Philosophical Teaching as a Means for Raising Critical and Moral Consciousness

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PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHING AS A MEANS FOR RAISING CRITICAL AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS

A Thesis Presented
by
Christine D. Jacques

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of the University of Massachusetts, Boston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
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Critical and Creative Thinking Program
c 1996 Christine D. Jacques
PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHING AS A MEANS
FOR RAISING CRITICAL AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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In remembrance of an extraordinary woman
My maternal grandmother

ANNA ARNOLD FLEMING
1901 - 1987

Gram

With her words She inspired us
Through her faith She gave us hope
and
By the way She lived her life
She taught us--
All living things have worth.

-cdj
A number of people deserve credit for helping me bring this thesis to completion. Although I cannot thank each person by name, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to a select few.

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Finally, I would like to thank my high school students. Without them this thesis would not have been possible.

Blessings on each and all!
ABSTRACT

PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHING AS A MEANS FOR RAISING CRITICAL AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS

September 1996

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Traditionally, high school English classes have been "tracked" according to ability level. This thesis addresses the problem of teaching an English course to a heterogeneous group of students with diverse academic backgrounds and a range of abilities. It shows how a philosophy-based approach to teaching, as compared with the traditional/didactic approach, provided a means for every ability level of student to participate in the thinking/learning process. "Philosophical teaching" is a method of teaching and a way of learning that promotes critical thinking, self-expression, and reasoning through self-reflection, while developing critical and moral consciousness at the same time. It is a method of inquiry that relies on the use of Socratic questioning, small group discussions, and empathic modes of learning as its primary teaching tools. Given the circumstances of this night school English class, both teacher and students found that philosophical teaching proved to be a viable way to help adolescents learn the required content and to think critically and morally.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Solution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of this Thesis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. EMPOWERMENT AS THE AIM OF EDUCATION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Oppression?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Oppression?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Philosophical Teaching?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is an Oppressive Conceptual Framework?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Empowerment?</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHING IN THE HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASSROOM: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Standard Paradigm and The Reflective Paradigm: Diverse Teaching Practices</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Traditional/Didactic Model of Teaching Practice</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philosophical/Critical Model of Teaching Practice</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Teaching: Educating for Personal and Social Transformation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE CURRICULUM: EXPOSING THE ROOTS OF OPPRESSION/PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Background</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Objectives</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Evaluation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Students</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Introductory Lessons</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 3 R's: Respect, Responsibility, and Reasoning</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and Introductions</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socratic Questioning</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Questions</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV. Lesson II: Exposing the 'Isms</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Assignment</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and Objectives</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson III: Ableism</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Assignment</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Teaching: A Zen Approach</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| V. LISTENING WITHOUT PREJUDICE: STUDENT RESPONSES WITH TEACHER REFLECTIONS.   | 69 |
| Chapter Overview.               | 69 |
| Participation: The Key to Empowerment | 69 |
| Conclusion.                    | 77 |

| WORKS CITED.                   | 80 |

| APPENDIX.                      | 84 |
| A. Activities and Reflection Sheets | 84 |
| B. In Their Own Words           | 93 |
To cultivate students' impulses to think philosophically, we must continually encourage them to believe that they can figure out where they stand on root issues, that they themselves have something worthwhile to say, and that what they have to say should be given serious consideration by the other students and teacher.

-Richard Paul
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I was asked by the head of the English department at a local high school if I would be interested in teaching a night school English class. The class met for two hours once a week for twelve weeks. The purpose of the class was to help students who had failed a semester of English to earn academic credit in order to graduate. There was no prescribed curriculum to follow, and I would not be required to use a textbook. Because I would have the opportunity to develop my own teaching materials, I readily accepted the challenge.

In preparation for the class, I began by asking myself how I could interest a group of students in a subject area they apparently didn't care about and hadn't succeeded with. Imagining them moaning and asking, "But why do we have to do English?" (the same way I had once moaned about algebra), I decided to help them discover how fortunate they were to have English as their primary language. So I borrowed *The Story of English Video Series* (1986) from the library and developed a set of lesson plans and student handouts based on this provocative program, focusing mainly on the growth of American English. And, in addition to teaching vocabulary words taken from the series, basic grammar, and writing skills, I also put together a number of journal exercises that revolved around personal values and moral
dilemmas. Well prepared and full of enthusiasm, I was ready
to teach my new class—or so I thought.

The Problem

Unfortunately, I was unable to sustain my enthusiasm
for long. After the second class meeting I could predict
which students would do well, which ones would fail, and
which ones would merely slide by. By mid-semester my
enthusiasm had all but disappeared. I realized there were
three factors I had not taken into consideration while
designing the curriculum.

First, I found I could not depend on the majority of
the students to do the homework which prepared them for the
in-class lessons. Second, over thirty students were
enrolled in the class, and two hours a week was simply not
enough time to help all of them or to cover all the material
I had planned. Third, and most important, I was not
prepared to deal with the diversity of academic ability in
the class which ranged from special needs to honor students
with the majority of the students performing somewhere in
between. I found this diversity the most difficult for me
because I was used to English classes that were usually
"tracked" according to ability level.

Although I managed to get through the semester, the
experience forced me to re-evaluate my own philosophy of
education and what I, as an English teacher, thought would
be valuable for these high school students to know in
addition to the requisite English skills. I agreed to teach the class again, and I spent the next two semesters experimenting with different materials, methods, and ideas before I decided upon the following curriculum and teaching method to solve these problems.

A Solution

In response to the pedagogical problem of how I could make the course more fair, meaningful, and accessible for all students in my heterogeneous English class, I developed an innovative curriculum on the topic of oppression. I chose oppression because I wanted my students to recognize how pervasive it is in their lives, how it affects their relationships with one another, and the way they perceive themselves and the world around them. Because many of these students would not go on to college, I wanted to raise their consciousness by providing a learning experience that would empower them through respect—respect for themselves and for each other. In addition to teaching the required English content, I hoped to encourage these students to take greater responsibility for their lives by helping them improve their reasoning skills so that they would learn to make increasingly sound and judicious judgments.

In addition to fulfilling my own philosophical goals, making oppression the subject matter of the course helped solve other problems. The material was new for all students, making the class more fair because none of the
students had previously been exposed to the topic of oppression in such depth. Additionally, oppression, as a topic for investigation, sparked an interest in student learning. Once students became aware of its insidious nature, learning about oppression became more relevant to them because it was something they could relate to in their everyday lives.

I also set out to find a way to make it possible for every ability level of student to actively participate in classroom discussions and learning activities. I chose to approach this aspect of my curriculum design from a philosophical rather than the traditional educational point of view. Because "the philosophical is a person-centered approach to thinking" (Paul 1992, 573), I have chosen the phrase "philosophical teaching" to describe the pedagogical approach that makes this possible. Teaching from a philosophical perspective places the student in the center of the thinking/learning process. To think philosophically is to recognize that everyone thinks within a self-constructed conceptual framework. "Critical thinking does not occur in a vacuum; it always occurs within some conceptual framework" (Warren 1988, 33). Having students inquire into the roots of their own thinking by having them reflect upon their own conceptual frameworks was a viable starting point from which all students could begin on equal footing. This kind of philosophical reflection allowed students to look at the material from their own perspectives and to express their own points of view in classroom
discussions. As a result, "philosophical teaching" provided a way for me to engage all my students in the thinking/learning process in spite of their diverse academic backgrounds. Moreover, philosophical teaching provided a means for students to discover for themselves the cultural roots of oppression. This technique allowed students to uncover the oppressive assumptions implicit in their thinking in a manner that was self-revealing rather than indoctrinating, showing them "how our modes of conceptualizing reality itself are conditioned by forces that are not always obvious" (Rothenberg 1992, 4).

The curriculum of this course is based on the assumption that self-knowledge is as important as academic knowledge, and might provide a means for integrating academic content. Examining and recreating one's own philosophical point of view plays a vital role in the intellectual growth and personal liberation of high school students regardless of whether or not they intend to go on to college. Given the importance of these considerations, an English course is an ideal vehicle for achieving these goals, as well as the goal of teaching the essential basic skills of communication and self-expression.

Purpose of this Thesis

Written to share my experiences with other secondary educators, the general purpose of this thesis is to show how the use of what I call philosophical teaching—a method of
inquiry that relies on the use of Socratic questioning, small group discussions, and empathic modes of learning as its primary teaching tools--helped me foster the development of critical and moral consciousness in my high school students.

Socratic questioning can be defined as a "mode of questioning that deeply probes the meaning, justification, or logical strength of a claim, position, or line of reasoning" (Paul 1992, 666). According to Paul (1992), there are three general forms of Socratic questioning: "the spontaneous, the exploratory, and the issue-specific" (362). Socratic questioning can come from the teacher and/or the students, can be used in large or small group discussions, one-to-one, or even with oneself. Through group discussions students discover that individuals have conflicting, and oftentimes paradoxical, points of view. Empathy, "the capacity to take the role and perspective of the other" (Gallo 1994, 45), allows students to look at issues from multiple points of view. According to Gallo (1994), empathy "can predispose the individual to more effective reasoning by increasing one's engagement with the issue and one's motivation for producing a fair judgment" (49), an educational goal of philosophical teaching. Together, the combination of these strategies helped me convert the traditional high school classroom into "a community of inquiry" (Lipman 1991, 14)--a place where teacher and students query and learn from each other.
Exposing the Roots of Oppression/Planting the Seeds of Change: A Critical and Creative Thinking Curriculum for Students-at-Risk is a thought-provoking curriculum that revolves around the topics of oppression, personal values, and moral dilemmas. Experientially based, its intent is to nurture the development of critical and moral consciousness in students by having them reflect upon their own frame of reference so that they might begin to critically examine and construct their own philosophical point of view. Moreover, it is this process of philosophical reflection that leads students to discover for themselves the presence of an oppressive conceptual framework that is deeply embedded in our thinking as a culture. Making students aware of this dominant frame of reference and how it shapes their view of reality creates a shift in consciousness. This awareness empowers students to perceive themselves, each other, and the world differently because they come to understand that they have the power to create and live meaningful and productive lives—regardless of race, gender, class, or academic ability.

In Chapter II, I place the issues in context by explaining why I chose oppression as both the central theme of the thesis and the content of the curriculum. I then define the terms and introduce the concepts I use in my solution. Chapter III details the theoretical framework for a philosophical approach, as compared with the traditional approach to teaching. It also addresses why a philosophical approach is a more engaging and less oppressive way for me
to teach adolescents how to think critically and morally. Chapter IV describes some of the lessons from the curriculum I developed and the methods used to implement them in the high school classroom. Student comments and reactions are incorporated into the discussion.

Based on a questionnaire given at the end of the semester, Chapter V looks at feedback from students as to whether or not my philosophical teaching approach had an effect on the way they learned the material. My own reflections on the class, the effectiveness of the teaching procedure, and what I learned from my students are also incorporated into the discussion.
Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves.

- Adrienne Rich
CHAPTER II
EMPOWERMENT AS THE AIM OF EDUCATION

Chapter Overview

This chapter puts the pedagogical issues into perspective by explaining why oppression is both the central theme of this thesis and the content of the curriculum. An explication of Warren’s (1988) oppressive conceptual framework reveals how teaching students to reflect philosophically on their own conceptual frameworks makes them aware of the dominant frame of reference that keeps oppression in place. It shows how philosophical teaching empowers students to think for themselves, and how it also prompts them to act in less oppressive ways towards themselves, each other, and the environment.

Why Oppression?

From the range of topics I could have chosen, why is oppression the subject matter of my curriculum and the unifying theme of this thesis? An explanation for my choice puts the pedagogical issues into context.

One of the factors that made teaching the night school English class so challenging was the diversity in academic ability among the students which ranged from special needs to honor students. This was a concern for two reasons.
First, it created a hostile classroom atmosphere among the students because they were not used to being grouped together heterogeneously. More than any other high school English class I had taught, the students in this class were blatantly disrespectful to each other. They treated one another differently based on how they viewed themselves and one another in relation to their perceived intelligence and the way each fit into the social structure of the school. Students in this particular class seemed to perceive themselves as "better than" or "less than," depending on their classifications according to their academic ability. Oftentimes this outlook led to open confrontation where students resorted to name calling, yelling such things as, "Oh, why don't you just shut up. You're nothing but a stupid SPED!"—or a burn-out, dumb jock, blonde bimbo, nerd, etc.—which in turn led to more vulgar language. Because of this predominant attitude, it was not a friendly and safe climate for learning to take place.

Second, the diversity in academic ability made it difficult to involve all students in the thinking/learning process, not necessarily because of the disparity in their so-called levels of intelligence, but because not everyone had the same types of learning experiences. For example, while some students knew what a thesis sentence was and had written essays derived from such statements, many students did not, nor had they ever been required to write an essay during their high school career. While some students had read Shakespearean drama, most had not. While some students
were able to analyze literary works in terms of symbolism and theme, most were not. Several students had never even been required to read a book while in high school. I didn’t see teaching to the lowest common denominator as a viable option. Yet this variety of academic backgrounds and abilities made it difficult to find a starting point from which all could begin on equal footing.

On the surface what appeared to be at issue was a blatant lack of respect for students who were considered "less intelligent," and therefore "different," by both their peers and an educational system that did not provide equal learning opportunities for all members of its student population. Even more alarming was that many of the "less intelligent" students unquestioningly bought into this notion that they were somehow less worthy because of their assigned academic status. Probing beneath the surface of the situation, I began to recognize that there were more subtle forces at work which perpetuated the ways that people and institutions treat those who are perceived as different from the norm. One need not go to an inner-city school to find the "savage inequalities" (Kozol 1991, 83) that exist in a public, secondary school setting. For what was taking place inside the classroom--individual and organizational discrimination--reflected the oppressive attitudes and practices of American society as a whole.

The high school I teach in is not situated in the ghetto, nor is it in a rural area. Similar to "Franklin High," the fictitious school Sizer (1992) describes in
Horace's Compromise, it is a typical public secondary school set in a fairly affluent community.

Unlike many suburban high schools, it has a relatively diverse population. Many of its students aspire to college, but not all. Its politics are dominated by white Americans, but issues of race and class and ethnicity are in the air. (Sizer 1992, x)

Like most high schools, the day is divided into seven, fifty-minute class periods, with three minute intervals between each class. Each faculty member teaches five classes per day and is assigned one "duty period" (study hall/lunch duty/corridor monitoring) and one "prep period" to prepare for five classes. Both teachers and students are allowed twenty-three minutes for lunch within a time block, beginning at 11:04 am and ending at 12:17 pm.

According to the faculty member I spoke with, the average number of students per class is twenty-five; some classes have more students, others have less. The minimum number of students I've taught in the night school class is twenty-seven, with the maximum being forty-five one fall semester. Without taking into account the number of students a teacher is assigned to supervise during a duty period, each teacher is then academically responsible for getting to know, effectively teach, and properly evaluate approximately one hundred and twenty-five students within a one-hundred and eighty day school year. Is this feat humanly possible?
From my experience and observations as a high school English teacher, the answer is an uncontested, "No!" A teacher only has time to get to know and give ample attention to students at the obvious extremes:

The physically handicapped. The emotionally hobbled. The children with exaggerated learning disabilities, usually meaning demonstrable inability to accommodate to the One Best Pedagogy or One Best Place of Learning. The actors-out, the kids so difficult to handle that special arrangements are needed for them. The gifted and talented, the kids who appear to flourish bountifully under stern academic or athletic or artistic regimens. (Sizer 1992, 34)

Consequently, the students in the middle, the ones who comprise the majority of the student body, "remain a genial blur" (Sizer 1992, 4). Efficient learning for all students is virtually impossible because the system "leaves the majority of students essentially anonymous, at the mercy of crude stereotyping..." (Sizer 1992, 42).

Moving kids along in cohorts by their ages, labeling them and putting them into tracks that fix their academic futures permanently, are sad practices for a school system that takes learning seriously. (Sizer 1992, 42)

Furthermore, a study conducted by Jeannie Oakes (1985) confirms my perception of what was transpiring in my night school class. In her book Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality, she illustrates how tracking "alienates students and undermines their social aspirations and feelings of self-worth" (McLaren 1994, 10).

Oakes argues that students at the bottom of the social hierarchy adjust their social aspirations downward as a result of tracking without being aware that schools are treating them unjustly. In essence, schools play a major role in the legitimization of inequality; that is, in
socializing students to accept the unequal features of the larger society. (McLaren 1994, 10)

In light of the situation I was faced with, I decided to develop a curriculum around the idea of respect—"respect for self, respect for the rights and dignity of all persons, and respect for the environment that sustains all life" (Lickona 1991, 67)—not by preaching about what respect is, but by showing students what it is not. Thus, I developed an original curriculum on the topic of oppression.

What is Oppression?

Oppression, as I think of the term, is the practice of putting down people—and keeping them down—whether the means is conscious or unconscious, blatant or subtle, in order to prevent them from reaching their creative potential. Frye (1983) captures the essence of what oppression feels like by describing the word in the following way:

The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press’. The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce.

Yamato (1992) defines oppression as "the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by
another for whatever reasons" (58). Frye (1983) elaborates on this definition in the following paragraph:

Oppression is a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group (individually to individuals of the other group, and as a group, to that group). Such a system could not exist were not the groups, the categories of persons well-defined. (33)

With these definitions and descriptions in mind, my original intent was to make students aware of the ways individuals are stereotyped and categorized into various groups, so they would be able to recognize oppression in their everyday lives as witnesses, perpetrators, or victims of it. I designed a series of lessons about various oppressed groups in our society. Each lesson introduced a particular thinking skill/s, and most lessons looked at a specific type of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, heterosexism, commercialism, naturism, and institutionalism. Yet after I finished putting it all together and reflected on what I had done, I realized I had designed a curriculum that merely dealt with the surface features of what oppression is—not how it operates or why it is so pervasive in our society.

This deficiency caused me to reflect further on the situation at hand. After much deliberation (and consternation), I decided upon the following methodology as a way for all students to participate and to discover for themselves the roots of oppression that are deeply embedded in their own ways of thinking. Called "philosophical
teaching," it is a way of teaching that promotes thinking through self-reflection. Philosophical teaching is "essentially a matter of orchestrating activities to continually stimulate students to express and to take seriously their own thinking" (Paul 1992, 573) with the expectation that they would increasingly make more reasonable and judicious judgments in their everyday lives.

What is Philosophical Teaching?

Philosophical thinking, as I use the term, is the examination of how one's fundamental beliefs come to be conceptualized. To think philosophically is to be aware that when one engages in thinking, "one thinks within a self-constructed network of assumptions, concepts, defined issues, key inferences, and insights" (Paul 1992, 555) whereas the unphilosophical mind is "unaware that it thinks within a system, within a framework, within, if you will, a philosophy" (Paul 1992, 556).

The unphilosophical mind thinks without a clear sense of the foundations of its own thought, without conscious knowledge of the most basic concepts, aims, assumptions, and values that define and direct it....Consequently, the unphilosophical mind is trapped within the system it uses, unable to deeply understand alternative or competing systems. (Paul 1992, 556)

I believe that to think philosophically is to think critically and morally as well, for the foundation of critical thought (reflection) is embedded in philosophical thought in which the language of morality is usually
implicit. The formulation of philosophical thinking that I use is akin to what Paul (1992) calls "strong sense critical thinking" (575).

The idea of strong sense critical thinking is implicit in the Socratic ideal of living a reflective life (and thus achieving command over one's mind and behavior). Instead of absorbing their philosophy from others, people can, with suitable encouragement and instruction, develop a critical and reflective attitude toward ideas and behavior. (575)

Thus, creating a classroom climate where students are encouraged to think philosophically allows them to critically examine the ideas of others, as well as their own ideas; it allows them to develop their own points of view and to create their own philosophy of life, to make their own choices, and to act on those choices. Teaching adolescents to pose and then to answer their own philosophical questions about themselves, their lives, social issues, and moral dilemmas prompts them to engage in critical thinking—"skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it relies upon criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive to context" (Lipman 1988, 39). It is "reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do" (Ennis 1987, 10).

Consequently, philosophical teaching, as I define the phrase, is a method of teaching that invites students to inquire into the structure of their own thinking and the ways in which they see what they see at their own cognitive level. It encourages students to reflect upon the
conceptual framework in which they think by having them critically examine their own assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes. My claim is that such philosophical inquiry leads to the discovery of an oppressive frame of reference implicit in our thinking as a culture. It reveals to them the degree of subtlety with which oppressive forces are both perpetuated and maintained in their everyday experience as described by Young (1992).

Oppression is related to unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchy and market mechanisms, the normal ongoing processes of everyday life. {177)

My philosophical teaching methodology allows students to see the oppressive roots inherent in our culture, the discovery of which leads to a shift in consciousness whereby students learn to perceive themselves, each other, and society differently because they come "to understand that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; mutable, not fixed" (Belenky et al. 1986, 10). This awareness will empower students to view themselves as being able to take more control of their lives and to more effectively influence the world around them.

What is an Oppressive Conceptual Framework?

According to Warren (1988), three characteristics are present in an oppressive conceptual framework. First, it is value-hierarchial in that it sees the world not only as
hierarchically ranked, but it also gives greater value to that which is perceived as higher in rank. Second, it typically supports dichotomous, either/or thinking by juxtaposing false dualisms "e.g. reason and emotion" (32), which may in fact be inseparable or complementary instead of opposite aspects of reality. Third, it functions under the "assumption that superiority justifies subordination of that which is deemed lower or less valuable" (32). Warren calls this the "logic of domination" (32), which first assumes hierarchal structures and then uses it to justify systematic oppression.

Let me make it clear at this point that it is not necessary for me to teach students about oppression directly in order for them to uncover the oppressive assumptions Warren (1988) claims are inherent in the dominant social frame of reference. Because adolescents get more than their share of oppression, I deliberately made oppression the content of the curriculum to illustrate how pervasive it is in their lives. However, if I were to use my philosophical teaching technique to teach F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, the same oppressive assumptions would be discovered by students. For when one begins to reflect on the novel and the structure of one's own thinking, one begins to discover that embedded in Fitzgerald's, the narrator's, Gatsby's, and his/her own thinking are these presuppositions that add up to the presence of oppression. Understanding the ubiquitous nature of oppression can be a liberating experience for anyone--not just high school students.
What is Empowerment?

I believe an explication and critical discussion of Warren's (1988) oppressive conceptual framework and its effects on adolescents in regard to the way they view themselves and each other is an essential element of empowerment. Empowerment, as I use the term, is the process of "enabling other human beings to take greater responsibility for their lives" (Coll 1986, 419) by making them aware of their inherent worth as human beings. Discovering how the presence of an oppressive conceptual framework affects their lives helps these adolescents understand the relationship between their own thinking, feelings, life situation, and the social context in which they live. This awareness enables them to take greater control of their lives, and provides them with

an appreciation of the fact that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created not discovered, that negotiation is the art of constructing new meanings by which individuals can regulate their relations with each other. (Bruner 1986, 149)

My philosophical teaching approach leads students to believe they are capable of thinking for themselves and making their own choices because it motivates them to do just that. It shows them that learning is not merely parroting what others say or think, and it proves to them that they are able to think for themselves, to make their own judgments, "to form their own understanding of the world, and develop their own conceptions of the sorts of
persons they want to be and the sort of world they would like it to be" (Lipman 1991, 19).

Philosophical teaching empowers me as a teacher for several reasons. It provides a means for me to put into practice my own conception of the ideal high school education as expressed by Scheffler (1973) below:

The function of education in a democracy is to liberate the mind, strengthen its critical powers, inform it with knowledge and the capacity for independent inquiry, engage its human sympathies, and illuminate its moral and practical choices. This function is, further, not to be limited to any given subclass of members, but to be extended, in so far as possible, to all citizens, since all are called upon to take part in processes of debate, criticism, choice, and cooperative effort upon which the common social structure depends. (139)

Philosophical teaching allows me to break through the barriers of the oppressive framework that permeates our traditional educational paradigm. Dismantling this framework affords me the opportunity to involve and engage high school students of every academic level in the thinking/learning process. Philosophical teaching empowers me to empower students by helping them realize that they have the capacity to reach their creative potential despite any oppression they may encounter.
The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.  
- Emerson
Historically, our standard educational paradigm has been fundamentally biased towards a didactic approach to teaching. The theoretical framework for a philosophy-based approach aims to show that it is a good mode for teaching thinking because it encourages students of every academic level to become actively involved in the thinking/learning process.

The works of Richard Paul (1992), Matthew Lipman (1991), Paulo Freire (1993), and Mary Belenky et al. (1986) lend support to my claim that a philosophical-teaching approach is not only more conducive to helping students think critically and morally, but it is also a less oppressive way to teach than the traditional approach. Philosophical teaching provides a means for students to examine their own frames of reference, as well as cultural frameworks that "set the conceptual and methodological tone not only of what we think but also how we go about thinking" (Walters 1994, 16). Such reflection empowers students to think critically about themselves, each other, and the society in which we live.
The Standard Paradigm and The Reflective Paradigm: Diverse Teaching Practices

To understand why a philosophy-based approach is a more engaging and less didactic way to teach than the traditional approach, one must be aware of the different frameworks from which the two teaching practices arise. Making the implicit assumptions of both teaching practices explicit unveils the oppressive nature of the traditional approach and reveals the humanistic nature of a philosophy-based approach.

In Thinking in Education, Lipman (1991) assumes that "there are two sharply contrasting paradigms of educational practice--the standard paradigm of normal practice and the reflective paradigm of critical practice" (13). Implicit in the assumptions of the traditional approach are the same oppressive features that comprise Warren's (1988) "oppressive conceptual framework" (32) and, more notably, Freire's (1993) "banking concept of education" (53). Once the oppressive framework of the standard paradigm of normal practice has been unveiled and compared with the philosophy-based framework of the reflective paradigm of critical practice, it becomes clear that in order to develop an integrated model, one must begin with a framework that is philosophy-based.

Paul (1992) lists twenty-one ways in which the assumptions of some educational theorists and philosophers differ in their approach to teaching (577-580); however, in order to expose the oppressive nature of the traditional
model, it is only necessary to look at three aspects of the teaching/learning process: the nature of knowledge, the methods used to impart it, and the educational goals of each model.

The Traditional/Didactic Model of Teaching Practice

Although educational psychology has several forms on which theories of teaching/learning are based, the teaching approach this thesis addresses is what postmodern educators refer to as the "behaviorist-technicist model of teacher education" (Kincheloe 1993, 11). According to Kincheloe (1993), behavioristic teacher education is based on the work of Ralph Tyler in the late 1940s and "has been the most influential position within colleges of education over the last three decades" (Kincheloe 1993, 10). This narrow view of the teaching/learning process removes the teacher as an active agent in the educational process, reducing the act of teaching to a simple technique. In the behavioristic-technicist point of view, teachers do not need to learn the "intricacies of the subject matter, nor do they need to understand the sociohistorical context in which the knowledge to be taught was produced" (Kincheloe 1993, 8). To teach students something, teachers only need to learn how to break the information down into smaller, separate pieces, go over the pieces again and again until students have mastered the information, and then test the students to make sure the pieces have been learned (Kincheloe 1993).
Moreover, it is the behaviorist-technicist model of teacher education that provides the oppressive underpinnings on which our traditional model of education is based.

For this reason, criticism of the traditional/didactic model as an ineffectual way to foster critical thinking abounds. In Critical Thinking Paul (1992) refers to it as the "didactic theory of knowledge, learning, and literacy" (577). Freire (1993) describes it as the "banking concept of education" (53) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), authors of Women's Ways of Knowing, call it the "adversarial doubting model of education" (228). In 1980 Ferguson optimistically makes reference to it as the "old paradigm of education" (289) in The Aquarian Conspiracy. Yet, eleven years later in Thinking in Education, Lipman (1991) still refers to the traditional/didactic model as the "standard paradigm of normal practice" (13). Standing outside the framework of assumptions implicit in the standard paradigm of normal practice, all five of these theorists collectively view the traditional model of education as a paradigm that impedes the development of critical and moral consciousness.

According to educational theorists who look at the traditional/didactic model from a critical perspective, knowledge is viewed as a definitive "body of ‘right’ information" (Ferguson 1980, 289) which is transmitted by an authority (teacher) in a passive manner to those who know nothing (students) (Lipman 1991). It assumes "that knowledge is independent of the thinking that generates,"
organizes, and applies it" (Paul 1992, 577). This is what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) call "received knowledge" (35) because students are seen as only recipients of knowledge, not sources of it (40).

Those who think of knowledge as received rather than constructed assume that the authorities can dispense only one right answer for each problem... there are no gradations of the truth—no gray areas. Paradox is inconceivable because received knowers believe several contradictory ideas are never simultaneously in accordance with fact. (Belenky et al. 1986, 40-41)

The standard educational paradigm emphasizes "analytical, linear, left-brain thinking" (Ferguson 1980, 290), which is what Paul (1992) calls "monological thinking" (659), that is, thinking that is "conducted exclusively within one point of view or frame of reference" (Paul 1992, 659). According to Paul (1992), the traditional/didactic model assumes that an "educated, literate person is fundamentally analogous to an encyclopedia or data bank" (Paul 1992, 577) and that the "authoritative answers that the teacher has are the fundamental standards for assessing students' learning" (Paul 1992, 580).

Based on the way critical theorists portray the traditional model of education, Lipman (1991) lists the assumptions of the "standard paradigm of normal practice" (13) as follows:

1. Education consists in the transmission of knowledge from those who know to those who don’t know

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

26
3. Knowledge is distributed among disciplines that are non-overlapping 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, i.e., data about specifics; an educated mind is a well-stocked mind.

Making explicit the assumptions of the standard paradigm of normal practice exposes its oppressive nature. For example, one of the features of Warren's (1988) "oppressive conceptual framework" is that it "typically supports the sort of 'either-or' thinking which posits inappropriate or misleading or harmful value dualisms" (32). One value dualism implicit in the traditional/didactic model is the teacher-student dichotomy described by Freire (1993) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1993) claims this "relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" (52) and that "banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:"

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) the teacher talks and the students listen--meekly;
(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the teacher;
(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge.
with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

(j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (54)

Unfortunately, this oppressive telling style of teaching is the predominate method used in secondary classrooms today (Sizer 1992). In A Place Called School, Goodlad (1984) discusses the results of a study he headed where over one thousand classrooms were observed in thirty-eight schools over an eight year period. Similar to Freire’s depiction of the teacher-student dichotomy, Goodlad and his colleagues found that the same pattern of teaching and learning activities dominated American classrooms as well.

We observed that, on the average, about 75% of class time was spent on instruction and that nearly 70% of this was "talk"—usually teacher to students. Teachers out-talked the entire class of students by a ratio of three to one. . . . These findings are so consistent in the schools of our sample that I have difficulty in assuming that things are much different in schools elsewhere. Clearly, the bulk of this teacher-talk was instructing in the sense of telling. Barely 5% of this instructional time was designed to treat students’ anticipation of needing to respond. Not even 1% required some kind of open response involving reasoning or perhaps an opinion from students. (Goodlad 1984, 229)

Another study conducted by Oakes (1985) substantiates the data collected by Goodlad. Oakes found that the dominant activities in most secondary classrooms were the teacher lecturing or explaining to the entire class, while students sat quietly and listened as passive participants who then later worked independently on written assignments.
As we expected, passive activities—listening to the teacher, writing answers to questions, and taking tests—were dominant at all track levels. And, also not unexpected, the opportunities students had in any group of classes to answer open-ended questions, to work in cooperative learning groups, to direct the classroom activity, or to make decisions about what happened in class were extremely limited. In most cases these things just did not happen at all. (Oakes 1985, 129)

As early as 1916, John Dewey observed the same lack of active student involvement in American classrooms and posed the following question in Democracy and Education. "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, [that] learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice?" (Dewey 1916, 46). In response to his own question, Dewey wrote that schools lacked the necessary means or "agencies" for interactive education—the programs, methods, and tools that facilitate active learning. For Dewey (1916) schools could only function at their full efficiency when students were afforded more opportunities to participate in classroom activities, "so that they may acquire a social sense of their own powers and of the materials and appliances used" (48).

Postmodern educators would argue that in addition to the lack of agencies Dewey noted decades ago, "there is also political opposition to student participation because it challenges power relations in school and society" (Shor 1992, 33), which is one reason why the behaviorist-technicist model of teacher education is the most influential one used today at teaching colleges and universities.
Do I have personal knowledge of this fact? Yes. It's the way I was "trained" to become a certified English teacher only six years ago. Under the guise of education, the behaviorist-technicist model is a method that Freire (1993) claims "anesthetizes and inhibits creative power" (52) in order "to maintain the submersion of consciousness" (62) which in turn maintains the status quo and keeps oppression in place. Teaching-by-telling systematically perpetuates the oppression of both teachers and students for political purposes: it is the pedagogy of the oppressed.

Having exposed the oppressive framework implicit in the dominant educational paradigm, in the rest of the chapter I explain why teaching from a philosophy-based framework is a less oppressive and more engaging way to teach adolescents to think critically and morally.

The Philosophical/Critical Model of Teaching Practice

Operating within a different framework of assumptions, a philosophy-based approach to teaching for thinking is a more humanistic and liberating way to teach and learn, and fosters critical thinking and intellectual autonomy by its nature. Since "thinking for one's self is a fundamental presupposed value for philosophy" (Paul 1992, 573), what better way could there be to get adolescents to think for themselves than to continually prompt them to make their own thoughts explicit?
Philosophical teaching is a person-centered approach, i.e. a student-centered approach. The thinking/learning process is viewed from the perspective of the thinker. A philosophy-based approach takes into consideration the idea that whenever one is reasoning, one is reasoning from some point of view and within some conceptual framework. With critical discussion and dialectical exchange as its mode of thinking, philosophy, as a discipline, formulates issues that can be approached from multiple perspectives (Paul 1992). Looking at issues from different perspectives brings into the open conflicting viewpoints, which in turn motivate students to reason through and re-evaluate their own points of view. In other words, to encourage adolescents to think philosophically is to continually engage them in "reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do" (Ennis 1987, 10). In essence, "philosophical thinking is critical thinking" (Beyer 1990, 55).

Some critical theorists who consider thinking, thinking about thinking, and teaching for thinking from a philosophical perspective have developed philosophy-based teaching models. In Critical Thinking, Paul (1992) refers to his method as "strong sense critical thinking" (575) and/or the "critical theory of knowledge, learning, and literacy" (577). Freire (1993) describes his model as "problem-posing education" (50) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Belenky et al. (1986), authors of Women's Ways of Knowing, call theirs the "connected teaching model" (228). In The Aquarian Conspiracy, Ferguson (1980) refers
to her model as the "new paradigm of learning" (289). All four alternative models are based on the same assumptions found in Lipman's (1991) "reflective paradigm of critical practice" (14), a philosophy-based model, as described by Lipman (1991) below:

1. Education is the outcome of participation in a teacher-guided community of inquiry, among whose goals are the achievement of understanding and good judgment

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 non-overlapping nor exhaustive; hence their relationships to their subject matters are quite problematic

4. The teacher's stance is fallibilistic (one that is ready to concede error) rather than authoritative

5. Students are expected to be thoughtful and reflective, and increasingly reasonable and judicious

6. The focus of the educational process is not on the acquisition of knowledge but on the grasp of relationships within the subject matters under investigation (14)

Making the assumptions of the philosophical/critical model explicit reveals that a philosophy-based approach is a more engaging, liberating, and personally meaningful way to educate human beings than our traditional one. The role of the teacher and students, the nature of knowledge and the way it is imparted, and even educational outcomes are all viewed from a different, more humanistic perspective. Awareness of the differences between the standard paradigm and the reflective paradigm shows how teaching within a
philosophy-based framework defangs the oppressive conceptual framework implicit in our traditional approach to teaching in several distinctive ways.

One transformative feature of the philosophy-based critical model is that it assumes education to be inquiry whereas the traditional model does not. Lipman (1991) defines inquiry as "any form of self-critical practice whose aim is more comprehensive understanding or more expert judgment" (245). Education as inquiry changes the dynamics of the traditional classroom where "the teacher talks and the students listen--meekly" (Freire 1993, 54) because it converts the classroom into "a community of inquiry" (Lipman 1991, 15), a place where students and teacher query each other. In this perspective, students are not treated as objects whose sole purpose is to 'patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire 1993, 53) what the authoritative teacher considers to be true knowledge. Instead, "the student is treated from the start not as subordinate or as object but as independent, a subject" (Belenky et al 1986, 224). Learning is a subject-to-subject encounter where together, in a community of inquiry, teachers and students learn from one another.

The students--no longer docile listeners--are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. (Freire 1993, 62)

From this description it is clear that the philosophical/critical model strives to dismantle the value-
hierarchical structure of the traditional classroom where the teacher, upheld as an authoritative and infallible expert, "knows everything and the students know nothing" (Freire 1993, 54). Instead, in the philosophy-based classroom, the teacher's role is to work in partnership with the students, to look at the material from the students' points of view rather than impose on the students her own point of view as the only point of view. Teacher and students work together in a classroom atmosphere that is predicated upon mutual respect, trust and cooperation, not subordination.

In a community, unlike a hierarchy, people get to know each other. They do not act as representatives of positions or as occupants of roles but as individuals with particular styles of thinking. (Belenky et al. 1986, 221)

Dismantling the barriers between teacher and students reconciles the contradiction of the teacher-student dichotomy implicit in the assumptions of the traditional/didactic model. Diminishing the boundaries between teacher and students defuses the "teacher-student contradiction by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (Freire 1993, 53). Reconciliation of the teacher-student dichotomy negates the oftentimes ineffectual method of education where the teacher's job is "to fill the students by making deposits of information which she considers to be true knowledge" (Freire 1993, 57). Instead, through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The
teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire 1993, 61)

Unlike the traditional/didactic model which assumes knowledge to be a definitive "body of 'right' information" (Ferguson 1980, 289) for students to blindly encode, store, and recall, the philosophical/critical model recognizes that knowledge depends upon thought. "Genuine knowledge is inseparable from thinking minds" (Paul 1992, 656). It cannot be gathered up by one person and passed on to another as a collection of sentences to remember. Instead, the philosophical/critical model recognizes that "all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known" (Belenky et al. 1986, 137). Knowledge, by its nature, depends on thought.

Knowledge is produced by thought, analyzed by thought, comprehended by thought, organized, evaluated, maintained, and transformed by thought. Knowledge exists, properly speaking, only in minds that have comprehended and justified it through thought. (Paul 1992, 656)

In other words, knowledge is not something to be found outside of the mind in the world. Instead, "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in this world, with the world, and with one another" (Freire 1993, 53). In a community of inquiry, the primary focus of the educational process is not on the acquisition of disconnected bits of information, but on the "grasp of relationships within the subject matters under investi-
Students are more likely to think about the world when our knowledge of it is presented to them as ambiguous, equivocal, and mysterious rather than finite and absolute. In a community of inquiry, students are encouraged to question existing knowledge and social conditions, rather than passively accept knowledge as fixed and social conditions as fine just the way they are. In a community of inquiry, students are expected to become more thoughtful and reflective—to develop autonomous habits of mind—rather than remain conditioned passive beings waiting to be told what things mean and what to do.

In presenting the case for a philosophy-based approach to teaching for thinking, I have had to argue against the traditional approach to teaching. My intent, however, is not to have the two teaching approaches perceived as opposites; nor am I arguing for one method at the exclusion of the other. Presenting the material this way illustrates how deeply this oppressive feature is embedded in our thinking as a culture—for this is the way in which the theorists cited have conceptualized, articulated, and presented their points of view. Because this type of either-or thinking is so ingrained in the way we, as a culture, conceptualize reality, it illustrates how difficult it is to express our thoughts in ways other than the methods used to determine how we come to know what we think. My argument is that in order to redesign the current dominant model of teaching practice so that a truly critical perspective analogous to Freire’s “conscientization” (Lister
1994, 63) is generated in the classroom, it is not necessary to exclude the ideas of traditional educational theorists altogether, but rather to shift the emphasis of our present educational paradigm towards a reflective model that is philosophy-based, and also includes the contributions of both affective psychology and social psychology to the teaching/learning process.

Teaching within a framework founded in a philosophy-based perspective then makes it possible to integrate the distinctive contributions of cognitive psychology which have more to do with how thinking occurs—how we generate, process, store, and retrieve information and knowledge—which has little to do with what we should know and the way we should learn it. Only when a pedagogical framework is established wherein adolescents can discover by themselves the oppressive assumptions implicit in any high school learning situation can we move towards a pedagogy that Shor (1992) calls empowering education, McLaren (1994) calls critical pedagogy, and I call philosophical teaching—teaching practices that aim “to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (McLaren 1994, 168).

**Philosophical Teaching:**

**Educating for Personal and Social Transformation**

Philosophical teaching (PT) is a method of teaching designed to foster the development of critical and moral
consciousness in high school students. Philosophical teaching begins with the premise that a person must have an awareness of critical consciousness in order to practice true critical thinking. For Freire (1993) critical consciousness is attained when women and men develop their power to perceive critically "the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; [when] they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (64). Philosophical teaching recognizes that with critical consciousness, students are better able to understand the relationship between their own thinking, feelings, life situation, and the social context in which they live; with critical consciousness, students come to recognize that society is a human creation which they can know and transform. Philosophical teaching cultivates critical consciousness: philosophical teaching empowers students to think for themselves and to take greater responsibility for their lives; critical consciousness helps students realize that they not only have the capacity to reach their creative potential, but they also have the power to effect change in themselves and the society in which they live.

In PT much depends on the teacher herself and the classroom atmosphere she establishes. Certain teacher dispositions and classroom conditions must be in place in order for PT to be effective. Philosophical teaching can only be effective when the teacher models the same
traits/dispositions she hopes to instill in her students (Costa 1985). For example, to teach the concept "respect," the teacher must treat her students with respect. She must respect the views and opinions of each student. To effectively model "respect," she must rid herself of defensiveness and be open to the views of each student, be sensitive to the feelings and level of sophistication of the student, be flexible about alternatives and answers, and be persistent in probing students' thinking by asking Socratic questions. In other words, to teach high school students to be respectful, the teacher must consistently exhibit these traits/dispositions to her students by being honest, sensitive to context, open-minded, flexible, inquisitive, and empathetic--respectful--herself (Warren 1987).

In addition to modeling respect and whatever other traits/dispositions she wishes to instill in her students, the teacher must establish a relaxed and trusting atmosphere where students feel comfortable to openly express their thoughts. Creating a psychologically safe space in which students can learn is crucial, especially with adolescents. Establishing a classroom atmosphere based on mutual respect helps foster a rapport among the students themselves, as well as between students and teacher. The quality of these relationships determines the feeling tone of the classroom. According to Oakes (1985), more learning takes place in classes "with a greater degree of intimacy among all classroom participants and an accompanying lack of cliquishness and friction among them" (116). Because good
classroom relations enhance student learning, it is imperative that a non-threatening classroom climate is created from the start and maintained throughout the semester.

To teach for critical consciousness, PT acknowledges the importance of conceptual frameworks and the idea that each of us operates out of a historically and socially constructed framework, i.e. "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which explain, shape, and reflect our view of ourselves and our world" (Warren 1988, 32). Warren (1988) elaborates on the concept in the following way:

Conceptual frameworks are influenced by such factors as sex-gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, affectional preference, and nationality. Although one's conceptual framework can change, all individuals perceive and construct what they perceive, know, and value through some conceptual framework. At any given time, a conceptual framework functions for an individual as a finite lens, a field of vision, in and through which information and experiences are filtered. As such, conceptual frameworks set boundaries on what one "sees." (32)

Understanding the significance of conceptual frameworks is essential to the practice of PT. In PT, students are invited to inquire into the structure of their own thinking and the ways in which they know what they know. Students are continually encouraged to reflect upon the conceptual framework in which they think by critically examining their own beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions. Through the process of experiencing PT, students gradually come to view themselves as socio-historical "beings in the process
of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire 1993, 65). With this awareness (critical consciousness) students begin to take their education more seriously because they come to see it as something in which they can participate and exercise control.

Moreover, this same process of inquiry and critical reflection leads students to discover for themselves the presence of an oppressive conceptual framework implicit within their own ways of thinking. Since critical thinking always occurs within a conceptual framework, Warren (1988) claims we also must have "a contextual understanding of critical thinking, i.e. one which acknowledges the ways in which conceptual frameworks affect the sort of thinking we do" (31). Since "all thinking is conditioned (although not inevitably determined) by what she [Warren] and others refer to as conceptual frameworks" (Walters 1994, 16), one must examine the assumptions of the framework within which the thinking occurs. Awareness of the way an oppressive conceptual framework can bias our thinking is necessary in order to practice critical thinking and to understand the nature of oppression. When students uncover the cultural roots of oppression inherent in their own ways of thinking, a shift in perception occurs whereby they learn to perceive themselves, each other, and society differently. Again, learning about the insidious nature of oppression empowers students to view themselves as being able to take more
control of their lives and to more effectively influence the world around them.

To teach high school students about oppression, the teacher must do so in a non-oppressive way so that through experiencing the method, they come to appreciate the difference. Philosophical teaching is a model that provides a means for her to do just that. In addition to raising critical and moral consciousness, the beauty of PT is that it does so in a way that is self-revealing rather than indoctrinating. In PT, method and content go hand in hand. This feature alone makes it a less oppressive and more engaging way to teach adolescents to think because it assumes that the student is the expert of her/his own subjective knowing. The actual practice of PT changes the power relations in the classroom; it shows students that the teacher values what they have to say. In PT, students are continually encouraged to make their own thoughts explicit and to critically examine the reasons for why they think the way they do. Through the experience of PT, students come to recognize and eliminate prejudices from their own thinking, which in turn prompts them to make more reasonable and judicious choices. In essence, philosophical teaching not only helps adolescents become more autonomous critical thinkers, but it also promises to make them more thoughtful, fair-minded, and compassionate human beings.

In the next chapter, I discuss the way PT was actually implemented in the high school classroom.
Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an overview of the critical and creative thinking curriculum I have developed on oppression for a high school English class. Course objectives and the criteria used for evaluation are discussed. The time frame, classroom atmosphere, and some students who attended the night school English class are described. The implementation of three of the lessons, and what transpired as a result, comprise the bulk of the chapter.

Curriculum Background

Initially I thought that teaching students about the different types of oppression, along with some critical and creative thinking skills, would be all that was necessary to help them understand oppression and to help them learn to become authentic critical thinkers. While my intentions may have been admirable on paper and in theory, during the actual practice of teaching the course the first time, I quickly learned that to teach about oppression using the traditional teaching approach was not an appropriate way to help students think critically and morally because it was, in practice, an oppressive method. In response to this
predicament, I developed an alternative way to teach the course using a philosophy-based approach. Thus, the following description of the curriculum on oppression is a modified version of the original one I developed for the night school English class using my philosophical teaching method.

Curriculum Objectives

Although each lesson introduces and exemplifies specific thinking skills and concepts, some of the general objectives of the curriculum are as follows:

- To allow students to explore their assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes through in-class exercises, group discussions, and writing tasks
- To encourage students to think critically and morally by having them pose and then answer their own philosophical questions about the material presented
- To expose different types of oppression to students, so they will be able to identify oppression in their everyday lives—as witnesses, victims, or perpetrators
- To raise student consciousness about the nature of oppression in relation to Karen J. Warren’s (1988) oppressive frame of reference model and how it relates to their everyday lives
- To teach students requisite English skills such as how to interpret an article, write a concise summary, develop an outline, and write a cohesive five-paragraph essay

Criteria for Evaluation

All assignments are evaluated in terms of their overall quality. Following directions, turning assignments in on
time, being neat, and making an effort are taken into consideration; however, the most important element is comprehension, that is, a student’s ability to express an understanding of the material and how well s/he supports her or his opinion based on reasoning. In other words, learning is not solely determined by how well a student regurgitates information and facts.

Since assignments and questions are open-ended, assessment is literacy-based. A holistic correction system similar to the Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program’s (MEAP) General Scoring Rubric for Reading helps to evaluate student work in an egalitarian way. A rubric is used for most of the work assigned because it provides guidelines for how to assess a student’s ability to communicate his or her understanding of the material in a comprehensive way. Although the curriculum includes a writing component, the content of the course is focused more on how a student constructs meaning and makes sense of the material rather than how well s/he writes in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and syntax. All work assigned, both in and outside the classroom, must be completed in a satisfactory and timely manner in order to earn credits for the course. Evaluation is based upon a student’s individual achievement in accordance with her or his ability level. Final grades are determined by a student’s overall progress and personal growth throughout the semester—not by the way s/he fares in comparison with other students in the class.
The Students

At the beginning of each semester, students fill out a data sheet providing important information. In addition to their names, addresses, and phone numbers, I also learn who their guidance counselors are, their course of study, and whether or not they plan to attend college. One of the open-ended questions invites them to explain why they are in the night school class. Some of their written answers are listed below:

Mess up in class both quarters. Had summer plans. Want to walk down aisle with a signed diploma.

I'm in this English class because I was an alcoholic and I went to a rehab and failed English and got kicked out.

I need to make up credits so I can graduate eventually. Plus, seeing that I'm pregnant, I'll have to do a lot more before it is born.

The reason why I'm in this class is because I was having difficulties at my parent's house causing me to move. I had no means for getting to school, so my guidance counselor worked out a plan so I'd be able to graduate this year.

I'm in English night school because I didn't like my English teacher, so stupidly I decided to take it upon myself not to show up for the class, thus resulting in credit loss for absences which landed me here!

I had a number of personal problems which led me to reach a state of depression, during which time I could barely function, let alone go to school....

I finished all my credits during my junior year. I just need senior English to graduate, so I work during the day and take English at night.

I'm here because I will be in school next year for only one semester; I'm graduating early. I only need second semester English to graduate.
These responses are representative of the kinds of students who take the class each semester. From their responses it is clear that their reasons for attending the night school class are quite varied, ranging from excessive absence or simple failure, to a bid for early graduation.

Time Frame

The class meets for two hours once a week for twelve weeks. Readers should keep in mind that I teach at a community college during the day in a different town; therefore, I am not a familiar face to these students, nor am I immediately accessible to them during the week as are their regular teachers. Making the most of the twenty-four hours I will be in direct contact with students over the semester is vital as well as providing consistency and continuity from class to class, in order to ensure productivity and learning. Yet, what is equally important is that I get to know my students as individuals as soon as possible. Getting to know who my students are as people helps me help them grow as learners.

Three Introductory Lessons

This section describes several lessons from the curriculum on oppression. It discusses the purpose of each lesson, how each was actually implemented in the classroom, and what transpired as a result. Lesson 1, The Three R's:
Respect, Responsibility, and Reasoning, sets the tone, determines the purpose, and clarifies the goals of the class. The first class meeting focuses on establishing a psychologically safe classroom atmosphere for students to learn in, an introduction to conceptual frameworks and some factors that influence frameworks, and the formulation of philosophical questions as a way to promote thinking and reasoning. Socratic questioning is the primary teaching tool used throughout the session. Lesson II, Exposing the 'isms, lays the foundation for the theme of the course (oppression) by having students understand what oppression is so they will be able to identify and resist the different types of oppression they might encounter in their everyday lives. Students work together in cooperative learning groups to enhance the thinking/learning process. In Lesson III, empathy as a tool to promote learning through human understanding is introduced. Once the concept of empathy is understood, the fundamental components of the curriculum are in place. Lesson III is the first time philosophical teaching as a method of inquiry is adapted to the overall lesson. Each of the three lessons shows how the interrelatedness of method and content enrich the learning experience for all classroom participants.

The 3 R’s: Respect, Responsibility, and Reasoning

Since developing a rapport with students is crucial to the effectiveness of the class, I begin by immediately
establishing a classroom environment that is founded on reciprocity in the following way.

Interviews and Introductions

Before I formally introduce myself and discuss the guidelines and goals of the class, I ask students to get in pairs and interview each other for approximately five minutes apiece before they take turns introducing one another to the class. I suggest they pretend they are either Oprah or Phil, and try to get as much information about their partners as possible. Chatter begins without hesitation.

During their individual introductions, I make a conscious effort to learn each student's name and some nuance about him or her. I usually have some kind of verbal exchange with the student being introduced, incorporating humor into the conversation whenever possible, and maintaining a non-judgmental attitude throughout the dialogue. In effect the message I am conveying to my students is that I "care" about them as individuals. Nel Noddings (1984) best describes my intention in the quotation below:

I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is be totally and nonselectively present to the student--to each student--as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total. (180)

Using humor, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude, and being present to each student is the first step toward
developing a relationship with each pupil that is based on trust and cooperation—not subordination.

In addition to the practical aspects of this icebreaker, the exercise is an especially useful one for this particular group of students because many of them do not know one another, nor have they been in classes with each other before. While the exercise allows students to make note of their individual likes and dislikes, it mainly helps them to realize how much they are alike as adolescents. And, despite the differences in their academic backgrounds, it allows them to recognize that they all have one major goal in common: to pass the night school English course so they can earn the credit they need to graduate.

After student introductions, I introduce myself, set guidelines for classroom behavior, and clarify expectations for student success. These initial activities and the subsequent student activities lay the foundation and set the tone for future class meetings.

Socratic Questioning

To introduce the concept of conceptual frameworks to students, I begin by having them listen carefully as I tell them a hypothetical story about a husband, a wife, a lover, a ferryman, and a murderer. (Refer to Lesson I in Appendix A for the hypothetical story.) At the end of the story, I randomly call on five students to rank order the five characters in terms of their responsibility for the wife's
death which I write on the board. Students invariably rank
the characters differently.

Next, I ask students why they think I had them under­
take this exercise. Although the initial responses differ
from class to class, a dialogue between me and my students,
similar to the one below, takes place.

(A Reconstruction)

Teacher: What do you think I want you to observe or learn
from doing this exercise?

Student: You want us to realize that people have different
answers to the same question, that people think
differently.

Teacher: That’s right. Even though you are all around the
same age and heard the same story, everyone who
was called on answered differently. Why do you
think that is?

Student: Because we have different opinions.

Student: Because we have different points of view.

Teacher: Why? Why do people have different opinions? What
are opinions? How are opinions formed?

Student: Opinions are what people believe, what they think.

Student: An opinion is what you believe about something.
It’s like a judgment.

Teacher: Is an opinion the same as a person’s point of
view?

Student: Sort of.

Teacher: Why do you think people have different opinions or
different points of view?

Student: Because people come from different backgrounds.

Teacher: What makes their backgrounds different?

Student: People have different life experiences. They’ve
been taught different things, learned different
things.
Student: People have different values because of the way they've been raised.

Teacher: What are values?

Student: Your values are what you think is important, what you give worth to.

And so on....

Socratic questioning is one of the primary teaching tools used in philosophical teaching. Both Socratic questioning and Socratic discussion provide students with the opportunity to develop and evaluate their thinking by making it explicit (Paul 1992). Through the use of Socratic questioning, a number of ideas I want to raise are brought into the open by the students themselves. First, they observe that even though they all listened to the same story, students had different opinions about who they thought was responsible for the wife’s death. Second, they find there is not necessarily one right answer to the question posed because it could be reasonably argued that any one of the five characters could be held responsible for the wife’s death, depending upon a person’s point of view. Third, in order to answer the question, they have to think about it. There is no quick yes or no factual answer. Finally, through the continuous use of Socratic questioning, students come to realize, with my guidance, that people have different opinions and points of view because everyone thinks within her/his own conceptual framework, a self-constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which is influenced by such factors as gender, class, age, race/ethnicity, sexual preference, and
nationality (Warren 1988).

This exercise is also useful in ways other than the ones mentioned above. It is easy to engage adolescents in this activity, I believe, because of its adult theme. Adolescents tend to act more like young adults when they are talked to and treated as young adults. Using a story with an adult theme such as infidelity shows students that I view them as mature adolescents who are capable of making their own judgments. In addition, it reinforces my commitment to establish a classroom atmosphere that is based on mutual respect. Once students realize that people think within conceptual frameworks that are formed on the basis of their own life experiences, they are more likely to respect one another's ideas and opinions. Students are also more inclined to participate in classroom discussions themselves because they realize that they, too, have something worthwhile to say.

Philosophical Questions

After the introductory activities, I explain the theme and the overall objectives of the course. Since a text is not required, I explain to students that I'd like to help them improve their reasoning skills by teaching them to think philosophically about some issues we'll cover in class that they will also encounter in their own lives. While students are groaning, I pass out enlarged copies of the definitions of the word "philosophy" taken from the third
edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1992), explaining that they will be focusing on two aspects of the possible twelve definitions: one is "inquiry into the nature of things based on reasoning rather than empirical methods" (1360), and the other is the "system of values by which one lives" (1360). In reference to the first definition, I explain that we'll be looking into the nature of oppression, a topic around which most of the curriculum revolves. In reference to the second definition, I explain that some activities provide opportunities for them to examine their own beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions, so that they might learn to re-evaluate, re-create, or solidify their own philosophy of life in order to make more thoughtful and reasonable choices.

Finally, we construct our own working definition of what it means to think philosophically and what a philosophical question is. The preceding activity helps students understand what philosophical thinking is and what philosophical questions are. As expressed in their own words, students think of philosophy as speculation and opinion rather than a set of facts that we can look up in a book. They view philosophical questions as ones that make us think, open-ended questions without a quick yes or no answer. There can be more than one answer because we can see the situation from different points of view. The lesson ends with a reflection sheet for students to complete which invites them to write their assumptions about the class before and after attending it.
Lesson II: Exposing the 'Isms

The general purpose of this lesson is to raise the students' consciousness about some of the different types of oppression in our society as depicted in the movie Fried Green Tomatoes. Based on the novel by Fannie Flagg, the story primarily takes place in the present with frequent flashbacks to the rural South during the Depression. A story about the value of friendship, it shows how one courageous woman's determination to resist the oppressive forces around her inspires another woman to drastically change her own life for the better.

Homework Assignment

In order to find out what conception of oppression students bring to the class, I ask them to write a definition of oppression and/or provide an example of oppression on a handout I give them for homework. Typically only a few students have an in-depth understanding of the word. Some have a vague idea, many seemingly guess, while others simply state they "do not know" what oppression means.

In view of this finding, students are asked to look up and write down the denotations of the words "oppress," "oppressive," and "oppression" as part of their homework assignment in order to clarify the meaning of the term. Next, they are to rent and watch the movie Fried Green
Tomatoes, write a summary of the plot, and then describe scenes where forms of oppression take place based on their understanding of what oppression means to them.

I have to admit that the first time I gave this assignment, I questioned whether or not it would work in the way I wanted. I thought I might be reading too much into the film and questioned whether I would be guilty of imposing my perception of it onto my students, for clearly the overall theme of the movie is explicitly about the value of friendship—not oppression. However, my doubts were quickly buried the first time I called on a student to give me an example of oppression in the movie and he said, "Evelyn Couch (Kathy Bates) is oppressed by her own lack of self-esteem." At that point I knew the lesson would fly, and it has proven to be a reliable teaching tool ever since.

Skills and Objectives

This lesson emphasizes the value of word precision, observation skills, and the detection of underlying assumptions. Understanding the exact meaning of words, and agreeing upon a working definition of a word/s, helps us to think more clearly. Knowing the precise word/s for things and what we experience helps us all to recognize and perceive more in our everyday lives. Observation is a process of sensing, perceiving, and thinking. Careful observation of our surroundings, as well as our own thought processes, helps us to become more aware and to discover new
knowledge. Being able to detect hidden or unconscious assumptions, especially those that are inherent in oppressive conceptual frameworks, can help us correct faulty reasoning and, perhaps, begin to view our world more judiciously.

In essence, the specific objective of the lesson is, through careful observation of the movie Fried Green Tomatoes, to make students aware of the different types of oppression so that they will be able to identify them in their everyday lives—as witnesses, perpetrators, or victims—in the hopes that through their understanding of the underlying assumptions keeping oppression in place, they may actively begin to change their thinking and behavior and, thereby, the world around them.

Cooperative Learning

At the beginning of class I ask students to volunteer information about the movie's characters in terms of their physical descriptions, personality traits, and relationship to one another as I write their responses on the board. Next, I ask for a volunteer to orally summarize the plot, before we, as a group, decide upon a working definition of the word "oppression." The last working definition we agreed upon as a class was anyone or anything that prevents someone from reaching his or her potential because of discrimination.
Once the elements of the story are clarified and a working definition of oppression is agreed upon, students count off into random groups of four or five (depending on the size of the class) to discuss the different incidents of oppression that they observed in the movie. Because cooperative learning promotes the use of higher reasoning strategies, students work in cooperative learning groups throughout the semester (Costa 1985). Each group chooses a person to record the group's ideas, a person to monitor how the group interacts, and a person who later addresses the class for the group. All students are encouraged to participate in the discussion and offer their ideas. Students are to come to a consensus about the most subtle example of oppression exemplified in the movie.

The last time I taught this lesson, the responses voiced by each of the six group speakers were as follows:

1. Mrs. Threadgoode's house is torn down without anyone telling her.
2. Buddy Jr. isn't allowed to play baseball with the other kids because he only has one arm.
3. Ruth is beaten by her husband.
4. Smokey Lonesome is discriminated against because he is dirty and poor.
5. Evelyn feels oppressed because she is fat and old.
6. The KKK whips Big George just because he is Black.

Once student responses are on the board, I ask them if they know the specific types of oppression that each of their answers indicate. Most students can identify racism...
as the kind of oppression exhibited in number six, but rarely can they identify any others without my help. Therefore, I write the other names and definitions of oppression on the board as students copy the information into their notebooks. The following definitions were taken from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1992) and correspond numerically with the examples cited on the previous page:

1. **ageism**--Discrimination based on age, especially prejudice against the elderly. (33)

2. **ableism**--Discrimination against people who are physically challenged. (4)

3. **sexism**--1. Discrimination based on gender, especially discrimination against women. 2. Attitudes, conditions, or behaviors that promote stereotyping of social roles based on gender. (1654)

4. **classism**--Bias based on social or economic class. (353)

5. **commercialism**--The practices and spirit of commerce or business, most often showing an undue regard for profit. (380)

6. **racism**--1. The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to another. 2. Discrimination/prejudice based on race. (1489)

A group discussion about the different types of oppression follows, and students are asked to add more examples from the movie that fit into the specific types of oppression. The issue of lesbianism has always been raised by students (in regard to Ruth and Idgie) and the term heterosexism is added to the list as "discrimination or prejudice against gay or homosexual people by heterosexual people" (The
Based on the definitions and the examples students identify in the movie, I then ask them to tell me what they think one of the underlying assumptions is that is implicit in all forms of oppression. Specific answers vary from class to class, but eventually all come to conclude that: "In all the definitions, it is assumed that someone is better than someone else." Voila! Students have identified for themselves the implicit assumption of "value-hierarchical thinking," a feature found in Warren's (1988) oppressive conceptual framework (32).

Students also uncover the "value dualisms" implicit in the definitions, another feature found in Warren's (1988) oppressive conceptual framework (32). Value dualisms are either-or pairs in which the disjunctive terms are seen as exclusive, oppositional, and "where higher value is attributed to one disjunct [rather] than the other" (Warren 1988, 32). Looking at each definition of the different types of oppression again, I ask students to identify the implicit terms that are set in opposition to one another. Their answers are young vs. old, able-bodied vs. disabled, male vs. female, rich vs. poor, thin vs. fat (in this context), and white vs. black. It doesn't take long for students to decide which term in the either-or pairs is valued more than the other in our culture. And while I'm not asserting that all students automatically comprehend the way oppressive conceptual frameworks influence our thinking,
I am claiming that some students experience an inkling of awareness as expressed by one student who said: "So is that why so many people oppress other people? Because of the way they learn to think?"

Time allowing, I engage students in an interactive discussion by asking them as a group, "In what ways have society's attitudes changed since the 1930's?" During the course of the dialogue, students are quick to determine for themselves that not too much has changed over the past six decades. All seven types of oppression, as depicted in the film, are still with us today in both subtle and blatant forms.

Finally, after reviewing material from the previous week about formulating philosophical questions, students pose their own philosophical questions about issues they think the movie Fried Green Tomatoes raises. Most students still have difficulty asking questions that are not factually based. With patience, guidance, and persistent questioning on my part, students gradually begin to catch on, as shown in the list of philosophical questions posed by them below:

- Is it ever right to steal?
- Can morality be above the law?
- Why are people racist?
- Is it right to oppress someone because s/he is poor?
- Why are these different discriminations allowed?
- Is the eye for an eye morality correct?
Why do people judge others by appearance before knowing their personality?

Based on the questions posed and written on the board, students also detect that there is a moral dimension inherent in most philosophical questions. Awareness of morality as an implicit feature of philosophical questions is another step towards moving students closer to critical and moral consciousness. Having students pose and answer their own philosophical questions about the material presented in class is an essential feature of philosophical teaching. "Since thinking is essential to all school subjects, it should be considered a means as well as an end" (Costa 1985, 5). Philosophical teaching provides the means to do just that.

This review of philosophical questions is also necessary in order for students to complete the reflection sheet I give them for homework which can be located in Appendix A under Lesson II.
Lesson III: Ableism

The general purpose of this lesson is to make students aware of the ways in which disabled people are oppressed in our society and to help them understand what it's like to be physically handicapped or deformed. To teach students about ableism, I use the 1969 television adaptation of Paul Gallico's (1941) novelette The Snow Goose. Set in England during World War II, it is a story about a hunchback with a deformed hand named Philip Rhayader who lives alone in a lighthouse away from the townspeople who shun him for the way he looks. Despite his deformities, Philip maintains a bird sanctuary and is an accomplished artist and sailor. A kind, caring, and gentle man, Philip later dies while saving stranded Allied soldiers on the shores of Dunkirk even though the military refuses to let him serve his country because of his "disabilities."

Homework Assignment

Choose a visible physical disability and then visit a mall for an hour or so. Observe how you are treated by shoppers and sales clerks. Write about your experience. For example, how did it make you feel and what did you learn from the exercise? Be prepared to discuss your experience at the next class.
Empathy

The class begins by inviting students to share their experiences about what it was like posing as a physically challenged person. For the students who do the assignment, the experience is an eye opener. Of the ones who do, students claim that they "felt like they were invisible." One female student, who legitimately found herself on crutches after being trampled by a horse, was appalled by the way she was treated by other students, saying that "at school the other kids seemed to ignore her as if she wasn't there. No one held the swinging doors for her or helped her carry her books." Unfortunately, few students take the assignment seriously.

Before discussing empathy, I ask students to define and/or describe a handicapped person in writing which I collect. As a class, we then discuss what empathy means. Clarification is necessary because most students usually think of it as having sympathy or pity for someone. Through the discussion, students come to understand empathy as the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes and to look at the world from that person's point of view. Since students are to choose a character to empathize with in the film, they must be open-minded, flexible, and non-judgmental to practice empathic roletaking successfully. Using empathy not only increases understanding, but it also enables students to internalize what they think and learn. In philosophical teaching, empathy is an essential tool used to
help students think critically and morally, yet it also benefits them in other ways. Gallo (1989) claims that the "practice of empathic roletaking from multiple perspectives followed by evaluative reflection on the experience can facilitate the development of an individual’s reason and imagination" (56).

Students watch the movie which runs for about an hour. After seeing the film, students get in random groups of four or five to discuss why they think I had them view this particular film. Answers vary from group to group, but basically students decide that I want them to understand the ways that physically challenged people are oppressed.

Next, students pose some philosophical questions that they think the story raises. Again, they work together in their respective cooperative learning groups, and then are invited to share their philosophical questions with the class. Some examples of their questions are listed below:

- Is it right to discriminate against disabled people?
- Should people judge others by their appearance?
- Are birds able to feel empathy?
- Is it right to deny certain people the right to serve their country during a war?
- Are some handicapped people actually more talented than "normal" people?

It's at this point that students begin to detect a discrepancy in their thinking about so-called handicapped people. When students reflect on their own conceptual
frameworks, they discover a discrepancy with their prior beliefs about the way they tend to perceive physically challenged people. Recognition of this conflict changes the direction of the inquiry, leading to a discussion that gradually raises students’ consciousness to another level of awareness about the ways people oftentimes are judged as "less than" based on the way they "look"—rather than being judged on their character and/or what they are capable of contributing. This contradiction prompts students to rethink what it means to be "normal" and what "disabilities" render a person truly disabled. Students also complete a reflection sheet on *The Snow Goose* for homework.

**Philosophical Teaching: A Zen Approach**

Once students experience the first three classes, they’ve been exposed to the fundamental elements of philosophical teaching. They know that I’ll be using Socratic questioning as a strategy to prompt them to think, and as a way of motivating them to use Socratic questioning on themselves and with each other. They know that they’ll be working together in small groups to discuss the lesson and to pose their own philosophical questions about the material. They know that empathy plays a major role in the way they understand someone else’s point of view whether it is a character in a story or a classmate voicing an opinion. Students know that I value what they think and that the
effectiveness of the class is dependent upon their participation and input.

The class on "Ableism" is representative of the way the remaining lessons on oppression are designed and approached. I present the material to students, pose questions, listen carefully to what students say, and then ask them to pose their own questions which usually leads to some discrepancy with their prior expectations or beliefs about the material and/or themselves. Paradox challenges students to re-think their thinking. The collective responses of the students then provide the raw material for them to critically discuss and investigate.

Philosophical teaching as a method of inquiry is a non-linear approach to thinking and learning. In some ways it is similar to Teays' (1996) "Zen Model of Problem Solving" (165). Using this model, problems are approached in three stages: conceptualization, realization, and actualization. In the first stage, students define the problem, gather and order evidence. In the second stage, students analyze and process, working critically and creatively to understand information and ideas. The third stage is one of application and evaluation. In the final stage, students move beyond the given to draw conclusions by reflecting on their own reasoning processes. All three stages are part of the process of achieving awareness and taking action (Teays 1996). As is the case with philosophical teaching, students move through the stages at their own developmental pace.
As a result of repeated experiences with philosophical teaching, students come to value the technique as a method that helps them learn how to learn and how to think about their thinking. In the next chapter, I discuss the overall effectiveness of philosophical teaching as a viable way to teach a heterogeneous group of adolescents.
Never doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.

-Margaret Mead
CHAPTER V
LISTENING WITHOUT PREJUDICE:
STUDENT RESPONSES WITH TEACHER REFLECTIONS

Chapter Overview

This chapter looks at written testimony from students based on a course evaluation completed at the eleventh class meeting. It focuses on the effectiveness of using a philosophy-based teaching approach to help a diverse group of high school students think critically and morally. My reflections on the class, the process, and the understandings I have gained from my students are also incorporated into the discussion. The quotations in this chapter are based on student feedback from each of the three semesters I have taught the curriculum on oppression.

Participation: The Key to Empowerment

This thesis began with the problem of how I could make a twelve-week night school English class more fair, meaningful, and accessible to a group of high school students with diverse academic backgrounds and a range of abilities. Did I succeed at making the class more fair by choosing oppression as the theme of the course, a topic with which most students are generally unfamiliar? I believe so. By choosing oppression as a topic for investigation, did I succeed at making the course more personally meaningful to
the students because oppression is something they could relate to in their everyday lives? I hope so. More importantly, did I, through the use of PT, provide a means for every ability level of student to participate in the thinking/learning process? The answer to this last question is a qualified yes. Reaching all ability levels is also the area I will focus on in evaluating the overall effectiveness of philosophical teaching to instruct this course.

For the past three spring semesters, I've taught the class on oppression using my PT method. Over the course of each semester, I have generally been quite pleased with the students' progress and their final papers. Most students meet the requirements described earlier and earn the academic credit they need to graduate. I have also been quite pleased with the positive responses students have to both content and method as expressed in their written course evaluations. One question students respond to is whether or not my PT method had an effect on the way they learned the material. Their answers provide good indications of the method's success, so I am choosing to evaluate the specific effectiveness of PT by them. Although most students claim they like the approach, their reasons vary as shown in the following summary.

Carol likes the PT approach because "it makes us think and stretch our minds as well as our imaginations. It makes us think for ourselves and develop our own beliefs and opinions." Another student agrees. Ron writes "by letting us think for ourselves, we are more involved in the class."
This allows us to be able to learn more and in ways we can understand. "Philosophical teaching "gets the student more involved in the class discussion," states another student. "It keeps the student on his toes and alert" because each student is expected to participate. Dave claims it is easier to understand and learn "because we learned it better by going over it altogether instead of just doing it by ourselves!" Using PT also shows students that not everyone thinks alike. "Instead of just memorizing what someone tells you, you must think for yourself. It encourages you to believe that your thoughtful opinion is valid...."

Encouraging students to believe they have something worthwhile to say and contribute is an important objective of PT, yet Christopher best captures the essence of PT in his description of the method:

> Philosophical teaching, like philosophical thinking, is by far the best form of learning. By questioning and analyzing information, we make it personal and part of ourselves. What we learn affects the way we behave, and the way we ultimately deal with life. If we learn in a questioning manner, we learn to think for ourselves; we learn to be individuals.

Learning to become autonomous thinkers rather than conformists is another valuable outcome of PT. Once students experience the night school English class, they’re able to appreciate the difference between the PT approach and the method they usually learn by in their daily classes. Although it isn’t always stated explicitly, students detect the oppressive nature of the traditional teaching approach as expressed by Anna in the most recent class:
Most teachers just tell you what to write, what to learn, and when to know it by. Like robots we do it. Then within a couple of weeks, we forget it. Using philosophy, we have to use our own minds, and think, say, and learn what we want, so it's pretty impossible to forget what it is that we taught ourselves.

While this student suggests that using PT is a less oppressive and a more engaging way to commit learning to memory, Jan writes that it's not easy for students to make the transition from the traditional teaching style to PT. Although she claims she enjoyed the course and thought that "more teachers should try experimenting with the philosophical teaching method for a change," Jan indicates that it is somewhat confusing for students to adjust to the different expectations of the PT style.

I think it's a good teaching method but I also think people need to get used to this way of teaching [because] the main method of teaching that everyone has grown up with is by the teacher telling you what to think by simply telling you information on the subject....

Jan's point is well taken. At the beginning of each semester when I use PT, I encounter resistance to the method by a number of students for a variety of reasons. While PT provides a means for every ability level of student to participate, it does not guarantee that every student will immediately take advantage of the opportunity in either whole class discussions or small group discussions. For instance, when I monitor the cooperative learning groups during the initial classes, I observe that many students are reluctant to participate; some withdraw altogether while others (sometimes unfortunately) dominate the discussion.
Because of this recurrent dilemma at the beginning of each semester, the question then becomes not how can I make it possible for every ability level of student to participate but how I might best encourage equal involvement from all students.

The first time I was confronted with unbalanced participation, I introduced a whole class discussion on the characteristics that differentiate "good thinkers" from "bad thinkers" as a possible solution to the problem. The discussion was based on Glatthorn and Baron's (1985) article "The Good Thinker." According to these authors, certain traits distinguish good thinkers from poor thinkers. For example, a good thinker "believes in the value of rationality and that thinking can be effective" (Costa 1985, 51) whereas a poor thinker "is impulsive, gives up prematurely, and is overconfident of the correctness of initial ideas" (Costa 1985, 51). Whether or not this discussion had any effect on student participation I do not know. What I do know is that towards the end of the semester, more and more students were participating in both whole class and small group discussions--and on a more equal basis.

Why? In my view, philosophical teaching as a method of inquiry facilitates participation because it helps students develop what some educational theorists call the "critical spirit" (Paul 1992, 186). For these theorists, certain traits and/or dispositions must be developed in order for students to become genuine critical thinkers. In other
words, telling students what makes for good thinking is one thing whereas having them repeatedly experience what good thinking is through continuous exposure and practice is another. In the process of experiencing and practicing PT, students not only learn to express themselves and participate in the formulation of their own education but they also develop the critical spirit along the way. Though I agree that having the critical spirit contributes to the effectiveness of PT, it still does not guarantee total student involvement. So what does?

From the experience of teaching the course several times, I've learned that whether or not students choose to participate is my responsibility. As a teacher teaching for critical consciousness, I must be critically conscious of each student as a socio-historical being in the process of becoming a better thinker, a better learner. Getting to know my students as soon as possible enables me to help them develop as learners. The sooner I know their strengths and weaknesses, the sooner I can give them feedback on what they have done well and what they need to improve.

According to Cohen (1986), "changing the perception of low-achieving students that are generally incompetent in school is probably the most difficult task for the classroom teacher" (153). I agree. But when a student's perception of herself as a low-achieving student is changed, it's one of the most rewarding accomplishments for a teacher and one of the most beneficial achievements for a student. Therefore, once the low-achieving students are identified, I
make it a point to look for ways to provide them with specific positive feedback—in public and in private, verbally and in writing—about whatever tasks they are doing well. In my experience, continuous and consistent reinforcement motivates all students to openly and increasingly participate.

Public acknowledgement of a low-achieving student for the fine work s/he is doing and/or for something s/he said not only helps change a student's perception of herself but it also changes the way the other students in the classroom perceive the student. Changing students' perceptions of one another is particularly important in a class that deals specifically with oppression. One early graduation student wrote the following comment on the evaluation in regards to her "before and after" assumptions about the night school class.

My assumption at the beginning of the class was that it was going to be pretty easy and I was not going to enjoy it because unfortunately I thought a lot of people [students] wouldn't care. I was proven somewhat wrong. The class was not difficult but you definitely have to do your work and I found that a good percentage of the people did care which I found good.

Effective teaching is a reciprocal process. Showing students that you care about them and perceive them as competent individuals in turn prompts them to care more about themselves, their education, and one another as human beings. Over the course of the semester, students increasingly begin to realize that each student is a unique person who has something special to contribute.
In the PT classroom where student participation is paramount to the effectiveness of the class, both teacher and students get to hear the voices of students who remain silent in other classroom settings. By posing questions, listening carefully, and re-presenting to students what they have said, the teacher is afforded the opportunity to integrate subject matter into their existing knowledge. With sustained encouragement and practice over time, students learn to express their ideas and opinions openly, seek the ideas and opinions of others, provide reasons to support their ideas, become better listeners, and appreciate another person’s point of view even when it differs from their own (Costa 1985).

Finally, the value of philosophical teaching as a way to promote thinking and self-expression, enhance learning, and elicit less oppressive behavior among a heterogeneous group of adolescents cannot be underestimated. At the very least, PT provides students with an opportunity to experience an alternative teaching model that most have not been exposed to prior to this class. At its best, PT affords students the opportunity to put their education to use. At least some students were able to make the cognitive leap from thought to action on their own, as typified by the comments of one student about the most valuable idea she learned in the class.

The most important thing I learned in this class is probably the way you taught the class. Before this class I knew nothing about oppression and the different types, philosophical questions, and empathy. Because I didn’t have to memorize it, I
learned and understood everything better. Now I feel that I have a thorough knowledge of everything I learned....This class has helped me in my other classes and in my life.

What more could a teacher want?

Conclusion

Both teacher and students agree that philosophical teaching proved to be a viable way to help students learn the required English content as well as to think critically and morally. Answers provided by students on the course evaluation clearly indicate that students not only found PT to be an effective way to learn but that they also learned the material. Based on my own observations, I find that in addition to increased classroom participation, many students are also more inclined to elaborate on their written responses as the class progresses, providing more thoughtful ideas and reasons for their answers. Their writing skills tend to improve because they seem to care more about what they are thinking and writing. A way to check the validity of this observation might be to give a pretest and posttest that evaluates writing and reasoning skills the next time I present the course.

To practice philosophical teaching it is not necessary to teach about oppression. Any topic, issue, or theme can be chosen for inquiry as long as it piques student interest and is one that they can relate to. Generative topics, as compared with academic ones, work best because "they grow
out of student culture and express problematic conditions in daily life that are useful for generating critical discussion" (Shor 1992, 55). Some generative topics I have successfully used with the PT approach are medical ethics, education, American history, friendship, the media, first amendment rights, the effects of television, and free will vs. determinism. Such topics ignite student thinking and discussion, allowing them to build upon their previous thoughts.

In closing, the title of this thesis--PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHING AS A MEANS FOR RAISING CRITICAL AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS--encapsulates what I set out to accomplish in my night school English class. By "exposing the roots of oppression" through the use of PT, I aimed to "plant the seeds of change" in my students' minds so that they might begin to create a less oppressive and more equitable and just society in the classroom which could ideally expand to the society at large. The seeds of change have been sown. What students decide to do with the approach to knowledge that they've learned in this class is up to them. I can only hope that as a result of having experienced the course, each student has grown as a human being in a way that is personally meaningful and useful to him or her.

Social activist Emma Goldman is noted for having said that the most violent element in society is ignorance. Ignorance is the condition of being uneducated, unaware, or uninformed. Whether or not these adolescents will go on to transform themselves and society remains to be seen. But if
I have at least raised their consciousness about oppression and the way it affects their lives and the lives of those around them, I have succeeded. And if through their heightened awareness of oppression these adolescents choose to act in less oppressive ways towards themselves, each other, and the environment, then I have achieved my goal of helping them become more respectful, responsible, and reasonable critical thinkers. Only with critical and moral consciousness can individuals be true critical thinkers. Only through awareness of the insidious nature of oppression can individuals take action to help stop the cyclical violence that systematic oppression perpetuates.


Lesson I

A Hypothetical Story

The following exercise is a modification of a "test" I came across in an unknown novel some twenty-odd years ago. I assume it was originally meant to be used as a "party game" of some sort to determine peoples' values in an unscientific, but fun, way. Although I use the activity in the same way as it was intended, I also use it to make students aware of several ideas pertinent to the course. For example, people have different points of view; some questions can have more than one "right" answer; but it is primarily used to show how each of us thinks within a frame of reference, that is, "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which explain, shape, and reflect our view of ourselves and our world" (Warren 1988, 32).

Procedure.

Emphasizing the importance of good listening skills, I explain to the students that I am going to tell a story which I expect them to pay close attention to. At the end of the story I will then ask them a question about it; however, they cannot confer with one another about the answer, nor may they ask me for any more information. Quite
simply, when called on, they must answer the question to the best of their ability based on the information presented.

In a dramatic manner, I ad-lib the following scenario:

A husband and wife lived together on an island similar to Martha’s Vineyard. The husband, a travelling salesman, was often away for days at a time. His wife, feeling lonely and isolated, wanted desperately to have a child. But her husband wanted to wait until they were financially secure even though they owned their own home and he made a decent living. As a result, the wife found herself a lover who lived on the coast of the mainland.

One day the wife went to visit her lover. As she prepared to leave him to go back to her home on the island, he became upset because she was not spending the night as she usually did. Although she really wanted to stay, she knew she had to get back home before her husband returned that evening.

Now there were only two ways to get to the island during the winter months. One was a small ferry; the other was a remote and dilapidated walking bridge at the far end of the island. When the wife reached the ferry, she suddenly realized she didn’t have any money to pay for her passage. As a result, the ferryman refused to take her back to the island without the cash up-front. In a panic she went back to her lover’s home to borrow the money. Still upset by her abrupt departure, he laughed in her face and refused to give her any money. Her only alternative was to walk over the old bridge—even though it was structurally unsafe and the evening was growing dark. Fortunately, she made it over the bridge to the island; but, unfortunately, a stranger was hiding in the shadows along the road that led to her home. The unknown assailant jumped out of the bushes and stabbed the wife to death.

At the end of the story I ask the students to silently think about who they believe is responsible for the wife's death without asking any further questions or conferring with one another. After a brief lapse of time, I randomly call on five students, one at a time, to tell me his/her choice as I record their answers on the chalk board. Again
I ask the class to silently consider who they believe is next in responsibility for the wife's death, calling on the original five students for their answers and writing them on the board, and so on and so on, until each of the five students has ranked the five mentioned possibilities (wife, husband, lover, ferryman, and assassin). The other students are required to quietly record their choices on paper as well. In my experience the ways the five students rank the characters have always been different.

The following three activities are used in response to this initial lesson. Since there is not enough time to use all three during the first class, the metacognitive activity described first is used at the end of the first class, whereas the other two activities are used at later dates in connection with the story of the wife's murder as either in-class assignments or homework.

Activity #1.

Since the concept of values is generally one which students are familiar with, we spend some time discussing what an assumption is before students complete their first "reflection sheet" on which they respond to the following four items.

Reflection #1

1(a) An assumption can be defined as a fact or a condition taken for granted, or as a supposition that something is true without proof or evidence.
Before attending tonight's class, what were some of the assumptions you had about what the course, the students, and teacher would be like?

(b) After attending the class, explain how your thoughts about the night school class have changed.

(c) What are your present thoughts about what the course will be like? Explain in detail.

2. Discuss an idea that you learned in class tonight that you didn’t know or hadn’t thought about before.

Obviously the purpose of this activity is to make students aware of their own assumptions, especially in regard to the type of student they assume would be taking a night school class. Some students immediately catch on to why I have them do this exercise; most do not. Regardless of whether they understand its relevance or not, this initial written response provides me with pertinent information as to how these students perceive themselves and each other. Later on in the semester, I refer to this reflection sheet to demonstrate how adolescents like themselves often times tend to oppress one another because of erroneous assumptions which are primarily based on "appearance"--not reality.

Activity #2.

Detecting Values

I use this handout soon after the initial class meeting usually as "filler" material. In reference to A Hypotheti-
cal Story, I ask students to respond to the following statement.

In the space below, write who you think is responsible for the wife’s death in rank order. Then in a cohesive paragraph(s), explain the reasoning behind your choices. Be explicit.

Although the handout is titled Detecting Values, I pass it back towards the end of the course and have students re-read their responses and determine the underlying assumptions/beliefs inherent in their answers.

Activity #3.

Exploring Values

For this activity I do one of two things depending upon the time element, and sometimes I have students do both. In connection with "A Hypothetical Story," I ask students to think about the five values in the story—love, happiness, sex, money, and fate—by posing questions about them. Below are some examples of questions students have asked:

What is love? Is it learned or innate? Are there different kinds of love? What are they? Does love really exist? How do we know what true love is? Does love really conquer all?

Based on the questions brainstormed in their journals, I ask them to define each one of the words according to what the word means to them as individuals without using the word itself in the definition, followed by a paragraph or two of explanation about the worth of each value in the student’s life and what it means to him or her.
Another assignment that intentionally encourages students to explore their values is a "Values Survey" I came across in a book titled *Choices: A Teen Woman's Journal for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning* (Bingham 1983). Students rate statements on a scale that ranges from one to four. The values covered are family, adventure, knowledge, power, moral judgment and personal consistency, money or wealth, friendship and companionship, recognition, independence and freedom, security, beauty and aesthetics, creativity, and helping others. Students do the same activities as cited above—question, define, and explore—but only in regard to their three highest and lowest values.

Students seem to like this assignment because they enjoy learning about themselves. This activity is often referred to throughout the course because many of the weekly lessons revolve around values. It is particularly useful in relation to the lesson titled Language and Thought.
Lesson II
Activity #1

Identifying Oppression

1. In the space below, define the word "oppression" in your own words. Include an example.

2. Look up the following words in a dictionary, and write their definitions below.

   oppression - n.
   oppress - v.
   oppressive - adj.

   Now that you're aware of the dictionary definition/s of oppression, formulate your own definition of it in the space below.

3. After looking up the above words, rent the video *Fried Green Tomatoes* and watch it carefully. Then, in the space below, summarize the movie in no less than 200 words. (For example, what was the theme of the movie?)

4. Next, describe at least six scenes in which instances of oppression occur. Be specific.
Activity #2

Reflection

Short essays - Be sure to answer the following questions in complete sentences. THINK before writing.

1. What philosophical questions does the movie raise? List at least three.

2. Why do you think I wanted you to be aware of the different types of oppression?

3. Describe a time when you, personally, were oppressed. How did it make you feel?

4. Describe a time when you witnessed oppression.

5. Describe a time when you acted as the oppressor.

6. Why do you think I had you watch the movie Fried Green Tomatoes? What kinds of values did I want you to be more aware of?

7. Why do you think oppression is so pervasive in our lives?

8. How do you think oppression can be eradicated? (Eradicated means "to tear up by the roots.")

9. Go back to the first question. Choose one of the philosophical questions you think the movie raises, and then attempt to answer it in a cohesive manner.
Lesson III

Reflection: The Snow Goose

Respond to the following questions/statements in complete sentences. Be sure to include the reasons for your answers whenever necessary.

Describe the setting of the story.

Name and describe the three main characters in the story.

Compare and contrast the characters to one another. In what ways are they alike? In what ways are they different?

Summarize the plot of the story.

The climax occurs when . . . .

List at least three philosophical questions that the story raises.

From your ideas listed above, what do you think was the author's main intent in writing the story? What point was he trying to make? Explain.

Describe the ways in which Philip Rhayader is oppressed.

What are some of the reasons why he is oppressed?

Do you think the reasons for Philip's oppression are justified? Explain.

Do you think the snow goose is a good actress?

What character do you empathize with the most? Explain why.

Define ableism.

After watching this film, what did you learn about ableism and the way it impacts peoples' lives?

What other character discussed in class this semester might you compare Philip with? Explain why.

Long Essay: In what way might you compare the oppression exercised by the military towards Philip to a present day type of military oppression? Discuss your answer in cohesive paragraphs.
The following student comments were written in response to whether or not my philosophical teaching approach had an effect on the way students learned the material. These comments were taken verbatim from the course evaluation given to the first class taught on oppression using a philosophical teaching approach during the spring of '94.

Ann wrote:
Yes, this class was interesting. I enjoyed it a lot better than my regular English class. You had us learning some pretty heavy issues but you made it understandable and motivating.

Joe wrote:
Yes, highly effective. I learned more in the class than my regular class. It open my mind to new ways of looking at things.

Fred wrote:
It is an effective and useful teaching style. A better method may be asking questions that start students asking questions to each other and you. I understand this depends on the class. It is important to "ignite" the classroom discussion.

Ray wrote:
Yes. Its helped me to answer questions with more thought and to ask more indepth questions. Its also taught me to take in the info and realize it before thinking.

Sasha wrote:
I think this teaching style has had an effect on the way we learned the info in this class because first of all its different from what most teachers do, talk, talk, and nothing else but talk. I think this got us to realize a lot of things and get our brains working. Most of the times we don't sit and think about it. This style gave opportunity to everyone to say something, and oh boy! We got a lot of different sides, opinions.
Kerrie wrote:
In a way yes, because I never really made myself think about oppression before I came to this class. It's made me really think about how I feel about it, and also that there are many forms of oppression. (Not just prejudices against blacks.)

Jay wrote:
yes, because it wasn't like a lecture. You made us think about what you were saying and in a way made us realize how it was related to us.

Mark wrote:
That style is ok. I thought a lot more in this English class than any other English class. It was kinda rough to get into the ideas. But, I liked this method.

Molly wrote:
I loved the way you taught us to speak our minds and not to judge us for our responses to your questions. You treated us all fairly and to me that is important. You gave us all our chances. And let us discuss what was going on.

Kimberly wrote:
Previously and currently, I've had teachers like this. I feel it is a better and a more efficient way to learn. It's more interesting than listening to a monotone lecture. Nobody learns from those. If you make it creative and interesting (which you do), people will be more attentive, thus resulting in extensive learning. I feel that if you must find the answer yourself, it forces you to think and learn the answer, unlike someone reading it to you and asking you to say it back. This way of teaching is not only more interesting, it is also a very efficient way to learn more.

Christopher wrote:
Philosophical teaching, like philosophical thinking, is by far the best form of learning. By questioning and analyzing information, we make it personal and a part of ourselves. What we learn affects the way we behave, and the way we ultimately deal with life. If we learn in a questioning manner, we learn to think for ourselves; we learn to be individuals.

If someone learns by simply absorbing some information, they will soon leak the information out again like a sponge. This accomplishes close to nothing. Only real thinking will allow information to be learned.
Brittany wrote:
Yes, because by asking everyone we all got to see in what ways it could be thought of as. We had a chance to each see how we thought about things.

Mark wrote:
Yes, because it makes you think. Anyone can copy down notes from a board or a lecture.

Tanisha wrote:
Yes it has, because it has taught me not to be lazy and think! I find it much easier to understand something if you ask yourself a question about it first! Don't always expect the teacher to tell you what the meaning of something is, how something is done, where something may be, or anything like that. It's good to figure things out for your self.

Jack wrote:
Not really. While I understand it may help some people, it doesn't do much for me. I do better just sitting there and absorbing information and formulating ideas and opinions has always come rather easily to me.

Jared wrote:
Yes because it made me almost teach myself. You ask a question then I could build off the answer and discover it all cut for myself.

Jill wrote:
Yes, speaking for most of the people in the class, the "philosophical teaching" approach has had a profound effect on the way we learned information in the class. In my 12 years of schooling, I've encountered many teachers who also use this approach in their teaching, and many who didn't, many who lectured while I diligently took notes. I feel that I, and others, learn much more by thinking and speaking our thoughts, than writeing down the thoughts of another. A lot of the time a student was so busy writeing down every word, they can't even remember what they wrote, let alone form an idea.

Matt wrote:
I think that teaching style gets the student more involved in the class discussion. It keeps the student on his toes and alert. Because you ask the question you are learning the route of the discussion.
Lila wrote:
I think this way of philosophically thinking helps out a lot because it makes you brainstorm a lot and it makes things a lot clearer. I mean things that you want answers to are usually right in your first thoughts and it's like using logic and there's your answer. This way of thinking helped me because now when I ask myself questions I can come up with better answers.

Warren wrote:
Yes, the way you have taught is more effective than most ways of teaching. We think our selves instead of getting spoon fed.

Amy wrote:
Yes, it pushes us students to use our minds instead of the teacher using them for us. It keep's student's more involved in your class; you learn alot more when you have to do it your self.

Jenny wrote:
I have always thought that teachers should teach "how" instead of "what" to think. I think it's a good approach. I know that because of your style, I've gone deeper into issues and ideas I would have passed over, asked "why" more often, and expressed myself on more issues (which feels good). I learned more about the way I think, and what I feel.

Dave wrote:
Yes, it doesn't bore you. You have to pay more attention to it to understand.

Michelle wrote:
Yes, because it stuck in my head. It did not just pass by me. I actually remembered alot of what was discussed here.

Sam wrote:
This teaching style is probably better, instead of just memorizing what someone tells you; you must think for yourself. It encourages you to believe that your thoughtful opinion is valid and that all of us don't think alike.

Tanya wrote:
Yes because it helped in a way and in a way it didn't. It did help because I'm afraid to answer a question and when I knew you are looking to call on someone for the answer I try to think of something good I can say and something that sounds right even if it is not. But it didn't really help because if a person says what they think the
answer is and you don't go over it, then I'll be lost and won't know whether what I thought in my head was right or wrong. But in some cases I'd say that it helped.

Steve wrote:
I think I would have learned more if you told us info about the material. I'm not very good at philosophizing.

Diane wrote:
Yes, I believe it has. You challenged us in a way different from how we are challenged in day school. We are taught what to think when we are there. At least in this class we are allowed to state our feelings without being oppressed or told that it is the wrong answer.

Fred wrote:
I think it is good to raise peoples consciousness. But I'm the kind of person who loves to learn facts rather than analysis everything. I also liked how you got everybody envolved.

Jan wrote:
I think it's a good teaching method but I also think that people need to get used to this way of teaching. The main method of teaching that everyone has grown up with is by the teacher telling you what to think by simply telling you information on the subject. More teachers should try experimenting with the "philosophical teaching" method for a change.

Tim wrote:
It has helped me learn where other teachers have failed in the past. Too bad there aren't more of you in 'Daytime School.' I would be getting a lot more A's.

Heidi wrote:
I think it has helped. If you had just come out and told us the answers we wouldn't have learned anything at all. In order to learn you basically have to do it on your own and think about the answers to questions or statements. I think that's how you learn alot.

Dan wrote:
Yes, I feel like I have been able to come up with my own conclusions and express them. Because of this I have enjoyed most of the assignments and feel inspired to write more often. It's strange that the best English class I've ever taken has
been in night school. I really respect the way that you chose the theme for this class. I admire the fact that you show respect to your students and always give us the benefit of the doubt.

Shanna wrote:
I think more and more teachers are finally waking up to the fact that there is no correct answer. Most teachers would like to tell you how to think and when to think it, which is oppressive. It doesn’t leave room for creativity or logical thinking. I think a lot of kids haven’t discovered that they can have as much power as these people who have, on average, only four or five more years of schooling than us. We can decide what is our correct answer. That is why I think your approach is more successful, especially if you have students interested in learning for themselves.

From Shannon’s response it is clear that she was able to detect the oppressive nature of the traditional (banking) style of education. While this realization may or may not be apparent to the rest of the students, it might be an issue worth raising in a future class.
The following student comments were taken from the course evaluation handout given to students during the spring '95.

Lauren wrote:
In most other English classes you must learn definite facts, memorize time periods and characters, and other useless information. In asking for an opinion you force the person to make a connection or idea about what they saw. This not only draws out information such as characters and time, it makes the story relevant to a small part in their life, which to me is much more useful than the time period when the story took place. It also asks the student to think at a higher level like comprehension than at the level they are most used to which is most likely memorization. They will probably be asked to comprehend much more in life than they will to memorize.

Carol wrote:
Yes, I definitely liked this approach to teaching. By simply telling us things, we don't really have to think or expand our minds. But by using this particular approach that you did, it makes us think and stretch our minds as well as our imaginations. It makes us think for ourselves and develop our own beliefs and opinions. This teaching approach I do like alot and it also makes me learn and enjoy this class more than my regular English class.

Brett wrote:
I think your way of teaching definitely had an effect on the way I learned information in this class. You made me think about the answer before answering. That's something I never really did before. Now I think before answering in all my other classes and it is really helping me out.

Ron wrote:
Yes, because by letting us think for ourselves, we are more involved in the class. This allows us to be able to learn more and in ways that we can understand.

Joel wrote:
Yes, I do. I feel it's made learning easier. I like having to try and understand and teach myself instead of always being told how.
Marie wrote:
Yes. In many ways it’s refreshing being able to decide for myself. Instead of just being told. But, I am the type of person who likes facts. So at times the class was a little frustrating for me.

Kerri wrote:
This teaching approach has had a good effect on the way I learned information in this class. In the other English classes we were told the information instead of thinking about it. I am learning much better than I did before. I am understanding a lot better. My papers have more understanding in them than BS. Because I didn’t understand the material, I had to BS the papers to get by.

Dave wrote:
Ya because we learned it better by going over it all together instead of just doing it by ourselves!

Mike wrote:
I think this teaching approach had an effect on the way I learned information by making me more open minded to the issues we covered. I believe that being open minded and philosophical is more effective than being straight factual. You produced a thought process where we could understand the material openly.

Candy wrote:
Yes, very much so--I wish more classes could be taught this way. I think you made the class interesting and I always felt that taking a list of vocabulary words and looking them up and passing them in is a bad way to learn vocabulary because it is quickly forgotten. But by basing a class on one word and then many words branching off, I feel I've learned a lot. Also using examples in the movies helped.

Erin wrote:
I like the philosophical teaching because I like to talk on the intellectual basis and these questions made me think about all kinds of things. Yes, it had an effect by opening my mind and a lot of times I became interested in the topic and I wanted to learn.

Erika wrote:
Yes. It seemed that conversations in the class were more intense and enlightening than my classes in day school. I felt that I involved myself more in the discussions because the questions were more
geared to my type of intellect. Yes. I learned more.

John wrote:
This class has made an impression on me. Most classes I have I am told to give an answer, not my thoughts. The answers you have wanted were my thoughts which have forced me to take a close look at myself, and it scared me. I'm a hypocrit.

Kara wrote:
It had a major effect because you learn your own way. We're not just sitting here listening. We have to think to know the answers we're looking for. We've also been able to actually have discussions. Some other classes we just sit and have to listen. It gets boring after a while and then you're supposed to know everything. The way you've done it, we have to be awake because we have to think to learn.

Ned wrote:
I think that it helps in a way because it does really help us to think, but it's tough because my whole life I've been taught what to think so....

Jamie wrote:
Yes, most definitely. This way we have to think about our answers we aren't given them. That is too easy. You made us use our brains.
The following student comments were taken from the course evaluation in response to the most important idea s/he learned in the class. They were chosen to illustrate the diversity of their answers.

Faith wrote:

The most important thing I have learned in this class is having a little more self-confidence in myself. More confidence in my awareness of oppression and more confidence in my broadening consciousness. I know the times to come will be difficult dealing with oppression, fighting it, and making others fight....This class helped me get a sense of understanding, knowing that some are on the side of righteousness, knowing that some classroom actually has educational content, a first in my experiences. Thank you Mrs. Jacques.

Rene wrote:

The most important thing I myself learned was how to write a thesis paper. Before this class I did not know what a thesis was and you taught me how to break it down in simple questions that I had to answer. I also learned that if you put more effort into your thinking about what you are going to write, then you make less mistakes.

Mike wrote:

I learned in this class that everyone has a different way of comprehending things. Everyone learned from everyone else's answers. I learned how oppression affects everyone differently. You taught us how to read between the lines and not just take our first answers, but to look deeper into things.

Kara wrote:

I have always been aware of oppression; I have seen enough occur in my time to show me that it should have no place in humanity. This class, and the material covered in it, showed me again how cruel our world can be....Another factor in this class helped me realize anew what our world is like; the diversity in the class itself. Having students from different "academic levels" was very enlightening to me, since I am hardly ever exposed to them in school. Being exposed to people different than you and learning to see them as who they are, can truly be an important step in overcoming oppression. Since oppression is based so much on difference, being exposed to it can aid the stop.
All in all, the course woke me up again to see the hurt that is present in our world. And when one is aware, the more they can deal with the subject.

Dee wrote:
The most important thing I learned in this class is how to look at the same situation differently, this being an important role in decision making. It will be a good advantage for me in the future. I will be able to make a good decision by looking at all sides of the point.

Dianne wrote:
This class has helped me to construct a clearer understanding of the many forms that oppression takes and the ways in which the power-over mentality has been engrained in us and our society. This understanding has helped me recognize the oppression in my life and the world and it has helped me face the oppression and try to deal with it in a non-oppressive and non-belligerent way....

Dale wrote:
I learned that people are people. They live, breathe, think, and feel the same way I do. I learned that life isn’t just instinctual, that every experience, thought, and moral affects how you think and treat others. This has helped me look at how I treat others and weigh the respect I give. I was single minded and self-neutered.... I genuinely think this class changed me and my life for the better. I have a better relationship with my family and my girlfriend. I actually worry about the effects of my actions.

Seth wrote:
The most important thing I learned in this class I think is that people are a lot different than you think. When we talked about conceptual frameworks, I realized that everyone is different because of the way they think, how they were brought up, and the different experiences they had. This is important to me because I have to think before I judge people because they have had a different life than me and feel differently about different things. I realize now that people have feelings for certain reasons and I can’t judge them without knowing those reasons. I plan to make sure I know more about a person before I judge them.

Fox wrote:
The most important thing I learned in this class is that things can change and we can change them.
If we open our minds to everything around us, we can make better decisions and become better people. It would make people realize that things don’t have to be this way. That is why our country is a democracy, so that we the voting public can change something if we don’t like it. Only if people weren’t so shallow and narrow-minded, it would work....

Robyn wrote:
The most important thing that I’ve learned was about myself. I never knew that I discriminated against people because of certain things. I learned about this when we did the Moon Project. This is important to me and will help me out in the future because I now know I do discriminate and when I try to make assumptions about someone or something, I will think before I discriminate.

Ned wrote:
I don’t feel there was really a most important thing. The class was only about one thing, oppression. Oppression is a very important subject though with various subsections that are hard to recognize. This class taught about a lot of oppression that may not be recognized by a lot of people. In my future I intend to try to recognize all types of oppression and attempt not to exercise any of them. If this were a required subject in school, maybe oppression could be cut down.

Liz wrote:
I have learned that people can make a difference. I have also learned that everyone is against oppression, yet everyone is oppressed and that no one is really doing anything to stop it.

If oppression is so wrong and everyone hates it so much, then why do we do it? Because people don’t think that one voice can make a difference. I have learned that one hushed voice speaking out can turn into a roar of discontent when it says the right things. If one person takes the time to say something is wrong with this picture, then soon that voice will find that alot of other voices agree....