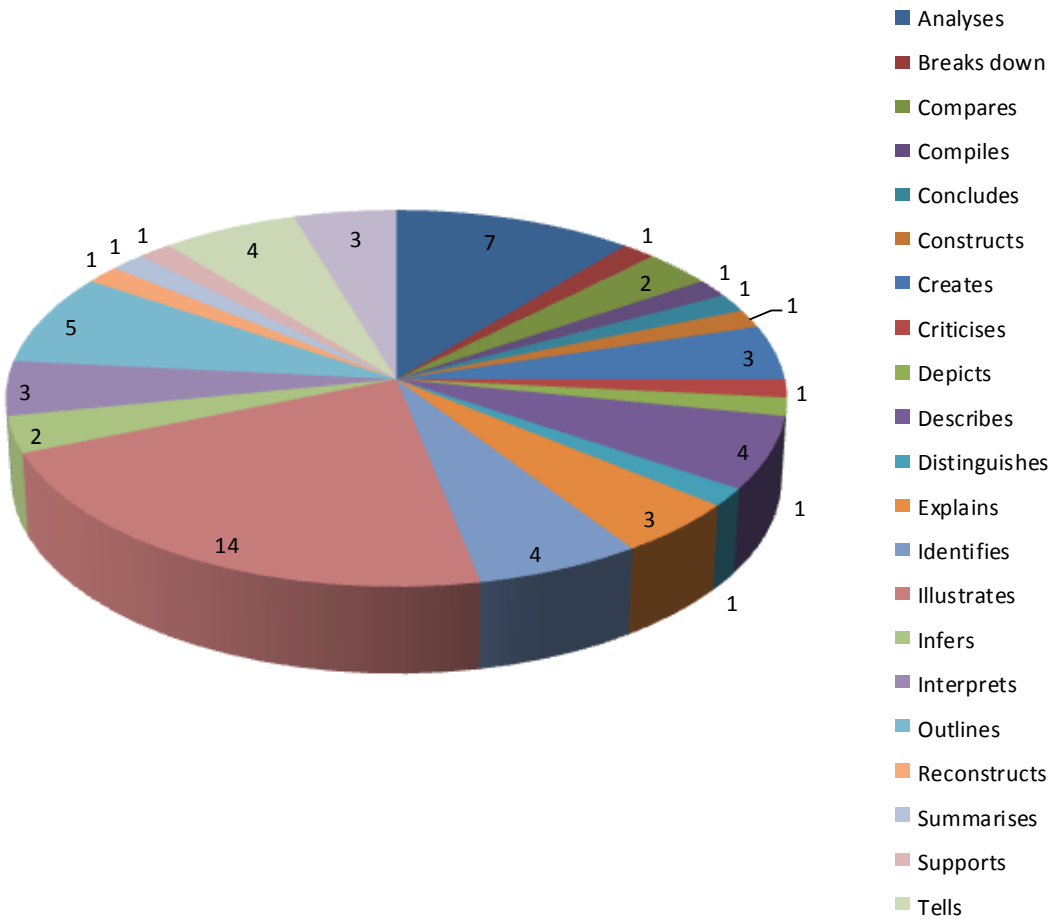
2. Book used for critical review



3. Keywords used in review (Tick all that apply)

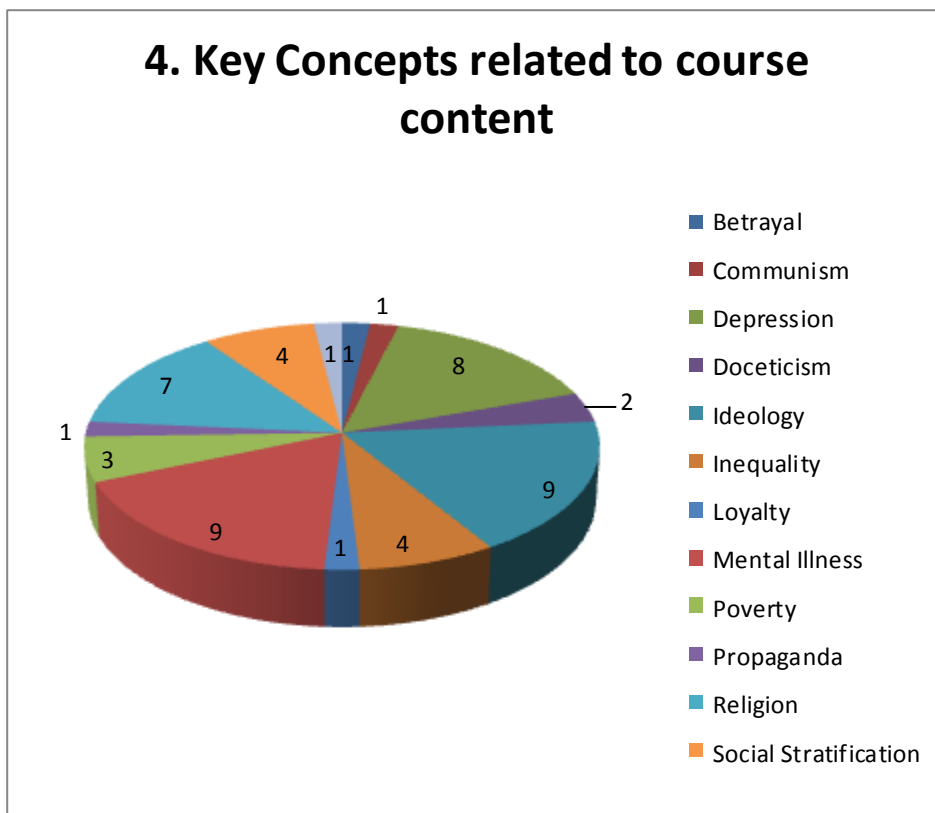
| Response | Total |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Analyses | 7 |
| Breaks down | 1 |
| Compares | 2 |
| Compiles | 1 |
| Concludes | 1 |
| Constructs | 1 |
| Creates | 3 |
| Criticises | 1 |
| Depicts | 1 |
| Describes | 4 |
| Distinguishes | 1 |
| Explains | 3 |
| Identifies | 4 |
| Illustrates | 14 |
| Infers | 2 |
| Interprets | 3 |
| Outlines | 5 |
| Reconstructs | 1 |
| Summarises | 1 |
| Supports | 1 |
| Tells | 4 |
| None used | 3 |

3. Keywords used in review



4. Key Concepts related to course content (Tick all that apply)

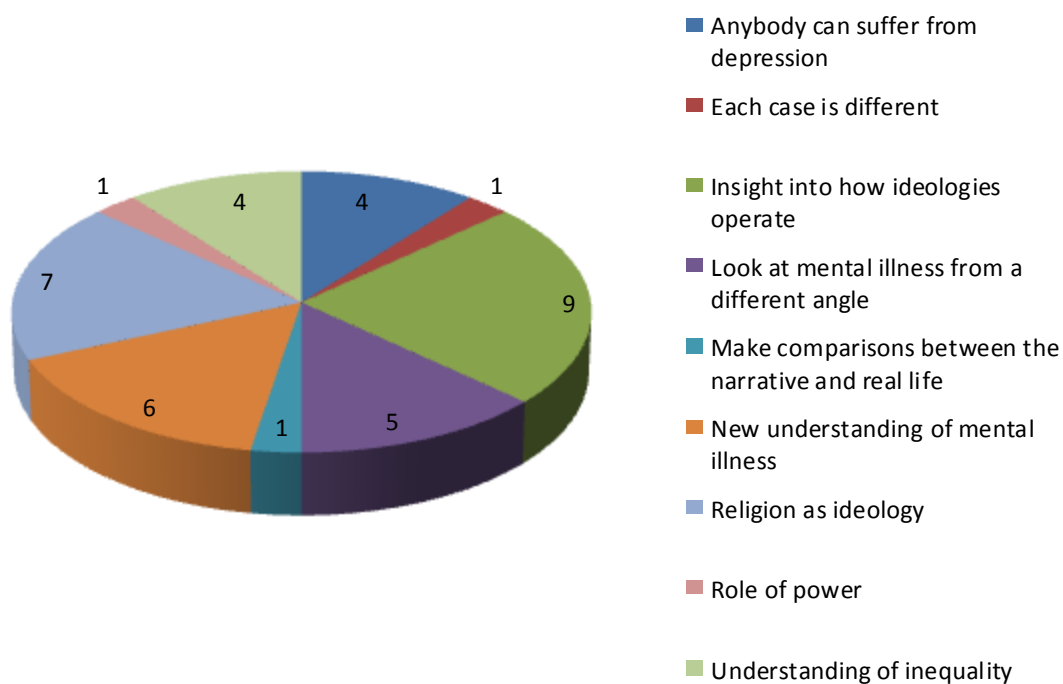
| Response | Total |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Betrayal | 1 |
| Communism | 1 |
| Depression | 8 |
| Doceticism | 2 |
| Ideology | 9 |
| Inequality | 4 |
| Loyalty | 1 |
| Mental Illness | 9 |
| Poverty | 3 |
| Propaganda | 1 |
| Religion | 7 |
| Social Stratification | 4 |
| Violence | 1 |



5. Connection between theory and practice

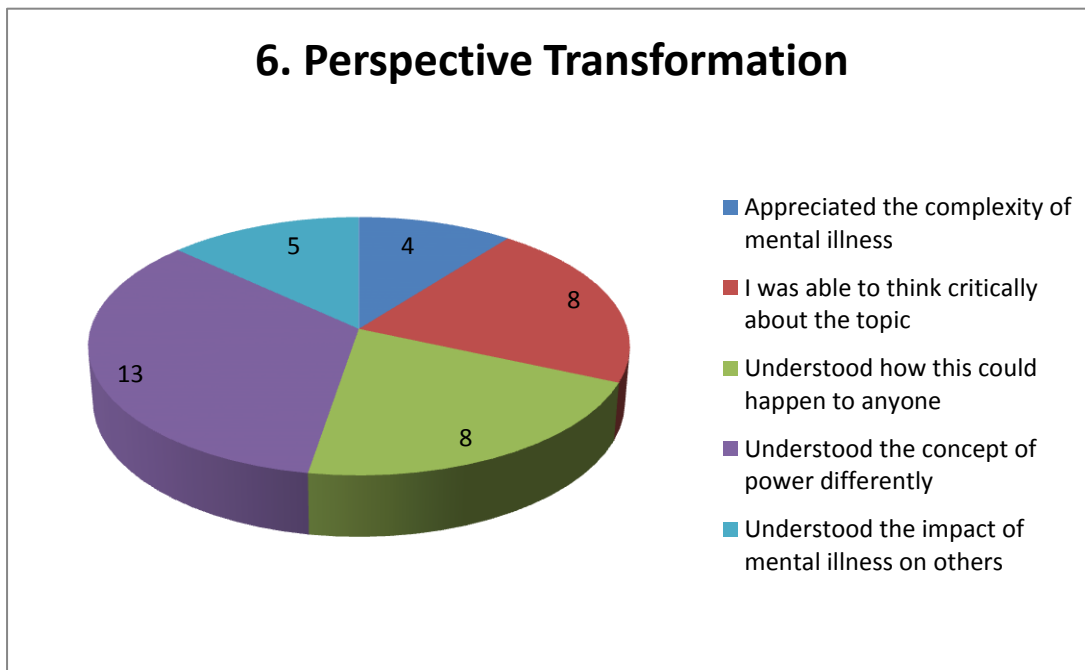
| Response | Total |
|---|--------------|
| Anybody can suffer from depression | 4 |
| Each case is different | 1 |
| Insight into how ideologies operate | 9 |
| Look at mental illness from a different angle | 5 |
| Make comparisons between the narrative and real life | 1 |
| New understanding of mental illness | 6 |
| Religion as ideology | 7 |
| Role of power | 1 |
| Understanding of inequality | 4 |

5. Connection between theory and practice



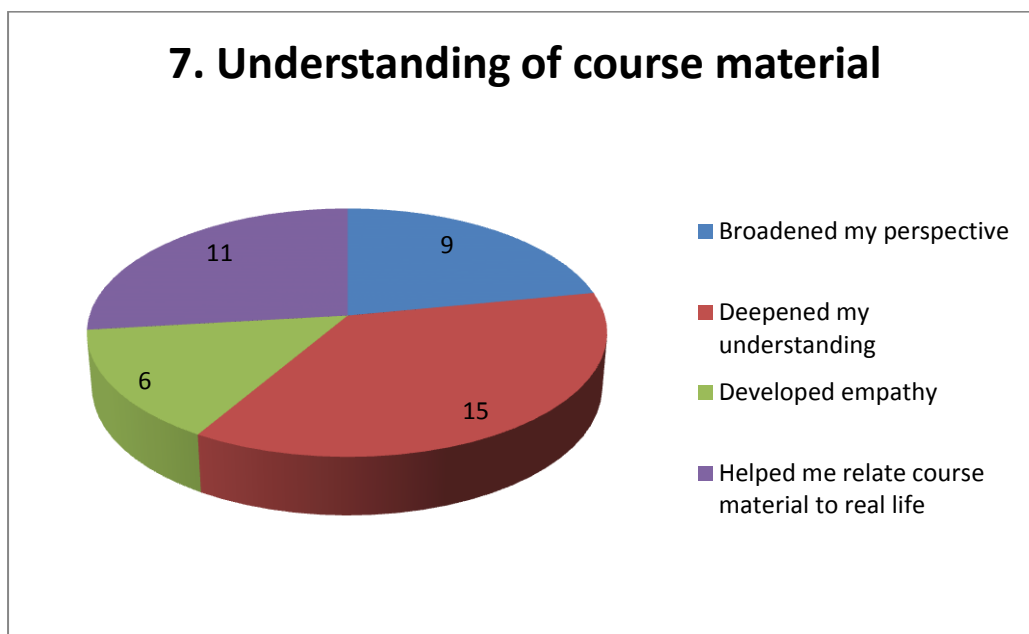
6. Perspective Transformation

| Response | Total |
|---|--------------|
| Appreciated the complexity of mental illness | 4 |
| I was able to think critically about the topic | 8 |
| Understood how this could happen to anyone | 8 |
| Understood the concept of power differently | 13 |
| Understood the impact of mental illness on others | 5 |



7. Understanding of course material (Tick all that apply)

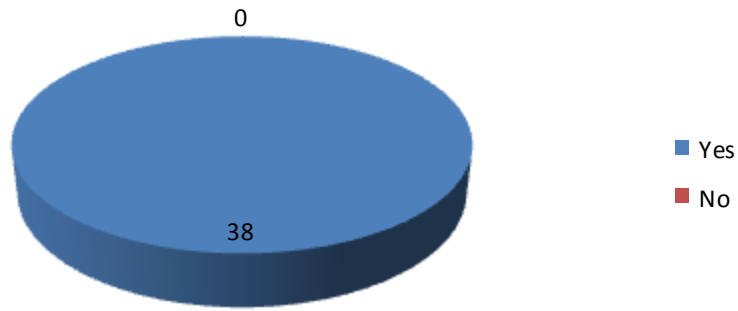
| Response | Total |
|--|--------------|
| Broadened my perspective | 9 |
| Deepened my understanding | 15 |
| Developed empathy | 6 |
| Helped me relate course material to real life | 11 |



8. Was this review helpful to your understanding of course material?

| Response | Total |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes | 38 |
| No | 0 |

8. Was this review helpful to your understanding of course material?



Appendix 8: Rules of Engagement

Good discussion is like art. It may be hard to define it, but you know it when you see it. Think back to a good discussion you once had, either as a student or an instructor. What made it enjoyable? What made it educational? What made it lively?

Characteristics of a good discussion:

- **Accessibility:** Students feel comfortable engaging in the discussion.
- **Non-combative:** There is a cordial and pleasant tone to the conversation and no hostility.
- **Diversity:** A variety of opinions and points of view get articulated.
- **Cohesion and focus:** Discussions should be about "something," with a pedagogical goal.
- **Trust:** Environment should allow students to take intellectual risks.

Conversely, think about your experience in a bad discussion. What troubled you about the discussion? Were there too many participants? Too few? Was it educational? Was it too combative? Too passive?

Characteristics of a bad discussion:

- **Limited discussants:** Only few students participate.
- **Limited perspectives:** Students echo instructor's thoughts and limit diversity of opinions.
- **Lack of focus:** Discussions go off-topic and miss the pedagogical aim.

This is your opportunity to test your opinions and ideas in a secure and unthreatening environment. Don't miss it!

(Adapted from University of Pittsburgh: Speaking in the Disciplines)

Appendix 9: Using literature to illustrate a 'disorienting dilemma'

A Martian sends a postcard home

Craig Raine

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings--

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on the ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the properties of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside --
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves --
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

Appendix 10: Interview Template

Name:

Date:

Major:

Book used in critical review:

Please outline the role of literature in developing your critical thinking skills this semester:

Appendix 11: Information Sheet

Research Project: The role of literature in fostering critical thinking in third level students.

The study is being conducted by Christa de Brun.

It will form the basis for a doctorate of education under the supervision of Brid Connolly.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of literature in developing critical thinking skills in third level students. It is my position that literature offers a gateway into theory for students and moves them away from rote learning towards deeper learning and a critical understanding of course material.

I will ask participants to read a novel related to course content and outline the key concepts from their course illuminated in the novel. The purpose of this activity is to create meaningful connections between theory and practice.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary – you are not under any obligation to consent. You may withdraw from the study at any time — at which point all written records of your participation will be destroyed. Your withdrawal from this study will in no way affect your academic standing or relationship with the school.

All aspects of this study, including the results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information about participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

The data collected during this study will be used to evaluate the role of literature in fostering critical thinking and to inform further research in the area. The data will be kept for a period of one year for research purposes. The data will be anonymised and kept in a safe place for the duration of the research.

When you have read the information I will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

Christa de Brun: christa.debrun.2011@nuim.ie

Brid Connolly brid.connolly@nuim.ie

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Appendix 12: Consent Form

Research Project: *The role of literature in fostering critical thinking in third level students.*

I (*print name*).....give consent to my participation in the research project described below.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: *The role of literature in fostering critical thinking in third level students.*

.....

RESEARCHER: Christa de Brun (christa.debrun.2011@nuim.ie)

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.
3. I understand that that my participation in this project is voluntary; a decision not to participate will in no way affect my academic standing or relationship with the school and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.
4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and that no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Appendix 13: Letter of Ethical Approval

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to NUI Maynooth Ethics Committee

13 November 2012

Christa de Brun
Department of Adult Education
NUI Maynooth

RE: Application for Ethical Approval for a project entitled:
"The role of literature in fostering critical thinking in third level students"

Dear Christa,

The Ethics Committee evaluated the above project and we would like to inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

Kind Regards,

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary, NUI Maynooth Ethics Committee

cc. Bríd Connolly, Department of Adult Education

Appendix 14: The 'Insight' dimension of the NQF descriptor.

| Levels | Competence | Insight |
|--------|--|---|
| All | Description of the dimension | Insight refers to the ability to engage in increasingly complex understanding and consciousness, both internally and externally, through the process of reflection on experience. Insight involves the integration of the other strands of knowledge, skills and competence with the learner's attitudes, motivation, beliefs, cognitive style and personality. |
| 6 | Advanced Certificate Higher Certificate | Express and internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others. |
| 7 | Ordinary Bachelor Degree | Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others. |
| 8 | Higher Bachelor Degree Higher Diploma | Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others. |
| 9 | Postgraduate Diploma Masters Degree | Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them. |
| 10 | Doctorate | Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them. |

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Ireland (2003) *Policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications*, Dublin: NQAI