Creatively Transforming Critical Teaching

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a reflection on both my own and other critical educators' beliefs and experiences of teaching from a critical perspective. Throughout this thesis, I am working toward a conceptualization of my own transformative pedagogy. I define a transformative pedagogy as one that is able to meet the three criteria identified by O'Sullivan (1999). These criteria are: 1) a critique of dominant culture and ideology; 2) the provision of a vision and a sense of hope that things can change; and 4) an active attempt to create an alternative culture that is attentive to the mind, body spirit, and emotion. I will argue that because collaborative group work, as a strategy for critical teaching, remains firmly entrenched in rationalist assumptions it is unable to achieve O'Sullivan's three criteria. I will then look to the arts in order to understand what intrinsic characteristics of the creative process meet those of O'Sullivan's criteria unmet by critical teaching.

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1 I conceptualize a critical perspective as one which moves away from notions of sexism, racism, homophobia...as individual acts of prejudice, and toward an understanding of how relations of power inequitably structure our society.
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Introduction

I began this Master's degree in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education in 1999 with the intention of investigating how to teach from a critical perspective. By this I mean specifically, that I want to teach about inequality and injustice in such a way that students leave the classroom with the ability to question and challenge existing hegemonic knowledge bases and power relations. I had just finished an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies, which had deepened my understanding of oppression and inequality. During my study I began to get excited about the possibility of presenting what I had been learning in university to high school students. I came to graduate school to gain more insights into how “historical inequalities have been entrenched in social structures” (Ng 1995, p.131) and to learn how best to transmit this information to grade school students.

Throughout my Master’s degree I have certainly deepened my understanding of systems of domination and oppression through exposure to a number of different pedagogies: critical, feminist, queer and anti-racist. I felt that that these approaches have a well developed critique of dominant society and structures of oppression by focusing on asymmetries of power and privilege. However, I was left with the feeling that something was missing. After my first year of graduate school I was unable to articulate what exactly I was missing. I did know that I was feeling isolated, exhausted, disconnected from who I was as a person and disillusioned about the possibilities of creating social change. I decided to take the summer off from school and investigate what lay beyond the walls of academia.
Chapter One: Possibilities for Transformative Education

Through word of mouth, I heard of a non-profit organization based in Seattle that held summer camps in British Columbia for teens 14-19 years of age. The camps are targeted to youth from diverse cultures, races, socioeconomic backgrounds and sexual orientations. Over 60% of the participants come from low-income families, and they come from inner-city neighbourhoods, middle-class suburban and rural communities, transitional shelters, housing projects and Native American reservations. Depending on the camp, the population includes between 30 and 50% youth of colour as well as gay youth, teen parents, homeless youth and youth facing mental and physical challenges.

According to the organization’s literature, the goal of the summer retreats is to involve the participants in an intergenerational, art-based empowerment program which instills “life affirming values and increases self-confidence” (Power 2000, p.4). The ultimate hope of the organization is to “motivate, train, and support teens from diverse communities to become life-long change agents, working to build a sustainable culture” (Power 2000, p.5). This non-profit organization seeks to achieve these goals by providing a supportive, high-energy learning environment where teens can explore their creativity, gain powerful communication skills, learn from people different from themselves, and discover ways to take active roles in their own home communities. The summer camps provide a ratio of nearly one adult for every two youth participants and the organization relies heavily on adult volunteers. The organization recruits artists, naturalists, community activists and other adults involved in building positive futures to staff the week long camps. I eagerly volunteered two weeks of my summer this past year because I thought that perhaps this camp could help me identify what I had felt was missing in my graduate learning.
The camps themselves are structured in such a way as to more closely resemble adult retreats than traditional summer camps. Each morning begins with an assembly of all participants in the main gathering hall where the entire group is led through a group activity. The rest of the morning and afternoon is divided into three or four workshop sessions. During each session the youth have the choice of attending five or six different workshops ranging from drumming, dancing, painting, singing, nature walks, theatre, writing, or a form of body work (e.g. yoga). Following the workshops, the youth are given two–three hours of free time each day to play, to get to know each other, to continue projects they have started or to have a one-on–one session with a workshop facilitator. The day ends with another assembly and activity or performance.

When I arrived at the camp I had very high expectations. I thought I would see activists and artists collaborating, using the arts as a tool to create critical consciousness in the youth participants and inspiring them to act against the systems of domination and oppression, that surrounded them. After the first day I found myself profoundly disillusioned and spent a significant amount of time considering how I could escape before the two weeks was over. I felt this way for many complex reasons, one of which was that I had assumed an ideological similarity between myself and the organization. I had assumed that underlying their work would be an “unflinching acknowledgment of difference not merely as diversity but as differential relations to power” (Kruger 1995, p.160). This understanding of difference was not present.

Despite my feelings of anxiety and disillusionment, I developed immediate connections with a number of teens and felt that I could not abandon them, so I decided to stay for the entire two weeks. Once I made the decision to stay, I became aware of another
level of my anxiety. I had come under the impression that there would be activists and artists and that we would work collaboratively, the artists leading workshops in the various arts and the activists leading workshops in issues like globalization or racism. To my discomfort I realized that the other activists present were not only activists, they were also artists. I was no longer sure that I had something valuable to offer because the workshops were structured in such a way that the youth explored issues like globalization through the creation of murals or bullying through Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (Boal 1977).

Having never had the privilege of taking an art class other than art history, and having only a background in Ukrainian dancing, I noticed how out of place I felt, how critical I was of myself and how unwilling I was to take any creative risks. I did not want to lead any workshops because I felt like I had no talents to offer. Despite the fact that I had painted pictures, learned photography and written poetry for several years in the privacy of my own home, I did not feel as though I could lead a group in an activity because I was not an expert. I noticed that these anxious feelings were also leading me to close myself off from the community being formed.

I looked around me and saw that the same thing was happening for a number of youth participants. I realized that I was in a perfect position to empathize with the youth who felt self-conscious and that I could use my position as a leader to set an example and provide both support and encouragement for taking some risks. I soon found myself in drumming and singing workshops. I was learning how to belly dance and make mandalas, and I was getting to do drama skits for the first time in my life. The experience was amazing because I was beginning to let go of the notion that I had to be an expert at everything I tried, that I had
to have, or at least appear to have, all of the answers. I was learning to experiment and take risks.

As the weeks progressed, each person, whether they were a youth participant or an adult volunteer, began trying things that they had never done before. The fact that we were all experiencing new things and all taking risks by doing things we were unsure of increased our sensitivity to and respect for each other. The fact that we were all taking risks together was an important element in the building of our community. As hooks (1994) points out, “any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by that process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (p.24). By taking risks in front of people and being recognized for our efforts, our hearts were opening to each other and our connections to the group as a whole were being strengthened.

By the fourth day, the entire group of people began encouraging each other to try new things in front of people by shaking their hands in the air and saying, “We support you”. With this simple statement, even the shyest members of the group began reading their poetry, singing or dancing in front of the entire group. The quality of the performance was less valued than the effort and emotion put into it. The entire energy of the camp began to shift as it became a place where not only those who were good at something were honoured but a place where those who took big risks were also honoured. The participants were growing with confidence and pride as they experienced their peers’ appreciation.

I began to see incredible changes in the faces, posture and attitude of everyone. People seemed more open to one another. The initial cliques that had formed at the beginning of the camp melted away. Most significantly those youth who had come from very stressful
lives no longer seemed like forty-year-olds trapped in teenaged bodies. As Simmons (1998) points out, the arts have the power to bridge generations, racial, class and sexuality differences. Individuals were working together to construct objects or performances with shared meanings and a common purpose.

The arts were doing more than reinforcing an already established sense of community or personal connection; they were actually enabling the creation of a new community and a new set of allegiances. The group art projects were providing an avenue for new kinds of unification, one where riveted joint attention, synchronized bodily rhythms and activities allowed for both personal and group messages to be conveyed to one another with conviction and memorability. I was left with the feeling that we had created a true community in a very short time.

The memory of how it felt to be a part of such a caring and creative community still fills me with incredulity. I have realized that this experience with the arts and community affected me at a profound, even spiritual level. As Harper (1996) points out, the difference between society and community is that community is soulful --a community is a group of people who feel connected to one another and genuinely care about the well-being of each other. The soul is nourished by community and the spiritual in us seeks an affirmative relationship to the world and people around us. As such, Abbs (1995) argues that the spiritual is not only found in the dogma of formal religion, but is an intrinsic part of human existence.

Spirituality can be experienced "in particular moments of relationship, of heightened perception and of high creativity, in states of trance, self-transcendence and spontaneous enthusiasm, as in those unexpected moments of timelessness when the sheer inexpugnable
miracle of consciousness quietly reveals itself" (Abbs 1995, p.18). The search for the spiritual is a search for a sense of wholeness and belonging and the spiritual in us seeks connection and desires to live in animated relationship to its discoveries. The arts, when significant, are invariably engaged with these matters.

In a lecture given in 1938, Max Beckman, an artist influenced by the Romantic period, declared: “Art is creative for the sake of realization, not for amusement; for transfiguration, not for the sake of play. It is the quest of our self that drives us along a never-ending journey we must all make” (qted in Abbs 1995, p.20). It is not difficult to understand the search of the artist, as described by Beckman, as a type of spiritual quest. Richards has similarly spoke of her pottery art as a way of doing and feeling within a spiritual realm wherein both are engaged. “In teaching pottery, I am continually aware of how the learning of art reverberates throughout the spiritual organism. It is this sense of personal destiny which makes teaching art such a serious endeavor” (Richards 1964, p.9).

The Guarni people of Brazil have also articulated a strong connection between art making and the spiritual. This indigenous group believe that during art-making individuals become closest to the fundamental and universal source of life, reaching transcendental values through images that are a reflection of their feelings. “Making art is creating and their highest deity is a creator; therefore, to create is to be one with the creator” (Morris 2000, p. 107). According to Morris, the arts are the physical manifestation of a culture, the ultimate tool to explain social and spiritual identities as well as an effective means for unifying disparate groups for social reformation.

Much like Fanon (1967), who concludes that decolonization is not simply a transfer of political power from one source to another, but a process of becoming oneself, McKeon
(1994) argues that it is through a process of connecting to one’s self that the individual becomes cognizant of their responsibility within the social milieu. “The emancipation that follows from an inward turn of the ego is an individual experience, but due to the inexorably social and interactive quality of human existence the freedom of the one is inseparable from the freedom of many” (McKeon 1994, p.20).

The arts provide the distinctive metaphors and technical means for reflecting the invisible life of human experience. “To engage with the arts is to engage dramatically with the meanings and possibilities of human existence” (Abbs 1995, p.23). By allowing for quiet contemplation and active experimentation, the arts release the play of both the conscious and unconscious, actively developing and deepening the life of the spirit through connection. In this way the arts have the potential to realize a process where a dialectic is created not only between the individual and their environment, but also within the individual themselves.

Those who have had the privilege of experiencing the arts claim that it can be life-transforming. As one student says in the case of performance poetry: “It helps get your mind and soul and heart together. It gives you a different view of life than you had before” (qtd in Bruce and Davis, 2000 p.125). D’Amboise, a former star of the New York Ballet, who now runs a program that brings dance to economically underprivileged youth, explains that this is the reason he does the work that he does. “I don’t do this to make performers. I do this so their hearts and minds are open to the possibilities that are in them” (qtd in Pogrebin 2001, p. B5). It is these connections, occurring among the emotional heart, sensual body and ordering mind that have the potential to energize the spirit and create the strength for working toward social change.
As my two weeks at the summer camp were coming to a close, I saw how much each participant became more and more interested in the other participants’ lives and struggles. I overheard many strategizing about what could be done to make each other’s lives better. This sentiment was also expressed in a recent *New York Times* article about D’Amboise’s dance program. One of the participants was described as having entered the program as shy and withdrawn, and at the end of the program he was described as “so outgoing that he worries that he shares his thoughts too readily” (Pogrebin 2001, p. B1). His transformation was not limited to the personal realm as was evidenced when he was asked what he wants to do when he grows up. He answered: “To make a difference” (qtd in Pogrebin 2001, p.B5).

I was excited by the impact that the camp experience had on both myself and the youth participants. I felt energized and hopeful that the world could be made a better place. When I left the camp I was left with a strong sense of how the arts can transform the way we relate to each other in community, and contribute to a deepening of the spiritual. I was also left with the very strong feeling that with a deeper knowledge and understanding of issues of power and privilege the impact of arts-based education could reach another level where its impact would lead to not only personal but social transformation. It was with this intuitive sense that I set out to investigate how the arts could contribute to my own understanding of what it means to teach critically, and my growing vision of a pedagogy with transformative potential.

**O’Sullivan and the Criteria of a Transformative Pedagogy**

I decided that I wanted my thesis to be a place where I could reflect upon and improve my own strategies for teaching. I am interested in exploring how education can
work against domination and toward a more just world. My main objective is to arrive at a set of principles for a transformative pedagogy. I set out in search of a framework that would allow me to articulate what I felt my pedagogy must include. I found such a framework in O'Sullivan's 1999 book, *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century*.

O'Sullivan is a major figure in transformative learning circles and I have found his work very insightful. He himself writes out of his schooling in applied psychology and education, and although his work is visibly influenced by this academic background, he is also interested in differentiating himself from the more liberal and the more personal aspects of transformative learning by addressing issues of social structure. The main focus of his work is developing a planetary consciousness which moves away from what he calls the "the exploitative relationship of our current industrial mode" (p.46). Although the focus of my work is anti-oppression education and not environmental education, I am nonetheless drawn towards his conceptualization of what is required from a transformative pedagogy.

O'Sullivan argues that a shift in education from its current state towards a transformative version of education will require an ability to move between visions. To explore a transformative vision of education "it must be kept clearly in mind that it will involve a diversity of elements and movements in contemporary education...[and] to some extent these trends are operating somewhat separately and independently of one another" (O'Sullivan 1999, p.6). O'Sullivan makes this claim because he feels that contemporary education lacks a comprehensive and integrated perspective that could be identified as a cosmology. He further argues that contemporary educational theory and practice carry with them the same blinders that have plagued modern science. He identifies these blinders as individualism and progress, cause and effect, and rationalism and the Cartesian split.
O'Sullivan insists that a transformative education must take into consideration a broad cosmological perspective that draws what it can from contemporary concepts of social justice, environmental concerns and peace perspectives, but is not limited by the blinders identified above.

Although I do not necessarily share with O’Sullivan the same ultimate vision of transformative pedagogy because, as I have already said, his focus is more environmental education and mine is more anti-oppression education, I do find his three general criteria for transformative education useful for framing my own vision. O'Sullivan argues that transformative education must simultaneously provide three things. Firstly, education must provide a critique of dominant culture and ideology. Secondly, education must provide a vision of what an alternative world would look like. Finally, transformative education must provide concrete indications of the ways a culture can abandon those aspects of its present forms that are functionally inappropriate while, at the same time, point to how it can be a part of a process for change that will create a new cultural form that is more functionally appropriate.

In my mind, O’Sullivan’s criteria mean that a transformative pedagogy must provide students with an ability to see and understand injustice. It must also instill in them a vision and a sense of hope that things can change. Finally a transformative pedagogy must be active in creating an alternative culture so that students are already familiar with another way of being, and this other way of being must be attentive to the mind, body, spirit and emotion.

In accordance with O'Sullivan's assertion that we must be prepared to look to a diversity of movements in education, my thesis integrates several approaches to education in order to reach a comprehensive perspective of what my teaching must strive towards. I am
interested in education that is subversive. Much like Ng (1995), I see my role as a critical teacher to “bring into sharp relief historical inequalities that have been entrenched in social structures and to facilitate the radicalization of students” (p. 131). My university life has been dedicated to understanding various approaches to anti-oppression education including feminist, anti-racist, critical and queer pedagogies. While I recognize that each of these discourses is substantively different and internally debated, I am interested in what they have in common --namely an analysis of power relations. I want to move away from the notion that sexism, racism, homophobia... are “merely products of individuals’ attitudes by emphasizing that they are systems of oppression giving rise to structural inequality over time” (Ng 1995, p.133).

Understanding Power

Critical teaching does not simply follow the liberal pluralist tradition of providing information about-dispersed or marginalized groups, in the hopes of making students more sensitive to difference. The emphasis is placed on the process of meaning making and the negotiation of identities within a context of hierarchical power relations. Critical teaching strives to link factual knowledge and the microdynamics of interpersonal interactions to structural inequality and differential social power. As Mohanty argues:

Creating such cultures is fundamentally about making axes of power transparent in the context of academic, disciplinary structures, as well as interpersonal relationships (rather than individual relations) in the academy. It is about taking the politics of everyday life seriously as teachers, students, administrators and members of hegemonic academic cultures (1994, p.15).

In order to make axes of power transparent, critical teaching requires that we first understand the nature power to be relational and not something that flows only from
positions of institutional authority (Ng 1997). Power is enacted socially rather than held; power operates not just on people but through them because power is a dynamic relation which is negotiated continuously in interactional settings. Ng (1995) provides a good example of this negotiation when she refers to Fishman's 1978 study, which concluded that there were marked differences in men's and women's conversational strategies and patterns. Fishman found that men tended to make statements and control the topics of conversation whereas women played more of a supportive role in the interaction. As such, power does not lie dormant as a thing occurring separate and apart from who people are. Power is manifest in the meanings and practices a society shares, the history they have inherited or lived and the conduct of their daily life and work. As Thomas (1987) explains, "it is unequal power that limits one's ability to earn a living, meet basic needs, make one's voice heard. It is unequal power that makes the struggle for self-respect...a formidable task" (p. 105).

Society is neither neutral, nor run on negotiated consensus; rather, it is a power structure that is guided by the political and cultural values of the dominant group (Srivastava 1997). It is by recognizing ourselves in history and in the context of differential, fluid power relations that we may understand how we can self-consciously engage in resisting dominant, normative discourses and representations. Critical teaching encourages students to see how power is foundational to the relevance of difference in our society whether that difference be race, sexuality, class, etc. These differences must be understood as shifting and illusive and negotiated in a complex dialectic of meaning. How we see, represent and understand others is directly related to how we see, represent and understand ourselves. Our identities are inflected by the context of power hierarchies in which we live.
As Ng (1995) argues, "power is a human accomplishment, situated in everyday interactions; thus both structural forces and interactional activities are vital to the maintenance and construction of social reality" (p. 132). As products of power relations, differences are neither free-floating nor permanently anchored. What is viewed as a minority trait or characteristic cannot be understood without considering how that identity has been constructed as a result, or as resistance to, dominant narratives. Who we are and how we act becomes more intelligible when we are capable of recognizing how we have been shaped by existing hegemonic histories. By examining our own lives we are better able to call attention to the contradictory interests that inform our everyday social and political behaviours (Elliot 1997; Hoodfar 1997).

In the case of racism, for example, having students examine their own lives would mean bringing to critical consciousness the often duplicitous racial beliefs of students. It would seem essential that they express their rhetoric of equality alongside their largely unconscious racist beliefs. We are then in a better position as teachers to open up societal myths to examination and to ideological analysis so that students may hopefully take away with them a question or two about their own investment and participation in structures of domination.

The unspokeness of dominant identity positions and social relations are a major source of their power. These positions retain their dominance through deployment of code. Codes which employ discursive techniques such as: examination, which is the power to be named; naturalization, through which the dominant are able to establish themselves as the norm by defining others and not itself; universalization, where the dominant alone can make sense of a problem and their understanding becomes the understanding (Fiske 1994).
Whiteness, as a concept tied to a process of racialization where a complex network of structures marginalize Others economically, politically, psychologically and through representational practices to the social advantage of whites, is an excellent example.

Orientalism is the term coined by Edward Said where in the Other is assigned a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interpretation.

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; the supply of Orientals with the mentality, and genealogy, and atmosphere; most important, they allowed the Europeans to deal with and even see Orientals as a phenomenon processing regular characteristics (Said 1978, p. 42).

Whiteness does not refer to a fixed set of ethnic characteristics, but to strategic deployment of power or the space from which a variety of identity positions can be taken. Whiteness is constructed precisely by the way in which it positions others at its borders; it is fundamentally a relational category. Moreover, the positioning of whiteness against Otherness means that critical teachers must be able to allow students to understand personal identity as a relational concept rather than as an essence (Butler 1990; Dill 1984).

The discursive construction of the Other can be traced to Enlightenment thinking. This binary form of logic was heavily influenced by Cartesian notions of separating mind and body and Darwin's theory of evolution, and has been instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race. In the second chapter of her book, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Mary Pratt outlines the emergence of what she calls Europe's "planetary-consciousness". She
explains that this consciousness was heavily oriented toward exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history.

White male Europeans conceptualized themselves as world citizens whose task it was to survey the world's life forms and "draw them out from the tangled threads of their life surroundings, and reweave them into European-based patterns of global unity and order" (Pratt 1992, p. 31). The entire world fell beneath their gaze. The categorization of all life forms included the categorization of humans along racial lines. This process was explicitly comparative leading Pratt to conclude "one could hardly ask for a more clear attempt to 'naturalize' the myth as European superiority" (p. 32).

Mind/body, white/black, culture/nature, male/female are some of the oppositional dichotomies of Western social thought. These dichotomies inform identity in a complex process where in order to understand who one is, one must first understand who one is not. Notions of whiteness depend entirely upon those of blackness for meaning, and each of these racial categorizations in turn depends on hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality.

One of the reasons whiteness is able to be rendered invisible is because it works through many discourses simultaneously. Whiteness has historically been, and continues to be, associated with the mind, with culture, beauty, purity, chastity and virtue while blackness has been associated with its opposites (Daniels 1997).

Because whiteness is able to retain the power to position others through representational practices and is able to turn individuals and groups of people into objects of information available for scrutiny, all the while managing to remain invisible itself, whiteness can be understood as a hegemonic ideology. According to Gramsci, ideology is the cement which holds together the structure and the realm of the complex superstructure of
society (Gramsci 1971). Ideologies are not judged by the criteria of truth or falsehood, but by their efficacy in actually binding together classes and class factions in positions of dominance and subordination.

Ideological statements are made by individuals, but the ideologies are not necessarily the product of that individual's consciousness or intention. In fact, according to Hall (1981), "ideologies work most effectively when we are not aware that how we formulate and construct a statement about the world is underpinned by ideological premises; when our formations seem to be simply descriptive statements about how things are [i.e. must be], or of what we can take-for-granted" (p.32). Hegemony is established as relations of power disappear from the social surface and people act (both consciously and unconsciously) in ways that reinforce established power hierarchies.

The ruling group has to subordinate other groups in order to maintain its position of power. One way for a ruling group to maintain its dominance is through brute force (i.e. military conquest and enslavement). However, brute force is not the most effective way to acquire power and maintain dominance, because it is considerably easier to institute and encourage aspects of culture which reproduce the continuance of the power elite through an ongoing transformation of moral values and customs in civil society (Fanon 1967).

Hegemony should not be seen to exist simply at the political level, but as existing at every aspect of social life and thought. Hegemony is only possible when some form of consent can be secured by those who are dominated, to the domination under which they live. Gramsci has argued that the ruling bloc's ability to speak in the name of "the people" "the nation", and so on, is a precondition for the founding of its own state and the guarantor of its
survival (Gramsci, 1971). The ruling bloc's particular characteristics become obscured as they becomes the standard to which all others are compared.

Ng (1995) has pointed to the fact that gender, race and class are sutured into the development of Canada as a nation. The white, middle-class male has been established as the norm --the universal citizen to whom all Other subject positions are represented as differently located. The universal citizen is normalized within our society to the point where laws and institutions, which are now presented as existing for all citizens equally, are actually based on the historical experiences and concomitant values of the proverbial white man. This is clearly the case when we look to the comments from Cubberley, a proponent of "social efficiency" (Kliebard 1986, 223):

Everywhere these people [immigrants] tend to settle in groups or settlements, and to set up here their national manners, customs and observances. Our task is to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people...and to implant in their children, as far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order...and to awaken in them a reverence for...those things in our national life which we hold to be of abiding truth (1909, p.15-16).

The absence of difference from the historical political imagination provides the foundation for the operation of contemporary common-sense racism and other forms of domination. Common-sense domination can be defined as "the unintentional and unconscious acts that result in the silencing, exclusion, subordination and exploitation of minority group members" (Ng 1995, p.133). Common-sense beliefs continue to pervade our society despite the fact that these assumptions are at times both incoherent and contradictory. Common-sense allows that one may choose, both logically and openly, to act in specific ways according to specific criteria, but still ignore the basis upon which one's thoughts and actions are founded.
According to Bannerji (1987), a foundation of common-sense assumptions allows people to act without consciousness of their actions so that certain relations disappear from the social surface. The way in which we decode or unscramble the meanings of events in the world are bound to reflect the unequal relations of power in which our society exists. The prevalence of common-sense domination allows us as a society to take common-sense or dominant ideas as our baseline without questioning why we believe certain things to be true. Once the negotiation of meaning has been obfuscated, relations of power are rendered invisible.

This invisibility trick is dependent upon a process of naturalization whereby specific social relationships, often of power and subordination, are presented as natural, when in fact they are the result of complex historical interactions between individuals, and/or racial and other groups. As Barb Thomas (1984) explains in the case of racism, "we have been told that racism is somebody calling us paki/nigger/chink but most racism you can't prove" (p.21). The naturalization of the universal citizen's particular characteristics has made action for social change difficult because the effects of domination are systemic and "ordinary" – they are invisible and subtle.

**My Emerging vision of Transformative Teaching**

In order to break the chokehold of common-sense beliefs and ideas, critical teaching asserts that we must be willing to look carefully at how our own identities are inscribed with both privilege and disadvantage (McIntosh 1989; Sleeter 1995). In a critical classroom, students are ideally taught to be aware of their own social location and to recognize how they have been shaped by and in turn shape their environment. Coming to a critical consciousness
requires unlearning dominant narratives and understanding how we are all implicated in
upholding a hegemonic system.

While I am intellectually aligned with teaching that questions and challenges existing
knowledge bases and power relations, I am left feeling that critical teaching, whether it is
based in feminist, anti-racist or critical discourses, is unable to escape the “blinders of the
scientific era” identified by O'Sullivan (1999). I believe that rationalism in particular
underlies most work in critical teaching. Although critical pedagogues do sometimes talk
about the importance of looking to matters of the spiritual, the body, emotions and creativity,
these aspects of their work are generally neither adequately explored nor developed.

Most strategies advocated by critical teachers remain firmly entrenched in rational
assumptions. In the following chapter of my thesis I will look more closely at one such
strategy, namely, small group work. I will show that the failure of critical teaching to
account for emotional dynamics, in particular, has the potential to sabotage the possibility of
critical learning in small groups. It is unable to address student resistance. I will further
argue that because critical teaching remains so staunchly in the realm of the rational, it is
unable to meet O'Sullivan’s last two criteria of a transformative pedagogy. I will explore
how being rooted in the “blinders of the scientific era” make it difficult to instill in students a
vision and hope that things can change and to create an alternative culture so that students are
already familiar with another way of being that is attentive to community, the mind, body,
spirit and emotions.

As a student of critical teaching, on my way to entering the teaching profession, I was
left unsure as to how to infuse non-rational elements such as intuition and emotion, into my
classroom. It was only by moving outside the discourses of critical teaching that I was able
to truly understand how a pedagogy could work toward creating community, enlarging imagination, and attending to emotions and the physical body. My previously mentioned experience at an arts-based summer camp lead me to investigate what the arts could lend to my own vision of a transformative pedagogy, which is what I explore in this thesis.

In the second half of my thesis then, I will explore what intrinsic characteristics of the creative process meet those of O'Sullivan's criteria unmet by critical teaching. To do this I will explore the transformative potential of the creative process through the argument of a feminist educator named Mittman, who uses improvisational theatre to explore social issues with teenagers. She argues that the transformative potential of the arts rests in two primary aspects of the creative process: the ability to allow the unexpected and the unknown, and the ability to make connections and tolerate ambiguity.

I will then go on to explore how the arts are also well suited to challenge hegemonic relations and common-sense knowledge through the development of imagination. By exploring the importance of imagination in challenging hegemonic relations and common-sense knowledge, I will show that the arts have the potential, when working with the understanding of power proposed by critical teaching, to also meet O'Sullivan's first criteria of a transformative pedagogy by encouraging students to see and understand injustice.
Chapter Two: Critical Teaching and Collaboration

In a critical classroom, students are ideally taught to be aware of their own social location and to recognize how they have been shaped by and in turn shape their environment. Coming to a critical consciousness requires unlearning dominant narratives and understanding how we are all implicated in upholding a hegemonic system, as well as how our very identities are inscribed with both privilege and disadvantage.

hooks (1994) has argued that in order for students to be successful in unlearning dominant narratives, critical teachers must focus on creating communities in the classroom while also managing to engage students in politically transformative self-reflection. Many critical teachers and educational scholars (Giroux 1991; Lather 1991; McLaren 1988; hooks 1994) suggest accomplishing these goals by having students share individual narratives, and work collaboratively to interpret these experiences in terms of social categories. Personal narratives and small group work is increasingly touted as useful for students who “do not routinely consider privilege and disadvantage in their own and other people’s lives” (Moremen 1997, p.109-10).

By requiring that students examine their own lives, it is hoped that students will be able to call attention to the contradictory interests that inform their everyday social and political behaviours, and to consider how socially determined differences influence the ways in which they relate to each other and in society. Advocates of collaborative small group work argue that this method of learning can establish a sense of shared commitment and community, encourage students to assume more responsibility for the production and interpretation of their own texts, as well as allow students to explore multiple approaches to issues (Hulbert 1989; Smit 1989; Trimbur 1989).
The theory of collaborative work is very alluring but some educators (e.g. Goodburn and Ina 1994; Ellsworth 1989; Nieto 1998) who have attempted to use collaborative work have expressed frustration over the lack of research that focuses on what happens within actual classrooms. These educators express dissatisfaction because their experiences of including collaborative methods in their pedagogies have fallen far short of what they had been led to expect from the theories. I believe that part of the problem with collaborative learning, although taught from a critical perspective, is that it remains staunchly in the realm of rationalism.

As Ellsworth (1989) argues, much of the literature that advocates teaching from a critical perspective implies that students and teachers can and should engage each other as fully rational subjects. She goes on to explain that under these conditions of engagement only one political gesture appears to be available to the critical pedagogue. “S/he can ensure that students are given the chance to arrive logically at the 'universally valid proposition' underlying the discourse of critical pedagogy –namely, that all people have the right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the social contract” (Ellsworth 1989, p.303).

Advocates of collaborative learning seem to assume that once students are presented with the narratives of their classmates, they will reflect upon their own lives and arrive at the conclusion that they need to participate in reordering the world in a more just and equitable way.

Srivastava (1997) calls the belief that we can enlarge our sympathies, broaden our experiences and deepen our empathy by exposing ourselves to ennobling narratives “the emphatic fallacy” (p.119). For her, the emphasis on the production of empathy too often

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1 Rationalism is a theory that relies on the belief that reason, rather than experience, authority, intuition and/or spiritual revelation form part of the basis for knowledge construction.
colludes with liberal humanist notions of universalism, equality and identification. While I understand and sympathize with Srivastava’s point, I do not think that empathy is in and of itself the problem. I agree that empathy alone is insufficient -- one of the goals of collaborative learning is the creation of community, and healthy communities cannot exist without empathy. I believe that the great failure of theories of collaborative learning lie in their failure to take into consideration how the dynamics of emotion are working alongside reason and power. Emotions, power and reason together influence how students construct their own narratives and legitimizing arguments, as well as how they listen and choose to make sense of the stories they hear.

Ellsworth (1989) has pointed out that because there is little examination of the roles students assume due to emotional dynamics during group work, the sharing of personal narratives is often not only unhelpful, it is actually exacerbated by the very conditions educators are trying to work against including racism, sexism and homophobia. According to Boler (1997), the interaction of emotions and power within a social context creates cultural rules of emotional expression and conduct that uphold specific cultural agendas. As educators, we need to acknowledge that emotions are playing a role in our definitions of what does and what does not count as legitimate knowledge.

As I explore some examples of how emotion, power and reason work together to shape what happens inside classrooms that are attempting to use collaborative learning from a critical perspective, I want to keep in mind O’Sullivan’s three criteria of a transformative pedagogy. I will be working toward an understanding of how emotions play a significant role in whether or not students are able to see and understand injustice, whether or not students are provided with a sense of hope that things can change, and finally whether or not
using collaborative methods from a critical perspective is able to create an alternative culture.

I will argue that without paying due attention to the emotional dynamics of classroom interactions, critical teaching is unlikely to achieve the criteria of a transformative pedagogy. Unless emotional dynamics are understood as integral to learning, and are addressed as such by teachers, unattended emotional dynamics will continue to sabotage strategies for critical teaching.

An Example of Using Collaboration in the Classroom

Goodburn and Ina, Ph.D. students at Ohio State University with several years of teaching experience and an interest in theories of critical pedagogy, were the professors of an upper-level college composition course called “The American Experience through Literature”. This class was charged by the university’s new general education curriculum with giving “significant treatment to the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the U.S. with special attention to issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity” (Goodburn and Ina 1994, p.3).

As part of the course requirement, Goodburn and Ina assigned a collaborative paper with the theme of gender and society. The paper assignment was presented to the students as deliberately open-ended. The students were asked to use personal stories to talk about gender issues and then work collectively to draw out conclusions, compare and contrast stories and analyze why they were different or similar. From the beginning, Goodburn and Ina had decided to use their experience teaching this class as an opportunity to write about what happens in actual classrooms when collaborative practices are used. During the ten-
week quarter, all class sessions were audio-taped, field notes were taken by Ina. All student texts were collected and the students were interviewed.

Goodburn and Ina end their article by concluding that "the extent to which these students could articulate and engage in discussions about difference was bound by their beliefs about their writing and identities as unmediated by social forces" (1994, p.11). Goodburn and Ina explain that while critical educators "aim to enable students to situate themselves along axes of power with the goal of transforming social relations we [critical educators] must constantly interrogate how our own language, assumptions and expectations can blind us from seeing how students participate in alternative ways of discussing and struggling over difference" (p.11). To improve the effectiveness of collaborative learning, Goodburn and Ina advocate establishing working definitions, through class discussion of concepts like "the personal," "conflict," "gender," and "difference" before the students engage in collaborative work.

Their conclusion that students tend to view their world as objective reality divorced from interpretation or constructed meaning is supported in the literature of critical teaching (Obach 1999; Sleeter 1995). Despite the fact that the idea that identity is socially constructed is widely accepted within social science disciplines (Haney-Lopez 1996; Omi and Winant 1986; Water 1990), relating this concept to students can present a serious challenge. Students often resist the idea that identities such as white and black or gay and straight, as they are commonly conceived are not objective categories, but rather that they represent notions that have developed historically (Obach 1990).

Students resist this type of discovery for many reasons, not least of which is the long history of educational practices that have asked students to be silent partners in their
education (O'Donnell 1998). Students' perceptions are conditioned by an educational system that provides few opportunities for critical engagement. The curriculum reflects the dominant viewpoint of white, male achievement, and the ubiquity of this singular perspective creates a racialized, gendered and sexualized identity that marks the Other but fails to mark itself as socially constructed.

The particularity of the middle-class white male experience is lost as it asserts itself as objective truth: "As a White doctor's kid, who was doing well in school, teachers believed the best about me and treated me accordingly. Doors never closed to me, and experience I assumed to be universal" (Sleeter 1995, p.19). It is the very assumptions of universality that provide the foundations for the operation of common-sense domination. When society comes to believe that one experience is universal, different experiences either become viewed as abnormal (for example homosexuality) or simply disappear from the social surface (for example racism in Canada’s multicultural framework).

I do not disagree with Goodburn and Ina's conclusions that their students were unable to see identity as socially constructed, but what I found most interesting is that their concluding discussion did not address how the emotional aspects played a role in what learning did or did not occur. I will use the information provided in their article about one small group's experience to look more closely at some of the emotional and power dynamics that emerged through attempts at collaboration. I feel strongly that the way emotions are (not) addressed may be decisive in fostering (or thwarting) the passage from denial to learning and acting for social change.

The literature written by those who teach from a critical perspective is filled with examples of how emotions and power interact to stifle the goals of collaborative
learning, although interestingly, many do not choose to explore these aspects. Because many of the dynamics that emerged in the Goodburn and Ina example are relatively common in the literature written by people who were actually trying to turn theories of critical teaching into actual practice, I will also briefly refer to other examples to strengthen my points.

I believe that it is important to reflect upon other educator’s as well as our own practices in order to identify some of the more common problems that arise when we attempt to teach critically. The following section is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive list of the ways in which emotion and power coalesce to create student resistance to critical understanding. It is my attempt to find examples that resonate with moments I have witnessed or experienced myself as a student interested in teaching critically. I am using this section as a way to explore more specifically some of the emotional dynamics that seem to emerge time after time in collaborative work in critical classrooms. My interpretations of events are just that --perceptions informed by other scholars work.

The Scenario

One small group in Goodburn and Ina’s class chose to examine homophobia. The group was composed of five members, three white self-identified heterosexual women and two white self-identified heterosexual men. I want to consider how three of the participants described the process and discuss some of the dynamics that seemed to be triggered during the exercise. One of the male participants Pat, described his contribution in this way:

I was trying to be the voice for the thousands of heterosexuals on campus that are sick and tired of the university giving special treatment to these immoral people. This is how the majority of people feel about this issue whether you accept it or not. I was neither
attempting to start a dialogue, throw out a challenge, nor trying to persuade people (qted in Goodburn and Ina 1994, p.2).

Another student, a female named Sheri, put forward what she characterized as a “non-homophbic” perspective and described her experience in this way:

I don’t think that she [Ina] even wanted us to have a view that was all similar...She was the one who I think in the beginning or on the handout said that you can write as personal narratives and we’re like, “oh that’d be great,” you know? And then she suggested that we conclude by having different voices interact with each other, and so we tried to do that, but it was too hard. And we, we couldn’t do that, and I wish we would have tried or something (qted in Goodburn and Ina 1994, p.10).

A third participant named Stephanie described Shcri’s position within the group this way:

She didn’t kind of fit as well as the rest of us did. I don’t know. And the topic we wrote our collaborative paper on is, it was on homophobia, and a lot of things we discussed when we got together were really funny. Like we made a joke of it and stuff. A lot of things that we discussed...she just never seemed willing to joke about (qted in Goodburn and Ina, 1994, p.10).

Some of the jokes that the group shared within the class included statements by Pat saying that if a genetic test were ever developed to detect sexual orientation, he would want to abort any fetus destined to be gay and referring to homosexual people as “freaks of nature” (Goodburn and Ina 1994, p.10). The entire group laughed while Sheri remained silent.
**An Analysis**

I found this example compelling because I have both witnessed and experienced similar situations during my volunteer teaching experiences and throughout my university education. Placing students in groups and having them write reflective pieces does not necessarily result in the production of counter-hegemonic thought, nor does it necessarily create a sense of community.

The first power dynamic which emerges from this example can be found in Pat's comments. Pat emphasizes that he is acting as the voice of "thousands of heterosexuals" on campus thereby solidifying his sense of authority. He feels secure in raising his points because they are shared by the "majority of people"; in other words, his perspective reflects common-sense sentiments, and as such implies that the underlying logic of his perspective is not open for questioning. It should not be surprising that those with the most confidence in their narratives and opinions tend to be those most privileged by current social arrangements. As Sleeter argues in the case of racial privilege, "whites so internalize their own power and taken for granted superiority that they resist self-questioning" (Sleeter 1995, p.167).

The fact that people in positions of privilege can choose to resist self-questioning is perhaps one of the most insidious privileges. As I have outlined previously in this thesis, racism, sexism and homophobia are sutured into the context in which we live; relations of power slip beneath the surface and oppressive knowledges are absorbed both by individuals and groups, where they function as common-sense. Privilege provides moral insulation against reality and awareness by normalizing and institutionalizing the accrued advantages of identity. By not seeing ourselves as benefiting from racism, sexism or homophobia we are also free from taking responsibility for eradicating it (McIntosh 1988; Sleeter 1993).
Pat clearly constructs his own sexual orientation as the norm by identifying homosexual people as "immoral people". By claiming his own identity as the norm he is once again claiming that his position should not be the focus; our gaze should be cast upon those who are not able to fit within the rigid boundaries of normalcy. According to Mohanty (1994), "the claim to a lack of identity or positionality is itself based on privilege, on a refusal to accept responsibility for one's implication in actual historical or social relations, on a denial that positionalities exist or that they matter, the denial of one's personal history and the claim to a total separation from it" (p.208).

Lacan argues that resistance can be defined as the refusal to accept the relevance of certain knowledge to oneself and that "teaching like analysis, has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as resistance to knowledge" (1981, p.79). In this sense, Pat obviously resisted interrogating how his own sexual identity was socially constructed and imbued with privilege. The theory behind collaborative learning is that some individuals enter the group unable to see how their own identities are inflected with relations of power but will emerge from their group experiences, having heard other people's stories and perspectives, with an awakened understanding of privilege and disadvantage (Moreman 1997). Apparently, this new understanding is to come directly from hearing information that they have here-to-now not been exposed.

The assumption that simply being exposed to information will have politically transformative effects is heavily dependent on "faith in the unbounded potential of reason" (Haste 1996, p.49). These assumptions presuppose that individuals will deliberately free themselves from their personal and social history in order to respect the rights and freedom of other people. Perkins (1997) speaks against these rationalist assumptions by asking us to
reconsider the belief that there is in fact a lack of knowledge about marginalized groups. She argues that oppressive ideologies like racism and heterosexism are in fact ways of "knowing and ordering the world", organizing principles heavily influenced by hatred and fear.

While I do not know enough about Pat's personal history to speak with certainty, I am inclined to conclude from his statements that his beliefs are reflected by many of the people who are close to him. Critical learning often requires that students re-evaluate many beliefs they have held as absolute truths, beliefs that students often share with family members, friends and often, in the case of common-sense assumptions, with the society at large. There are many risks involved in changing one's understanding of power relations. As Joe Cheung, a Wilfred Laurier graduate student, explains:

> Students reject critical thinking at quite a visceral level because they already realize, live the fact, that critical thinking is already political action. Since political action can be life-endangering, they are hesitant to proceed until they know more or less how that is going to affect the particular political constellation of their own particular lives. (Qted in Elliot 1997, p.151)

Lewis (1990) concurs with Joe Cheung's statements when she claims that feminist politics create, rather than ameliorate, feelings of threat: "the threat of abandonment; the threat of having to struggle within unequal power relations; the threat of psychological/social/sexual as well as economic and political marginality; the threat of retributive violence - threats lived in concrete and embodied ways" (p.485). These threats are always just below the surface of critical learning and are influencing whether or not students feel ready to embrace an equity focused politic.

Knight (2000) argues that deeply held values and beliefs are rarely transformed through rational discussions of right versus wrong or good versus bad. Instead, she argues
that it is only when emotional landmines disrupt the hegemony of individual constructions and trigger the struggle and joy of collective inquiry, that it is possible to transform individual beliefs and the collective maintenance of the status quo. Teaching is a practice that proceeds not progressively through time, but through resistance and through emotional breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities and regressions. Students have personal histories, families, religions, languages, cultures and experiences that have shaped how they view and importantly how they feel about issues confronted in a critical classroom.

Nieto's (1998) experience teaching a class on multicultural education, which included critiques of heterosexism and anti-racist analysis, seems to support Knight's assertion that emotional elements are fundamental to the learning process. Many of Nieto's students struggled with the issues and concepts presented throughout the course and many resisted any learning that challenged their perceptions of the world, or learning that asked them to acknowledge privilege. In her article, Nieto describes numerous incidents of having students from her seminar class appear in her office overflowing with anxious feelings of guilt, shame or anger triggered by the seminar discussions. Several students expressed their desires to drop the course because they found it too emotionally difficult to remain.

Eventually one of the students, a male who was described as being unreceptive to examining heterosexism and homophobia, made an overture to the mother of a lesbian classmate when she came to discuss her experiences coming to terms with her daughter's sexuality. The class reception of this male student’s comment, that the mother “must be very proud of her daughter” (p.26), is recounted by Nieto as a cathartic moment: “some of the class wept openly, and all were moved by what we recognized as a moment of transcendence” (p.27). Nieto describes this moment as the crucial turning point in her
It was the release of pent-up emotion that created a solidarity "akin to the solidarity that develops when people experience a common disaster, an airplane crash or fire" (p.27). Nieto describes this solidarity as being what finally allowed the students to trust one another enough to establish a sense of community and become willing to engage in the types of self-reflection that challenged deeply held, socially established beliefs.

The idea that the small group, presented in Goodburn and Ina's article, could come together as a community "where all voices were respected and where a deep sense of bonding developed despite the real differences that existed" (Nieto 1998, p.30) is immediately doubtful when we read Pat's comments. Pat confidently indicates that he is both uninterested in and unwilling to consider his own process of meaning-making by declaring that he is neither attempting to start a dialogue nor throw out a challenge. He is seemingly unconcerned with how his beliefs may impinge on the well-being of other people. He is also uninterested in even entering a dialogue about how his opinions may affect other people. As Harper (1996) has indicated, a community is differentiated from a mere grouping of people in that a community is made up of members who feel connected to each other and are genuinely interested in what each other have to say about their own well-being.

While Goodburn and Ina attempted to prepare their students through a series of discussions about trust and commitment, and dealing with conflict, I am once again brought to question their rationalist assumptions. It seems highly unlikely to me that a simple discussion of trust and commitment is sufficient to bond people into a community; having a theoretical understanding of what it is to be a part of a community is very different from living it.
Interestingly, Goodburn and Ina do mention that, in their opinion, “students seemed to value collaboration because it enabled them to form friendships” (1994, p.4). Unfortunately, the only way that these students felt able to develop friendships was by not engaging their differences. I can’t help but wonder if the results of Goodburn and Ina’s collaborative strategy would have been altered if they had put an emphasis on establishing a sense of community within the classroom before assigning a collaborative project. If a bond had already been established between students they may have been more willing to look closely at their assumptions and differences without being so concerned with how these differences would affect newly forming friendships.

As it was, Sheri resolved that “the trick, the key to it, is just state what you believe in and don’t let anyone else sway your opinion” (Goodburn and Ina 1994, p.11). Each member of the group stressed that their narratives functioned as opinions. Emphasizing the narratives as opinions rather than social commentary allowed the student’s stories to stand in isolation from one another, without contradicting, challenging or engaging one another. The students’ right to an opinion was conflated with the notion that all opinions are equally valid and therefore cannot be challenged. The group seemed unwilling to attend to the contradictions inherent in their belief that every opinion should be valued equally, for example the group’s concluding statement that “homosexuals should respect other people’s homophobia” (qted in Goodburn and Ina 1994 p.9) ignores how homophobia affects gays and lesbians in material and psychological ways.

Sheri’s comment indicates that attempts at dialogue were stymied, “we tried to do that, [create a dialogue with the various different experiences and perspectives] but it was too hard...I wish we would have tried” (1994, p.10). When taken together, Pat’s and Sheri’s
comments seem to indicate that Sheri was willing but Pat was unwilling to engage in a
critical dialogue about the issue of homophobia. Sheri’s point of view was not taken up.
Since her view was the minority view both within her group, and according to Pat throughout
the world at large, she was put in the vulnerable position of being dependent on those in more
dominant positions to extend their goodwill by seriously considering what she had to say.
This obviously did not happen.

Pat’s comments clearly reveal that in his view, homophobia is not only justified but
partly in reaction to what he sees as the unfair advantages bestowed upon homosexual
people. His refusal to see how he benefits from heterosexual privilege frees him from any
responsibility for eradicating homophobia and opens the space for him to make claims about
reverse discrimination. Further, Pat’s comments create a space for a backlash against efforts
at eradicating homophobia. Those who wish to speak out against unjust treatment of
homosexual people are put in a defensive position.

Sheri’s position was made even more tenuous because she was labeled as an outsider
by her fellow group member Stephanie: “She didn’t kind of fit as well as the rest of us did”;
“A lot of things that we discussed...she just never seemed willing to joke about”. The
accusation of humourlessness, or of being overly politically correct, is common towards
people who try to put forward counter-hegemonic perspectives. Such criticism often has a
silencing effect as attention is shifted away from the culpability of dominantly positioned
students towards those “who can not take a joke”.

In the larger world, this type of criticism works to maintain the impoverishment of
resources because once an individual or group is dismissed as bitter, others feel under little
obligation to work for their empowerment (Campbell 1994). The criticism of bitterness is
most powerful against people whose resources for expressing anger are limited to recounting injury in the hope that others will listen — people who are not in a position to influence politicians, launch lawsuits, make threats, or otherwise express anger irresistibly. The disadvantaged of society — racialized groups, the poor, gays and lesbians — are all easy targets for the accusation of bitterness.

According to McFall (1991), bitterness can be defined as “a refusal to forgive and to forget. It is to maintain a vivid sense of the wrongs one has been done, to recite one’s angry litany of loss long past the time others may care to listen or sympathize. ‘You’re so bitter’ is condemnation, never praise...designed to silence the sufferer” (p.146). Bitterness is a particular mode of expression — the recounting of incidents of injury, but only in a context in which people no longer care to listen. Therefore it is the collaboration of a certain mode of expression (recounting of injury) with a certain mode of response (failure to listen) which actually forms bitterness. However, the accusation of bitterness does not acknowledge mutual failure in a communicative situation; rather it condemns the individual or group which had expressed anger or been accused of humourlessness. By placing responsibility on the expressers, the challenge of bitterness both ignores the collaboration of the interpreters and, significantly, lessens their responsibility for continuing the encounter (Boler 1997).

These types of accusations challenge both the judgment and motives in bringing forward complaints and may lead to a state of paralyzing doubt by those who have grievances. Students with marginalized identities often develop a keen awareness of the feelings of those around them as a survival technique. Lewis (1990) elaborates on this defence mechanism in the case of women: “Women know that historically not caring has cost us our lives; intellectually, emotionally, socially, psychologically and physically. I see this
played out over and over again in my classes, and in every case it makes women recoil from saying what they really want to say and simultaneously leaving men reassured about their right to speak on behalf of all of us” (p.474). In this way, the criticism of bitterness is a powerful tool that can be used to persuade people that the importance of how they view their lives, as marked by what is recalled and recounted as significant, is of dismissable interest to others and better left unspoken.

The fear of being ostracized, criticized and isolated makes speaking out difficult since it requires a strong sense of self and strong convictions. Thus, we cannot expect that students will readily appropriate a political stance that is truly counter-hegemonic in small groups or society in general unless we also acknowledge the ways in which such a stance creates, rather than ameliorates, feelings of threat. Taking on counter-hegemonic ideologies are difficult in our society because it requires the persistent critique of dominant cultural representations in a society that persistently marginalizes counter-hegemonic representations. Critical learning requires that students take risks and deal with their fears, and yet little attention seems to be paid to how critical teaching should help students negotiate these elements. Although critical theorists often acknowledge that strong emotions are common consequences of deconstructing students' lives and belief systems (see hooks 1994; Tierney 1992; Konradi 1993), many continue to treat emotions as a side-effect and not a constitutive element of learning.

For example, what a teacher ought to do, according to Konradi (1993), is to presuppose the pain that discussions of oppression inevitably arouse. Some of the strategies she suggests are: specifying in advance which topics will be addressed; including essays on how people combat oppression; acknowledging the pain that will surface; listing local
support services on the board; emphasizing the importance of feelings; discussing the silences; agreeing on appropriate language. While Konradi’s advice acknowledges that emotions are likely to erupt, it fails to help students come to terms with the emotionally wrenching positions in which they find themselves.

By suggesting that emotions are side-effects that must be dealt with before consciousness’ can be raised, I was left feeling that Konradi’s approach acknowledges the presence of emotions while simultaneously pushing them to the margins of teaching and learning. She acknowledges that emotions will be triggered by critical questioning, but she seems to force them back into the private sphere of the individual. The responsibility for control is left with both the students, who should seek out support to interrogate and deal with their emotions outside the classroom, and the teacher, who should teach students a contrived objectivity to discuss issues inside the classroom. The illusion of distancing and objectivity provides a means whereby contradictory actions informed by emotions and power are left unexamined and unquestioned.

When reason is upheld as the primary basis for knowledge, challenging common sense assumptions is made more difficult because such challenges are often based in experience. Such is the case with racism. As Thomas (1984) explains: “we have been told that racism is somebody calling us paki/nigger/chink but most racism you can’t prove” (p.21). Literary criticism, cultural studies, post-structuralism, feminist studies and media studies have by now amassed overwhelming evidence of the extent to which the myths of the ideal rational speech and the “universality” of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, middle-class, Christian or heterosexual.
When critical teachers limit the scope of discourse to what can be rationally argued, they are failing to see that the ability to speak from a place free of emotion is in itself a privilege. Feelings arise out of the circumstances of our lives, out of our relations with other people, institutions and hegemonic structures. Lorde elucidates my point when she describes her experiences speaking to white women about racism: “When women of colour speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are told that we are ‘creating a mood of hopelessness’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt’ and standing in the way of trusting communication and action” (Lorde 1984, p.131-132).

As Knight (2000) points out, rationalism’s ideal speech does not adequately attend to the emotional effects of oppression on marginalized groups; limiting the expression of emotions is an attempt to maintain the status quo of power through the “denial of collaborative constructed emotions and the examination of emotional skills in relation to cultural differences” (Knight, 2000 p.25). The desire to limit expression in the classroom to rational discourse must be questioned because it does not adequately address the question of difference, nor does it attend to the emotional effects of oppression on marginalized groups. Critical teaching must find a way to accommodate emotions as central tenants of both expression and the learning process, instead of pushing emotions to the margin.
**How Critical Teaching Stands up to O'Sullivan's Criteria**

While I am ideologically aligned with the knowledge base of critical teaching, I have shown that the rationalist assumptions of collaborative learning, as a strategy for critical teaching, impede the achievement of O'Sullivan's first criterion of a transformative pedagogy. The possibility of leading students toward an ability to see and understand injustice is hindered by a failure to understand how power, reason and emotion are mutually constitutive of knowledge and understanding. Critical teaching, approached in this way, seems unable to effectively reach beyond simply providing evidence that systemic inequality does indeed exist. Critical teaching seems to struggle with helping students overcome their resistance to learning how their own lives and identities are inscribed with both privilege and disadvantage.

My investigation of collaborative learning as a strategy for critical teaching leads me to conclude further, that even as critical teachers seek to create social change, they are unable to transcend what O'Sullivan (1999) refers to as the “blinders of the modern scientific era” (p.46). Collaborative strategies, as they have been configured in the examples that I have referred to, have participated in producing self-regulating individuals by encouraging students’ capacities for engaging in rational arguments and failing to prepare students to deal with the emotional onslaught that often accompanies intense debate about issues that affect students personally and socially.

It is not surprising that rationalism continues to be firmly entrenched in critical teaching, even when teaching from a critical perspective. hooks (1994) reminds us that in constructing the rational, one is also constructing a particular image of the self. According to hooks, the desire for rationality, and the resulting avoidance of emotion within educational
contexts, is also an ushering in of the self as stable and in control. Emotions are ambiguous and often messy. Emotions seem to work against the notion of the self as stable and in control as one student in Knight’s 2000 study expressed, “I think people got carried away in their emotions when talking about issues of gender, race and class. I think that when our emotions take control we lose control” (p.9). According to hooks (1994), the fear of losing control seems to be lurking just below the surface of many educators’ reluctance to move beyond rationalism.

This reluctance to move out of the realm of the rational impedes the ability of critical teaching to create an alternative culture -- O’Sullivan’s second criterion-- especially one that is attentive to the mind, body, emotions and spirit. There is little room for anything other than cognitive processes when reason is the primary basis for knowledge. Lewis (1990) argues that critical teaching has failed to develop a language that can adequately address the more subtle, often bodily forms, of pleasure-taking or retreat that are common occurrences in classrooms. Kohli (1998) similarly points out a lack of discussion about how our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with historical relations of power and how these relations continue to influence how we feel about expressing our perspectives. If critical teaching is unable to even address what is happening beyond cognitive reasoning in classrooms, it most certainly is unable to be active in creating an alternative culture that is attentive to the minds, bodies and spirits of students.

O’Sullivan’s final criterion revolves around whether or not a pedagogy is able to instill a sense of hope its students. Moulder (1997) argues that despair and hopelessness are embedded in critical teaching; he describes a culture of despair that, although not exactly the same, parallels a kind of nihilism that West (1993) suggests pervades Black communities.
West argues in *Race Matters* (1993) that within Black communities there is a profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness and despair and that social movements need to tackle the cultural climate of nihilism pervading Black communities as well as (or at the same time as) confronting racist economic and political structures. As one African American student commented: “I’m so sick and tired of sociology, we always talk about how bad things are, why don’t we ever talk about anything good? I feel so bad about myself” (Moulder 1997, p.120).

Hopelessness is one of the aspects that must be healed in order for social change to occur. Once people are made aware of the unjust circumstances that surround us, many become paralyzed by a sense of despair and inevitability. Freire (1970) has spoken about this state as a “form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it” (p.78). Educators must have concerns for the ways in which young students feel conditioned, pre-determined and even fated by prevailing circumstances. Dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness.

Because we are constantly critiquing the inequities perpetuated around us, we must take a critical look at the cumulative message course contents are sending out to students. As one student commented to hooks (1994): “We take your class we learn to look at the world from a critical standpoint, one that considers race, sex and class and we can’t enjoy life anymore” (p.42). While some may argue that critical teaching must simply face the harsh realities that are the results of living in a racist, sexist, classist and homophobic society, I agree with Britzman (1992), who argues that the pedagogy behind harsh realities problematic. Harsh realities resonate with feelings of cynicism, despair and hopelessness. Students often become overwhelmed and fearful as they internalize knowledge about systems
of domination and oppression and if they lack an equivalent knowledge about the possibilities for change, they conclude that nothing can be done, because the power structures are just too strong.

Students must not only engage in critical thinking, but must also be able to imagine something coming from their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search. We obviously cannot entirely obviate students' attitudes of despair or apathy because we live in a profoundly unequal society. However, we should strive to cultivate a belief in our students that change is possible and prepare them for the difficult struggle. This is ostensibly why scholars like hooks (1994) argue that spirituality must be infused into the classroom in order to address and heal the hopelessness of the spirit. But once again, much like comments on the importance of building community and the importance of emotion, I feel that comments about the importance of the spirit are not developed in critical teaching strategies.
Chapter Three: Introducing the Arts

My reading of the literature on the arts is informed by my reading and understanding of critical teaching. While I am inclined to align myself with the politics behind critical teaching, I do have doubts about its efficacy as a pedagogy as demonstrated in the previous two chapters. As I was reading and researching the arts and arts-based education, I was searching for those aspects of arts education that I felt could either complement or fill gaps left in critical teaching’s wake. For the purposes of this thesis I will conceptualize the arts broadly as anything that is the conscious, symbolic and interpretive representation of a thought or feeling. This definition is the same that was agreed upon in a Curriculum Teaching and Learning graduate course, in which I was enrolled during the fall of 2000, entitled “Using the Creative Arts in Education”. The definition is intentionally general so that there is room for everything from literature to performance and conceptual art to be included.

This chapter of my thesis is a way for me to reflect upon what it is about the arts in particular, as a medium included in pedagogy, which can help transform the way students read, understand and act out in the world. Many educators (Greene 1998; Mittman 2000; McKeon 1994) have espoused a connection between the arts and the goals of critical teaching, even suggesting that the arts are intrinsically well suited to overcome student passivity and resistance to critical thinking. Further, other scholars (Morris 2000; Marino 1998; Boal 1977) have suggested the arts have the potential to contribute to the critical and reflective capacities of students well beyond the time they spend in classrooms by providing them with outlets for the words, ideas and sounds that circle inside of them.
It is not my intention to suggest that the arts provide the only avenue for achieving a transformative pedagogy. Rather, I will argue, based on my experiences outlined in Chapter One, that the arts have the potential to be a very powerful complement to critical teaching. Because the arts are conceptualized in such a way that they require a meeting of the mind and the sensual, the arts are able to provide one way to transcend the limitations of rationality by opening up spaces where emotions can emerge as an intrinsic component of learning.

In the following chapter, I will explore what intrinsic characteristics of the creative process are well suited to meeting those of O'Sullivan’s criteria unmet by critical teaching. In order to this I will explore the transformative potential of the creative process from a theoretical perspective, through the argument of a feminist educator named Mittman, who uses improvisational theatre to explore social issues with teenagers. She argues that the transformative potential of the arts rests in two primary aspects of the creative process: the ability to allow the unexpected and the unknown, and the ability to make connections and tolerate ambiguity (2000).

I will then go on to explore how the arts are also well suited to challenge hegemonic relations and common-sense knowledge through the development of imagination. By exploring the importance of imagination in challenging hegemonic relations and common-sense knowledge I will show that the arts have the potential, when working with the understanding of power proposed by critical teaching, to also meet O'Sullivan’s first criteria of a transformative pedagogy by encouraging students to see and understand injustice.
The Ability to Allow the Unexpected and the Unknown

Kohli (1998) and Ellsworth (1989) have both argued, and I concur, that students rarely change deeply held political, social or philosophical positions through rational dialogue or gain new perspectives through conversation with others. As I have already demonstrated, reason, emotion and power are mutually constitutive of knowledge. In order “to disrupt the hegemony of individual constructions” (Knight 2000, p. 17) students must be engaged at levels beyond only the intellect and given the confidence to take the personal risks critical thinking requires.

The arts can be used to teach students to relinquish some of the desire to control outcomes and to become comfortable in the chaos of creating something unknown. As Mittman (2000) attests: “my experience suggests that more involvement in creative expression may be one of the means of moving, more easily, into unfamiliar places” (p.3). Thus, when considering the transformative potential of the arts, Mittman first points to the capacity of the creative process to allow the unexpected and unknown, which encompasses an openness to experience, a willingness to risk, the need for flexibility and the ability to act without predictable outcomes. Feminist educators and others have recognized the importance of providing students with situations for encountering the unknown and even unknowable, and in doing so, requiring students to trust in themselves and others with whom they are working.

The capacity to teach students how to allow the unexpected and the unknown suggests that commitment to process is a fundamental element of creativity. This commitment to process is akin to the faith required in social change work in that outcomes are not knowable in advance and often take decades to fully emerge. Social change always
involves a risk, a venture into the unknown. Addressing issues of inequity require faith and a willingness to take risks and face the operations of fear and desire. Part and parcel of being committed to process means that one must release the fear of making mistakes. As hooks (1994) argues, all cultural revolutions experience periods of chaos and confusion, times when grave mistakes are made. She argues that “If we fear mistakes, doing things wrongly, constantly evaluating ourselves, we will never make the academy [or society] a culturally diverse place where scholars [or students] address every dimension of that difference” (hooks 1994, p.33).

Through the arts, students learn about risk taking at a visceral level by interacting with the world and not by viewing it from a far. The arts not only embody meaning by translating thoughts into physical form, the arts “bid us to touch and taste and hear and see the world…they shrink from all that is brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories and sensations of the body” (Yeats qted in John-Steiner 1985, p.34). An important aspect of using the arts in learning is the arts’ ability to reach beyond the limits of theoretical and philosophical reflections, which have conventionally been the province of the mind, to add sensory and participatory experiences which join mind and body.

The improvisational elements of the arts require the full attention and awareness in the moment, an ability to be present even in creatively difficult times. One of the most basic elements of creating art is an ability to roll with mistakes. A creative imagination is playful, able to overcome the censorious aspects of the mind. A creative imagination is able to go on playing even when its conscious meaning is humiliated. Many artists have alluded to
reaching a crisis in creation, a point at which their intended product seems unachievable and they are left with the option of continuing or starting over.

I suspect that many of us who are not artists would be more likely to start our art project over in frustration, but artists like Miro claim that it is at this moment that they are most in touch with their creativity. If they are able to let go of their intended vision and continue at a more intuitive level, they can find themselves having transcended their initial vision and arriving at something they could not have imagined before the moment of its creation. This is not because of a cerebral inspiration, but because of a turning inward, an ability to listen to oneself and one’s surrounding on a very deep level in order to allow the flow of intuitive responses. These intuitive responses are generated from an integration of all aspects of the artist, from their minds, their hearts and their bodies.

Allowing for intuitive responses requires an awareness of self that is often forgotten in our daily lives; yet being self-aware seems essential if we are to create a more just world. Being self-aware is the first step to social change because it requires a deep understanding of who we are and how we are affected by our surroundings. While I am not arguing that the turning inward which happens when one is creating a piece of art is exactly the same as the self-reflection required in critical learning, I suggest that this turning inward may allow students to become more familiar, at both an intellectual and a visceral level, with the processes that are required when we learn to critique the world. I believe this may be especially true because a turning inward at the time of creative crisis teaches us patience in times of turmoil, and teaches us, once again at both an intellectual and a visceral level, that we are able to get beyond obstacles which at first seem insurmountable. Undoubtedly there
will be obstacles to achieving equity and we must be prepared to continue and reshape our initial visions, which brings me to Mittman's second point.

The Ability to Make Connections and Tolerate Ambiguity

Mittman's second point revolves around the capacity for the creative process to allow students to make connections and tolerate ambiguity; this capacity includes an acceptance of contradiction, disorder and unconventionality. Dewey often spoke about the value of artistic inquiry because it deliberately challenged the desires for fixed understandings. According to him, there is always a gap between what we are living through in our present and that which has survived our past, "because of this gap all conscious perception...assimilates the present to the past and it also brings about some reconstruction of that past" (Dewey 1934, p.272).

The strength of creative expression must be in its on-going interpretation and transformation of seemingly fixed notions.

For example, in the case of the Merchant of Venice, Howe (1994) comments that the story seems to encourage the audience to make choices between good and bad characters and then goes on to make these choices impossible by making the characters more complicated. In this process the audience is drawn "into experiencing this dissolution (of normal beliefs) ourselves...We are forced to see, then, that any interpretation is merely wish-fulfillment. This radical shift in awareness, in turn, undermines our sense of ourselves; it is the prerequisite for any changes in us that might evade habitual, socially induced patterns of thought" (p.23). This is an example of what can be understood as a complex seeing of analysis by moving us away from a linear duality of good and bad and moving us toward a more dialogical and complex portrayal (Linds 2000, p.12).
Unfortunately, too often when the arts are used as tools in social change agendas, the intrinsic power of the arts is lessened by a narrow focus on trying to examine an issue from too simplistic a framework in order to get out the proper message. Kearney (1988) has argued that the imagination needs to play "...to ensure it is ethical in a liberating way, in a way which animates and enlarges our response to the other rather than cloistering us off in a dour moralism of resentment and recrimination" (p. 366). The arts must allow for students to explore issues from a variety of perspectives and vantage points so that students are able to tap into the arts’ potential to provide affective, spiritual and bodily understandings.

Concentrating solely on bringing students to understand an issue from a pre-determined perspective stands in stark contrast to the power of the creative process to accept disorder and challenge desires for fixity. Too often people who are concerned about blending social activism and the arts fail to provide freedom for creativity and those things that most need to be expressed remain silent, buried beneath the politically correct perspective. The results are often less than thrilling. Hancock (1995) expresses his dissatisfaction with this phenomenon in respect to much youth and community theatre:

It glosses over disharmony, suppresses tensions, ambiguity and complexity and blends out differences in order to present a tightly ordered and unified whole. A polyphony of voices is lost or avoided. Theatre becomes simplistic and contrived. Scenes become something to be looked at, with no imagination or involvement called on from the audience (p.19).

If the focus is solely on the message and not the medium, the arts and imagination become almost negligible elements to the piece. The emphasis is removed from other modes of understanding and experience, for example visceral or emotional, and placed once again firmly in the realm of rationalism. Severing freedom of expression and exploration from art is similar to “separating the qualities of the mind from those of the body. You can do it, but
by doing so you deprive one of its manifestation and the other of its motivation" (1995, p.25).

We must remain conscious, as Oliver and Bane (1971) have pointed out, there is little transfer of learning to situations outside of the classroom when rationalism is the underlying logic of a performance or discussion. Dewey (1934) contends that experience can only become fully conscious when meanings enter through the exercise of one’s imagination, since imagination “is the only gateway through which these meanings can find their way into a present interaction” (p.272). If students are able to experiment with new forms of social order through imagination and play, if they experience different vantage points in an embodied and personal way, they are in a better position to reason about their moral implications. Ironically, in the drive to present a politically salient message the potential power of the arts to reach students as levels beyond the rational is often lost.

Greene (2000) is very clear that simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to “occasion an aesthetic experience or change a life” (p.125). When students do not feel challenged to emotionally engage with an art form, they take no heed of the images or scenarios they are being presented. They know they are not being asked to play with hypothetical alternatives or develop a sense of identification with the characters. According to Oliver and Bain (1971), “the great need for young people (and perhaps adults alike) is not simply the opportunity to discuss and justify personal or social decisions about events in the world. They need the opportunity to project themselves in rich hypothetical worlds created by their own imagination or those of dramatic artists” (p.270). In order for the arts to retain their power, students must be able to enter a fictive world perceptually, affectively and
cognitively to allow for further reflection to continue in an interpretive spiral that is able to hold their attention.

Greene (1988) contends that although logical thinking is important, the point of cognitive development is to gain the ability to interpret lived experiences from as many vantage points as possible. The arts allow students to transcend the limits of their particular biographical situations. Since most students come to class with somewhat limited life experience the arts can be used to broaden students’ perspectives by exposing them to unfamiliar lifestyles and emotions. A work of art has the potential ability to transport students to a world, or a perspective that they might not have ever seen on their own.

By coming to understand that reality is made up of many different perspectives and experiences, the arts also feed students’ capacities to develop a sense of empathy through imagination and identification. According to Kearney, an ethical imagination is “the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person’s skin, to see things as if one were momentarily at least, another” (Kearney 1988, p.368). An ethical imagination seeks to imagine a situation that should be otherwise in ethical response to the other.

While Srivastava (1997) would likely continue to critique the focus on empathy as a liberal humanist notion, Mittman (2000) advocates promoting "ethical" imaginative knowledge. She sees this type of imagination as being able to generate trust and allow for unplanned alternatives as a way of beginning to deal with the painful mistrust and competition for power that happens when dealing with issues of difference. While being cautious about too much of a focus on the production of empathy, I am inclined to argue that without the ability to imagine how it is for people we conceive as different from ourselves, we are left with a diminished capacity to create or fully participate in a just community.
Challenging Hegemony through Imagination

The arts have often been credited with an ability to take on a transformative role in challenging hegemony and the dehumanizing aspects of late capitalist society. The Frankfurt School of Art conceived of the subversive truth of art in its ability to give word, tone and image to that which is silent, distorted and suppressed in the established reality (Mittman 2000, p.5). To similar ends, Gilmour (1994) insists that education in the arts should emphasize:

the process of thinking in symbols, that make use of the “texts” that help students at all levels learn how to begin to question, to think independently of received everyday meanings and to begin to be ready to challenge inherited cultural meanings (p.518)

In his view, education in the arts would have to consider strategies for developing skills in symbolic thinking that include exploring personal and cultural memory. Gilmour regards the development of students’ imagination as crucial in their ability to perceive how complex cultural symbols function.

Many scholars who write about the arts agree that imagination is central to social change. In her 1988 book, The Dialectic of Freedom, Greene argues that the modern world is one of fragmentation in which people feel themselves impinged upon by forces they do not understand it is a world of myth and mystification, in which agendas and purposes are hidden. She argues that the neglect of imagination in education signifies "an acquiescence to existence within boundaries or frames and a contained, systemized way of living closed to alternative possibilities" (p.45).

In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse similarly argues that the standardization that occurs in advanced industrial societies leads quite directly to regimentation and to unthinking and
unfeeling forms of social interaction. He claims that it is through the deadening of the senses that repression and manipulation are made possible. Marcuse regards education in the arts as liberating because of its ability to impel humanity beyond the first dimension, the realm of mere fact, to the world of significance and meaning. Marcuse concludes that because the arts employ the senses and produce multi-dimensional kinds of knowledge, the arts can act against the debilitating fragmentation of the senses that he considers the major source of cultural alienation.

Greene and Marcuse agree that imagination has the ability to breathe life into experience. Marcuse stressed the value of the arts lie in the qualitative difference he found between the multi-dimensional kind of knowledge produced by the aesthetic imagination against the uni-dimensional kind of knowledge attributed to the socially established rationality. Imaginative creations remind us that there is always more to experience and more in what we experience than we can predict. When we see more and hear more, it is not only that we are not surrounded by the familiar and the taken-for granted but that new avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience. "We may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is we may take an initiative in the light of possibility" (Greene 1998, p.123).

By placing emphasis on the development of imagination students are brought to envisage previously unimaginined possibilities. To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and objectively real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or common-sensical and to carve out new orders of experience. The development of imagination is essential if students are, in Hutchinson's words, "to deconstruct colonising images of the future" (1993, p.46). With the opening up of alternative
possibilities, students may become empowered to engage in some sort of praxis, engaged enough to name and begin to dismantle the power structures that deny them equality and justice. It may be that the recovery of imagination lessens the social paralysis we see around us and restores the sense that something can be done.

In her writings on the subject, Warnock makes the case that the cultivation of imagination should be one of, if not the chief, aims of all education. In her view, the imagination

is a power in the human mind which is at work in our everyday perception of the world, and it is also at work in our thoughts about what is absent: which enables us to see the world, whether present or absent as significant, and also to present this vision to others, for them to share or reject. And this power...is not only intellectual. Its impetus comes from emotion as much as from reason, from the heart as much as the head (Warnock 1976, p.196).

According to Warnock, imagination is involved in all perception of the world, in memory of the past as well as envisaging the future. As a means of developing the imagination the arts are of critical importance. An education in which the arts are neglected is an education in which the development of imagination, “the means by which a future can be envisaged which is different from the present” (Warnock 1976, p.170), is absent.

The persuasion of hegemony is often so quiet, so seductive, so disguised that it renders people acquiescent to power without our realizing it. We live certain possibilities without necessarily realizing them as only possibilities and not necessities. This is why the notion of wide-awareness is a key theme in Greene’s writing about the arts. Wide-awareness denotes a plane of consciousness of highest attention, an attitude of full attention to life, an active, not a passive, awareness. She argues this type of consciousness always has
an imaginative phase because imagination more than any other capacity breaks through the inertia of habit.

Greene suggests one role of encounters with the arts is to move us to want to restore some kind of order, to repair and to heal. The arts have long had a transformative, often liberating effect on many populations, not merely by embodying and expressing the suffering of oppressed and constricted lives, but also by identifying the gaps between what is longed for and what may become some day. Accordingly, Lorde describes the function of poetry thus:

Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into ideas, then into more tangible action (1984, p.37).

However, it must be acknowledged that for all of their emancipatory potential, the arts cannot be counted on to liberate.

We must be cautious not to obviate sociological factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation. We cannot simply fantasize the disappearance of racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism. It may be, however, that a general inability to conceive of a better order of things can give rise to a resignation that paralyzes and prevents people from acting to bring about change. The arts can provide one opportunity to break through surface meanings and teach students to critically read their own worlds.
**Challenging Common-sense Knowledge**

When considering how we are to address the problem of ideological entrenchment, which manifests itself as common-sense knowledge in our students, the most powerful aspect of the arts is their ability to make the familiar strange. The importance of making the familiar strange has been addressed by many philosophers, among them Foucault. He asserts that thought itself is "freedom in relation to what one does, the notion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as a problem" (1984, p.388).

Marcuse argues that art is committed to that perception of the world that alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society.

> It is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity. The aesthetic transformation becomes a vehicle of recognition and indictment...art withdraws from the mystifying power of the given and frees it for the expansion of its own truth (Marcuse 1974, p.9).

The arts do not necessarily provide us with empirical or documentary truth, but they do enable us to know in very unique ways. As Locke (1968) points out, the power of the arts is in their ability to allow for perceptions of truths beyond facts and therefore may offer a representation of experiences, which are at once more inclusive and more stirring than conventional, everyday language could allow for.

Our critical awareness can be enhanced as new possibilities open for reflection. The arts have the capacity, when authentically attended to, to enable persons to hear and see what they would not ordinarily hear and see. According to Locke (1968), the arts have the potential "to offer visions of consonance and dissonance that are unfamiliar and indeed abnormal; to disclose the incomplete profiles of the world...and the capacity to defamiliarize experience: by beginning with the overly familiar and transfiguring it into something
different enough to make those who are awakened hear and see” (p.128-129). This potential provides rich soil for interrogating common-sense assumptions.

A new genre of public art has emerged in the past three decades for the precise purpose of exploring potential links between the arts and critical awareness (Green 1998). What this new genre of art shares is a desire to deal with social issues in a manner that resembles political and social activity. This art is distinguished from rational interrogations of identity and power relations it attempts to “consider integration and wholeness, to break with such notions as those that split the cognitive from the emotional, and the rational from the affective capacities” (Greene 2000, p.12). Experiencing this type of art is meant to push us toward more intellectual, visceral and emotional awareness of social relations by reflecting our assumptions and actions back to us through the use of representation and metaphor.

As an example, Green (1998), an art educator, refers to one of her student’s art projects. This project questioned how Asian women are stereotyped by American culture. The student simply created and circulated a poster featuring the photo of an Asian woman and asking: “Who is this girl?” The multiple choice answers included: “A. The foreign exchange student that studies twenty hours a day. B. The girl who has more boyfriends than classes. C. No one you really know.” This is an excellent example of how the arts can be used to take up issues that we as a society struggle and lead us to question our common-sense assumptions.

The arts are not limited to the limited scope of rational discourse because the arts have been conceptualized in such a way that opens spaces where emotions can emerge. Because of these openings, the arts can be a way to provide a more holistic perspective to
issues of injustice, one where "synthesis rather than analysis is predominant, one that might have a deeper more enduring impact which would not vanish after the notes had been studied for the exam" (Samuels 1987, p.55). The arts are able to infuse emotion and personal feeling into the classroom, stimulating critical thinking in students and broadening students' intellectual experience. Students can be provided with insightful, non-objective examples that can penetrate deeper into the human experience perhaps better "allowing students to locate the sociological imagination and the intersection of individual biographies with social history" (Moran 1999, p.111). Richards (1964) argues that learning through the arts in this way trains our emotional and intellectual perceptions by teaching us to see better, hear better and make finer connections between things.

A good example of deepened understanding through the arts can be found in Moran’s 1999 article explaining what happened when he chose to incorporate poetry into his college level sociology course. His course focused on equity issues and he found that students had difficulty understanding how abstract sociological concepts related to the reality of stratification and because of this, many students became resistant to the evidence presented in the readings. He wanted to find a way to make the material more concrete and engage students both intellectually and emotionally, so he turned to poetry.

At first he brought in poetry and had the class use sociological concepts to analyze it. He found that through investigating and understanding metaphor his students’ understandings of inequality became more complete and seemed to stay with them longer. One student commented that "the use of poetry was important because we could actually see the things we discussed in class in literature. Personally it made certain topics more real and proved to me that they exist in the real world" (Moran 1999, p.111). By using the arts in this way
Moran was able to provide legitimacy to the course material in the form of corroborating evidence and add deeper meaning to the processes of social change.

Interestingly, although Moran found his first way of including of the arts as corroborating evidence powerful, he found a more powerful way to include them in his second attempt. In his first attempt, the arts were included very much as products; for his second venture he became more focused on the process aspect of the arts. He asked students to select any concept which had been presented in the lectures of his class, then had them 1) explain it in their own words; 2) write a poem which illustrated the concept; 3) explain the connection; and 4) relate the concept to experiences in their own lives. The poems themselves were not graded. Students responded enthusiastically. Many commented that this process gave them a new understanding of inequality and through personalizing the material they were able to see things more clearly.

Although initially this may seem very similar to the creation and sharing of personal narratives advocated in critical teaching, I would argue that there are several qualitative differences. The first being that representation of experience in a poetic form does not carry with it the same intellectual baggage; it does not have to justify itself as either a generalizable or an individual experience. Poetry, and the arts in general, is a medium that seeks to embody states of mind, or experiences that are at immediate origin personal to the writer, but at deep levels common to all who encounter it. In this way, the poem is able to be simultaneously very personal and somewhat distanced from the author themselves. Secondly, the poetic voice is never expected to be without emotion. Indeed, poetry is made more powerful through the inclusion of feeling. As Dewey has pointed out: “emotion
functions to direct and cement the process and product of expression; it is constitutive of artistic expression” (1934, p. 47).

Thirdly, in a culture such as ours, it is not common for individuals to be asked to present their thoughts in a creative format and being asked to do so pushes most people out of their comfort zone and by doing so, the use of poetry may have worked toward minimizing power differences based on social location and identity. As I explained earlier in the thesis, it is common that those most confident in sharing their narratives are those most privileged by current social arrangements. I also pointed out that speaking against commonsense assumptions is made difficult because of fears of being ostracized. These emotional and power dynamics often work together to ensure that those who more confidently present their perceptions are more likely to be heard by, and influence, their fellow classmates.

During my camp experience described in Chapter One, I found that as students moved out of their own personal comfort zones, their attentiveness to other people increased. Because everyone was facing fear and taking creative risks, we became more sensitive to the difficulties inherent in making our voices heard. It is through this process that we were able to establish the bonds of community that encouraged us to care about what each member had to say about their own well-being within our group.

Finally, being forced to think about issues and then translate those thoughts into a metaphoric form, one that is infused with emotion, requires a more holistic understanding of the issue at hand. According to Kandinsky (1997), one of the greatest powers of the arts lie in their requirement of meditation upon consciousness and hidden thoughts in order to create expressive symbolism. “This meditation creates the possibility of meaning and freedom, of dilemma and doubt, of fragmentation and reparation. It opens the world to the transformative
powers of the imagination and the free play of the creative act” (Kandinsky 1997, p. 71). The creation of art is one wherein the individual is in the process of coming to know something—a process of meaning-making, followed by a translation of that meaning into physical form.

In order for the translation of meaning into physical form to be effective, an artist must first gain a deep understanding of that which they are trying to represent. Art-making requires knowledge of particular and distinctive qualities of the issue at hand, but this knowledge cannot be limited to the recounting of rational facts. As MacDonald (1978) argues, “understanding is the crystallization of our aesthetic knowing; explicit knowledge is its rational handmaiden. To know is to describe his characteristics; to understand him is to be able to write a poem and capture his essence” (p. 196). Thus art does not lead to meaning; it embodies it.

In order to access or to realize a work of art, individuals must be equipped with a degree of cognitive understanding. To make the abstract concrete means engaging both divergent and convergent thinking. The creative process must find a way to link perception and reflection, as well as contemplation and action. It must facilitate an integration of feeling, thinking and doing. It is by combining perception with reflection that students are able to step back from both their perceptions and their production to ask: What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What am I learning? What am I trying to achieve and am I being successful. Through asking these questions, it is possible for students to be made more aware of their own life histories and themselves as meaning makers.

Because art always involves selecting from and re-working experience—framing the experience for an audience, the concept of frames is a very important aspect of arts based education (Greene 1998). “Frames” entail a sense of perspective, recognizing that facts and
Theories are always subject to a range of interpretations based on individual experiences. The arts present an opportunity to create a constant interplay between interpreting and representing reality from often conflicting points of view, teaching us to question how we come to assign meaning. The arts are a way of framing possibilities so that they may be taken up in an embodied experience and not treated as finalities.

A frame of reference also recognizes that we ourselves are participants in the events and phenomena we are intending to represent. In this way, we may come to understand that we are all persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us. The arts provide an opportunity to show students that reality is made up of multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete, that the world perceived from one place is not the world. By setting aside hegemonic frameworks of meaning and common sense assumptions of universality, the artist exposes hegemonic understandings as only one means by which a given society could make sense of experience. By breaking through the frames of presuppositions we are enabled to recapture "the process of our becoming" (Greene 1988, p.150).

The ability to understand how we have come to believe what we do, by learning to look at situations and issues from new vantage points, and then to critically interrogate what we are being told, is particularly important because common-sense thinking is so naturalized. The arts may provide a distinctive way to investigate the sometimes incoherent and contradictory assumptions which inform how we decode and unscramble the meanings of events and issues in the world. Greene (1988) explains that what is distinctive about critical awareness in the artistic realm is that understanding "is achieved by means of expression in a particular medium: paint, language, the body-in-motion, musical sound, clay, film" (p.187).
Learning is potentially taken beyond the limits of theoretical and philosophical reflections which have conventionally been the province of the mind, to add sensory and participatory experiences which join mind and body in a meaning-making dialogue. Experience, emotion and reason become equally legitimate for disrupting socially inherited meanings and common-sense assumptions.

**How Arts-Based Education Stands up to O’Sullivan’s Criteria**

The arts in of themselves do not meet O’Sullivan’s first criterion of providing a critique of injustice and inequity. However, I have demonstrated that the arts provide a rich avenue for both overcoming resistance to critical interrogation as well as to helping students gain a deeper understanding of social issues.

In accordance with feminist and other critical educators, the arts provide students with situations for encountering the unknown and even unknowable, requiring students to trust in both themselves and others with whom they are working. As a creative process, the arts provide an opportunity for students to learn about risk-taking at both an intellectual and a visceral level, teaching students to relinquish some of the desire to control outcomes and to become comfortable in the chaos of creating something unknown. These aspects of the creative process are important to critical learning because, as I explained in Chapter Two, critical learning can be a risky endeavor by creating feelings of threat: “the threat of abandonment; the threat of psychological/social/sexual as well as economic and political marginality” (Lewis 1990, p.485).

The creative process also provides a way for students to experience different points of view in an embodied way by, if only momentarily, “slipping into the skin of someone else”
(Greene 2000, p.200). Oliver and Bain (1971) have argued that the opportunity for students to project themselves into rich hypothetical worlds is more likely to create the type of learning they are able to transfer to the world outside the classroom. By entering fictive worlds perceptually, affectively and cognitively, students are led into a reflective and interpretive spiral that is more likely to hold their attention. Through the arts students may come to understand that reality is made up of many different perspectives and experiences feeding into their capacity to develop a sense of empathy through imagination and identification.

As students experience different points of view, they are also led into a consciousness that the world perceived from one place is not the world; they are learning to disrupt the taken-for-granted. By placing emphasis on the imagination, students may come to see beyond what they have known as common-sense and carve out new orders of experience. With the opening up of alternative possibilities students may become empowered to name and begin dismantling the power structures that deny them equality and justice. In this way, it may be the recovery of imagination which can help lessen the social paralysis we see around us. If the arts can strengthen the imagination, then the arts have the potential to restore in students the sense that there is hope, fulfilling O’Sullivan’s second criterion of a transformative pedagogy.

Using the arts to teach from a critical perspective is distinguishable from other strategies in that the arts are taken beyond the limits of theoretical and philosophical reflections, which have conventionally been the province of the mind, to add sensory and participatory experiences which join mind, body, and emotion in a meaning-making dialogue. Further, because creating art requires both quiet contemplation and active
experimentation, the arts release the play of both the conscious and the unconscious allowing for the development and deepening of the spiritual. Once the spirit is engaged the possibilities for the creation of community are more likely. As Harper (1996) has pointed out, the spiritual in us seeks affirmative relationships to the world and the people around us. A community is soulful in that it is a group of people who genuinely care about the well-being of each other. By actively engaging the cognitive, emotions, the body and the spiritual the arts are able to transcend the “blinders of the modern scientific era” (O’Sullivan 1999, p. 46) and are actively engaged in creating an alternative culture, fulfilling O’Sullivan’s final criterion of a transformative pedagogy.
Conclusion

This thesis has been a way for me to reflect on both my own and other educators' beliefs and experiences of teaching from a critical perspective. I will conclude by outlining what I have learned and how I intend to take this learning with me as I enter the teaching profession.

In order for my teaching to achieve all of O'Sullivan's (1999) criteria of a transformative pedagogy, I believe that first and foremost I must see my students as whole beings. Students, like all people, are complex individuals. Thus the simple of factual information about domination and oppression is not likely to have transformative effects. The manner in which students integrate knowledge and interrogate their assumptions is mitigated by many factors including experience, emotion and logic, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two. I want my teaching to engage students at levels beyond the intellect.

Coming to a critical consciousness is difficult because it means unlearning dominant narratives and taking responsibility for how we are implicated in upholding a hegemonic system. Critical learning requires students to understand how their very identities have been shaped by power relations. Critical teaching must find a way to encourage students to engage in a self-reflective process that challenges their common-sense assumptions.

The types of self-reflection required in order for critical learning to occur is not only unfamiliar to most students; it also poses significant threats "to the particular political constellations of [students'] own particular lives" (Elliot 1997, p.151). As a teacher I must be conscious of creating/leading activities that facilitate a turning inward in order to deepen students' awareness of how we are affected by the society around us. While this type of
activity does not have to be an arts-related activity. My experiences have led me to believe that the arts are well suited to this purpose.

The creative process requires a turning inward in meditative contemplation as students consider, at a visceral, emotional and cognitive level, what they are trying to represent. It also requires a turning outward as students consider how best to represent this thought or feeling to the world. As students turn inward, they are learning to listen to themselves in an integrated way; they discover that the arts are more powerful when the message reflects emotion, logic, physicality and cognitive processes. As students “frame” their thoughts or feelings for an audience, they are made aware that theirs is only one of many potential perspectives. As students present their creations to the outside world or the class, they are learning to take risks and become more comfortable with the chaos of creating something new, without knowing in advance how it will be received.

As someone interested in teaching from a critical perspective, I want to find ways to harness the experiential learning described above, in understanding issues like racism, homophobia and sexism. As I develop/choose activities I must remain conscious of the importance of providing freedom for creativity and experimentation because once the focus is shifted from creativity and experimentation to presenting a pre-determined political perspective, understanding is placed firmly in the realm of rationalism once again.

Although teachers are not therapists, I believe that my being aware of the emotional dynamics that are being played out by students in my classroom at any given time is essential. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, students choose to speak or remain silent, listen to or negate their peers’ perspectives and engage in or ignore their differences based on a complex matrix of power and emotion. I am convinced that building communities within
the classroom is a way to mitigate these factors. My experiences have shown me that when students feel bonded, they are more likely to be concerned with each other's well-being, creating a context wherein students feel more comfortable delving into difficult subjects like power and privilege. It is through building community that the spiritual may also be infused into the classroom.

The arts are also a powerful way to build community and tap into the spiritual. As a teacher I will seek out group art activities that are able to provide an avenue for unification through joint attention, and synchronized bodily rhythms and activities that allow for both personal and group messages to be conveyed. As we build affirmative relationships within the classroom, I believe we will be also learning to nourish our souls because the spiritual in us seeks connection to each other and the world around us.

I am grateful to this thesis process for helping me articulate my goals in teaching.
Bibliography


