Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition: The Quality of Thought
in High School Philosophy Classrooms

By
Lucas Berman

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Copyright by Lucas M.C. Berman, April 2016
Abstract:

Critical thinking has saturated the educational landscape. While many educators have heard this educational buzzword, and while many might know what critical thinking is in theory, my study offers a unique look at how actual teachers apply their individuated understanding of critical thinking in everyday practice. Specifically, this small-scale qualitative study seeks to understand how individual teachers conceptualize and promote critical thinking in Ontario high school philosophy classrooms. Critical thinking is, at its core, thinking that formulates some sort of judgement. Embodying criterial reasoning, metacognition, sensitivity to context, background knowledge and habits of mind, critical thinking calls for students and teachers to engage in intellectually rigorous activity. But a question remains: how are actual teachers embedding these facets of critical thinking in high school philosophy? As a subject rooted in critical thought, this study seeks to uncover the various pedagogical techniques teachers use to implement critical thinking, as well as the challenges, barriers and issues that arise from said implementation. This study not only discusses the ways in which teachers promote communities of inquiry, but the problems that stand in the way of making critical thinking a constant element of everyday class.

Key Words: critical thinking, high school philosophy, criterial thinking, metacognition, habits of mind
Acknowledgements:

The first people I have to thank are my family, and Colleen McDonald. They have been there through every edit, hard-drive failure and panicked draft. Without their constant support and love, these one-hundred some-odd pages would never have been. This is as much a product of their perseverance and dedication as it is my own. I would also like to thank my research participants for taking the time and energy to share their endlessly valuable experiences with a master’s student and a shoddy laptop microphone. Had they not taken time out of their days to talk with me, my research would simply not exist. I would also like to thank Thanasi Stamatis for his keen pair of eyes and eloquent feedback – the conversations, comments, and tireless proofreading sessions did not go unappreciated. Finally, I would like to thank all of those wonderful educators in my 2016 I/S Cohort. Their fabulous energy and spirit will carry something special into any school they teach in.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** .................................................................................................................. 2  

**Abstract** ......................................................................................................................................... 3  

## Chapter 1: Introduction  
1.0.0 Exploring Critical Thinking ........................................................................................................ 7  
1.1.0 The Philosophy Class and Critical Thinking ............................................................................... 9  
1.2.0 The Research Problem: Looking at the Reality of the Class ....................................................... 11  
1.3.0 Background of Researcher ......................................................................................................... 12  
1.4.0 Limitations .................................................................................................................................. 14  

## Chapter 2: Literature Review  
2.0.0 Critical Thinking Defined ............................................................................................................. 17  
2.0.1 Criteria Thinking .......................................................................................................................... 22  
2.0.2 Metacognition and Self-Correction .............................................................................................. 24  
2.0.3 Background Knowledge and Sensitivity to Context .................................................................. 28  
2.0.4 Habits of Mind ............................................................................................................................. 35  
2.1.0 The Two Paradigms of Education ............................................................................................... 38  
2.1.1 The Standard Paradigm ............................................................................................................. 38  
2.1.2 The Reflective Paradigm ............................................................................................................. 41  
2.1.3 Problematizing Content .............................................................................................................. 42  
2.1.4 The Community of Inquiry ......................................................................................................... 46  
2.2.0 Concluding Remarks .................................................................................................................... 51  

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology  
3.0.0 Preamble ....................................................................................................................................... 52  
3.1.0 Research Approach and Procedures ........................................................................................... 52  
3.2.0 Instruments and Data Collection ................................................................................................. 54  
3.3.0 Participants ................................................................................................................................... 56  
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria ....................................................................................................................... 56
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure and Recruitment ........................................... 58
3.3.3 Participant Biographies ................................................................. 58
3.4.0 Data Analysis .................................................................................. 59
3.5.0 Ethical Considerations ................................................................. 60
3.6.0 Methodological Limitations and Strengths .................................... 61
3.7.0 Conclusion .................................................................................... 63

Chapter 4: Findings

4.0.0 Introduction to Findings ................................................................. 64
4.1.0 Conceptualizing the Relationship between Critical Thinking and Philosophy … 64
  4.1.1 Critical Thinking and the Philosophy Classroom ......................... 64
  4.1.2 Teacher Specific Definitions of Critical Thinking ....................... 67
4.2.0 Constructing the Philosophy Classroom ......................................... 72
  4.2.1 Philosophy Class: What is the Purpose? ....................................... 73
  4.2.2 Activities and Assignments used to Promote Critical Thinking ........ 74
4.3.0 Challenges in Promoting Critical Thinking in Philosophy Classrooms ...... 87
  4.3.1 Student-Centered Challenges: Participation ............................... 88
  4.3.2 Teacher-Centered Challenges: Issue of Expertise ....................... 91
4.4.0 Conclusion ................................................................................... 97

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations and Extending Discussion

5.0.0 Introduction .................................................................................. 100
5.1.0 Relation to Literature ................................................................. 100
5.2.0 Considering the Implications ...................................................... 104
  5.2.1 General Implications ............................................................... 104
  5.2.2 Personal Implications ............................................................ 107
5.3.0 Recommendations ...................................................................... 108
5.4.0 Conclusion .................................................................................. 110

References .......................................................................................... 113
Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview ......................................................... 115
Appendix B: Interview Questions ........................................................................ 117
Appendix C: Code Genesis Table ....................................................................... 119
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0.0 Overview: Exploring Critical Thinking

I was taking the train one day and I noticed an advertisement on the wall. It was nothing special or even particularly eye-catching. It was simply an advertisement for online courses at some university or another. But what this advertisement was promoting was the development of ‘critical thinking.’ This phrase must have been haunting me. Having recently started Teacher’s College at the Ontario Institute of Secondary Education (University of Toronto), I had been hearing much about ‘critical thinking.’ I had courses that focused on the need for critical thinking in the classroom; I had been hearing from various instructors about the need to promote critical thinking in education. And the more I read about supposed ‘crises’ in education, the more critical thinking was heralded as the answer to the apparent deficits in student thinking. This advertisement on the train proved something to me: critical thinking had become ubiquitous, saturating educational discussions everywhere. But a question remained unanswered: what did critical thinking actually mean?

Upon further investigation into this question, I realized that the answer is diverse and varied. For Hester (1994), critical thinking is what makes a creative individual; it must be implemented into schools in order to create citizens who are capable of doing more than simply regurgitating information. For Granatstein (1998), the critical thinking component of history is the means by which one comes to participate in a democracy. For Paul (1993), critical thinking is the very means of survival in a world of rapidly accelerating ideas. But Ennis sums up these diverse claims nicely: critical thinking is the “reasonable, rational thinking that helps us decide what to believe and do” (from Lipman, 2003, pg. 37). At its core, critical thinking is the basis of informed action. In this sense, critical thinking is a basic life skill. It is the means by which
people ought to navigate the information present in their day-to-day life, to form opinions, and to ultimately engage with the wealth of ideas around them in a more active, conscious way.

But if critical thinking is so important, if critical thinking ought the be the basis of informed action, then one must naturally turn to our educational systems to see if such thought is being promoted in the classroom. It would seem odd to believe that students can learn without thinking – it seems almost oxymoronic. However, the Critical Thinking Movement in education began to suggest that the quality of thinking being taught in schools is often deficient (Lipman, 2003). Thus, Lipman (2003) traces the origins of critical thinking in education back to the 1960’s when the educational community was faced with a challenging question: how can education promote a higher level of thinking in students (i.e. critical thought)? To answer this question one must ask whether schools are meant to simply pass along information, or whether they ought to give students the means to informatively engage with the wealth of knowledge, information, ideas and perspectives in the world around them. The Critical Thinking Movement advocates for the latter: it is, in part, responding to educational trends that fetishize the transmission of content – content absent of any thoughtful accompanying analysis (Paul, 1993). Simply put, the Critical Thinking Movement suggests that it is not enough to teach thinking by teaching content. There needs to be something more. Human thought should not be reducible to a bunch of disparate facts. What is often missing from education is an emphasis on the critical capacities that transform unstructured thinking, into rational, reasoned thinking (Lipman, 2003). This ability to not only recall, but actually use information is something that seems necessary if one is to actively participate in the world around them. For this reason, critical thinking has become a cornerstone of modern pedagogy. However, if critical thinking has truly been “assimilated into
all levels of education” (Lipman, 2003, pg. 45), then it becomes necessary to understand the ways in which actual teachers implement and promote critical thinking in their practice.

1.1.0 The Philosophy Class and Critical Thinking

Philosophy forms the backbone to this Critical Thinking Movement in education. At its core, the Critical Thinking Movement aims to promote a higher-quality of thinking in education just as philosophy is a discipline focused on determining what excellence in thinking ought to be (Lipman, 2003). For this researcher, philosophy is the study of not only ideas and arguments, but how one comes to think more effectively. Like critical thinking, philosophy is focused on empowering individuals to actively engage with information and formulate reasoned, rational judgements. The tenants of philosophy and critical thinking go hand-in-hand – critical thinking is a key constituent of philosophical thought. But it then seems strange that, despite critical thinking getting so much attention in educational circles, so little attention has been drawn to how critical thinking is implemented in secondary school philosophy courses – the place where many students have their first contact with philosophical content. As a subject so closely aligned with critical thinking, philosophy courses have the chance to be the ideal locale to teach critical thought. And this was the intent behind Ontario philosophy courses (c.f. Ontario Curriculum, 2013). Frank Cunningham (1991, December 4th), one of the forefathers of the Ontario secondary philosophy courses, saw such courses as an opportunity to engage students in “constructive critical thought.” In the Ontario College of Teachers’ Professionally Speaking, Andrew Wilson (2005, September) – the co-founder of the Ontario Philosophy Teacher’s Association – claims that high school students (especially in their upper years) have reached an age where their capacity for abstract thought, and their ability to critically examine the world have begun to
emerge. Thus, according to Wilson, philosophy courses are the perfect tool for cultivating such blossoming critical capacities, and enabling students to engage with the issues in the world around them. Ethics, metaphysics, politics, being, identity, religion and many more discussions can all stem from a philosophy class. If critical thinking is the basis for informed action, then philosophy acts as the perfect playing field for critical thinking to flourish.

Despite how high school philosophy courses are meant to embody the ideals of the critical thinking movement, little has been written on how critical thinking manifests in the actual philosophy classroom. Inquiry into such questions are of particular importance in Ontario where secondary philosophy courses are a recent addition to high school curriculum. Only through understanding actual classroom practice can one determine whether teachers, and by extension the philosophy courses, are promoting the vision both Cunningham and Wilson had in mind. Inquiry into actual classroom practice will ultimately act as an assessment of whether the vision of Ontario’s secondary school philosophy courses aligns with the reality of the class.

As students enter university, especially students who pursue philosophy, they are expected to have developed the capacity to think critically. As someone who has obtained an undergraduate degree in philosophy, I can state with confidence that students are expected to develop nuanced arguments that can assess, evaluate and cogently support a position in a logical, well-structured, and convincing manner. Secondary school then is the preparatory period, the place where students are meant to develop the basics for their critical thinking (that they will then refine further in a university setting). Determining the ways in which philosophy classrooms are teaching students how to think critically, and how they are trying to develop students’ critical thinking skills is a way to understand the effectiveness of the pedagogy surrounding critical thinking.
Ultimately, through research into this area both teachers and teacher educators can become aware of whether their teaching strategies are actually cultivating the skills needed for future student and teacher success. This will benefit teachers in the sense that it will help them to reflexively identify ways in which their practice could change in order further promote critical thinking in the classroom – critical thinking that will be necessary for future pursuits in philosophy. However, if it is discovered that critical thinking is not actually playing the role that it should in the class, then this may also point towards issues in teacher education. If critical thinking, as Lipman (2003) suggests, has truly permeated all aspects of education, and if teachers are not effectively implementing critical thinking in the classroom, then teacher educators must look towards reassessing their teacher education programs to better prepare teachers to meet the demands of this Critical Thinking Movement.

1.2.0 The Research Problem: Looking at the Reality of the Class

This study will provide insight into the everyday reality of the high school philosophy classroom to better determine the role of critical thinking in such spaces. Borrowing from Lipman (2003) I define critical thinking as “thinking that facilitates judgment” (212). While seemingly simple, this ‘facilitation of judgement’ is, in actuality, a complex process with multiple characteristics. For now, this definition suffices to capture the active, reasoned, rational thinking that characterises critical thought. More thorough discussions of the various characteristics of the critical thinking process (i.e. the process of formulating judgements) will be addressed in Chapter 2. With this definition of critical thinking in mind, my small scale qualitative study describes how two public Ontario high school teachers promote critical thinking within grade twelve philosophy classes. In the process of answering this question, I aim to
understand how these two teachers personally define and conceptualize critical thinking both explicitly and implicitly in their everyday practice. Moreover, I seek to understand what resources (e.g. textbooks) and classroom activities (formative and summative) are used to promote their respective definitions of critical thinking in their philosophy courses. Finally, I seek to understand the barriers and challenges that teachers face while implementing critical thought into everyday class structure.

1.3.0 The Researcher: Philosophy Student and Someone Concerned for Philosophy Students

As a university undergraduate in English and Philosophy, critical thinking has played a large role in my undergraduate education. Essays, tests, assignments, exams: all demanded critical engagement with multiple perspectives, arguments, and ideas. As a first year student coming out of high school, one is quickly introduced to the heightened standards of university: the arguments must be more nuanced, more convincing, more in depth. And developing my critical thinking skills in the university setting was no easy task. Philosophy courses proved quite difficult for this very reason. There was no philosophy program at my high school so coming to university I was totally unfamiliar with the subject – I took it out of sheer curiosity. Luckily, I had excellent English teachers at my high school who helped me to develop my critical thinking capacities. This is not to say that I was a superior thinker; instead, it means that by pure happenstance, I was fortunate enough to have teachers who pushed me to analyze, criticize and argue in a rigorous manner. It was these teachers who prepared me enough so that I would not totally drown in the higher academic expectations at the University of Toronto.
My first year university experience, this constant feeling of trying to stay afloat, is not unique. In the final year of my undergrad, I gained some perspective on how common it is for first year students to struggle with the critical thinking demands of university. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to lead two tutorial sessions for the Introduction to Philosophy course (PHL100). This was a survey course for first year students that covered seven major philosophical thinkers from Socrates to Quine. In the course, students had to write one paper on each of the seven philosophers. This paper was comprised partly of content understanding (describing the theory, knowing how the theory was argued etc.), but mostly of argumentation for or against a position based around said content. This latter element of the essays – this argumentation and engagement with the content – characterises the critical challenge, the higher level learning; the first half of the assignment – the content understanding – is simply the content recall that characterises mere lower-level ‘thinking’ (Bloom, 1956).

After a brief poll of my tutorial, I quickly discovered that some of the students took philosophy in their respective high schools. As a Teaching Assistant, I thought that these students would fair far better on the essays. But I was incorrect. It was clear that almost all of the students were quite good at understanding the content; however, argumentation and critical engagement with the philosophers was a constant, painful difficulty – even for those previously exposed to philosophy. What I discovered was not only that majority of my students did not understand how to effectively argue, analyze or engage with an individual’s position, but that the people who took philosophy did not have any more experience in such areas than those who did not. In essence, their high school philosophy courses focused more on knowledge recall (i.e. knowing what a person said) than engaging with a person’s position in a constructive, critical manner. Recalling Paul’s (1993) disparaging comments about such teaching strategies, it was
clear that this content recall did nothing that had actually helped the students think philosophically.

Having reviewed the philosophy curriculum, and some of the literature surrounding the introduction of the Ontario high school philosophy courses, my experience in these tutorials seemed to reveal an apparent schism between the projected image for the Ontario philosophy courses, and the actuality of said courses. University is an environment that expects critical thinking skills to have been developed, yet the high school philosophy courses of these students – courses supposedly designed to critically engage students with philosophical concepts – played no role in such development. This led me to my present research question: to determine how teachers apply and understand critical thinking in secondary school philosophy class. While critical thinking seems to be one of the fixations of modern educational practice, it is necessary to understand how this concept is actually playing-out in real cases. It is not enough to talk about the need for critical thinking, or to talk about critical thinking in the abstract. It is not enough to simply look at the curriculum and say that philosophy courses are critical thinking courses. To truly uncover the reality of critical thinking in secondary school philosophy, one must place actual classes under scrutiny to see the how the lofty goals of the Critical Thinking Movement manifest in reality.

1.4.0 Limitations:

The first limitation of my research is its narrow scope. I am only drawing data from two Ontario high-school teachers for my data collection. Thus, the claims drawn from my interviews are not necessarily generalizable – the data is rather narrow and selective. This does not mean that my research is without purpose: in a sense, it acts as a sample of how philosophy, as a
relatively new subject in Ontario high schools, is being approached in the high school setting. While the behaviours of my teachers do not be represent some totalizing picture of Ontario high school teachers’ approach to philosophy, it provides some insights into the challenges, successes, and struggles behind implementing critical thinking in this new course. While the educators I interviewed, educators who focus quite actively on critical thought, contradict my suspicions of secondary school philosophy this does not then mean that ‘critical thinking’ is at the forefront of every philosophy class. My research acts as a refreshing diagnosis for philosophy – some teachers truly embrace the more rigorous thought promoted by critical thinking. However, my research must be viewed as a preliminary test, not a final diagnosis of whether critical thinking is effectively manifesting in high school philosophy classroom.

My literature review is limited in the sense that it cannot provide in depth discussions about the need for critical thinking. Such discussions are rich and informative, but they are not directly relevant to my research topic. Fischer (1998), for example, sees the need for critical thinking stemming from an inherent human need to enhance our rationality. In this sense, his approach is almost Aristotelian: humans ought to cultivate their reason, the feature that ostensibly defines us as a species. Other authors like Paul (1993) take a more pragmatic approach: it is only through critical thinking that one will be able to address the increasingly complex problems that are emerging in society. Unfortunately, fully fleshed-out discussions of why education needs critical thinking extend beyond the scope of my paper. For my research, I operate under the assumption that critical thinking, as higher-order thinking, is something desirable in education; since critical thinking is a key constituent of philosophical thought, it ought to be promoted in philosophy courses. Even without fully addressing the reasons why critical thinking is desirable in education, the fact that philosophy courses aim to promote critical
thinking provides enough motivation for my research: to inquire into whether critical thinking is actually being promoted in secondary philosophy classes.

Further limitations stem from the fact that the literature in my Chapter 2 is predominately American. Majority of the foundational Critical Thinking Theorists (e.g. Dewey, Lipman, Ennis, or Paul) are American so this is a natural limitation of the field in which I am working. While I operate under the assumption that the American and Canadian education systems are analogous, it would be beneficial to have more emphasis on the Canadian perspective. In this way, I can assure that the nuances of Canadian educational systems are more embedded into my discussions. As of now, authors such as Case and Gini-Newman help tie in American discussions of critical thinking into the Canadian educational world.

The final major limitation comes from narrowing my discussions to ‘critical’ thinking. As Lipman (2003) identifies, critical thinking is often accompanied by discussions of creative and caring thinking – thinking practices that focus more on developing and implementing new solutions (creative) and thinking in accordance with empathetic, open-minded qualities (caring). Such discussions naturally tie into critical thinking (see Chapter 2); however for the sake of brevity, these two other forms of thought will not be explicitly discussed. Ultimately, to narrow the scope of my research question I focus mainly on critical thinking, and thus the process of thinking. The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this focus.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0.0 Critical Thinking Defined

To begin understanding how teachers promote critical thinking in Ontario high school classes, it is important to develop a coherent definition of critical thought. Only in this way can one accurately categorize the kind of knowledge being promoted in the classroom setting, and moreover, begin to understand whether a teacher’s practice is conducive to promoting such critical thought. While the following discusses critical thinking in general terms, it will provide the theoretical framework from which I will begin to analyze the practices of two Ontario philosophy teachers.

Borrowing from Lipman (2003) I define critical thinking as “thinking that facilitates judgment” (212). But to truly understand this definition, one must first explore the contrast between higher and lower-level thinking. In accordance with Bloom’s taxonomy (1956), critical thinking is ‘higher-order’ thinking. But what separates critical thought, this formation of judgements, from lower-level intellectual activity? As McPeck (1981) notes, thinking (both critically and uncritically) is always about an X (some subject matter). Thus, the distinction between uncritical and critical thought is not in the subject matter per se, but how one thinks about said subject matter – the difference is found in the process. The main separation between this higher and lower-order thinking is the level of activeness or purposefulness present in said thought process. Lower order thinking is characterised by passivity – the mere possession of knowledge (Lipman, 2003). For example, one is exercising lower-order thinking when one is asked to recall the date for when World War II began. Here, the datum (the date of the start of World War II) is not used in any way; instead, it is simply remembered, recalled and regurgitated.
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

Contrast this passive thought to ‘critical thought,’ thought that produces judgements as its outcome. Judgements are present whenever “knowledge is not merely possessed but applied to practice” (Lipman, 2003). The question of ‘When did World War II begin?’ can be the occasion for critical thinking if one argues whether 1939 (when the Allies declared war on Germany) ought to be considered the beginning of the war. Here, one is forced to apply historical knowledge to formulate some sort of judgement. One could cite Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, one could cite definitions of ‘world wars’ to create a case, to judge whether 1939 really should be considered the beginning of the war. Consider this philosophical example: What is utilitarianism? Here, a student could easily regurgitate some textbook definition. Like the date for beginning of World War II, this definition easily becomes a mere memorized piece of data. But consider this question: Should all moral decisions be based on utilitarianism? Here, the thinker is now forced to take that definition of utilitarianism, and apply it to ultimately formulate some judgement. In essence, an answer to this question demands the use of knowledge to formulate an answer. If one was simply to restate the definition of utilitarianism in response to the aforementioned question, they would ultimately fail to address the issue at hand. Possessing knowledge simply is not enough.

As Dewey (1933) notes in his discussions of ‘reflective thought’ (a concept more or less synonymous with critical thinking), critical thinking is concerned with a logical progression and connection of ideas. Thus, unlike the mere passive possession of knowledge, critical thought demands the employment of formal and informal logical principles – in a sense, this is a precondition to critical thought (Dewey, 1933; Paul, 1993; Bailin, 1999; Lipman, 2003). In lower-order thinking, there is no sense of progression – facts are simply stated, or remain stagnant. Moreover, the datum being recalled in lower-level thinking is connected only with that
which it represents. In higher-order thinking, there is a connection of thoughts and ideas that are inherently bound by formal and informal logic. This is what allows one to move from, for example, various historical facts, to a final conclusion about when World War II actually began.

In essence, the usage of logic enables one to extend their thinking beyond mere facts – it is what allows one to apply their knowledge (Lipman, 2003). Here, one moves beyond mere isolated pieces of data and relates them into a coherent logical structure – the premises progress, and lead to the final conclusion. Thus, since judgments rely on the connection of ideas, one must understand logical principles in order to make critical judgements. For example, a critical thinker should know a premise from a conclusion, an inference from an assumption, a necessary vs. a sufficient condition, and validity vs. soundness. While a broad smattering of examples, logical principles formulate the skeleton of critical judgements.¹ But knowledge of logical operations only gives us the structure of critical thought. One is not thinking critically in virtue of knowing what modus ponens is, or what a valid argument consists of. Without further characteristics, the definition of ‘critical thinking’ as ‘thinking that produces judgements in accordance with formal and informal logical principles’ still falls flat.

Before these characteristics can be fully explicated, a key point must be made. To make a judgement one ultimately makes a decision – to propose, reject or support some conclusion. In the above example, one does not make a decision when they simply recite the definition of utilitarianism. One does make a decision when they are asked to determine whether utilitarianism is an appropriate ethical system to use in all moral dilemmas. At first glance then it may seem then that critical thought is simply the process involved in decision making. But to say that any

¹ It is important to note that critical thinking does not demand that the thinker be consciously aware of these logical principles. One can critically think without consciously understanding various aspects of logic (however this will hinder metacognitive self-analysis).
thinking that ends in a decision is properly ‘critical’ would be to undermine the very standard of thought trying to be expressed. To classify decision making as critical thinking would be too broad of a claim; someone who decides to go to a doctor based on the fact that they drew said doctor’s name from a lottery is deciding (they are choosing one doctor over another), but in an uncritical manner (Lipman, 2003). Even logical decisions can still be uncritical: a person who thinks and decides based on perfect modus tollendo ponens is not, by default, thinking critically. This could just be lower order, rote memorization masking itself as an active judgement.

To understand why this would be uncritical thought means that what constitutes a critical judgment must be further qualified. In this sense, critical thinking cannot be based solely in outcomes; it is not only about the production of judgements, but the way in which those judgements are produced. Critical thought possesses attributes. When thought satisfies these attributes, and when a judgement is produced in accordance with these attributes, then the thinking can be properly called ‘critical.’ For Lipman (2003), Critical thinking is not only thinking facilitates judgement, but thinking that facilitates judgment because it:

a) Relies on criteria (critical thinking is ‘criterial’)

b) Relies on metacognitive strategies, and metacognitive ‘self-correction’

c) Remains sensitive to its context

However, these categories need some additions. Since being ‘sensitive to context’ necessarily demands knowledge of the relevant information of a given context (i.e. the factual information of a given situation), I will be extending and connecting Lipman’s discussion of sensitivity to discussions of content, or background knowledge. In section 2.0.3, I will begin by discussing knowledge as a precondition for critical thought in order to buttress Lipman’s (2003) claim and
place it in direct conversation with the convincing emphasis on background knowledge raised in other conceptions of critical thought (Case, 2005; Gini-Newman, n.d.; McPeck, 1981; Hirsch, 1993). But another addition must also be made – one that adds an entirely new category to Lipman’s conception. This addition comes from critical thinking theorists (Dewey, 1933; Paul, 1993; Facione, Carol, Sanchez, Norreeen, Facione and Gainen, 1995; Case, 2005; Gini-Newman, n.d.) who posit that critical thinking also depends on possessing certain dispositions and habits. Thus, in addition critical thinking:

d) Requires the thinker to possess the appropriate dispositions and habits of the mind.

In the following sections I will elaborate on these four significant aspects of critical thinking (a-d). In order to answer the ultimate question of this research – how two high school teachers are promoting critical thinking in the philosophy class – it is of the utmost importance to understand what critical thinking actually is. With muddied definitions of critical thinking, critical thinking is doomed to become another vague educational buzz word only applicable to confused, mislead or detrimental teaching practice. Only through clear definitions can one avoid misrepresenting critical thinking and ultimately confusing it with what Paul (1993) identifies as ‘pseudo-critical thinking.’ Pseudo-critical thinking is “intellectual arrogance masked in delusion or deception” (49). Misrepresenting and misunderstanding critical thinking is particularly dangerous in the philosophy classroom – a classroom meant to be the crucible of critical thinking development. When the philosophy teacher, as a model of thinking in the class fails to realize the flaws within their own forms of thought (i.e. how it fails to be actual critical thought), they simply inhibit the development of good thinking in their students. But misunderstandings of critical thinking are also problematic in a researcher: to misunderstand critical thinking would lead to a misdiagnosis of whether Ontario secondary school philosophy classes are promoting
critical thought in accordance with the ideals of the curriculum. Thus, to have a clear definition in mind is to recognize the qualities and characteristics of good thinking – what one’s thinking should aspire to. Such a conceptual framework provides me with the means to determine whether critical thought is being effectively promoted in the high school philosophy classrooms of my two research participants. To avoid misrepresenting critical thinking as pseudo-critical thinking (or vice-versa), each characteristic of critical thinking will now be elaborated to solidify the critical thinking framework of my research.

2.0.1 Criterial Thinking

Criteria can be defined as “[rules] of principle utilized in making judgements” (Lipman, 2003). Thus, it becomes quite obvious that critical thinking, thinking that concerns making a judgement, will be necessarily criterial. Judgements are not reducible to the statement of preferences, personal opinions or beliefs. Properly considered, judgements are a more substantial product of thought that offers an evaluation, assessment or opinion (Case, 2005). But in order to prevent critical judgements from descending into unsubstantiated preference claims, one must have reasons. Criteria are such reasons. But as Lipman (2003) further qualifies, they are not just any reason, but particularly reliable kinds of reasons. For example, one may use rather shallow criteria to formulate a judgement. Say a child goes to a movie and says that “This movie was terrible! It didn’t have a single dinosaur in it!” one can easily see that the criterion used to make the judgment (‘having dinosaurs in it’) is not the best example of reasons why a movie might be good. To make a more effective judgement, one might appeal to more reliable criteria such as acting, cinematography, message etc. What this example illustrates is that critical thought is a) supported by reasons and b) these reasons must be strong. Without strong criteria, judgements
become weightless and ultimately indefensible on rational grounds. Making a judgement inherently forwards some sort of claim; criteria are what transforms a flimsy claim into one that is “well-founded, structured and reliable” (Lipman, 2003, pg. 212). But as one sees in the Child Movie Critic, the employment of weak criteria makes judgments weak as well. In order to discern ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ criteria, one must also impose criteria for our criteria. Aptly, Lipman (2003) refers to such criteria as ‘meta-criteria.’ Example of meta-criteria might be consistency, coherence, precision, reliability, evidential warrant, relevance or validity (Lipman, 1988). With our child movie critic, using the criteria ‘has dinosaurs’ is not the strongest, most consistent, or the most relevant criteria to evaluate film. Therefore, one could say that it is a ‘weak’ criteria by which to judge the quality of a film. In the end, it is meta-criteria that allow the thinker to select strong criteria that will then lend to the formulation of stronger, better structured judgments.

With this idea of criteria, critical thinking becomes connected with a certain intellectual rigor. It is not only a matter of making judgements, but doing so in a defensible way that can be substantiated by appeal to reasons.

Ultimately, critical thinking is thinking in which the thinker is held ‘cognitively accountable’ (Lipman, 2003). Whether this is students or teachers, a classroom that supports critical thinking will emphasize the usage of criteria to defend, substantiate and support judgements made in either classroom activities (e.g. discussions) or in assessment (e.g. essays). Part of this ‘accountability’ is understanding what constitutes good and bad reasoning – understanding and using meta-criteria to evaluate the quality of justification for one’s own judgements. For both students and teachers, if one is to think critically it will not do to simply make preferential claims; it will not do to simply appeal to emotion or preference. While these responses might indicate some position we wish to defend, they are not themselves defences or
reasons for said position. To make judgements properly ‘critical,’ to make thinking more than mere anemic subjectivism, the thinker must take the onus to substantiate their position by not only providing reasons, but good reasons. It will be interesting to see how Ontario philosophy classes promote, teach and help students develop the capacity for criterial thinking.

2.0.2 Metacognition and Self-Correction

In his characterisation of critical thinking, Paul (1993) states that critical thinking is a unique kind of purposeful thinking. With Lipman’s (2003) emphasis on judgements (i.e. active thinking) it is clear that critical thinking is something deliberate and directed. As such, metacognition becomes an important concept in understanding critical thinking. Essentially, metacognition is “being aware of our thinking […] and then using this awareness to control what we are doing” (Marzano, Brandt, Hughes, Jones, Presseisen, Rankin, and Suhor, 1988).

Metacognition is the means by which thinking becomes purposeful. It is the self-reflexive check on one’s thinking that ensures that the thinking is properly critical. In a sense, it is a self-awareness and self-assessment of our own thought. But how does one appropriately think about thinking? Marzano et. al (1988) identify three key components of metacognitive thinking: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge.

Declarative knowledge is knowledge of the information necessary to make a critical judgement. It is identifying the things one must know in order to perform the thinking task. For example, to analyze a play one must know the plot and the characters.

Procedural knowledge is knowing how to perform the critical thinking task. For example, knowing how to analyze a poem is much different than knowing how to analyze the information in a graph; understanding different thinking strategies and how to use them contributes to
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

Metacognitive awareness. Having a grasp of procedural knowledge is not only knowing the various strategies for reading a poem (this would be declarative knowledge), but knowing how to apply said strategies (e.g. understanding how to analyze imagery, rhyme scheme etc.). One must understand how a thinking task can be performed before one can actually critically engage with said task.

Conditional knowledge refers to knowing why a given strategy works, or why certain pieces of information are important. In essence, conditional knowledge is understanding why one is using the declarative information, or the procedural strategy for a specific task. For example, when faced with a data-set with various percentages, one might choose to represent such data in a pie-chart instead of a bar graph. Using conditional knowledge, the thinker is cognitively aware that, given the data, pie-charts are most effective at representing percentages of a total. What is key here is that the thinker is not only aware of what strategy to use, and how to use it; instead, the thinker understands why this constitutes the most effective approach to the problem.

In combination, Marzano et al. (1988) argue that these three forms of knowledge allow for purposeful thought; understanding these three categories of knowledge allows the thinker to exert metacognitive control over the thinking. Since critical thought is connected with a certain intellectual rigor, this purposefulness separates metacognitively aware thought from the mere wanderings of the mind, or the arbitrary usage of various thinking strategies. It is not difficult to imagine a student performing a task simply because they are told to; fostering metacognition means bringing the students to understand the constituent elements of the thinking process.

This purposefulness also has a pragmatic application: it is what allows the thinker to self-reflexively improve her own thinking. A key component of metacognitive awareness is the evaluation of our own thought. In this respect, it is not only about having declarative, procedural,
and conditional knowledge of our thinking, but assessing whether our knowledge in these areas is actually satisfactory (Marzano et al., 1988). Consider the analysis of a Shakespeare play. A metacognitively aware thinker might ask herself: Do I understand the plot of this character (declarative)? Do I understand how to effectively summarize the main ideas in characters’ speeches (procedural)? Why would summarizing be a better strategy than copying passages verbatim (conditional)? Upon evaluation, this thinker might realize that they need to bolster their declarative knowledge (e.g. look at imagery) to perform this task, or perhaps adjust their strategy. What this example highlights is that the thinking is not an arbitrary exercise – it is a highly aware process that plans, checks and evaluates the thinking taking place. Moreover, it demonstrates that an inherent part of the critical thinking process is the constant need to identify, assess and attempt to strengthen weaknesses within the thinking process. As Lipman (2003) notes, much of our day-to-day thinking remains uncritical. We are swept up in emotional opinions, taken in by unanalyzed first impressions, or we simply move along from association to association with little awareness or concern of whether such thoughts are defensible, valid or even factually accurate. In essence, we are not often metacognitively aware of our thought processes. But in critical thinking this awareness is imperative to ensure that the thinking, being a judgement, remains rigorous and purposeful. Yet metacognition is not reducible to some stagnant checklist; instead, it is has a self-correcting purpose (Lipman, 2003). Metacognition is the means by which we become consciously aware of the deficits in our own thoughts (Fischer, 1998). To be an effective critical thinker is to be able to identify when one’s thinking goes awry (e.g. when one is employing the wrong strategy, or ignorant of important information).

As Paul (1993) notes, the critical thinking process demands that the thinker be actively assessing the thinking along the way. One of the key things that one must be aware of in this
self-corrective thinking is one’s own biases. As Paul (1993) discusses metacognitive strategies, he emphasizes the need to be aware of what he calls neutral and negative biases. A neutral bias is one that is accidental of one’s point of view. For example, an English speaking person might come to a different interpretation of a translated poem than someone who speaks the native language of the poem. A negative bias would be an irrational prejudice that skews one’s thinking. For example, Holocaust deniers have negative biases that dramatically alter their engagement with historical information. Part of metacognition is being aware of these biases and the effects that they have on thinking. Only through understanding these biases can one aim to actively improve his or her thought and redirect it to a more structured and accurate form of reasoning.

At its core, metacognition is a recursive process, one that turns critical capacities in on the thinking itself (Facione, 1995). Often, this metacognitive quest to self-reflexively assess and correct one’s thinking will lead back to an assessment of criteria. This is evidenced in the employment of meta-criteria – a metacognitive check on the effectiveness and quality of the criteria employed. While Lipman (2003) and Marzano et al. (1988) do not discuss criteria in terms of declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge, their arguments work well together. When assessing declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge, the critical thinker will naturally be drawn to assess their criteria, their reasons for their judgement, in terms of effectiveness, purpose, or use. If metacognition is ultimately the means by which one corrects and thus enhances their judgements, then this self-reflexivity must be turned towards criteria – the very foundation of critical judgements. Am I using effective criteria in my judgement? Are my criteria affected by biases? Do I know all the information necessary to create effective
criteria? Such is a small example of the metacognitive checks a critical thinkers could ask themselves that would inevitably lead back to criterial assessment.

Education should not only teach one to manipulate or apply information (Fischer, 1998). In essence, it should not only teach one how to make generic judgements. In addition to this, one must bring the “application processes of thinking to a conscious level” (Fischer, 1998, p. 14). Only then does thinking take on its purposeful, critical nature – a self-reflexive awareness that can turn in on itself and aim to further strengthen and enhance the thinking taking place. This becomes vital in an educational setting because it encourages students to become aware of shortcomings in their own thought. Only with an understanding of such shortcomings can the thought processes of students be improved, and encouraged to grow. But this capacity for self-criticism must be nurtured (Fischer, 1998). How metacognitive reflection is embedded into the classroom structure (to ensure that knowledge is not merely being transmitted, but utilized purposefully, consciously, and ultimately critically) is a key facet of my findings in chapter four.

2.0.3 Background Knowledge and Sensitivity to Context

Both the need for criteria and the knowledge categories necessary for metacognition hint at another characteristic feature of critical thinking: sensitivity to context. But before thinking can be sensitive to its context, the thinker must first possess the appropriate background knowledge. As Bailin, Case, Coombs and Daniels suggest (1999), background knowledge is a precondition to critical thought. From the definition of critical thinking, it is clear that critical thinking (applied thinking) stands in stark antagonism to mere knowledge recall – the possession of inert facts. However, while critical thinking is thinking that facilitates judgement, the
facilitation of judgments depends on one to understand the background knowledge of the area in which they are making a judgement (Bailin, Case, Coombs and Daniels, 1999; Case, 2005; Gini-Newman, n.d.; Hirsch, 1993). Without a grasp of these inert facts, one cannot then construct criterial, metacognitively aware judgements. As McPeck (1981, pg. 9) argues, there is “no set of supervening skills that can replace basic knowledge.” How can one know which criteria to evaluate a film by without any knowledge of film? How could one know which strategies are best for analyzing a novel if they have no grasp of literary studies? Hirsch (1993), in his discussions of cultural literacy, describes background knowledge as the best route to deeper knowledge. In essence, it is mastery of what Hirsch (1993, p. xv) calls “shallow” facts that leads to “true education” – the ability to read, learn and ultimately think more effectively.

Critical thinking demands certain skills. It is clear that critical thinkers must be able to create reliable criteria and be adept at metacognition. But in order to perform these skills, one must naturally be versed in more specific sets of mechanical thinking skills. While it would be impossible to create an exhaustive list of such specific thinking skills, it is assumed that to make judgements (especially criterial, metacognitively aware judgments) one must be able to infer, predict, interpret, analyze, evaluate (i.e. perform thinking operations that apply information). But critical thinking skills vary greatly depending on the context in which they are employed (Bailin et al., 1999). Predicting the tragic trajectory of a character in a novel is a vastly different form of prediction than predicting outcomes based on quantitative graphs. In this sense, critical thought and the skills that accompany it will ultimately be governed, in part, by the background knowledge or the subject area that one is working in. Without knowledge of tragedy or graphs, one will be wholly incapable of making predictions or interpreting such material. The previous discussions emphasize how critical thinking skills can be used in the formation of judgements–
to interpret, create, and assess criteria, for example. But what needs to be noted is that these skills are not necessarily generic, nor generalizable; instead, they are dependent on background knowledge in order to effectively address the critical thinking task at hand (Bailin, 1999). In essence, one cannot formulate accurate or effective judgements when operating in a vacuum of knowledge and content. As Case (2005) suggests, “many of us are incapable of thinking critically on a number of topics,” and it is not a lack of thinking skills that prevents us from critically thinking, but the fact that we are ignorant in many matters. Consider me for a moment. I am an English-Philosophy major; as such I would be wholly incapable of judging the most efficient way to launch a satellite into orbit. I simply lack the background-knowledge to make good judgments in said area – I cannot formulate effective criteria of what makes a successful launch, and I cannot even assess where my thinking could improve because the topic is simply inaccessible. Does this mean that I am incapable of interpreting, analyzing, or synthesizing information? Of course not: English, like astrophysics, demands that one be proficient in such generic thinking skills. The issue is not the skills themselves, but the context in which they are applied.

Thus, McPeck (1981) extends this the term ‘background knowledge’ to include more than just facts: to have a grasp of background knowledge one must also be aware of domain-specific skills. For example, if one is to think about history one needs both the knowledge and skills of the historian; to think about science, one needs the knowledge and skills of a scientist. Returning to my satellite-launching example, it is clear that the issue is not only a lack of factual information about satellites and astrophysics. This example reveals that there is more to being an astrophysicist than possessing a certain category of factual information; instead, there is a methodology, a logic, a way to think astrophysics that some people (like myself) simply lack.
This complicates the picture of critical thinking and its relation to background knowledge. It is not about simply building criteria, being self-correcting (metacognition) and then acquiring factual background knowledge; instead, the standards that guide these three operations can be domain specific (McPeck, 1981). For example, as a historian there are certain standards that dictate what counts as good history – as good historical thought. For an astrophysicist, there is a methodology that dictates what good astrophysics is. For philosophy, there is a vast difference between good and bad argumentation. To think critically about any field, one must get inside such a domain. The knowledge of how to do ‘good X’ (where X represents the field one is operating in) would thus be a part of the general ‘background knowledge’ necessary to critically think about said field. Therefore, in a classroom setting, one does not only have the task of teaching certain information in order to lay the foundation of critical thought; instead, one must also teach the appropriate way to think for the field that the students (the thinkers) are going to be working in.

Being ignorant to the context and content knowledge leaves one incapable of applying these general thinking skills in a way that is applicable, or successful for the critical task at hand. But while critical thinking necessarily demands domain-specific background knowledge, one must also note that this does not mean that every critical thinking task can or ought to be discretely divided amongst disciplines. In this way, I depart from McPeck’s strict emphasis on background content. A consequence of McPeck’s (1981) view is that critical thinking becomes atomistic – everything divides neatly into domain-specific categories. Thus, there are always ‘specialists’ equipped for a certain critical thinking task. But this seems too simplistic, and as Paul (1993) notes it seems to flagrantly disregard questions that demand an interdisciplinary
dialectic: questions that, at their core, have no recourse to a single knowledge domain, or set of domain-specific skills. Thus, I wish to draw attention to the ‘global’ thinking described in Paul (1993) – thinking that Paul posits as a counter to McPeck’s (1981) atomism. While I believe that domain-specific content and skills are necessary for certain questions (e.g. to launch a satellite in space, one is going to need to know some astrophysics, or some relatable field), I also think that certain questions do not neatly fit into the specialized thinking of any single domain. Paul (1993) describes such questions as multi-categorical – these are the questions that demand ‘global’ critical thinking. For example, many social, world or philosophical problems fit into this category. Consider this question: what is the best way to solve world hunger? Such a question does not fit into any one specific knowledge domain; one could approach such a question from the perspective of a scientist, a politician, a historian, a philosopher, a post-modernist author. These multitudinous perspectives all offer answers to this one question; unlike what McPeck (1981) implies in his constant emphasis on domain specific skills and content, not all questions will fit neatly within such categories. Thus, while background knowledge and domain-specific knowledge is important and sometimes necessary, one needs to make note of the global issues that necessarily cut across categories. Such questions demand interdisciplinary discussion for no single set of discipline specific skills can save the day from such issues (Paul, 1993).

But even with Paul’s (1993) counter to McPeck, I still think both theorists make substantial claims that solidify the picture of critical thinking. All questions demand background knowledge. Sometimes, this background knowledge will be highly specialized; and sometimes, one must adopt a more global, interdisciplinary approach to critical thinking. Regardless, this discussion simply substantiates the fact the critical thinking is thus sensitive to context – a fact that Lipman, (1988, 2003) sees as imperative to critical thought. For Lipman (2003) though,
sensitivity to context does not simply mean that one is well versed in the subject area they are thinking in; instead, it requires overarching thinking skills that monitor and mediate the way the thinker approaches the information before them. If background knowledge exists as a precondition for critical thought, sensitivity to context is the means by which one navigates this background knowledge in a conscious, purposeful way. Lipman’s discussions of sensitivity help place McPeck’s atomism in conversation with Paul’s globalism. For example, Lipman (2003) demands sensitivity to ‘overall configurations:’ the particularities and uniqueness of a given situation. This means that some situations (such as the need to launch a satellite) may naturally focus one’s thinking within a specific knowledge domain; however, in another context (such as social issues like world hunger) one must naturally adjust their thinking – broaden their thinking to approach from a more global perspective. Lipman’s call for sensitivity to context thus demonstrates the thinkers need to actively assess the critical thinking task at hand to ultimately understand how best to apply their background knowledge (and by extension, their criteria and their metacognitive strategies). Understanding when evidence is atypical, understanding exceptional or irregular circumstances (two more ways that Lipman (2003) suggests one can be sensitive to context) naturally shape the way in which our thinking occurs. In this sense, Lipman’s sensitivity to context forces one to assess and actively consider how to use background knowledge to ensure that the nuances of particular situations, whether they resemble McPeck or Paul’s thinking, are not lost.

With the above attributes in mind, critical thinking is clearly a process. Whether it is the ability to create logical reasons in support of an argument, the ability to self-reflexively check data for reliability, or actively remain sensitive to the context, critical thinking employs certain skills in order to be successful. But these sets of skills ultimately enable one to actively utilize
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

background knowledge – pieces of data that are the subjects of lower-order information recall – in the formation of judgements. Critical thinking is always active. It is “a process used to deal with some content” (Ennis and Norris, 1989, pg. 5). In this sense, there is an interplay between critical thinking skills, and the subject of critical thought. Critical thought cannot be thought of as a set of skills disconnected from content or background knowledge; the separation of content knowledge and critical thinking skills, the skills necessary to make a judgement, is fraught with difficulty (Bailin et al., 1999). Thus, while critical thinking positions itself in antagonism to traditions that emphasize the need for content and facts, it too depends on content knowledge. However, this does not mean that critical thinking must recourse back to the rote memorization that it tries to depart from. Instead of leaving background knowledge as stagnant pieces of datum, critical thinking attempts to motivate these pieces of data towards a more applied purpose – the formation of judgments.

Thus, part of promoting critical thinking in the class is achieving the balance between addressing the necessary background information for critical thinking in philosophy, while allowing students the chance to apply it. To only complicate this balance further, students must exercise sensitivity to the contexts in which they are thinking. While there are domain-specific skills relevant to good philosophy (strong argumentation, inference, usage of logic, validity, soundness etc.), philosophical questions often demand interpretation from multiple disciplines. When faced with questions such as ‘What is justice?’ such discussions may demand, for example, historical or political lenses – some perspective outside of a strictly ‘philosophical’ context. Navigating the balance between domain-specific ‘philosophy skills,’ global thinking, and providing the knowledge basis for critical thinking will provide constant challenges for philosophy teachers. How teachers conduct their class such that the delivery of background
knowledge does not descend into lower-order thinking – the mere digestion of inert facts – is a major focus of the discussions in chapter four.

2.0.4 Habits of Mind: The Characteristic Qualities of the Critical Thinker

What must one be like to be a good thinker? The above discussions aptly describe what one must do to be a good critical thinker, but what is the thinker like as a person? Many critical thinking theorists (e.g. Paul, 2003; Case, 2005; Gini-Newman, n.d.; Dewey, 1933; Facione, 1995) draw attention to the personal qualities or attributes of a good thinker. Facione (1995) suggests that there “is a characterological profile, a constellation of attitudes, a set of intellectual virtues, or, if you will, a group of habits of mind which we refer to as the overall disposition to think critically” (pg. 1). In essence, Facione (1995) posits that without such attitudes, one cannot think critically. It is this “dispositional dimension” (Facione, 1995) that must accompany the cognitive abilities discussed in the previous sections; these dispositions are what inclines the thinker to actively use their critical capacities, to formulate well-founded judgements, to verse oneself in background knowledge, to improve and analyze their own thinking. It is significant then that theorists like Facione (1995), Case (2005) and Gini-Newman (n.d.) call such dispositions ‘habits of the mind.’ The term ‘habit’ connotes that such dispositions are regular, a part of typical practice – they are routine to critical thinking.

But what kind of attitudes contribute to good critical thinking? Broadly speaking, it is the attitudes which would allow one to think critically in the aforementioned ways (sections 2.0.1 – 2.0.3). As Dewey (1933) states, these dispositions contribute to the readiness needed for critical thinking. One of the key characteristics of good critical thinking is open-mindedness (Paul,
Such a trait cuts across all the aforementioned critical thinking ‘skills:’ one must be open-minded to establish accurate and relevant criteria, to metacognitively assess one’s thinking and errors, to analyze multiple perspectives and implications, to assess the kinds of background knowledge needed to answer a problem, to remain sensitive to nuanced contexts. Open-mindedness thus becomes a staple disposition: something that good critical thinkers should not lack. But there are many traits that contribute to good thinking – too many to exhaustively list here. For example, the kind of person who will carefully craft and consider criteria is prudent in their judgement, deliberate instead of careless; the kind of person who will engage in metacognitive self-analysis is honest about personal bias, fair-minded in their evaluations, willing to reconsider (Facione, 1995). While only select examples, the attitudes a person possesses directly influences their ability to engage in the kind of cognitive activity elucidated in the aforementioned sections. As such, one must not only become versed in these types of cognitive activities, but in developing the correct habits of the mind. Returning to Marzano et al.’s (1988) discussions of metacognition, they posit that another aspect of metacognition is managing one’s personal attitudes. Metacognition, when correctly exercised, concerns both knowledge and control of the personal self. In this sense, while good attitudes are needed to aptly perform metacognitive self-analysis, one can actively reflect on their own attitudes to try and cultivate appropriate habits of mind.

If it is certain attitudes that allow a person to engage in critical thinking, then an individual’s attitudes truly are “key constituents of good critical thinking” (Case, 2005, pg.6). This seems intuitive to a certain extent. When one thinks of any example of a good thinker, there are certain personal qualities attached to their character (Case, 2005). To borrow Case’s (2005) example, consider Holocaust Deniers. Such people may be well-versed in history, they may be
incredibly intelligent, and they may employ the use logic, criteria and strong, persuasive argumentation. But for some reason, one would not consider such Holocaust Deniers good thinkers. The issue with the Deniers’ thinking lies in their attitudes – their lack of openness to ideas and evidence, or their inability to demonstrate fair-mindedness. No matter what raw thinking ‘skills’ they possess, it cannot overcome their narrow prejudicial thinking. Thus, their thinking is crippled. But one need not look to the Holocaust Denier to see examples of poor thinking attitudes – many of us are exposed to poor reasoning in our day-to-day lives. The person who jumps to conclusions without considering the evidence (lacking sensitivity to context), the person who argues purely from emotion (instead of appropriate criteria): all these people lack certain attitudes (e.g. care, deliberateness) that aid in characterising good thinking.

Thus, the cultivation of good habits of the mind becomes imperative in education. Dewey (1933) calls on education to “weave” the impersonal abstract principles of critical thought and logic with the “moral qualities of one’s character” (34). He claims that no separation can, and ought to be made between these areas. In the philosophy classes, teachers cannot only teach the skills and process of philosophical thinking; a teacher must also encourage the growth of certain personal attributes to foster thinking that is truly critical. A classroom that actively encourages such growth will foster better critical thinkers. But this is not to advocate for some fluffy moral education. It is to advocate for a classroom environment that inadvertently fosters positive characteristics within the students. In the following sections, I will be looking at what such a class would look like.
2.1.0 The Two Paradigms of Education: The Contexts of Uncritical and Critical Thought

The previous sections focus on the attributes of critical thinking – defining it as a framework for my research. Critical thinking is the thinking done by a thinker with the appropriate habits of mind; it is thinking that formulates criterial, metacognitively aware, sensitive judgments that are rooted in a strong understanding of relevant background knowledge. But while such a definition is useful, it will not fully answer my research question. To truly determine the ways in which critical thinking is being promoted in the high school philosophy classroom, one must not only look at the kind of thinking, but the teacher’s approach to teaching thinking. In this section, I will be exploring what Lipman (2003) calls two ‘educational paradigms.’ The Standard Paradigm characterises an approach that emphasizes uncritical thought while the Reflective Paradigm is characterised by an environment which is meant to stimulate a student’s critical capacities. When looking towards answering my research question, understanding the standard paradigm and its major features will be crucial when it comes to determining whether the philosophy classes of my study are actually promoting critical thinking. One must first understand what both uncritical and critical environments looks like before one can determine whether actual classrooms are ‘critical’ in nature. Returning to Paul (1993) idea of pseudo-critical thinking, establishing clear criteria of a ‘critical classroom’ will allow me to avoid category mistakes – misidentifying non-critical environments as critical thinking classrooms.

2.1.1 The Standard Paradigm

According to Lipman (2003) there are two major, contradictory learning paradigms. The ‘standard paradigm’ dominates much of education and it stands in direct antagonism to the ‘reflective paradigm’ that is constituted of critical thinking. But before one comes to understand
critical thinking and its place within the classroom, one must first see its counterpart, and the problems that arise from it. The ‘standard paradigm’ sees education and knowledge in the following way:

1. Education consists in the transmission of knowledge from those who know (i.e. teachers) to those who don’t know (i.e. the students)

2. Knowledge is about the world, and our knowledge of the world is unambiguous, unequivocal and unmysterious

3. Knowledge is distributed among disciplines that are nonoverlapping and together are exhaustive of the world to be known.

4. The teacher plays an authoritative role in the educational process, for only if teachers know can students learn what they know

5. Students acquire knowledge by absorbing information. According to this, a mind stocked full of data and specifics is a well-educated mind (Lipman, 2003, pg. 18).

The standard paradigm thus characterises an educational model that relies on knowledge to be, or be perceived to be, stable, unchanging and unyielding. In reference to 2, knowledge is described as “unambiguous, unequivocal and unmysterious,” that is, knowledge is not something to be questioned or doubted; instead, it is something to merely be remembered since the facts are stagnant and stable. Reconsider this previous example: in a history class, the teacher tells students that World War II started in 1939 when Britain, France and Canada (one week later) declared war on Hitler’s Germany. In the standard paradigm, this piece of data is unquestionable – students hear it from their teacher and it becomes but another ‘fact’ that has been transmitted from the knower (the teacher) to the one’s seeking to know (the students). Students are not called
to question or engage with this data. And importantly, they are not called to relate prior knowledge, or interdisciplinary knowledge to the material they are presented with in the classroom (as 3 suggests). With regards to 2 and 4, the teachers’ knowledge is not questioned, or even the subject of questioning; teachers represent an authority that acts as the students’ means to ‘knowing’ the ‘facts’ about a world composed of stable, knowable pieces of data. With regards to 5, it becomes clear that this standard paradigm is characterised by a passivity – the absorption of information. This emphasis on ‘absorption of information’ is often described as a didactic, sage-on-the-stage educational style where teachers teach by spewing information to the class, and student success often boils down to rote memorization of mounds of information (Paul, 1993, pg. 51; Gini-Newman and Gini-Newman, 2014, pg.2). In essence, when a ‘standard paradigm’ is invoked throughout the rest of this paper, I will presume that it encapsulates these aforementioned characteristics.

Lipman (2003) provides scathing review of such ‘standard teaching practice;’ he states that students are sent to school to learn, but the way in which they are taught ultimately keeps them from actually thinking. But how can learning, in the didactic style described in Lipman’s standard paradigm, actually prevent students from thinking? With reference to our previous discussions of critical thinking the answer should not be all that surprising. Again, one simply has to look at the kind of thinking that the standard paradigm promotes. According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, the standard paradigm’s emphasis on rote memorization and passivity characterises the lowest form of thinking: something that Bloom (1994) believes should be guarded against in the educational setting. Paul (1993) believes that this standard paradigm has put education “in big trouble” – it has crippled the ability of graduates to “read, write and think with a minimal level of […] critical or analytic exactitude” (363).
2.1.2 The Reflective Paradigm

With the standard paradigm in mind, an obvious question arises: how do we encourage higher forms of thinking in the classroom? Lipman (2003, pg. 19) sets the foundation:

1. Education is the outcome of participation in a teacher-guided community of inquiry, among whose goals are the achievement of understanding and good judgement
2. Students are stirred to think about the world when our knowledge of it is revealed to them to be ambiguous, equivocal and mysterious
3. The disciplines in which inquiry occurs are assumed to be neither nonoverlapping nor exhaustive; hence their relationships to their subject matter quite problematic.
4. The teachers’ stance is fallibalistic rather than authoritative.

Initially, this looks like a mere contrast to the standard paradigm. But shifting the paradigm is no simple task. To understand the reflective paradigm, one must begin to break-down 1-4 in terms of their constituent claims. I will begin by discussing claims 2-3 since these claims, at their core, deal with the problematizing of classroom content. Following this, I will address 1 and 4 since both of these section concern the overarching classroom structure in critical thinking classrooms – the ‘Community of Inquiry’ and the role of the teacher within such a community. Throughout these discussions I will be referring to the standard paradigm to illustrate where the teaching methods of this standard paradigm go awry. With the discussion of the reflective paradigm, I am hoping to establish a general picture of the critical thinking classroom. While I am painting in broad strokes at the moment, the specific data that comes from my research will provide interesting juxtapositions and comparisons to this theoretical classroom. In the end, I am hoping to see the ways in which teachers both align, and depart from this theoretical model.
2.1.3 Problematizing Content as the First Step towards Critical Thinking

Criteria 2 and 3 of Lipman’s ‘reflective paradigm’ concern problematizing content. If one recalls the standard paradigm, knowledge is unequivocal, unmysterious and by extension, unproblematic (c.f. criteria 2). The Reflective paradigm, in contrast, attempts to make the world a more problematic place. Dewey (1933, pg. 15) states that “appeals to a child (or to a grown-up) to think, irrespective […] of some difficulty that troubles him and disturbs his equilibrium, are as futile as advice to life himself by his boot-straps.” For thinking to occur, someone must be pushed, disturbed, intrigued by a difficulty. Without some intellectual obstacle, the mind can never perform the sort of purposeful thought characteristic of critical thinking. Thus problem solving becomes the motivation for critical thinking. Problems force the thinker to formulate structured judgements; thus, the thinking is not the mere wanderings of the mind, but intentional deliberations pushed onwards by the desire to posit a solution. As Case (2005, pg. 14) says, “if a situation is not problematic (i.e., there is only one plausible option or a correct answer is obvious) then it does not call for critical thinking.” If knowledge is ‘unequivocal’ and ‘unmysterious,’ then no real problems can ever emerge. Questions in classrooms that are simply based on information recall never problematize the content. While schools may be getting students to ‘think’, the standard paradigm is only encouraging intellectual activity at the lowest level. The reflective paradigm attempts to make knowledge something to be explored, thought about and engaged with; knowledge provides the springboard from which students can then delve into critically engaged tasks.

2 It is worth noting that the reflective paradigm offers students the opportunity to engage in the praxis outlined in Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1997). In a paradigm that problematizes previously accepted knowledge, students are offered the chance to think critically about preconceived beliefs, systems of power and oppression, and the naturalized discourses that surround them. This anti-oppressive education lens is one that goes beyond the scope of my paper. However, it is worth mentioning the connection to Freire in order to demonstrate the power of a reflective paradigm, and the danger of a standard paradigm (similar to Freire’s ‘banking model’) that encourages passive acceptance.
Consider the following task: students are asked to find out the definition of ‘democracy.’ Such a question fits directly into the Standard Paradigm: there is a single solution that can be looked-up, memorized and used to answer the question. But imagine if the teacher asked the students to judge whether Plato paints an accurate picture of Democracy in *The Republic*. Here, there is not only one answer: the knowledge, in accordance with Lipman’s reflective paradigm, is more ambiguous. An answer to this question ultimately depends on the students’ construction of an argument to support their understandings of both Plato’s conception, and their own conception of democracy. Here, students are called to create criteria. Before they can answer this question they must formulate criteria for what constitutes democracy, and reasons why Plato either accurately or inaccurately portrays democracy. Moreover, students are invited to remain cognizant of their own opinions, their justifications and their thinking process as they seek an answer. Such a question also demands an understanding of the philosophical content (calling the students to be sensitive to context and to understand the relevant background knowledge). An effective answer depends on students formulating a judgment and, with the encouragement of the teacher, learning more about both Plato’s philosophy and present day democracy. Unlike the first question (What is the definition of democracy?), these discussions of politics and philosophy are more than a mere amalgamation of dry facts and definitions; instead, they provide a chance to actively think about the subject matter. Such an example is but one of the many ways that one could problematize the content of a philosophy class. As Lipman (2003) states, “For there to be inquiry, there must be some doubt that all is well, some recognition that one’s situation contains

---

3 It is important to note that the content question ‘What is democracy?’ is not inherently bad. The problem arises when these content recall questions dominate the classroom space. Such a question could scaffold and lead to more critical discussions. Again, the question becomes problematic when it does not act as a stepping stone to more critical inquiries.
troubling difficulties and is somehow problematic” (94). But problematizing content does not simply mean asking more questions. Problematizing content is asking the kinds of questions that allow for knowledge to exist in Lipman’s ambiguous, equivocal, mysterious state.

Knowledge can also be problematized by dissolving the often too rigid boundaries that exist between disciplines. In the standard paradigm, knowledge is divided into non-overlapping categories (c.f. criterion 3). In contrast, the reflective paradigm recognizes and encourages interdisciplinary discussions if they are relevant to the issue at hand. If one recalls Paul’s (1993) global thinking (c.f. 2.0.3 and discussions of background knowledge), it is easy to see how the critical thinker cannot necessarily divide the world into divisible, discrete disciplines. Part of formulating a judgment is assessing multiple viewpoints, and considering alternatives (i.e. metacognitive procedural knowledge, thinking how to approach a problem). Interdisciplinary thought is not only desirable, but necessary for certain issues if one is to remain sensitive to the context in which their judgement occurs. When thinking about, for example, global economic crises (e.g. solutions to poverty), historical, political, scientific, sociological, philosophical and many other types of thought become relevant towards positing judgements on the issue. Such interdisciplinary knowledge is the means by which one understand the rich, nuanced context that this problem is a part of. Unlike the standard paradigm, the reflective paradigm attempts to encourage such thought by posing meaningful problems that not only get students to recall information, but apply information from the class, other classes, and other areas of knowledge.

While not every critical thinking problem is interdisciplinary by nature, critical thinking inevitably defies stable categories of knowledge – answers are not necessarily bound by subjects, or the class’ ‘topic of the day.’
As Dewey (1933) notes, “In the desire for accuracy in remembering details, large and comprehensive views are shut out” (53). The reflective paradigm attempts to move away from being bogged down in the details; this is not to say that content becomes unimportant – recall that critical thought is based in being versed in background knowledge. What the reflective paradigm calls for is the problematization of content so that it creates an opportunity for thought, for more comprehensive analysis that moves beyond mere information recall and clearly delineated disciplines. Only when students are given the opportunity to make judgements can they make judgements. One cannot blame graduates for lacking critical thinking abilities if said abilities are not nurtured within the classroom. Critical thinking is composed of skills and habits. But the only way to develop such skills and habits is exposure, practice and ultimately an environment where one is encouraged to formulate judgements on meaningful problems. Dewey (1933) suggests that it is all too often the case that teachers make students work from the same textbook; it is all too often that classes must remain ‘on topic’ to the point where spontaneity, novelty, and variety fall by the wayside. While a comment stated in 1933, the issue still arises in educational settings that encourage a ‘standard’ approach. Problematizing knowledge gives students a vested interest in the content – it gives the whole process of answering the question vested meaning for the thinker (Gini-Newman, n.d.). The world is not merely some knowable place to be memorized, but an interactive structure of overlapping, mysterious information that begs to be considered.

In the world of philosophy, problems are not hard to locate. Philosophy is filled with more questions than answers and as such, it provides the ideal forum for students to apply the knowledge that they learn – to think about important issues and engage with powerful ideas that have had huge historical, and modern day impacts. The philosophy class cannot, and should not,
become a place where information recall dominates. One should not simply recall what dualism is, but judge whether such a metaphysical position is defensible in our present day context; students should not only learn what Plato says about justice, but deliberate over the issues that come along with adopting such a view. The problematization of content is, in the end, a constituent element of philosophical thought. But a question remains: which paradigm are Ontario secondary philosophy falling under? My research is an attempt to discover an initial answer to this question and ultimately determine whether our curriculum goals of promoting critical thinking are actually coming into fruition.

2.1.4 The Community of Inquiry

Problematicizing content is not enough to create a reflective, critical thinking classroom. Thus far, these discussions and characteristics revolve around a single thinker. As the thinker, one is faced with a problem that demands a judgment. One must develop criteria, metacognitively assess one’s thinking, remain sensitive to context, and monitor one’s own habits of the mind when formulating a response to said problem. But such activity is painfully isolated. Naturally, one is in a community within the educational setting – the classroom is a group of thinkers. Lipman (2003) identifies one of the prominent features of the reflective paradigm as a ‘Community of Inquiry” (CI). Essentially, this is the transformation of a classroom into a collective working towards critical thinking. While Lipman’s discussions of the CI revolve around young children (since he is the founder of the Philosophy for Children program, and CI is one of its most prominent tenants), his discussions are applicable to the secondary school setting. Thus, I will be discussing Lipman’s Community of Inquiry in part while avoiding aspects that are specific to his proposed Philosophy of Children curriculum (a topic beyond the scope of this
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

paper). To this end, I will be drawing from the methodology of CI and its focus on collaborative critical thinking.

Philosophy has always had an interlocutive dimension – philosophy is a constant conversation between thinkers via spoken word, texts or other forums (Kennedy, 2009). The CI thrives from this interlocution by encouraging dialogue amongst the thinkers (students and teacher) in the classroom setting. The CI is a collective discussion in which the issues present in the class are debated, discussed and argued. As Lipman (2003) states, discussions in a CI provide “a setting for the negotiation of understandings, for deliberations about reasons and options, for the examination of interpretations” (100). Thus, the discussions within Community of Inquiry are not to be confused with frivolous conversation – students are not merely stating preferential opinions, or haphazard comments. As Lipman (2003) suggests, the dialogue within the community is one inherently “disciplined by logic” (92). In order to discuss, debate, assess and critique thought one must be able to reason, infer, identify assumptions, apply evidence, relate and identify connections amongst ideas, identify inferences, assess validity etc. Without both formal and informal logic forming the background to this dialogue, the ‘community of inquiry’ becomes a disconnected conversation that does not reflect the rigorous critical thinking process described in sections 2.0.0-2.0.4. Just as logic underpins one’s ability to formulate judgements, it too underpins the collaboration in the community of inquiry.

Essentially, CI is the locale of ‘shared cognition’ where the critical thinking process is externalized amongst peer-to-peer dialogues. Throughout the aforementioned discussions of critical thinking, it has become clear that there is a process to critical thinking, to formulating judgements. While such a process is inextricably tied to individual thinkers, the community of inquiry allows for some of the critical thinking leg work to be distributed amongst the collective.
For example, if one is asking the question “What is beauty?” one person could provide a response, another could question the person’s reasoning (thus playing the part of metacognition), another person could inquire about context, about information being absent (background knowledge and sensitivity to context) while still another could bring in other considerations previously not thought of (thus starting the process again). Here we see that the individual constituents of critical thinking are not only present in the thinkers themselves, but in the working body of the community itself.

To encourage such discussions, the teacher plays an imperative role. In order for critical thinking to play-out in the dialogue of classmates, the teacher must firstly encourage the appropriate setting: one in which students are respectful towards others, where students feel safe to discuss and debate, where everyone feels included (Lipman, 2003). While idealistic, setting such an environment avoids rigorous dialogue descending into unconstructive thought (e.g. a place where students freely vent personal biases). A teacher who allows such an environment undermines critical thinking by enabling less rigorous forms of thought to dominate the class; instead, when properly constructed, the classroom can become an open forum where students can practice their reasoning and thinking skills as a collective. Reconsider the above question: What is beauty? As students work through arguments and opinions, the class can work through the steps of critical thinking – they could collectively establish criteria, collectively analyze metacognitive strategies to solve the problem, discuss the relevant background information and correct the misunderstandings of those around them. With the appropriate environment, even the students’ habits of mind are actively being developed throughout this process. By fostering
CI, the critical thinking procedures that ought to be taking place in each of the students is modelled. Ideally, each students’ contributions affirms this critical thinking process while also developing their thinking skills on a personal level.

Beyond maintaining an appropriate environment, the teacher must perform another important task: ceding some of their authoritative knowledge. In other words, teachers cannot position themselves as the sole arbiters of knowledge – as the end solution to all problems in the class – if CI is to truly come into fruition. Thus, as Lipman suggests in criterion 4, the teacher must then occupy a fallible position. Within CI, the teacher cannot have all the answers, or be viewed as the one who will provide the final, stable answer. Such an authoritative stance undermines the task set before the students: to practice constructing criterial, metacognitive, contextually sensitive answers. Why would students feel compelled to engage in such critically aware dialogues if their answers become irrelevant to the ‘final solution’ that the teacher will inevitably provide? This is not to say that the teacher should not have an answer; instead, the teacher becomes another voice in the dialogue that, through their inevitably superior knowledge, can guide students along their process of inquiry. It can be a voice that draws attention to certain details, a voice that notices an assumption that slipped past, or a voice that reassesses criteria to move the students along in the right direction when they inevitably get off track. The teacher being fallible does not mean that the students rule; instead, it implies that the teacher allow for the students to think for themselves while still providing the necessary guidance that the classroom needs to develop. But in order to become fallible, the teacher must be willing to concede the fact that answers are not simply things to be known. Answers are not an end-point: they are organic structures constantly being reassessed, re-examined and repurposed. One must
overthrow the standard paradigm’s obsession with stability in order to give the students engaging problems to think through.

In the classroom, encouraging a community of inquiry is to enforce the process of critical thinking on a macro level. The class should not only attempt to orient students to think critically, to help them formulate reasoned judgements, but to give this process expression in a communal dialogue. For philosophy classes, this becomes imperative. From Socrates in Ancient Greece, to modern day philosophers, philosophy has always been a tradition based in a conversation between ideas. The philosophy class, just in virtue of the topic itself, therefore offers the unique opportunity to dialectically engage with deep, problematic issues that beg critical consideration in a dialogic environment. To reduce philosophy to a set of memorisable facts is to strip philosophy of its essence – the need to constantly question, wonder and posit new ideas with others. To build a philosophy class that does not promote critical thinking is to rob students of the opportunity to develop the skills that are required in philosophical thought. When looking towards the ways in which critical thinking is promoted in the class, I not only look at the teacher’s ability to encourage critical thinking within the individual students, but within the collective group as well. But again, this means looking at more than just the students: how the teacher positions his or herself within the class also becomes important to my findings in Chapter 4.

This is not to say that a classroom that fails to perfectly mimic Lipman’s idealistic CI fails to promote critical thinking. Instead, this ideal represents the critical thinking process perfectly manifested in a group setting. While a class of twenty students engaged in constant deep critical discussion is rare, trying to create this atmosphere is not something to shy away from. No one expects a perfect Community of Inquiry; instead, what is important is fostering an
environment where students are able to collectively, and individually, develop their critical thinking skills. A teacher who can utilize the characteristics of CI will ultimately establish a strong environment where critical thinkers, and their thinking, will flourish. And as students critical thinking develops, their ability to engage with philosophy – a discipline based in rigorous thought and argumentation – will only improve as well.

2.2.0 Concluding Remarks

With the above framework established I will be looking to understand how two Ontario high school teachers promote critical thinking in the classroom. With a fleshed-out the definition of critical thinking, as well as the contrast between uncritical and critical classes, I am now in a position to begin assessing how critical thinking manifests in the classroom. Critical thinking is a core constituent of philosophy and philosophical thought – without effective critical thinking abilities, students cannot effectively engage in this discipline. Thus, it is time that we asked ourselves a question: are philosophy classes creating the conditions for critical thinking, or is the thinking in philosophy classes in critical condition? The following chapter outlines the methodology for his study before I delve into my rich findings for this question.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0.0 Preamble

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology that I implemented in my study of critical thinking in Ontario high school philosophy classrooms. I first describe my general research approach, briefly touching on the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and then extend discussions into my use of qualitative research. I then elaborate on my data-collection process and instruments. Here, I offer insights into my use of convenience sampling and the strategies that I implemented to find suitable participants for this particular study. By offering criteria for participant selection, I clearly delineate how I chose my participants and why such criteria were necessary for my study. Moreover, I discuss my data-analysis procedure while also reviewing the potential ethical issues within my research. Extending my brief discussions in chapter 1, I elaborate on both the limitations to my study, as well as its merits. To conclude this chapter I offer a brief summary of my methodological choices and the rationales behind them.

3.1.0 Research Approach and Procedures

To answer how two high school teachers implement and define critical thinking in grade 12 philosophy classes, I first conducted a review of the relevant literature on critical thinking. Beginning in the works of Dewey (1933) and his discussions of ‘reflective thought’ (a predecessor to present day critical thinking), and extending discussions through multiple 20th and 21st century sources, I have offered a strong theoretical framework on which to base my discussions of critical thinking. However, what is apparent in this literature review is the lack of qualitative studies surrounding the actual implementation of critical thought in the classroom. Marrying the theoretical framework crafted in my literature review with the semi-structured
interviews I conducted for my research, I have gained valuable insights into the reality of Ontario Philosophy courses. While ostensibly posed as crucibles of critical thought (Ontario Curriculum, 2013; Wilson, 2005; Cunningham, 1991), this research offers the opportunity to see both the strengths and weaknesses, the successes and challenges, of creating such critical learning environments in the relatively new Ontario Philosophy course.

In conducting a qualitative case study of two high school philosophy teachers, I offer a more intimate, human perspective on how ‘Critical Thinking Theory’ is actually parsed in an everyday educational reality. Thus, qualitative research becomes an important tool due to its focus on understanding lived experiences from a subject’s own frame of reference (Bogden and Biklen, 2007). To understand how critical thinking is being cultivated in philosophy classrooms, one cannot quantitatively approach this problem. The results of a survey, or the numbers assigned as a student’s grade are not enough to understand how teachers develop, employ and approach critical thinking. For that task, the subjective experiences of participants are imperative – experiences that quantitative research cannot capture in its abstracted numerical data. Through its focus on rich descriptions of people, places and conversations, qualitative research provided me with the in-depth dialogues that offer insights into personal practice, and the teacher’s lived experiences with the challenges of a high school philosophy class (Bogden and Biklen, 2007).

Moreover, qualitative research is concerned with learning the unique and subjective meaning of participants’ experiences, not a set meaning imposed by the researcher or the surrounding literature (Cresswell, 2013). My research question thrives in this space between theory and participant experience. With the theoretical framework of critical thinking as a backbone, this qualitative study offers the human counterpoint to the disconnected theory. Having completed my study, I have now obtained a better understanding of this interplay between theory and actual
practice by better understanding the strategies, resources and methods teachers use to imbed critical thinking into philosophy curriculum.

### 3.2.0 Instruments of Data Collection

To collect data for my research I used semi-structured interviews (recorded with a digital audio recorder on my laptop, and transcribed using a word processor). I chose semi-structured interviews because they are, in reality, extremely structured – every participant gets asked the same questions. Since my literature review (c.f. Chapter 2) identified emerging themes surrounding critical thinking (e.g. metacognition, sensitivity to context), I wanted an interview that focused around such themes in order to gain teacher insights into these areas. Moreover, I wanted consistency amongst my participants; I wanted various perspectives on these same issues. Relying on, say, a conversational interview does not guarantee my participants and I will discuss the same issues, or even the same questions. The more improvised style of the conversational interview would have introduced difficulties into the data collection by ultimately being inconsistent amongst participants. The more stable protocol of the semi-structured interview ensured that participants interacted with the same questions thus providing a more stable point of comparison and contrast during the coding process. Open-ended interviews also offer the chance for participants to elaborate in as much detail as they desire. Since my research question depended on gathering rich narrative insights from my participants’ daily practice, providing the opportunity for elaboration only aided this process. With open-ended questions, my participants lead me into unexplored, or previously unconsidered areas. Ultimately this allowed me to alter, adjust and seek elaboration on potentially new and important insights into my research topic.
My interview protocol began with general introductions and gathering background information. Specifically, I looked for insights into my participants’ experience in education and the time that they have spent teaching philosophy courses. Furthermore, I sought to understand the teacher’s background in philosophy studies. After these preliminary background questions, I had teachers define critical thinking and discuss what they think a critical thinking classroom looks like (or ought to look like). Following such discussions, I looked to learn more about my participant’s day-to-day practice in philosophy courses. This included insights into lesson plans, routines, projects and assignments and approaches to philosophical content. To address the emergent themes in my literature review, I crafted these questions to target how teachers approached criterial thinking, metacognition, context, and habits of mind in the philosophy class.

Interviews have the benefit of offering that intimate perspective into the high school philosophy class. Since my topic demands rich, elaborated dialogues on teacher practice, the interview became the lynch-pin in the success of my research. The open-ended interview allowed me to gain fully fleshed-out experiences and viewpoints of my participants (Bogden and Biklen, 2007). Without such insights, my research would have been relatively impotent. As Creswell (2013, pg. 49) suggests, qualitative research offers an “insider perspective” into the experience of the participant. The interviews were the window into these insider perspectives, offering a glimpse into the lived reality of high school philosophy teachers, and ultimately, the beginning of an answer to my research question.
3.3.0 Participants

In this section I review the sampling criteria I used to gather participants, and discuss how I recruited my research participants. I also offer brief bios of both John and Mark – my research participants – to give the reader an understanding of these two educators’ background, and experience in the philosophy classroom.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

To answer my research question, my study requires Ontario high school teachers who have had experiences teaching grade 12 philosophy classes. To participate in my study, teachers must have the following criteria:

1) They are willing to be involved in a research project and share experiences in their daily practice

2) They regularly teach grade 12 philosophy courses in an Ontario public high school, and have taught philosophy for five years or more.

3) They are recommended as exemplary practitioners by professors, colleagues or other educators in Ontario High Schools.

My research question demands honest insights into daily practice. Because of this, the first criterion was met in order to gather rich information around the daily practice of high school philosophy teachers, and their attempts at cultivating critical thinking. Criterion two follows from my research question. I was not looking for just any teacher to offer insights into how they might cultivate a critical thinking environment in a philosophy classroom; instead, I sought to analyze and gain insight into high school teachers who have actually attempted to create such
critical thinking spaces. In essence, I was looking for actual teacher experience with philosophy courses. While it would have been interesting to see how, for example, an English teacher (who has never taught philosophy) might approach critical thinking in a philosophy course, due to the limited time and scope of my research, I focused my research strictly on teachers who regularly teach such philosophy course (and specifically the grade 12 university philosophy, HZT4U). The reason I included ‘regularly’ in this criteria is because I did not want a teacher’s lack of experience to cloud my findings. Implementing critical thinking is a difficult task. If a teacher was learning the curriculum, creating lesson plans and attempting to teach with a keen eye for critical thinking, it seems like an overwhelming task. Simply put, a teacher in such a situation may not be teaching in the way that they ultimately want to be teaching. By focusing my research on teachers who regularly teach philosophy courses, I gathered insights into more refined practice. I looked for educators with a minimum of five years in philosophy courses. Finally, in an extension of criterion 2, I found examples of exemplary practitioners. Considering that my research aims to achieve a glimpse into the reality of Ontario high school philosophy classrooms, I recruited teachers who were genuinely invested in creating the best learning experiences possible for their students. One could not begin to conclude anything about the state of critical thinking in philosophy classes if a teacher simply did not care about their students learning experiences.

In addition to these criteria, I found one participant who had a philosophy background (Mark), and one participant who did not (John). While not a criteria at the time of recruitment, I was hoping for such diversity in my participants. The value of this diversity is that it promotes maximum variation in my sampling (Creswell, 2013). Since I only have two participants, having the perspective of a ‘philosopher’ and someone not as versed in philosophy provided an
interesting point of comparison and contrast. This lead to fruitful discussions in my issues section in the following chapter.

### 3.3.2 Sampling Procedures and Recruitment

To locate participants I utilized previously built professional and social network. By leaving my contact information with said contacts (instead of asking for potential names), I alleviated any potential ethical issues that might arise from people feeling pressured to participate. Furthermore, I also offered an abstract of my study so that potential participants, even before they contacted me and were given the consent letter, had an idea of what my research focuses on.

After my research participants agreed to meet with me, I immediately sent my recruitment forms (see appendix A). After each participant had a chance to read over said form, I arranged a 45-60 minute interview with said participant at a location of their choosing. Upon meeting the participant I collected the recruitment form and proceeded with the interview.

Unfortunately, due to the constraints of my research (time, ability to travel, access) I heavily relied on convenience sampling and found participants that were readily accessible within my limited time-frame. While convenience sampling may have sacrificed some of the quality of information, and the credibility of my study, it offered the most feasible approach for finding participants.

### 3.3.3 Participant Bios

Mark, my first participant, is a public high school English, philosophy, computer technology, and math teacher. In university, he did a double major in English and philosophy.
He had been teaching for fifteen years, and had been teaching philosophy for a little over a decade at the time of my interview. While not teaching a philosophy course at the time of our conversation, he was developing his own course reader and attempting to create a blended learning classroom for his future philosophy courses. He had only ever taught the grade 12 university philosophy course (HZT4U).

John, my second participant, is public high school history and philosophy teacher. John had been teaching for fifteen years at the time of my interview. His background is heavily situated in historical studies. Philosophy, and his education in philosophy, was described as a personal passion – something briefly studied in university, but constantly studied in his personal time. Similar to Mark, John’s experiences with philosophy were heavily focused around the grade 12 university course HZT4U.

3.4.0 Data Analysis

To analyze the data for my research I first transcribed the interviews using my digital recordings and word processing software. Following this transcription, I then reviewed these transcripts with my descriptive notes from the interview. With this data collected I then begin ‘coding’ the data. My transcription of both Mark and John’s respective interviews used a combination of descriptive, value and in vivo codes. Since Mark was my first interview, I began a three-step process to coding with his interview transcription first. After my initial reading, I went through the transcript and made note of a broad smattering of codes. On the following two readings, I began to subsume some of these highly specific codes into larger conceptual categories. Placing these revised codes into a code genesis table (see Appendix C), I then entered into a third reading to pare my codes down further. The final set of codes is reflected in
the rightmost column of my code genesis table. For John’s interview, I first read the interview without coding. Then read it a second time making note of any emergent themes. Following this reading, I then identified any points of convergence between my two interviews; I identified the emergent themes common to both Mark and John’s respective interviews. I then updated my code genesis table with any newly emergent themes. However, I did not only be look at the points in which the data from my individuals overlap; I also paid keen attention to the points of divergence in my participants’ perspectives. These points of divergence were also recorded in my code genesis table. The resultant codes from both interviews were then categorized into broader conceptual categories that inevitably became the main sections of analysis in Chapter 4, and the main points of consideration for chapter 5.

3.5.0 Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines outlined here reflect the desire for qualitative research to consider the needs, concerns and well-being of those being studied. One of the first things necessary for my study was full-disclosure of its purpose and implications for participants. To ensure that my participants understood exactly what would occur in my study, I first sent an abstract of my research and then provided them with a written letter of consent (see Appendix A). This letter outlined the expectations of the study (e.g. one interview lasting up to one hour), the ethical considerations for the study (including the consent for audio recording during interviews), and the topic of my research (with the research problem). This letter also gave my participants an honest look at what to expect as a participant thereby ensuring a necessary transparency between the researcher and those being studied. As Creswell (2013) emphasizes, it is important to develop a strong rapport with participants. Not only did my actions ensure a more effective and successful interview environment, but an appropriate level of trust between the researcher and
those being researched. By honestly conveying the intent and direction of my study within this letter, I avoided ethical complications from participants feeling deceived or mislead throughout the study.

Throughout my research the privacy of my participants was of the utmost importance. Considering that I relied on personal and professional networks, and that philosophy teachers are among a minority in high schools, the anonymity of my participants was imperative. Since I asked teacher’s to share insights into their teacher practice, and insights into teaching in general, I wanted to ensure that this information would not negatively impact their personal and professional lives. Thus, I used pseudonyms throughout my study so that their identity would remain confidential. To only further ensure the protection of their privacy, I also ensured effective and safe storage of all data. To prevent any breaches of privacy, I ensured that all files (audio recordings, typed notes, scans of consent letters) were stored on a password protected hard-drive that this was then stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. Furthermore, as per Creswell’s (2013) suggestion, I maintained a ‘master list’ of all documents and files (digital and hand-written) to ensure that no information was accidentally left unaccounted for. To maintain a respect for their autonomy and person, both my letter of consent, and my first meeting with my participants highlighted their right to withdraw from the study. As a final step, all files will be destroyed five years after my research is completed.

3.6.0 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Due to the scope of the MTRP, my research has a few limitations. The first limitation stems from the fact that the ethical guidelines for my research restrict me to only speaking with
teachers. Ideally I would have liked to observe the teacher’s actual classrooms in order to have observational field notes to accompany the interview data. Because interviewing is the primary source of data, my research lacks the rich varieties of qualitative data that could be analyzed (observations, documents and audio-visual material) (Creswell, 2013). Again, having more diverse range of sources would increase the variation in my interviews allowing multiple perspectives and viewpoints to be compared, contrasted and analyzed.

Secondly, my study is limited by my sampling procedure. While I depended primarily on convenience sampling for this study, I recognize how maximum variation sampling would have been ideal. Through maximum variation I would have been able to more diversely reflect the variety of approaches and strategies teacher employ to promote critical thinking in the high school philosophy classroom. As Creswell (2013, pg. 157) suggests, maximum variation is a popular qualitative approach because it enables the researcher to meet an ideal – the ability to compare and contrast diverse viewpoints and perspectives. While I managed to obtain two participants who are highly diverse in their teaching styles, I would have ideally liked a sampling procedure that leant further credence to my findings.

Further limitations stem from my small sample size. While this small sample seems initially problematic, I it did afford me the opportunity to develop a stronger rapport with my participants. Moreover, it gave me more room for descriptive detail within my study. As Creswell (2013, pg. 101) admits, “the study of more than one case dilutes the analysis.” In this sense, the small sample size was beneficial, allowing me to include a more closely detailed analysis of my two participant’s data. While my research was inevitably marred by my limited sample size, it was strengthened by the fact that I was able to capture the richly elaborated perspectives that my participants provided on my research topic.
However, this small sample size does present problems for generalizability. Because I am working with such a selective set of cases, my conclusions are not necessarily generalizable. But even so, my research acts as an initial diagnostic of the state of critical thinking in Ontario high school philosophy classes. To fully describe the ways in which teachers approach philosophy in high schools a much more thorough study will have to be conducted. Perhaps then my study will act as the initial springboard into more involved research.

### 3.7.0 Conclusion

This chapter outlined my research methodology. To complete my study of how teachers define and approach critical thinking in Ontario high school philosophy classes, I conducted qualitative research using semi-structured interviews. The participants of my study met the aforementioned criteria outlined in section 3.3.2 and will were found primarily through my existing social and professional networks. While my research had no immediate ethical issues or risks for participating, section 3.5 addressed the ethical concerns surrounding privacy, autonomy and data storage. Admittedly, my research has inevitable limitations (as section 3.6 addresses). But in the end it provides important insights into how teachers parse the complex theory behind critical thinking in daily practice.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0.0 Introduction to Findings:

This chapter presents an analysis of data gathered from my two interviews with high school philosophy teachers, Mark and John. I have categorized my data into the following three themes: 1) conceptualizing the relation between critical thinking and philosophy, 2) constructing the philosophy classroom, and finally 3) challenges in teaching high school philosophy in Ontario. My first theme will explore the relationship between critical thinking and philosophy as a high school subject, as well as teacher-specific definitions of critical thinking. Theme two will discuss the role of high school philosophy (i.e. its conceived purpose as a course) and the specific activities teachers use to promote critical thinking in the classroom. Finally, theme three will discuss (and extend) discussions of both student and teacher-centered challenges in promoting critical thinking. The two challenges that I will focus on are what I title an issue of participation, and an issue of expertise. Throughout these discussions, I will analyze my participant’s respective pedagogy to determine points of convergence and divergence from the critical thinking literature outlined in Chapter Two. In doing so, I intend to provide a snapshot of the reality of critical thinking within the context of an authentic high school philosophy classroom.

4.1.0 Conceptualizing the Relation between Critical Thinking and Philosophy

4.1.1. Critical Thinking and the Philosophy Classroom

In both interviews, the relationship between philosophy and critical thinking is clear: philosophy is a subject fundamentally rooted in critical thought. Mark, my first participant, indicates that there is an “immediate connection” between high school philosophy and critical
thinking; compared to other courses like English, Mark feels that high school philosophy makes critical thinking an “explicit process,” an actual targeted focus instead of an accidental product. He says, “[In English we] read literature and hopefully that spark will emerge” (i.e. the desire to critically think), but in the philosophy class “we start there from the beginning.” In Mark’s mind, the connection between critical thinking and philosophy exists in a state of cyclical mutualism: critical thinking is born from philosophical studies and philosophical studies are born from critical thinking.

John initially seems to echo this sentiment. When asked if philosophy lends itself to critical thinking more than other subjects he responded:

Absolutely. I think...for sure. That’s all it is. That’s all it should be. Is it? No, because [the students in high school philosophy] don’t have the background. If you were with a bunch of friends who were well-versed in a bunch of philosophy, that will be a critical thinking discussion that you’ll have. So the course, unfortunately, is trying to get them to that point where they can have intelligent philosophical discussion.

For John, Philosophy is critical thought: ‘that’s all it is; that’s all it should be.’ However, this addition of ‘should’ provides an interesting point of contrast between my two participants. John posits a noticeable separation between philosophy as a subject proper, and philosophy as a subject in high school. Unlike Mark, who suggests that the high school philosophy class is simply an extension of actual philosophical studies, John distances himself from this assumption. For John, the course ‘unfortunately’ descends into this world of philosophy-light: a place where students are not truly engaging in ‘intelligent philosophical discussion,’ but the mere building of ‘background knowledge.’ While background knowledge is essential for informed critical thought (McPeck, 1981; Bailin, 1999; Case, 2005), it is clear from the discussions in chapter 2 that

---

4 For the purposes of this discussion, ‘high school philosophy’ refers to the HZT4U course in the Ontario Social Sciences and Humanities Curriculum (2013).
background knowledge is simply not enough. John ultimately suggests (as we see in the connotations of ‘unfortunately’) that the class is disappointingly focused on the rote acquisition of philosophical concepts. He feels that this course is not necessarily the place to jump to a strict critical thinking focus; instead, it is about introducing students to content that “is not something they’re familiar with,” something that is “such a new subject for them.” Thus, the main purpose of his class seems to be the development of this background knowledge so that students can eventually participate in actual philosophy.

Unlike John, Mark actively positions his classroom as an immediate introduction and extension of the philosophy classes one encounters in a more academic, post-secondary setting: “it’s the same stuff” in both high school, and future studies. While Mark recognizes that his studies in philosophy might not be the “deeper readings” one sees in university, he does not suggest the staunch disconnect between philosophy (as a critically thinking discipline) and high school philosophy (as a course focused mainly on content acquisition). Essentially, the class is posed as a space to, as he says, “practice” the philosophical discipline. For Mark, high school philosophy is primarily focused on developing thinking skills necessary for studying philosophy; for John, it is focused on acquisition of background knowledge that can then lead to informed critical thinking later on.

Thus, while my two participants broadly conceive of the relation between philosophy and critical thinking in similar terms (i.e. as integral to one another), their views of the classroom space – the focus of my study – depart from one another rather dramatically. The Ontario Curriculum (2013) states that “students will develop critical thinking and philosophical reasoning skills as they formulate and evaluate arguments related to a variety of philosophical questions and theories” throughout a philosophy course. But it is important to see the various
ways in which this ‘development’ plays-out in the actual classes. When trying to understand how critical thinking is promoted in high school philosophy classes, the differences in how teachers view such thinking in the high school context becomes vitally important: it dramatically shifts the ways in which the course is taught, and the skills students learn. As the subsequent sections begin to elaborate on the ways in which both Mark and John conceive of, and actualize critical thinking in their day-to-day practice, one will see how this marked contrast influences their respective pedagogical approaches.

4.1.2 Teacher-Specific Definitions of Critical Thinking

In the previous section, one sees an emerging difference between how my two participants view the relation between critical thinking and the high school philosophy classroom. With the multi-faceted definition of critical thinking (as outlined in chapter 2) in mind, it is important to see how actual teacher practice aligns with such a theoretical definition. In this section, I will explore the various facets of each participant’s definition of critical thinking to further understand how it factors into their respective classroom spaces.

Mark personally defines critical thinking as “a sort of meta-thinking,” a kind of thinking that gets students to “seriously consider questions they have never considered before.” For Mark, critical thinking moves beyond passive teacher-centered paradigms in order to foster student awareness of the “facts and figures” that dominate students’ education. Mark consciously recognizes that secondary schooling is often a “regimented system of a lot of rote learning and definitions” – a system of passive learning antagonistic to active, critical thought (as discussed in chapter 2) (c.f. Dewey, 1933). While Mark considers his philosophy class an “advanced course in defining” he consciously avoids the passivity often associated with
definitions. When Mark thinks about fostering students’ critical capacities, it is the process of having students not only “spit those things back” (i.e. the learned ‘facts and figures’), but to have them “define all those things they spout off as answers.” He aims to avoid mere transmissive learning, and instead moves towards problematizing content such that students are afforded the opportunity to analyze and evaluate their previous assumptions.

For example, he says that he could ask, “Why is the sky blue?” And he knows that a “good science student” will give him “some physics answer.” But for Mark, a seemingly simple question with a seemingly simple answer becomes the opportunity to problematize content. As Mark says, “they never actually consider, well, what do I mean by blue?” In this sense, Mark begins to actively align his class with the reflective paradigm (Lipman, 2003). In such a paradigm, content is constantly revealed as ambiguous, or equivocal – less stable than initially thought. Mark then becomes the driver in a teacher-guided community of inquiry, forcing students to analyze the answers they have learned, the content of those answers, and other interpretations of this content. In essence, his philosophy class is meant to be the locus for the re-evaluation of answers students passively accept as truth. This ‘defining’ that he describes is not synonymous with the mere memorization of a textbook glossary; instead, it constitutes a more regimented process of self-reflexivity that demands students interrogate “all those typical answers of how they define things in the world around them,” things that they “don’t normally think too hard about.” As students build “an encyclopedia with […] a much richer text to define the concepts that we take for granted,” Mark seeks to challenge his students by encouraging criterial thinking – judgements and claims that are supported by sound reasoning (Lipman, 2003; Case, 2005). If students still wish to tout their ‘definitions’ as truth, they now have to have informed reasons to support their view. Mark wants students to “think about what it is [they’re]
actually saying” instead of simply responding with what they memorized. Here, Mark is seen consciously distancing himself from the standard paradigm outlined in chapter 2—a paradigm characterized by the passive absorption of rote facts. Mark’s definition of critical thinking therefore reinforces the idea of critical thinking as a process of not only regurgitating an answer, but holding students cognitively accountable for their answers (Lipman, 2003).

John’s definition of critical thinking is similar in this respect. Like Mark, he too defines critical thinking as this interrogation of definitions. For John, critical thinking is not “taking things at face value until you’ve thought through them.” Similar to Mark, John sees critical thinking as criterial thinking—this constant call to support one’s assumption and thoughts with sound reasoning (Lipman, 2003; Case, 2005). Consider the process John encourages when one disagrees with something: if one does not agree with a statement, John says that one should ask “why not” and “what is it about [said statement] that [one doesn’t] like” and “what is it now that [one] is going to pursue?” This line of questioning intends to push students to make a conscious effort to bring criterial thinking to the forefront. As students learn new information and new arguments, John’s conceptualization of critical thinking avoids passive learning by having students undertake a similar questioning process that Mark alludes to in his ‘advanced course in defining.’ John too aims to avoid the standard paradigm that easily plagues the classroom. John wishes to move away from students taking classroom content, “memorizing it, regurgitating it word for word exactly how it was presented to them without having a clue as to what it means.” Thus, within their respective definitions one sees an analogous push for deeper meaning: an investigation not just of concepts and terms, but the reasoning and context in support of their acceptance or rejection.
Furthermore, in this process of questioning and interrogating definitions (in this process of developing reasons for one’s beliefs) both educators adopt the intense focus on metacognition that appears in the definition of critical thought outlined in chapter 2 (Marzano et. al., 1989; Paul, 1993; Lipman, 2003). As Marzano et. al. (1989) suggest, metacognition is “being aware of our thinking […] and then using this awareness to control what we are doing.” Both Mark and John (in their conceptualization of critical thinking) aim to have students interrogate previously accepted truths – to engage students with their passively absorbed assumptions and foster the more purposeful thinking that characterises metacognitive critical thought (Paul, 1993). But uniquely for John, this conceptualization of metacognition appears to afford opportunities for students to engage in *praxis* within his classroom space (Freire, 1997). Consider the following:

I just want [students] to not take for granted how they think about the world. They think about the world because of what’s gone on before: how they’ve been brought up, how they’ve been educated. And so they see the world in a particular, but hopefully by exposing them to all these different ways of viewing the world, they will shape their own view (rather than their parents, rather than their teachers).

While John remains vague on the details of such praxis, he alludes to critical thinking being applied to an evaluation of the belief systems imposed on us by education, our parents and society in general. John suggests that critical thinking offers an anti-oppressive opportunity: a reaffirmation of identity that will enable students to challenge reified social constructs, and truly begin to think for themselves in informed ways. Thus, within his definition of critical thinking, within this desire to move beyond rote-learning, is a perceived opportunity for critical reflection that is not just in preparation for future studies in philosophy, but for engaging with the naturalized discourses in the world around us. For John, philosophy is “the most important course you will take in your life. Not in school. For your life.”
To use such powerful language to describe a high school course is telling, especially when placed next to his more pessimistic prediction that his classes are content-driven, instead of thinking-driven. The critical capacities that allow one to analyze one’s assumptions are not just for academic purposes; in John’s eyes, critical thinking in philosophy allows one to “shape [one’s] pathway in life.” This conflict between what John thinks philosophy ought to be (i.e. this conceptualized definition), and what John feels high school philosophy actually is, portrays an educator struggling to actualize the lofty ideals that he passionately believes philosophy is capable of. This is not to suggest that Mark does not struggle with such ideals (in our interview, he even suggests that he is not always successful). What I am suggesting is the noticeable tone difference between the educators. Mark recognizes that critical thinking, like any pedagogical approach, will not be effective all the time. John, on the other hand, seems more frustrated with the whole prospect of integrating critical thought into the daily classroom. As he says, he “wishes it were more often.” His self-proclaimed “passion” coupled with the powerful, life-changing potential he sees in philosophy jars too strongly against his image of the content-driven class to go unnoticed.5

Thus a question begins to emerge in these findings: why does one educator (John) see the actualization of critical thinking as “idealistic” while the other (Mark) defines his whole course as constant exercise in ‘meta-thinking’? From the above findings, it is clear that both educators define critical thinking in strikingly similar terms. John sums it up nicely: critical thinking is this process of “not just being able to regurgitate [a concept] on a test in a fill-in-the-blank, but to really know what [said concept] means.” Similar to Mark, John posits the need for deeper

5 While emerging in his definitions of critical thinking, this discussion alludes to the teacher-centered barriers that will be elaborated in section 4.3.0
understanding – not the shallow memorization of what was said in class, but a richer understanding of context and reasoning behind classroom content. What is interesting then is not shared salient points of their individual definitions of critical thinking, but their feelings of success surrounding its implementation in the class. In this struggle to not get “bogged down” in teaching content, one begins to see the shared definition of critical thinking push against the perceived reality of John’s classroom space. Thus, within these definitions of critical thought we are met with another question: if teachers have a largely similar understanding of critical thought, then how is this being manifested in actual pedagogical practice? Both definitions are similar, but their views on the feasibility of implementing critical thinking on a daily basis widely differ. The next section seeks to better understand this relation between the conceptualization of critical thinking, and critical thinking in the actual classroom space, as I explore the day-to-day classroom tasks and activities of both Mark and John.

4.2.0 Constructing the Philosophy Classroom

While the teachers’ personal definitions and conceptions of critical thinking embody many of the theoretical elements addressed in chapter 2, one must now look to see how such definitions are integrated into the reality of the class. From the above discussions, John alludes to a tacit separation between the ideals of critical thinking and the reality of the class; Mark does not allude to such schism. As I look towards how these educators construct their respective classrooms, I aim to demonstrate the correlation between their definitions of critical thinking, the perceived purpose of high school philosophy and ultimately their actual daily practice.
4.2.1 Philosophy Class: What is the Purpose?

Mark and John promote rather different classroom environments. For Mark, philosophy is an academic, regimented practice and as such, he treats his classroom as a preparatory space for university studies in philosophy. Mark thinks that “it’s a bit of a sham when philosophy courses in high school are done by, you know, ‘Here’s a fun activity to do!’” While he recognizes that teachers ought to try “different methods to get the lesson across,” his classroom intensely focuses on the “reading and writing aspects” of philosophical studies. To teach philosophy without this intense focus on reading and writing is “a bit of a lie” in Mark’s eyes; such a class would not adequately prepare students for a “true and honest philosophy course” at the post-secondary level. For Mark then, the class is not only the process of building philosophical background knowledge through fun, creative activities; instead, it is to develop the domain specific-skills pertinent to one’s ability to critically think in philosophy (McPeck, 1981). Mark states that he approaches his course from a “skills-perspective;” moreover, he claims that content is actually not as important at the high school level. As such, his class is more about developing the “comfort level with being able to do some reading and writing” in philosophy.

Contrast this skills focus to John’s more content-heavy focus. As mentioned in the previous sections, John feels more obligated to “trying to get the concepts across” – that is, to develop students’ background knowledge. And it is within this contrast that one learns something interesting about the perceived purpose of high school philosophy. While both educators work from the same curriculum, we see a marked distinction in the implemented curriculum that these educators teach. While every class has to focus simultaneously on skills and content (as the curriculum dictates), it is important to understand what is inevitably seen as taking precedent in the classroom space. While anyone can discuss the importance of critical
thinking, and how it ought to be an embedded part of the philosophy classroom, the contrasting stories of Mark and John reveal the multitude of experiences in implementing such a perceived ideal. As classes come to value skills or content, students will emerge having drastically different experiences with critical thinking. When coming to understand how critical thinking is thus implemented in the philosophy class, these contrasting stories reveal that the answer to this question is implicitly embedded in the perceived focus of the course. To further demonstrate this point, let us look at the stark differences in the structure and activities of the two classes.

4.2.2 Activities and Assignments used to Promote Critical Thinking

Consider Mark’s course structure:

Basically they do an essay for me every two weeks. Not something gargantuan or long – usually I set the word count at approximately 1000 words. Over, under, it’s not a big deal – I’m not sitting there counting words. But usually 1000 words is enough content that I can see that their thinking about stuff. The frequency is so that they get better at writing about this stuff, and they get better at the thinking.

Mark’s course is designed around this ‘frequency’ of reading and writing. In essence, students are called to explain and argue for or against a particular theory or idea on a regular basis. Such a constant exercise allows students to engage with the weekly concepts (content) while simultaneously practicing, and receiving feedback on the skills that Mark aims to develop (namely, analysis and argumentation). But it is important to note that these papers are extensions of classroom discussions, an invitation to “bring in classroom discussion.” In this sense, the critical-thinking that ought to form the basis of any good argument is simultaneously embedded within the daily class structure. Instead of learning content and then thinking about it on a culminating assignment, students are always called to think in class (or subsequently on the online class forum) as they engage in Mark’s ongoing “Socratic […] question-discussion”
format. In this sense, his essays are constantly being scaffolded; as students put forth ideas and engage with Mark in class, they are practicing the thinking needed for success on the essays. Thus, the essays are not the students’ sole opportunity to critically think; instead, they become the summative products of daily critical discussions.

Students are frequently “deconstructing readings in class as well.” Mark recognizes that students “have to get used to” the unique style that philosophy texts are often written in so that they can better understand philosophical content. So while Mark’s class claims to focus on skills development, this does not then mean that content then falls to the wayside. Students are simultaneously practicing their reading skills and as these skills develop, so does their ability to understand, and engage with, the content. In Mark’s class, a conscious effort to embed critical thinking into the classroom space (instead of reserving it for assignments) emerges through a consistent effort to engage students in active thinking. Instead of simply reading content in class (and then absorbing the content), the combination of deconstruction and discussion allows for content to be analyzed in the criterial, metacognitive way Mark describes in his definition of critical thinking. Once again, Mark positions himself firmly within Lipman’s (2003) reflective paradigm as he shifts towards a teacher-guided community of inquiry, and presenting information not as stable facts, but points of discussion and debate.

For Mark, the connection between his definition of critical thinking as ‘meta-thinking,’ and his daily classroom practice is clear. Within such a space, one returns to Marzano et. al.’s discussions of metacognition outlined in chapter 2. With this intense focus on developing the ability to read and engage with philosophy (through this constant call to ‘practice’ such skills within the classroom space), Mark is seen developing students’ declarative and procedural knowledge. The reading deconstructions help students develop the skills to parse dense primary
texts; the ongoing guided dialogues integrated into day-to-day lessons model how to breakdown, and critically inquire about philosophical ideas. In this sense Mark’s vision of the philosophy class is consciously embedded in his pedagogical approaches. Students are constantly tasked with partaking in the process of ‘defining’ he sees as integral to critical thinking: this process of not simply reading something and absorbing content as fact, but truly thinking about what is being said, why it is being said, and ultimately positing a judgement in an open forum for discussion.

But for John, there does not seem to be such an immediate connection between his definition of critical thinking and the actual implementation of such a definition in the context of the classroom. As John states, “You need to let them know or inform them on what philosophers have said” on any given topic before critical discussions can occur. Thus, class becomes less focused on the critical, or interrogative praxis that John defines in his definition of critical thinking, and more of a space to do the “background work” necessary to garner an understanding of a given philosophical subject. As such, John’s classroom does not focus on thinking critically on a day-to-day basis; instead, the focus is on making difficult content as accessible as possible. Instead of discussion and reading deconstruction, John utilizes pop-culture (such as The Matrix or The Simpsons) in order to make complex philosophical content “more relatable.” As John and the students connect content to cartoon characters and movie plots, the alien concepts of philosophy become something less lofty and more attainable.

Here we see an interesting contrast between Mark and John’s pedagogical approaches. In one respect, Mark is more focused on a traditionally academic approach to philosophy – reading and academic discussion. John, on the other hand, pulls philosophy from the ivory tower to make it very much a part of his student’s zeitgeist. While their aim is to ultimately familiarize students
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

with content so that they can critically engage with it, their approaches could not be more antithetical. This become clearer when one considers their use of primary texts in the class. John avoids engaging directly with the primary works since he finds that students just “throw up their hands a lot of the time;” he does not truly think that they have the “skills to read and really comprehend” what is being said in such primary works. Due to experience with students getting lost in dense philosophical works, he chooses to instead discuss concepts generally and through the aforementioned use of pop-culture – YouTube clips, movies, cartoons. Mark also recognizes how difficult primary texts can be. As him and I discussed our own experiences with reading philosophy, Mark noted that “It’s a tough slog too!” Reading primary texts is no easy task and students “are often thrown off” because it is so different from the literature analyses they learn in English – it requires a different analytical skill-set. But despite recognizing the difficulty students naturally have with primary texts, Mark takes an extremely different approach from John. As noted earlier, he reads through and deconstructs primary texts daily with his students. Thus, instead of making the content as familiar as possible (to help students access it), Mark aims to attain this accessibility through constant exposure. In other words, he forces his students through that ‘slog’ so that they do develop the “comfort with reading and writing” that he aims for. In this respect, both teachers aim to familiarize students with philosophical content but again, the contrast in a skills-focus, and a content-focus become immediately apparent. John aims to have students better absorb content therefore making philosophical concepts more attainable; Mark aims to build students reading skills to therefore make philosophical concepts more attainable.

Here we see both John and Mark building background knowledge – a key aspect of critical thought (McPeck, 1981, Bailin, Case, Coombs and Daniels, 1999; Case, 2005; Gini-
Newman, n.d.; Hirsch, 1993). But with Mark’s skill-focused classroom, it becomes apparent how students are developing both content knowledge, and domain-specific thinking skills; in Mark’s class, students critically think and learn content in a more overlapping way. But if John’s class, as he states, is focused primarily on content acquisition, then where do these domain-specific critical thinking skills factor into daily classroom practice? Are they being suffocated beneath the standard-paradigm’s focus on content acquisition? For John, critical thinking is not necessarily a daily constituent of high school philosophy. When asked about whether critical thinking was something mainly reserved for assignments, John stated that “it seems to be” because daily class gets “bogged down” in teaching background knowledge. For these reasons, John’s class seems situated in a more standard paradigm: a place focused primarily on the transmission of knowledge from teacher to students (Dewey, 1933; Lipman, 2003). Implicitly, John seems to subscribe to the idea that “knowledge is acquired by absorbing information” (Lipman, 2003, pg. 18). In this sense, John seems to posit a discrete separation between the acquisition of background knowledge, and critical thinking. While Mark attempts to embed one in the other, John’s class suggests that it is one or the other.

While John paints philosophy as a subject solely comprised of critical thought, his descriptions of his classroom suggest an obvious disconnect from this ideal. In one respect, this disconnect is born from his perceived role of the course: to develop students’ background knowledge. With John’s implicit separation of content and critical thinking, it is not a surprise that he describes his course as ‘bogged down’ in content instead of motivated by critical thought. However, once one looks at John’s assignments and classroom activities, it becomes clear that these culminating tasks are designed to promote the critical thinking that he sees as integral to philosophical practice. Consider one of John’s assignments: an application of Plato and
Aristotle’s theory to a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon. John claims that the purpose of such an assignment is to help students “internalize” the theories of the two philosophers. But in terms of critical thinking, such a task allows students to actively apply learned concepts, thereby leading to a deeper understanding of the specific philosophical content. However, it is important to note that this is not equivalent to a simple matching process between the content of the cartoon, and the content of Plato and Aristotle’s philosophies. In terms of Bloom’s taxonomy (1956), this would in fact be considered a ‘critical’ task. Students are not regurgitating answers previously stated by the teacher; instead, they partake in more active thought as they parse the meaning of the comic, the meaning of each philosopher’s argument, and the potential linkages between the two.

Within the above task, students are partaking in active critical thought despite how the goal is the ‘internalization’ of content. For John, the true internalization consists of breaking away from the passive learning as students apply learned concepts. And while this thinking might be reserved for assignments, it is still present – it is not as though critical thinking is inherently lost in virtue of John seeming to situate himself within more standard paradigms of education. Unintentionally aligning himself with Ennis and Norris (1989), John realizes students need to work with the content if they are going to move-beyond the rote-learning that both he, and Ennis, disparage. In this sense, his practice aligns nicely with Mark’s: the end goal is the same. Both educators aim to have students think critically – whether it is through a paper or a comic analysis.

With both educators’ end goals being critical engagement with philosophy, it is not surprising that both educators’ summative tasks embody their respective definitions of critical thought. When asked which activity best promotes critical thinking in the classroom, both
educators stated that student-led seminars are the moment where they really get to see student’s critical thinking skills shine. For Mark, this seminar consists of a student-led, class-long discussion about a philosophical article that interests the group. For John, this takes the form of a twenty minute “coffeehouse” discussion of a philosophical concept “covered in class or […] approved by the teacher.” It is key to note that both these seminar-style activities embody the active, judgement based critical thinking outlined in chapter 2. Students cannot simply regurgitate class discussion. For Mark, the students “must come up with some meaning” (i.e. put forth an informed reading of an article); for John, the students are expected to “go beyond the classroom” – not just “re-hash” class conversations.

Mark further emphasizes the active critical role of the students by stating that they “become the teacher for the day” – the leader of the discussion who directs the flow of the classroom through ongoing dialogue with classmates. Again, Mark firmly places himself in the reflective paradigm by shifting the student-teacher binary towards a more communal dialogue – one that lends authority to the students as sources of knowledge. Through his seminars, Mark also actively promotes important habits-of-mind – a part of the critical thinking definition in chapter 2 that has yet to be addressed. As theorists suggests, critical thinking must be accompanied by the appropriate dispositions; such dispositions simultaneously help students think more critically, while also creating environments where critical thinking can actually happen (Dewey, 1933; Facione, 1995; Gini-Newman, n.d., Case, 2005). In his class structure, one can infer that Mark tries to promote a space of open-mindedness and intellectual risk-taking as students constantly parse philosophical texts and ideas in a dialogic environment. But in his seminars, this becomes a much more explicit process. Consider the following:
So they read the article in depth, try to become the expert with the article. So they may have to do some outside research to even figure out what the article is saying in the first place. Oftentimes they’ll pick out this article with a lot of technical jargon in it, some advanced concepts that we haven’t touched on in class or anything like that. And I say, “That’s not something to be afraid of— that’s just something fun to research, right? Why don’t you figure out something more about it?

Recall that Mark positions his class as a place to practice philosophical skills. In his description of the seminar assignment, this element of ‘practice’ strongly emerges. As students ‘try’ to become experts in the article, they are encouraged to go beyond the familiar, to pursue topics outside of class. Moreover, Mark encourages that they do extra research and not shy away from something challenging or beyond their comfort zone. In terms of habits of mind, one begins to see how Mark fosters open-mindedness and intellectual risk-taking as he pushes students to try. But this push is also accompanied by an atmosphere that recognizes mistakes as a part of the learning process. As he says, “it doesn’t even matter whether they nail it on the head with what the author’s intent was.” While this may sound like Mark is lowering his expectations, such an interpretation undermines the habits of mind at play in such a choice. By recognizing that mistakes are a part of learning, he shifts the focus of the class away from content-acquisition and more firmly towards his skills perspective.

Since Mark’s class focuses on practicing critical thinking, this approach makes sense. Strongly penalizing students for content mistakes would foster an environment where they would not want to engage with alien concepts, or experiment and ultimately put forward their potentially flawed opinions. The seminars are not a chance to nail students on factual misunderstandings; instead, Mark looks to evaluate their ability to “pull something out of it” – an informed opinion from difficult content. As he concedes, “at this level” that is enough for him. This is not to say that Mark does not grade their analytical skills. Mark “evaluate[s] their
thinking on the subject – being able to deconstruct and pull out the main concepts, what their questions or concerns were, how they interpreted the reading.” But within such an evaluation there is an obvious movement away from an emphasis on factual accuracy in order to emphasize thinking over rote-regurgitation of read content. If students are silent or stifled by content, then they never participate in the community of inquiry that Mark tries to create. By creating an environment that encourages open-mindedness and intellectual risk taking, Mark attempts to build a space where critical thinking can be pushed to the forefront.

John’s coffeehouses plays a largely similar role. While less explicit with his habits of mind, he too fosters an explorative environment as students engage with topics that they are personally interested in. Like Mark, this assignment pushes students to experiment with content as they are encouraged to think ‘beyond the classroom.’ Thus, elements of intellectual risk-taking and open-mindedness (habits of mind which might not be as present in John’s day-to-day, content-driven classes) surface in the coffeehouses. While it is unclear whether he emphasizes factual accuracy more intensely than Mark, one does notice John make a similar shift away from content-emphasis. Unlike the more teacher-driven learning that John describes in his classroom, in the coffeehouse, “it really is up to [the students] to lead discussion.” Here, John gets to play a part in student-driven dialogue instead of teaching content. Consider the following:

I may not be the best because I like to get involved. […] Which is actually a compliment to the person’s seminar because I’m interested now. Oh that’s cool, what did they say? What did you say?

While John may position himself as an educator that usually sits within the standard, teacher-centered paradigm, here we see him become an active participant in a teacher-guided community of inquiry. As students openly parse philosophical concepts and engage in active critical thinking, he prompts, contributes to, and guides learning without acting as the sole, authoritative
voice of knowledge. John allows students to explore philosophical concepts, and as such, one sees this activity begin to more closely embody the critical, interrogative thinking that he defines as critical thought. Moreover, unlike Mark (where these seminars are a summative task taking place in “the last third of the course”), John’s coffeehouses run biweekly. Therefore, the critical thinking that John claims is reserved for assignments is really something that is routinely embedded into the course.

Despite John explicitly aligning himself with the standard paradigm, I feel as though he undersells the critical thinking that is frequently embedded into his lessons. John’s bi-weekly discussion structure allows him to “get in [his] content” on days preceding the coffeehouse. And while this initially seems as though the classes preceding the seminars adopt a more standard approach, I feel as though John is less ‘standard’ then he initially leads us to believe. Let us reconsider his use of pop-culture: as students relate philosophy to pop-culture they will inevitably make similar active, critical connections that are demonstrated in his assignments (be it the cartoon analysis or the coffeehouse). Consider John’s description of a video he uses:

I’ll show them the clip – I don’t know if you’ve seen in – but there’s 5 basketball players that are all wearing white (or some are wearing white and some are wearing black) and it’s like, how many passes do they make or are they trying to make? So the kids are counting and meanwhile somebody moonwalks through in a bear costume. And then at the end it says, “It was 13” and they all go “Yah!” [Then I ask,] “But did you see the moonwalking bear?” So then I talk to them about how our senses are fallible and those sorts of things.

Such a classroom activity involves the principles of a reflective paradigm as John consciously challenges his students’ preconceived beliefs – as he gets students to partake in the interrogative process he defines as critical thinking. While touted as a “great introduction” to content, an observer can see that this exercise does more than just content delivery – it fosters a critical
engagement with the material as students assess, and reassess their assumptions. Like Mark, John too partakes in this teacher-guided community of inquiry since critical re-evaluation seems embedded into his content discussions. For Mark, this appears as a more conscious, vocalized process; for John, it is just an inevitable undercurrent in the way he approaches content delivery.

Again, John tacitly enforces a binary between content acquisition and critical thinking: if students are watching a video to help them learn content, they are not really thinking critically in John’s mind. Considering that John describes critical thinking as this interrogation of rote facts, or this act of praxis, it is not difficult to imagine why John might fail to describe the mere observation and discussion of a video as a critical thinking task. Consider what John says when asked about the feasibility of daily critical thinking:

You know there comes a time where you are expected to get through the curriculum, or are expected to get through content. Would I love to just walk into a philosophy classroom, put a question on the board and have a discussion for 75 minutes? Absolutely. Will that work? Will students respond to that? Probably not.

For John, true critical thinking seems to be found in extended, meaningful discussions that are simply beyond the capability of high school students (and most people for that matter). Of course daily class will not be critical in this regard – students cannot always be re-evaluating social constructs, or discussing challenging questions for full periods at a time. It would simply be too much. Students do need the concepts to discuss and as such, it is not hard to see why John focuses on content: one cannot discuss what they do not know (as discussed in chapter 2). But by viewing critical thinking as such a lofty goal (e.g. extended 75 minute discussions about a single question), John ultimately short-sells the more embedded critical activities that implicitly factor into his lessons.
The critical thinking in John’s class is simply less explicit; except on assignments, critical thinking is more of an accidental product in John’s day-to-day lessons than a conscious target. John is more situated in the standard paradigm, but it is not necessarily because of an absence of critical thought, or because a content driven class cannot be the locus of critical thought. It is simply due to the fact that he views himself as an educator building background knowledge. But as one digs deeper into his attempts to actively involve students with content, John’s class begins to challenge the easy categorization Lipman (2003) describes in his mutually exclusive reflective and standard paradigms. John’s class vacillates between the two paradigms. As he states, it “depends on the unit; depends on the concept.” Sometimes class is comprised of taking notes, and sometimes it consists of analyzing YouTube clips. While John claims to approach the class with a content focus, one cannot let content then become a dirty word indicating a world of rote-learning and passivity. While Mark situates himself consciously in a reflective paradigm, the reality is that the critical thinking in John’s class is similar to that of Mark’s – both have students engaging preconceptions and challenging the passive absorption of rote facts. While Mark may partake in this process more frequently and actively, it is still present in the undercurrent of Mark’s lessons. And within the context of their assignments, we see the distance between Mark and John’s classes collapse even further.

From these findings, we see that both Mark and John conceive of critical thinking in strikingly similar ways; moreover, the critical thinking in each of their classes are of the same ilk. The main difference is the frequency of critical thought, and how they individually perceive their respective course’s focus. Thus, when looking to understand how critical thinking is promoted in the high school philosophy classroom, the answers are highly varied. While present in my participants’ classes, critical thinking can either be implicitly embedded in (some) content
discussions, or it can be the explicit focus of a course. From my participants, it becomes clear that there is not one way to implement critical thinking: critical thinking can be born from a YouTube clip, or direct engagement with Kant. But while both educators implement critical thinking in their own ways, one cannot ignore the fact that John feels almost forced to reserve more involved critical thinking for assignments. If critical thinking is meant as a conscious focus of philosophy, then such findings raise an important question: how do we help teachers who feel bogged down in content actively implement critical thinking more regularly? While John inevitably does implement critical thinking outside of assignments, his comments allude to an issue of making this a more conscious, explicit target of everyday tasks.

But perhaps more importantly, these discussions of John and Mark’s classroom practice indicate that each paradigm can, and inevitably will, bleed into one another. And I feel as though this can be reassuring to teachers. As they are bombarded with this clarion call to implement critical thinking (c.f. Paul, 1933; Lipman, 2003; Case, 2005), in reality, critical thinking does not mean conducting seventy-five minute discussions (as John suggests). As we contrast Mark and John’s perceived ability to implement critical thinking on a day-to-day basis, we uncover this mythologizing of critical thought, this mutation of critical thought into an unattainable ideal – a challenge never explicitly addressed in the literature. Mark sees critical thinking as a process of practice, something that students will learn as they constantly struggle with new skills and content. John sees critical thinking in such an exalted way, that he ultimately describes his class as a place less focused on critical thinking than it actually is. How could he, or any teacher for that matter, promote such a lofty image of critical thinking on a daily basis? While John inevitably embeds critical thinking into his lessons, it is not hard to imagine educators who simply abandon the project of critical thinking because of its perceived infeasibility. What this
alludes to then is an issue of fully understanding the rather simple ways that critical thinking can, and inevitably does, manifest in day-to-day classroom space. In this respect, as my study uncovers the various approaches actual teachers use to promote critical thought in the class, it also helps to prevent critical thinking from descending into an unattainable buzzword.

4.3.0 Challenges in Promoting Critical Thinking in the Philosophy Classroom

Although I have discussed findings relating to conceptions of critical thinking, the purpose of the philosophy class, and the actual promotion of critical thinking in the classroom, largely missing from such discussions are further explanations of the issues teachers encounter when trying to implement critical thinking. This is an area largely missing from the literature; while there are extensive discussions about what constitutes critical thinking and the need for it, there are surprisingly few discussions analyzing the actual challenges faced by actual teachers in the actual class. This section aims to lessen the distance between theory and practice. As observed in previous sections, the world of theory and the philosophy classroom naturally collide as both John and Mark conceptualize, and act on the conception of critical thinking outlined in chapter 2. But to ignore the issues surrounding critical thinking is to only enforce this troublesome mythologizing of critical thought emerging in the preceding discussions. Although the above analyses of John’s class have alluded to some issues (e.g. getting ‘bogged down’ in content, critical thinking as an unattainable ideal), many issues raised in both interviews have gone largely unaddressed. The following section discusses two general categories of barriers in the philosophy classroom that will extend, and add nuance to the issues previously mentioned. Below I identify two main issues (one student-centered, one teacher-centered) that encapsulate a
variety of problems my participants faced, or observed while implementing critical thinking in the high school philosophy classroom.

4.3.1 Student-Centered Challenges: Participation

When trying to teach critical thinking, both participants note an issue of student involvement. Since Mark’s class is heavily dominated by class discussion, this becomes a rather trying issue within the skills-based classroom model. In such a model, student development is dependent on participation; as he states, “[the students] can’t get any better if they don’t formulate any of those words either orally or written.” In general, students just “can’t get better if they’re not participating.” Thus “getting the participation in” becomes “probably the biggest” barrier to a student utilizing and developing critical thinking within Mark’s class.

In response to this challenge, Mark now “runs his course as a blended-learning course.” Instead of revering oral discussion as some necessary constituent of student success, he differentiates his instruction by using online forums. As he says:

If you’re not a strong oral participant, you can be a strong written participant; if you’re strong written, then vice-versa. I don’t need to force them one way or the other and I still have something to evaluate as well. Just from a practical stand-point.

Participation is what Mark identifies as key to the development of critical thinking skills and upon reassessing the dominance of oral communication, he has found a way to include more student voices. Now, it cannot go unnoticed that there is a mark attached to both oral and written communication (albeit, a mark that can be earned through either oral or written participation). This grading structure surely adds incentive to participate, but naturally, students will sacrifice a few marks if oral participation is truly such a daunting task, and no alternative exists. Thus, Mark’s approach attempts to foster more inclusivity and conversation both inside and outside the
class. If he is truly trying to build the collaborative community of inquiry that Lipman (2003) sees as imperative in critical thinking, then the online forums provide a space for meaningful conversation to trump social anxiety. While not explicitly addressed by Mark, these online forums surely become launching points for in-class discussion. In this manner, Mark can reemphasize intellectual risk taking as he fosters collaborative dialogues between discrete student conversations. Therefore, by drawing attention to participation in the online forum within the class setting, Mark creates an avenue by which he can lend credence to the more shy students’ voices, potentially build their confidence to participate in class, and ultimately help them develop critical thinking skills.

While not identifying this as his primary barrier, John too sees an issue of participation emerging in his classroom space. But for John, it is not the issue of silence that he draws attention to; instead, it is a struggle with students who are “drifting off” from the discussion. John notices that when he gets into dialogues with the students surrounding a certain philosophical topic, he can often only engage “three or four” of them. This poses a problem because if the students are not engaging with the discussion, then they end up “not being with [John]” as the class builds up to the next concept or task. Unlike Mark, whose response is to find more diverse ways to engage students, John feels that you “kind of have to move on.” Considering that John feels ‘bogged down’ in content, this does not seem like too surprising of a response: why waste time discussing something that only benefits select students when you could be teaching concepts that will help everyone?

The diversity in these two educator’s approaches relates back to their perceived focal points of the philosophy class: skills or content. Since John structures his course such that content is then followed by critical thinking on assignments, daily class discussion is not as
necessary. But for Mark, who bases his course on skills development, this element of practice becomes vital – the issue of participation seems to pose a larger threat to Mark’s overall course structure. This paper does not seek to pass judgement on whose approach to the issue of participation is the correct one. As John states, discussion “depends on the school; depends on the students.” Some classes will be stronger at discussions than others so maybe, depending on the circumstance, it is better to just move on to other considerations. But John also recognizes that “discussion in grade 12 is not at the level [one] would like it to be.” In light of such a comment, one has to begin wondering why this tactic of ‘moving on’ is being utilized. If discussion is not at the level it should be, why is such a problem not being actively addressed?

John’s tactic of ‘moving on’ raises an important concern. John ‘moves on’ not because he fails to understand what critical thinking ought to be in theory, but because he does not have a strategy to better foster the discussion he desires. And this issue of participation is a concern not addressed in the theory (especially in the context of the philosophy class). While positing a theoretical pedagogical framework, the theory does little for teachers who encounter classroom specific issues of engagement. By identifying such issues, my research aims to better our understanding of how critical thinking is being implemented, and ultimately the real-world barriers to such implementation. How do we get students to engage in open-debate when their previous classroom experiences are so firmly situated in a dominant paradigm of rote-learning and passivity? As John says, students are “looking for the notes” – this is what they have come to expect of school. When trying to break into the more active paradigm of critical thought, some students will inevitably have issues engaging. Thus, it becomes a primary concern to not only posit a firm theory of what constitutes critical thought, but to bridge the gap between this theory and the reality of the class.
This issue of participation leads us into another issue: an issue of expertise. These findings raise concerns of not only the literal issues that teachers face, but their ability to posit solutions and implement solutions to said problems. How does one get students to participate in ongoing critical dialogues? How does one avoid getting bogged down in content, or defaulting to just ‘moving on’ to another concept whenever students fail to actively engage with content? While this paper does not seek to posit an answer to this question, it does seek to identify barriers so that they can inevitably be addressed. However, such solutions cannot be posited until we better understand the barriers surrounding not only students, but teachers as well.

4.3.2 Teacher-Centered Challenges: Issue of Expertise

One emergent theme in the data was a discussion surrounding teacher-expertise in philosophy. Both Mark and John posited that when the teacher is in a position where they are not experts in the classroom, critical thinking inevitably falls to the wayside. Again, this is something completely unexplored in the literature. For example, Lipman (2003) never considers experience, or subject expertise as a barrier to creating more reflective paradigms. Consider what Mark says on the subject:

I remember that I was teaching a civics course once, and it’s not like I don’t know how government works and how the subject could be taught, but the thing is, I don’t know that I had the time when I was a young teacher just trying to get through the day, to come up with some wild lessons to get kids engaged about those things. Sometimes you’re just trying to survive by ‘here’s the definition, here’s a worksheet to fill in,’ to keep the kids busy why you’re trying to wrap your head around how to evaluate all this stuff.

Within this passage, one sees the image of a teacher struggling to stay afloat amongst the whirlwind of duties one performs as a teacher. Throughout all the previous conversations, it has been easy to forget all the considerations a teacher has outside of getting a class to think
critically. While touted as a focus in education, the reality is that a teacher is constantly being pulled in multiple directions. This passage indicates an issue of expertise in regards to experience. If a teacher is not experienced (and hence not an expert), then it will be a constant pragmatic struggle to balance the hectic world of a new teacher with the implementation of critical thinking. Conversations like this help anchor discussions of critical thinking within the real world context of teachers. When one is facing piles of marking, and piling responsibilities, Mark suggests that there is implicit recourse towards more content-driven pedagogy: rote-learning, worksheets, copying definitions. It is just simpler. This makes sense: if critical thinking is active thought then naturally it demands more active involvement on the part of the teacher. If students are to partake in a teacher-guided community of inquiry (Lipman, 2003; Case, 2005), then the teacher must be an involved part of that community – not just the figure who hands out easily completed worksheets. As this passage (and as Mark’s daily classroom practice) implies, conscious integration of critical thinking is a process of planning – it is a lot of work. Monitoring discussion (both online and in the class), deconstructing dense readings, preparing Socratic discussion: these are all highly involved processes. When faced with such regular responsibilities and duties, Mark alludes to the fact that many teachers – new or simply overwhelmed – will naturally default to more passive rote learning to simply try and “survive.”

But consider this ‘survival’ in the context of philosophy, a context that I would argue compounds issues of expertise (and experience). Generally speaking, Mark states that teachers are assigned to subjects that align with their teachables. But he also notes that it’s “a very rare occurrence” to find teachers with a philosophy teachable; as the Canadian Philosophical Association (n.d.) states, philosophy is not regarded as a teachable in most teacher education programmes. Thus, the aforementioned issue of surviving in a hectic teacher context is only
exacerbated further since philosophy teachers are often not familiar with the discipline. Mark and John have both been teaching philosophy for over five years. But Mark’s words shed light into the reality of classes outside of his own – issues that stem beyond my immediate data sample. Mark describes his encounter with a social-science teacher tasked with teaching philosophy:

So they assigned the philosophy course to somebody who had humanities and social science, but they’d never ever taken a philosophy course before. She even admitted, “I really don’t want this course but I’m going to have to teach it for the semester, so I’m just going to use the textbook and photocopy the worksheets.” And that’s how she ran the course. So she had no choice but to do it that way. But she had no choice to teach it either. That wasn’t her teachable and the principle decided that we need to fill this slot so here you go. So you don’t always get to be in that area of expertise.

Here we have a teacher who, having never taught philosophy, falls into the exact ‘survival’ situation that Mark alludes to earlier. In order to stay afloat amongst her schedule, she simply defaults to teaching from the textbook. As Mark notes, “Textbooks are notoriously bad for structuring content in, here’s a definition, here’s a worksheet, answer some questions.” And as such, her class descends into pure rote-learning – the antithesis to the active thinking that characterises the discipline.

It is worth noting that there is no placement of blame in this circumstance – Mark even states that this teacher ‘had no choice’ in either teaching the course or running it this way. What is present is a tacit understanding that as someone not versed in philosophy, it would become increasingly difficult to craft a course grounded in critical thought. Moreover, Mark identifies systematic barriers (i.e. the need to fill timetables) that ultimately force teachers into situations where they are not experts – where even the most experienced educators are reduced to the state of a new teacher trying to stay afloat. John echoes this sentiment: he himself, an educator of for more than fifteen years, still becomes “discombobulated” in courses he is not familiar with
teaching. It is not then surprising to see such recourse to rote-learning from a textbook: such resources, despite how flawed, provide a sense of stability amongst the flux of the unfamiliar. Understandably, teachers will have to teach courses outside of their expertise. But in the context of philosophy, it is important to note the prevalence of such an issue due to the rareness of the teachable. If philosophy is more susceptible to this issue of expertise, then one must begin to look into feasible solutions that can prepare teachers to teach philosophy with the critical focus that is so vital for the subject.

Mark suggests that countering this issue of expertise might not be that hard; he notes that, “it’s tough to say whether [teaching philosophy critically] requires a lot of expertise.” High school philosophy simply “requires somebody […] to get their hands dirty, to get reading.” Here we can return to John’s class. While John claims that his course is bogged down in content, one sees that it does not descend into same passivity outlined in Mark’s anecdote. John seems to prove Mark’s claim about the issue of expertise being countered by someone willing to get their hands dirty. For John, philosophy has “become [his] hobby outside [the classroom].” He imbeds his “own passion” for the subject into the class. And in this way, even though John is a history teacher by trade, he does not descend into merely handing out worksheets and having students passively work through a textbook. His own active engagement with philosophy naturally trickles into his lessons (as we have seen), even when he claims he is focusing on content-acquisition.

In this respect, the answer to the issue of expertise seems simple: engage with the subject on one’s own time and problem solved! But if we return to Mark’s anecdote about the teacher thrown into the philosophy class, one must ask whether ‘passion’ for the subject would have been enough. Remember that Mark, a philosophy teacher by trade, says that “she had no choice”
Critical Thinking or Thinking in Critical Condition

but to teach the course from the textbook. In this sense, we see an issue with the feasibility of this ‘passion’ approach: some might find it difficult to learn about philosophical discipline on their own, in their spare time (especially with no previous exposure to the subject). As Mark implicitly recognizes, the inability to promote critical thinking is not inherently a personal shortcoming on the part of the teacher. Education exists in a constantly shifting, hectic context and here, despite the literature pushing for critical thinking all the time, one can begin to see the real challenges that teachers face.

Critical thinking is something of value in education. If students are to be more than just good memorizers, then developing their critical capacities will be of the utmost importance, especially in philosophy. But promoting critical thinking in the face of the issue of expertise will not be answered by hollow appeals to more ‘passionate’ teachers. While a passion for the subject is never something to be discredited (as we see with John’s classroom), alone it is not enough. John adds another layer of nuance to this issue:

And to be honest with you, we are constantly being introduced every couple of years to something new. This is the new board initiative; this is the new buzz word in the board; this is the new, you know…. Critical thinking is actually gone […] it’s kind of morphed into growth mindset and this mindset and differentiated instruction. So now this is the new buzzword on PD days, this is the new thing that we are now focusing on.

John identifies an educational world with a constantly shifting target. As John suggest, just as one is “trying to wrap their head around” critical thinking, a new initiative in education steals its limelight. And while John knows such new initiatives are meant to be an “add-on,” he notes that this inevitably diverts a teachers’ focus. As he says, “Let’s get critical thinking down first,” then one can introduce something new. In this respect, the issue of expertise moves beyond teacher experience as an educator, or within the philosophy class; the issue of expertise also applies to
critical thinking as a pedagogical approach. As teachers are being bombarded with more and more initiatives they never get the extended opportunity to practice the successful implementation of critical thinking into the classroom. Moreover, the external support seems to eventually disappear. As John notes, ‘critical thinking is actually gone’ as a focus of professional development. In essence, teachers are meant to help students’ foster critical thinking skills, but as John implies teachers are not afforded the same opportunity to foster critical thinking pedagogy.

It is here we return back to the issue alluded to at the end of section 4.2.2 – the idea that critical thinking can become exalted as this unattainable ideal. If teachers feel as though they cannot adequately practice critical thinking pedagogy before being bombarded with a new initiative, then it is understandable why critical thinking is perceived as an unreachable goal. Such rapid movement of initiatives ultimately places teachers further in the ‘survival’ situation previously addressed: if too many things are happening at once, something is going to be abandoned. Unfortunately, as something that does require a conscious, intentional effort for its success, critical thinking could easily fall to the wayside. In philosophy courses, courses that are based in critical thought, this becomes particularly problematic as students encounter classes that never truly expose them to the discipline. While both the John and Mark attempt to promote classes of critical thought, they simultaneously reveal a nuanced landscape of problems and issue that teachers encounter in the process. I do not seek to solve these problems in this present work – I merely want to bring them to attention. Throughout this discussion, we have seen specific issues like student engagement bump against larger, systematic issues of expertise. Overlapping and mixing together in the philosophy class, teachers are faced with potent challenges that
ultimately must be the focus of further research if high school philosophy is to become a consistent crucible of critical thought.

4.4.0 Conclusion

Throughout the preceding discussions, I have discussed my findings relating to how critical thinking is promoted in the high school philosophy classroom. I began, with the relationship between critical thinking and the philosophy course. Unsurprisingly, both Mark and John felt that philosophy is a subject founded in critical thought. To have philosophy without critical thinking would be a failure to truly teach the discipline. But in such discussions, an important theme emerges: the relation between critical thinking, and teaching content. By analyzing both Mark and John’s practice, I uncover two divergent approaches to the classroom: critical thinking as something consciously embedded into daily class structure, and critical thinking as something more reserved for culminating tasks. In light of this contrast, John and Mark’s classroom practice begins to situate itself in the standard, and reflective paradigms respectively. Such discussions provide interesting insights when viewed in tandem with both John and Mark’s respective definitions of critical thinking. Overall, both educators’ definitions align closely with one another, and the theoretical definition proposed in chapter 2 (with a specific emphasis on criterial thinking and metacognition). But while both educators share a similar theoretical understanding critical thinking, their views on the feasibility of this theory in the actual classroom space begin to diverge.

As I explore critical thinking within the context of the philosophy classroom, my findings reveal a constant tension between content acquisition and the promotion of critical thought. As Mark implements his skills-based approach, one sees an approach that embeds both content
acquisition with the development of critical thinking skills. But in the realm of John’s classroom, an implicit binary between content and critical thinking emerge – one that ultimately bogs down critical thought in more passive learning. While initially seeming to instantiate John’s easy categorization into the standard paradigm, his struggles with balancing content and critical thinking inevitably destabilize these discrete categories. Further analysis of the ‘content-heavy’ classroom reveals a mythologizing of critical thinking that ultimately lends to a problematic interpretation of the feasibility of critical thinking in daily class structure.

My research thus demonstrates that actively promoting critical thinking in the class is not necessarily dependent on theoretically comprehending critical thinking (both educator’s define critical thought in line with the theory); instead, the contrast between John and Mark reveal an issue of connecting said theory to the actual classroom space. By contrasting Mark and John, I uncover important findings that begin to illustrate a lapse in the theory. While this push for critical thinking is prominent, and while many voices have helped establish the theoretical framework of critical thinking pedagogy, there is distinct silence surrounding feasible ways in which the theory can be embedded in the classroom space.

With an analysis of Mark and John’s pedagogy revealing issues with implementing critical thinking, the final part of my findings discusses two specific issues: participation and expertise. The discussions of these two issues reiterate the need for further research to discuss tangible ways in which critical thinking can be embedded into daily class structure. While teachers like Mark and John share diverse and useful strategies for doing so, there needs to be further discussions surrounding the philosophy class. By analyzing the tasks, assignments and daily routines of Mark and John, my research begins to share some ideas of how one might approach critical thinking within high school philosophy. But more importantly, my research
reveals a need for teachers to feel guided and supported as they undertake the rich, difficult task of teaching philosophy. As a subject that compounds the issues of participation and expertise, more time needs to be dedicated towards this specific classroom context. If critical thinking truly is a focus of philosophy, and it would be very hard to argue that it is not, then my findings must act as launching point for further discussion into the implementation of critical thinking in philosophy at the secondary level. Chapter 5 seeks to begin such discussions. The findings in this chapter reveal important information for philosophy teachers and teachers in general. Thus, the following section elaborates on these findings, discussing the recommendations and implications that arise from my analysis.
Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations and Extending Discussion

5.0.0. Introduction:

As seen in my findings, both my participants’ conceptualization of critical thought, and their subsequent practice align closely with the theoretical definition outlined in the literature. The first section of this chapter will briefly discuss these points of convergence, and the minor divergences from the literature. Considering that critical thought is something that is not limited to the philosophy classroom, the findings elucidated in this brief study hold weight for not only philosophy teachers, but teachers in general. Therefore, following these discussions of the literature, I will then outline the potential implications of my findings – both for professional practice in general, and my future teaching. Finally, I will conclude by offering some recommendations based on my research.

5.1.0 Relation to the Literature:

In chapter two, I defined critical thinking as criterial, metacognitive thinking that is both sensitive to context, and performed with the appropriate habits of mind. While lengthy, this definition captures the multi-faceted views of critical thinking outlined in my literature review. But even with such a definition forming the backbone to the discussions throughout this paper, a question remains: were all facets of this definition addressed by my participants when describing their personal practice? The following will briefly discuss the four elements of this definition in relation to both the practice, and personal definitions of critical thought that Mark and John describe in chapter four.

John and Mark noted criterial thinking as an important element of the high school philosophy classroom. While not using the word ‘criterial,’ their constant call for students to
challenge the solidity of their assumptions hearkens back to the kind of thinking outlined in both Lipman (2003) and Case (2005). For both educators, the Socratic line of questioning they describe in their classroom signals the desire to push students to make arguments that are “well-founded, structured, and reliable” (Lipman, 2003 p. 212). As the literature notes, criteria are the means by which students can transform preferential statements into solid arguments. As Lipman (2003) outlines this notion of ‘cognitive accountability’ (i.e. possessing a solid reason as to why one holds a certain view) it is easy to see how both Mark and John construct classroom environments that hold students’ thought to a certain standard. As Mark calls for students to wrestle with their unanalyzed assumption, and as John pushes students to develop reasons for their agreement or disagreement with a given claim, it is clear that both educators align themselves closely with the literature; critical thinking is thought based in criterial reasoning not only theoretically, but in their day-to-day practice.

Similarly, both Mark and John emphasize the metacognitive elements of critical thought outlined in chapter two. As both Mark and John emphasize the criterial thinking in their respective definitions of critical thought they simultaneously emphasize the awareness of one’s own thought that that is imperative to the critical thinking process (Marzano et. al, 1989; Marzano, et. al., 1989). As students undergo this interrogation of their previously held beliefs, or as they engage in the praxis that John sees as integral to the class (Freire, 1997), students are called upon to evaluate their thinking to ultimately determine if it is satisfactory. In essence, as criterial thinking becomes a focus of both John and Marks classrooms, they likewise demonstrate a desire for the metacognitive awareness that allows students to assess the quality of critical thought. While their discussions are not couched in Marzano’s (1989) terms (e.g. procedural, conditional, or declarative knowledge), these educators emphasize both the acquisition of content
knowledge and thinking strategies to utilize said knowledge. However, what is missing from both John and Mark’s discussions is the element of meta-meta-thinking – an awareness of one’s metacognition and knowing why a meta-cognitive strategy is effective or not (Lipman, 2003; Fischer, 1998; Marzano, 1989). In essence, it is unclear whether this meta-metacognition is simply an implicit undercurrent of their practice, or an explicit focus for students. While both educators partake in their respective Socratic process, are they simultaneously creating a conscious awareness of metacognition in their students? This question ultimately lingers. The brief snapshot into both Mark and John’s practice provides no feasible way to determine how conscious students are of the metacognitive process. This awareness of metacognition, and the importance of said awareness, are questions that are ultimately left for more involved studies of teacher practice.

In terms of sensitivity to context, my findings again align with the literature. Both Mark and John attempt to develop students’ domain-specific skills and knowledge. Both educators understand that the philosophy classroom is a space that aims to develop students’ knowledge of philosophy (Case, 2005), and their domain-specific philosophical skills (e.g. essay writing, text deconstruction, logic, formulation of arguments etc.) (Bailin, 1999; McPeck, 1981). Mark and John generally place emphasis on one or the other: skills or content. The dichotomy that implicitly emerges in chapter 4 points to important implications and recommendations that will be addressed in subsequent sections. For now, it suffices to say both educators position themselves in a similar theoretical framework of critical thought despite the divergences in their personal approaches.

Habits of mind are the least addressed element of the definition outlined in chapter two. While Case (2005) and Facione (1995) describe habits of mind as the real impetus to critically
think, both Mark and John discuss habits of mind in a rather discursive way. In my interview with Mark, habits of mind appear in offhand comments concerning how he encourages students to explore, engage new ideas, and wrestle with new topics; for John, habits of mind appear in his self-proclaimed passion for the subject, the infectious drive to question that he tries to pass onto his students. Interestingly though, there is no indication that habits of mind are a conscious focus in either teachers’ definition of critical thought; instead, they remain in the background. Again, considering that this is a limited study, it is unclear whether Mark or John explicitly discuss habits of mind. But in my findings, it seems that habits of mind – unlike criterial thinking, metacognitions and sensitivity to context – are not a conscious daily focus. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many of the habits of mind outlined in chapter two (e.g. fairness, open-mindedness) are typical elements of any successful class ethos. In this respect, perhaps both Mark and John do not view habits of mind as a part of critical thinking (i.e. the focus of our discussions), but broader, more general school structures.

My findings illustrate that both Mark and John seem to operate from a definition of critical thinking that closely aligns with the literature. But beyond this definition, both Mark and John also position themselves within the reflective paradigm that Lipman (2003) sees as integral to critical thought. This reflective paradigm is, essentially, the locale where all these elements of critical thinking can come into fruition. In chapter four, it is clear that Mark positions himself consciously and firmly within this reflective paradigm. But as for John, despite positioning himself in a paradigm antagonistic to critical thought, further analysis reveals his practice is more ‘reflective’ than he initially assumes. The standard paradigm is a place of rote passivity, and since John views critical thinking as something lofty and unattainable, he fails to see the small ways in which he crafts a ‘reflective’ space for his students. Within this struggle between
content-acquisition and critical thought, John begins to reveal an important issue for the implementation of critical thinking. When I began this study, I anticipated that my most fruitful discussions would come from how actual practice departs from theory; I anticipated that educators would fail to enact all of the facets of the definitions outlined in chapter two. Instead, what I now find is a close alignment to the theory. Because of this, what becomes significant is not how educators conceptualize critical thinking, but their self-proclaimed ability to implement critical thinking in the classroom. The most fruitful discussions in chapter four come from understanding an educator’s perceived confidence in creating communities of inquiry, in making critical thinking a part of daily class structure. It is here that I turn towards the implications of the issues outlined in chapter four.

5.2.0 Considering the Implications:

The following sections will address the implications of my research for both general teacher practice, and my own. Moving away from the theoretical definition of critical thought, this section will address the effects of the emergent issues outlined in chapter four, namely the student-centered and teacher-centered issues. While the scope of this research is narrow, John and Mark allude to important issues of confidence, feasibility, and cynicism percolating in the teacher community. Using this study as a preliminary diagnosis, and as a starting point for future, more involved research, I am hoping it will benefit not only the high school philosophy class, but the classroom in general.

5.2.1 General Implications:

My data reveals the potential to mythologize critical thought into an unattainable ideal. As John struggles to balance content and critical thought, a powerful binary emerges making
critical thinking into something that appears mutually exclusive from content acquisition. Instead of a more embedded understanding of critical thought (i.e. that content acquisition can be critical in nature) this tacit dichotomy implies that teachers must choose one or the other.

Unlike Mark who sees content working in service of critical thought, John reveals a different side of this discussion. If one uses John as an example, then one can see teachers feeling as though content must precede critical thought, or that a content lesson cannot be properly critical. As John describes being bogged down in rote-learning, he reveals a struggle to meet the demands of the theoretical definitions he himself outlines. What he fails to consciously recognize are the constant small ways in which his day-to-day ‘content’ activities actually foster the metacognitive, criterial, contextual judgements that are foundational to critical thought. Unlike Mark who consciously recognizes the relation between critical thinking and content, John demonstrates how even the most effective educators can become overwhelmed in the classroom when tasked with creating these constantly critical environments.

This indicates that we need to shift our thinking about critical thought. Firstly, it cannot be seen as something removed from daily class content. Secondly, these findings indicate a need for teachers to develop a more conscious understanding of the small ways in which critical thinking manifests. Again, the issue does not arise solely from misunderstanding critical thinking in theory, but understanding how that theory looks in the daily classroom space. While having an understanding of the theoretical ideal is important, these findings reveal that this alone can create a lack of confidence, or even a cynical attitude to critical thinking’s feasibility. Part of the issue identified in my chapter four results from idealizing critical thinking into more than it actually is. In reality, critical thinking is simply providing opportunities for students to practice and develop their ability to make reasoned judgements. But as John reveals in his discussion,
teachers can mistakenly interpret ‘critical thinking’ as these lofty activities (e.g. extended philosophical debates) that are far beyond the capability of many high school philosophers. By failing to account for the variety of ways students can communicate or think critically, this problem may ultimately lead to overlooking, or even silencing potential critical thinking opportunities. Thus, my findings signal a need to focus our attention not on theory, but on actual practice. In philosophy, critical thinking is integral. And if teachers cannot recognize simple ways to actualize critical thought then it is not hard to imagine teachers slipping into more standard paradigms. If there truly is this push for the critical thinking that the literature indicates, then my study reveals a need for teachers to be educated on how to feasibly make critical thinking a part of daily practice (recommendations on how to do so will be discussed later). John demonstrates that without this understanding, critical thinking is threatened by apathy. If teachers do not feel that critical thinking is possible in the day-to-day classroom space, then it will inevitably fall to the wayside.

Implementing critical thinking is clearly challenging, perhaps more so in the philosophy classroom where critical thinking is so entwined with the discipline. While both Mark and John are seasoned educators in the philosophy class, they also point to an issue of expertise that needs to be addressed. Since philosophy is a rather uncommon teachable, teachers not versed in the discipline are often assigned the course. My findings indicate a need for teachers to have proper supports when teaching philosophy and critical thought. Amidst a teachers’ hectic day-to-day schedule, the demands of teaching critical thinking become difficult when compounded with a lack of knowledge surrounding the discipline. My participants’ observations of overwhelmed, ill-prepared teachers struggling to stay afloat in the philosophy class illustrate a situation in which teachers must resort to poor pedagogy just to survive. It is not enough to delineate what a
critical classroom looks like if teachers feel that they do not have the time, knowledge or confidence to create such spaces. As Mark demonstrates, not all educators feel that critical thinking is impossible or idealistic. But my findings reveal that some do. While the scope of my study is too narrow to determine the extent of this issue, my findings imply a very real need to help teachers feel supported as they implement critical thinking pedagogy. While I provide some recommendations on what this support might look like (c.f. 5.3.0), my findings indicate the need for more involved studies on this issue.

5.2.2 Personal Implications:

As a pre-service teacher, having the opportunity to speak with experienced educators has been valuable for my future practice. While my current teachables are not in philosophy, it is a subject I want to teach. Armed with this knowledge of the philosophy classroom, I feel as though this research has better prepared me to take on the difficult, nuanced educational landscape of high school philosophy. Not only can I borrow and learn from the actual teaching strategies outlined in chapter four, but I can also reflect on each of Mark and John’s personal successes and struggles to better understand how to approach critical thinking in the classroom. Throughout teachers college, I have been developing a theoretical understanding of critical thinking. But as my research indicates, this is simply not enough. Combining both Mark and John’s experiences with my own, I feel as though I have a better grasp on how to blend both the theory and actual classroom practice. Perhaps most importantly, by analyzing these discussions of idealism, cynicism and potential teacher apathy, I feel as though I can be more self-reflexive of my own practice. Understanding the factors that contribute to these feelings can help me meaningfully reflect on, and find solutions for these issues as I encounter them. For example, as a new educator, I can now begin to see small ways in which I can foster critical environments for
new students. Building this confidence in my own practice, and better understanding ways in which I can make critical thinking a part of my daily practice, will help me be more successful in the philosophy classroom, and classrooms in general.

Being a researcher has also afforded me the unique opportunity to engage with issues of theory and practice. Instead of being passively involved in this educational issue, I have been able to discuss, identify and recognize a potentially pervasive problem. While the scope of my research is small, it has provided an impetus for future study and observation. As I enter into the field of teaching and informally engage with other teachers’ pedagogy, I now possess an awareness of issues that influence the application of critical thinking. By possessing an understanding of this issue I can begin to consciously act in ways that will improve the implementation of critical thinking in philosophy. It is a truly unique opportunity. Armed with this understanding and awareness, I now turn to some recommendations based on my findings.

5.3.0 Recommendations:

One of the major limitations of this research is its small-scale. In this sense, these recommendations should all be viewed as general suggestions that could potentially address the emergent issues in my study. While these conclusions may not be generalizable writ large, it is only with more involved studies that one can provide a more nuanced and accurate diagnoses of the reality of critical thinking in high school philosophy classes. The following recommendations are meant to spur further consideration. And importantly, these recommendations should not be bound solely to the parameters of the philosophy class. Since critical thinking is a pervasive movement in education, the recommendations here also have implications for educators in general.
The first recommendation is simply a continuation of ongoing practice. Teacher education programs need to continue to address critical thinking in the classroom; this will allow teachers to intentionally navigate, and explore the multiple elements of critical thought in their own classroom spaces. However, as my research indicates, pre-service programs cannot become too theoretical. While theory is important, it can ultimately leave teachers with an idealized image of critical thinking, and no practical applications for how to apply said theory in the classroom space. If pre-service teachers could leave their programs armed with tangible ways to bring critical thinking into the class, I predict that fewer teachers would feel overwhelmed by the prospect of critical thinking becoming a daily element of philosophy lessons. However, the role and effectiveness of pre-service teaching programs in relation to critical thinking pedagogy was something wholly unexplored in this study. Thus, this suggestion is born from John’s struggle to balance content and critical thought. Pre-service programs could help future teachers avoid this struggle by helping them better understand the mutual relation between critical thinking and content, while simultaneously providing feasible strategies to facilitate its integration into the classroom. With proper pre-service training, I predict that teachers will be able to dismantle the unattainable mythos of critical thinking revealed in my findings.

My other recommendations stem from the issue of expertise addressed in chapter four. Here, my findings indicate that the philosophy classroom is often a space where teachers feel out of their element. While ideally there would never be a philosophy class taught by someone without a philosophy background, this is unrealistic. Instead, I suggest an emphasis on fostering collaborative communities so that teachers feel more supported in the classroom. As my findings indicate, critical thinking is often abandoned when teachers feel overwhelmed by the demands of their class. Having active professional learning communities or further professional development
could act as a way to help teachers feel better supported in the classroom. But again, such supports need to not only clarify the theoretical underpinnings of critical thinking, but simultaneously provide teachers with an understanding of how that looks in day-to-day practice. With this support, teachers could focus less on surviving in the class, and more on creating the critical spaces they know classrooms should be. Unfortunately, a collaborative teacher community is not something that can simply be parachuted into schools. It is something that will demand active department leaders, administration and encouragement at a systemic level. Without sustained support at this systemic level, professional learning communities or professional development will be ineffectual – they will be just other things that demand more of a teachers’ time and energy (thereby exacerbating the problem without solving it). As a researcher, I had the opportunity to discuss pedagogy with two very different, successful educators. By simply engaging in such conversations, I now feel that I have a better understanding of how to be successful in the class. I can only imagine the benefits of sustained, committed dialogues between teachers; I am not in a position to say that it would fully address the issues that this paper discusses, but it would surely be a step towards solving teachers’ perceived ability to successfully implement critical thinking pedagogy.

5.4.0 Conclusion:

This small-scale research paper is meant as a diagnostic of the state of critical thinking in the high school philosophy classroom. It illustrates that issues surrounding the promotion of critical thinking in the philosophy classroom do not stem from a misunderstanding of what critical thinking is in theory. John and Mark’s personal definitions of critical thinking are not only consistent with one another, but with the literature as well. Thus, one’s attention moves away from the theory, and towards the application of said theory in the actual space of the
classroom. My findings indicate that issues surrounding critical thinking in the philosophy classroom are born from the perceived infeasibility of implementing critical thinking on a daily basis. While Mark is confident in his capacity to foster daily critical thinking, John reveals that this confidence is not universal. As such, my paper indicates a need for teachers to better understand not only the theory, but the applications of said theory. Only in this way will teachers come to better understand the small, feasible ways in which critical thinking can become an embedded part of the class.

While limited in scope, the findings in my paper indicate a need for pre-service teacher education programs to continue to provide future teachers with both theoretical and practical classroom strategies. In a discipline like philosophy, this becomes imperative: to reduce the philosophy classroom to the standard paradigm is to fail to teach philosophy at all. But for this reason, pre-service education is not enough. Ongoing collaborative efforts between teachers will be necessary to combat the teacher apathy that develops from being overwhelmed by the demands of critical thinking pedagogy. By promoting sustained and committed teacher collaboration (through professional learning communities or ongoing professional development), schools can begin to combat issues of expertise, and collectively improve teacher confidence surrounding critical thinking in the classroom.

Critical thinking is important not only in philosophy, but in all education. Because of this, more in-depth studies in the same vein as my own need to be conducted in other disciplines. There is an overwhelming amount of literature that seeks to delineate what critical thinking is at a theoretical level, but there are much fewer discussions surrounding how this theory looks in the day-to-day reality of the class. My study seeks to generate further questions that will hopefully be taken-up by researchers in the future. How can we combat the issue of expertise? What
systematic changes would benefit critical thinking pedagogy? What strategies in the philosophy classroom would help foster sustained critical inquiry? While this paper hints at answers to these questions, it is only with further research into critical thinking pedagogy that we will find more definitive answers. This paper then acts as an invitation for further investigations of the high school philosophy classroom. As any good philosophy student knows, the unexamined life is not worth living. In a similar sense, the unexamined philosophy class is not worth teaching.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

[Logo of University of Toronto, OISE]

Date:

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Lucas Berman and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the ways Ontario high school teachers define, promote and implement critical thinking in the philosophy classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have at least 5 years’ experience teaching grade 12 philosophy courses. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lucas Berman
Name

Phone Number

Email

Course Instructor’s Name: _________________________

Contact Info: ____________________________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _____________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _______________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Background Information:

1) 
   a) How long have you been teaching?
   b) How long have you been teaching philosophy?
   c) What is the main subject that you teach?
   d) What grade do you generally teach?
   e) What did you study in university?

Classroom Practice - What/How

2) How do you define critical thinking? How do you feel about curriculum’s emphasis on developing student’s critical capacities?

   2.1) What do you think about using this term? I’ve personally noticed that some teachers resist this label. Do you? Do you have any idea why there might be resistance to this term?

3) To what extent is critical thinking a part of your daily routine in the classroom?

   3.1) Are there ever times where you avoid critical thinking? Why?

   3.2) If not evident from 2 or 3: Why isn’t critical thinking a part of the daily routine in your classroom?

4) In what ways do you try to get your class to think critically?

5) What resources do you use in the classroom to support critical thinking? Why did you choose those resources?

6) Can you tell me about a specific lesson or assignment that you think cultivated high-levels of critical thinking in your students? Why do you feel that this assignment/lesson was so effective?

8) In what ways do you promote student awareness of their own thinking (metacognition) in your classroom? Do you feel that student awareness of their own thinking is an important part of your daily practice?

9) Every field has a definition of excellence. In philosophy, this excellence is seen by the quality of arguments that one can make. How do you teach students proper argumentation? What strategies do you use to help them be a ‘philosopher’?

   9.1) In the literature, there is a lot of discussion about criterial thinking – have students think in accordance with strong, sound reasons to support their claims. How does criterial thinking factor into your philosophy classroom?
9.2) Ask whether this is a daily aspect of the class, or something that is more reserved for assignments.

10) When trying to get a class to think critically, how important are students’ attitudes towards the task at hand? Do you actively try to promote strong habits of mind in the class?

**Barriers/Challenges**

11) Philosophy is filled with abstract and complicated ideas. How do you go about introducing a new philosophical idea to the class?

12) What is the greatest challenge for promoting critical thinking in your philosophy classroom?

13) Do you approach philosophy courses differently than the other courses you teach?

13.1) In what ways are your approaches different and why?

14) Reflecting on your past philosophy classes, what is something that you would do differently in your approach to the course? How/why would you change that?

15) Considering that philosophy is offered to grade 12 students, in what ways have you prepared students for the demands of post-secondary education?

**Critical Thinking – Why?**

16) As someone coming from teachers college, I have noticed that there is a lot discussion surrounding critical thinking in the classroom.

Do you feel that philosophy, more than other courses, demands a stronger focus on critical thinking? Why or why not?

16.1) If yes: how do you meet this higher demand? How did you adjust your practice?

16.2) If no: How does philosophy then compare to your other courses?

17) Do you feel that philosophy plays an important role in developing students’ critical thinking capacities?
### Appendix C: Code Genesis Table

**Appendix C:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary Codes</th>
<th>Final codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as ‘talk’ vs. Philosophy with an ‘academic slant’</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as traditionally academic (based in reading and writing)</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as ‘serious’ consideration</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging open-mindedness</td>
<td>Open-Mindedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as Meta-thinking</td>
<td>Teacher conception of critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia focused on rote-learning/regurgitation of facts</td>
<td>Rote-learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned rote-memory (from academia)</td>
<td>Rote-learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable knowledge</td>
<td>Destabilizing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destabilizing knowledge</td>
<td>Destabilizing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-thinking</td>
<td>Self-Reflexivity and Metacognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond the descriptive</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as ‘deeper knowledge’</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rote-response as ‘superficial’ thinking</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as meaning making</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking embedded into daily practice</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socratic Discussion</td>
<td>Socratic discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of own practice</td>
<td>Reflective practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing reading and writing</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as ‘talk’ vs. philosophy as an ‘academic’ practice</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as a regimented process</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as regimented academic practice</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing reading and writing skills</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school philosophy as preparatory for future studies in philosophy</td>
<td>High school philosophy as preparatory for future studies in philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and writing as ‘core’ to philosophy</td>
<td>Developing field specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading deconstruction</td>
<td>Reading deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>Habits of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling deconstructive reading</td>
<td>Reading deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding essay writing</td>
<td>Essay writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading vs. reading philosophical texts</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing students philosophical reading skills</td>
<td>Developing field specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing field-specific skills to support critical thinking</td>
<td>Developing field specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as more focused on critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking as analysing ideas</td>
<td>Philosophy based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English class focused on developing mechanical skills over thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as rooted in critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English analysis vs. philosophical analysis</td>
<td>Philosophy based in critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic as the ‘mechanics’ of philosophy</td>
<td>Developing field-specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing logic skills</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aversion to certain philosophical subjects</td>
<td>Issue of Expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher before and after curricular changes in philosophy</td>
<td>Reflective practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly open course structure</td>
<td>Highly open course structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging to learn and teach logic</td>
<td>Issue of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic as a core part of Philosophy</td>
<td>Developing field-specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging intellectual risk-taking</td>
<td>Intellectual risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom atmosphere where mistakes are accepted</td>
<td>Habits of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Thinking</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge in teaching philosophy</td>
<td>Issue of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic as a part of critical thinking</td>
<td>Developing field-specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended learning</td>
<td>Blended learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion forums</td>
<td>Online discussion forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class participation</td>
<td>Online discussion forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations to Socratic discussion</td>
<td>Issue of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>Community of Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of evaluating philosophical thought</td>
<td>Issue of evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages of Socratic Discussion</td>
<td>Socratic discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of Engaging Students</td>
<td>Issue of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class as space to practice philosophy</td>
<td>Practicing philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ‘stilts’ philosophical thought</td>
<td>Issue of evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of getting participation</td>
<td>Issue of Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding learning</td>
<td>Logical analysis / reading deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing logical analysis skills</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical reading skills</td>
<td>Reading deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student as Expert</td>
<td>Destabilizing student-teacher binary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging curiosity</td>
<td>Habits of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to breakdown student/teacher binary</td>
<td>Destabilizing student-teacher binary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building academic independence</td>
<td>Habits of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy specific skills</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving beyond the paradigm of rote-memory</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the primary works</td>
<td>Focus on primary texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing writing</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency develops critical thinking skills</td>
<td>Practicing philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing ‘comfort’ around reading and writing</td>
<td>Developing field-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of time</td>
<td>Issue of Time constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good ‘sampling’ to evaluate students</td>
<td>Issue of evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstructing examples for essays</td>
<td>Example Synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling the construction of examples</td>
<td>Example Synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding as more than rote-memory</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical thinking in contrast to rote-learning</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of expertise leads to problems in the development of field-specific skills</td>
<td>Issue of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic barrier to teaching critical thinking</td>
<td>Systematic issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defaulting to a paradigm of rote-learning</td>
<td>Issue of time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks as ‘notorious’ for promoting rote-learning</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of expertise can be overcome</td>
<td>Issue of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic challenges leading to issue of expertise</td>
<td>Systematic issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of expertise not always a personal flaw</td>
<td>Systematic Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as beginning with critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical thinking as critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical thinking as ‘explicit’ critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking in other courses as accidental</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate connection between philosophy and critical thinking</td>
<td>Philosophy as based in critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the primary works</td>
<td>Developing field-specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast to philosophy as ‘academic’</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge with philosophy resources</td>
<td>Critical thinking as beyond rote, descriptive facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Issue/Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks as preventing students from developing familiarity with primary texts</td>
<td>Developing field specific skills/knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge in promoting critical thinking in philosophy</td>
<td>Issue of Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark-driven mentality as barrier to critical thinking</td>
<td>Issue of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as a ‘serious’ subject</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy as ‘talk’ vs. philosophy as regimented, academic practice</td>
<td>Philosophy as rigorous practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>