

Reading Response Theory and Critical Pedagogy:  
Measuring Values in Manitoba's Senior ELA Curriculum

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a close-reading of Manitoba's senior years ELA framework. It attempts to scrutinize the overall wording, phraseology and intent of the curricular document and determine whether or not it fosters democratic teaching and classrooms. The main democratizing theories, critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism are teased out to show not only how they coexist but also how they may form oppositions. That is, while these theories can co-exist, they can present contradictions in emphasis, scope and focus. Although populist by many standards, Reader Response theory may not be concrete enough to be housed alongside critical literacy values. This may be connected to a kind of misguided interpretation of critical pedagogy as 'philanthropy'. Does the framework deal with this problem adequately? Its ability to help teachers deal with this contradiction may indicate not only the overall success of the curricular framework as a democratizing instrument, but may serve as a reminder as to how democratic education remains a paradoxical ideal. It also may suggest that professionalization of teachers in this area is more difficult than previously imagined.

*Introduction:  
Context and Background*

To a significant degree schools are reflections of society. A society that tramples on human rights, denies freedom or promotes conformity will invariably create schools that do the same. That there is a kind of ‘trickle down’ effect from societies to schools is not exactly a bold assertion. What might be harder to qualify is that the reverse occurs – that is the proclamation of an idealist. Critical pedagogy is a step in this direction. Advocates, often called ‘democrats’, suggest that when implemented with the right combination of care and technique, schools are not necessarily locus’ of oppression of which Friere speaks (1970). They are vessels of challenge and change to the status quo. In a sense, education can promote democratic values from schools to society – a kind of trickling up.

Although there can be no doubt that such idealistic initiatives have many supporters in academic and professional realms, many of these same supporters will admit that in many ways critical pedagogy is nothing new. Education has often had the power to invigorate social change. Even under the mantle of religious indoctrination, the unpredictable and uncontrollable quality of the teacher-student relationship had a potentially liberating power. For example, Jesuit missionaries like Padre Ernesto Cardenal presented a liberal theology by blending religious archetypes with the folk stories of the people that their church sought to ‘save’ (Martin, M.T., 2002, 124). Of course, some of these more ‘liberal’ readings (and teachings) were suppressed but one must acknowledge that a teacher’s struggle to empower his or her students amidst an oppressive society, situation or institution has occurred with some regularity throughout history.

Perhaps this idealism is connected to the essentially moral epistemology at the foundation of educational philosophy. Even Plato argued that the purpose of education was to raise ‘good Greeks’ (Plato, 380 BC). In fact Locke, Rousseau and many others have all maintained that education’s chief purpose was to foster conscientious and moral citizens (Locke, 1692; Rousseau, 1762). Of course the definition of ‘moral citizen’ has changed over the years, but essentially there is an ethical end in text and subtext to most educational philosophy. It may be, however, that post-modern democrats may have more in common with those philosophers of previous eras than the ‘anti-chaos’ rationalists who have taken over many Canadian schools (Barlow, 1994, 11). Like those philosophers of old, democrats are concerned with fostering a moral society and eschewing an education that serves a dogmatic, sophistic or conformal authority (Barlow, 1994).

Contemporary democrats must now contend with the dilemmas of a pluralistic and globalized age. They must negotiate with the post-modern spectrum that refracts knowledge and truth like light from a prism, disallowing absolutes and ideals from emerging clearly. This could be a productive or counter-productive problem to consider, but generally speaking one is either propelled by or mired in the fact that we are part of complex global village rather than patriots to a single state. On the jobsite this lack of absolutes can be very perplexing. Those in ‘people-professions’ may compensate for these difficulties by holding on tightly to outdated practice or method. Democratic pedagogical initiatives are often met with resistance by both teacher and institutions (Beck, 2005). To be fair, teachers resist for a variety of understandable reasons including the fad-like nature of training and re-training - the feeling that they are ‘already doing that’. Another common complaint is that these innovations are presented in a way that

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contradicts personal experience (Van der Berg, 2002, 579). Essentially, there is a *modus operandi* that prevents innovation within the realm of education and maintains a status quo - a kind of top-down bureaucratic structure that ensures mediocrity, devalues human capital and destabilizes plausible democratic teaching initiatives. This has been outlined by the likes of Van der Berg (2002), Apple (1990), Shor (2002) and Clifton (2004).

That is not to say innovations have not found their way into the profession. A mobile definition of literacy, for example, has been the *modus operandi* for the ELA teacher for quite a while now (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 4). The move from traditional skills of reading and writing to 'representing' and 'viewing' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000) reflects not only the need for a media-savvy, technologically-literate population, it allows for democratized pedagogy. As some academics have indicated, increased focus on current texts and media literacy may even be part of a lessening of gaps and advantages due to race, class, sex and ethnicity (S Martin, 2003, 289). But as Van der Berg argues, the school 'system' can only contain a 'bite-sized' supplement of these transactions and innovations. Innovation, he contends, is often received in good faith but do not receive comprehensive attention and understanding (Van der Berg, 2002).

Meanwhile, when left to its own devices academia can become esoteric. Some hold on to grandiose assertions: The transfer of critical skills to traditional skills like reading and writing are presented as incentive (Nickerson, 1989, 7, 17). Whether or not democratic education has these cognitive benefits is not the primary angle of argument of this thesis. For most democrats it is the larger social benefit that is the key point. It cannot be denied that this grander motive can make democratic education sound overly fervent, but democrats are not the first to contend that without a literate middle class, one

that contains citizens capable of critical thought coupled with social action, democracy on a larger scale may be doomed. Therefore these pedagogues believe our society can avoid a repetition of past political mistakes through education. Their broadened view of democratic education hinges on the belief that the social injustices and totalitarianism of the past can be avoided in the future by fostering a citizenry with strong critical thinking skills (Semali, 2003, 276).

### *More on the Terminology*

To differentiate between critical literacy, critical pedagogy and democracy in the classroom is not to merely split hairs. While a Venn diagram might reveal considerable overlap between the first two approaches, 'democracy in education' would be considered a much broader concept. Undoubtedly, its immediacy as a term has something to do with its broader political implications, but even within the realm of education it reaches more deeply probably because of its veneration as a term. Democracy in education was presented and discussed most notably by Dewey (1916) and re-contextualized by the likes of Apple (1983, 1986), Shor (1992), Levin (1998) and more locally, Osborne (1991). Many of its adherents believe that education must be inclusive of local constituents, students and teachers, although there has been considerable debate over these finer points. This debate has invariably led to division into various camps (Levin, 1998, 59). Key questions like 'what a democratic curriculum looks like' emerged with some doubt and controversy. Some propelled democratic education in terms of curriculum or teacher 'praxis' (Friere, 1970). Others focused on giving local constituents

control (Levin, 1998, 58). In general it seems democratic ideals became muddled at the level of implementation despite a fairly large-scale acceptance in principle.

Critical pedagogy might be seen as a kind of antidote to the aforementioned problems. This is because both critical literacy and critical pedagogy, indelibly related terms, contain language that reinstates the classroom as the locus of control. 'Critical pedagogy' may ameliorate the difficulties of perspective and approach in the term 'democratic education', one that even democrats will admit is a problematic and ambiguous word in most post-modern contexts (Crick, 2007, 240). Essentially, critical pedagogy tends to focus on teacher practice and the process of learning which instils democratic values and self-actualization (Shor, 1992). Critical literacy maintains a focus on what it means to be a literate person in today's society. More specifically, it redefines 'literacy' from the ability to decode words on a page to looking for underlying messages to finding 'stories that are left out' and processing how stories are 'trying to change them' (Friere, 50, 1970). As Shor states, 'critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self' (Shor, 1992, 1). So while 'critical pedagogy', as a term, tends to focus more on the approach of the teacher, 'critical literacy' is more about the experience of the student, the learner or the class in general. For the purpose of this thesis, 'critical pedagogy' is discussed mostly in relation to teaching method and is seen as a means towards an end. 'Critical literacy', meanwhile, is discussed more as an end to a means. 'Democracy in education' remains a broader mantle under which many of these more specific ideals and approaches take shape. Critical pedagogy is most discussed as a strategy for teachers and critical literacy is an ideal for classrooms. While the line



between these terms continues to blur and overlap somewhat, there will be an attempt in this writing to use them accurately in conjunction with the content and context.

Another term central to this thesis is Reader Response theory. Broadly speaking, this is a branch of critical theory that brings forth a variety of readings through the supposition that meaning is not necessarily contained purely within the text (Rosenblatt, 1998) – a fairly democratic assertion in some ways. As a form of criticism, it was part of an overall debunking of New Critical theory in academic realms during the 1970s. That is, the general perspective of the academic reader shifted from being ‘text-focused’ (New Critical theory) to being a negotiation between reader, text and author. By the early 1980s Reader Response criticism had not only gained a foothold as a legitimate alternative to New Critical theory and Formalism, it had opened up new ground for reading texts from a greater variety of perspectives such as Post-Colonialism and Feminism (albeit, some of these alternative readings had been around for a while). And since advocates of Reader Response theory argued that meaning in the text existed in a transaction between reader, text and author or some variation of this equation, this revolution had important pedagogical ramifications. That is, although reader response theory was originally part of the academic critical landscape, it would later become seen (some would say pigeon-holed) as a pedagogical strategy (Harkin, 2005, 419). This is likely because it could be utilized with so much flexibility – it may be valuable within an ‘implied reader’ construct (Iser, 1979, 2000) or find life within ‘interpretive communities’ (Fish, 1970). As such, Reader Response theory also works well with the advancement of social learning strategies (Vygotsky, 1978).

An operational definition of Reader Response criticism might be born from Rosenblatt's philosophy of reading and visceral descriptions of teaching literature, where 'the reader savours the experienced evocation, registers its quality, first during, then after the reading event'. Through this 'it becomes possible to reflect on the experience and to look at the text to see what unique combinations of signs, what juxtapositions, might have contributed to the experienced ideas and blended feelings.' (Rosenblatt, 1998, 888)

Clearly here, the text is not the only subject of interest:

The reader becomes a critic, and the professional critic begins as a reader, embracing all such activities, putting them into a larger context, and communicating these experiences and reflections to others. (Rosenblatt, 1998, 888)

It is no coincidence then that Rosenblatt defended her philosophy of education in conjunction with her philosophy of reading (Rosenblatt, 1998, 886). It is an empowering philosophy to both reader and student. Thus, Reader Response criticism is seen as both a pedagogical and a reading strategy, one that through transaction and evocation allows for the consideration of literary texts on the aesthetic level, where the reader's story may be as important as the author's.

### *Objectives*

Since the merit of critical literacy and reader response theory as teaching tools in senior ELA classrooms is the chief focus of this study, there needs to be an exacting knowledge of the similarities and differences between the two theories. To be clear, this thesis looks at Manitoba's senior ELA curriculum with an eye for critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory, not only how they function individually but how the two theories might be cooperative strategies. These theories will be teased out of the

curricular documents with an awareness of the apparently cohesive yet challenging bedfellows they make. This thesis also deals with a prevailing conundrum: the Manitoba curricular instrument in English Language Arts may present aspects of reader response that may both reinforce and contradict the implementation of critical pedagogy. Clearly, this document outlines limitations of critical literacy and Reader Response theory as presented in the curriculum not only to point out the weakness of the documents but to flesh out new possibilities. That is, since much of the academic literature infers a general inability of democracy to flourish in schools and because teachers who experiment with critical pedagogy haven't exactly experienced unmitigated success (Beck, 2005), this study will ultimately produce recommendations on how school curriculum may procure an initiative that is lauded academically but is unevenly implemented. The fact that this lack of implementation could come from a lack of teacher agency or that it stems from problems of school culture will be considered only to a point. Rather, it is hoped that by using Reader Response theory and critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework, the saliency of Manitoba's senior four ELA curriculum documents for the purposes of democratic learning can be determined. Therefore, the curriculum will be put under an analytical microscope with an eye on how critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory, two potentially democratizing values, present their tenets individually and together. Is there enough provision within the curriculum for the scope of values set forth in these theories?

But, as stated, critical pedagogy and reader response criticism present both mutual benefits and incongruities. Theoretically speaking, it could be asserted that their greatest faults as teaching tools can be exasperated by each other. In turn, it could be contended

that their greatest strengths can also be amplified under the right conditions. Specifically, critical pedagogy can be reduced to a political correctness and a blind indoctrination into a set of prescribed values. This has been discussed at length by Dillabough (2002). Even Friere alludes to the fact that so-called 'liberating' teachers can have a re-indoctrinating power (Friere, 1970), a bitter irony. It may be argued that Reader Response criticism might serve as a corrective measure that maintains currency with student beliefs and a priori knowledge. Without the benefit of honesty, personal reflection and discourse advocated in Reader Response theory, critical literacy classrooms might quickly spiral into indoctrinating environments, where political beliefs are pre-conceived. The suggestion here is that when response theory is applied prudently, the real and present danger of critical pedagogy becoming esoteric is stayed.

A converse benefit may also be true. When isolated in its elements, Reader Response criticism can be very post-modern insofar as any answer is acceptable and there is clarity of purpose. This causes it to lose traction as a teaching strategy, especially with young readers who are 'searching for answers'. So, does the curriculum reinforce a positive blend of the two theories or does it bring out the meddlesome contradictions? In order to sustain a democratic classroom one would think the brand of Reader Response that contains a sense of social context and utilizes that to challenge assumptions and mitigates extremes through interaction is probably most desirable (Fish, 1970). That there is provision for these values within Manitoba's ELA curriculum is not an unimportant detail, one that will be outlined further. This study then pivots off this paradox and asks: *To what extent are critical literacy and reader response theory presented and utilized as cohesive strategies in Manitoba's ELA curriculum?*

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this work might be considered a combination of a ‘critical review’ and a ‘close-reading’ of the ELA curriculum. That is, I will be conducting an intensive examination of the general and specific outcomes, standards for assessment and rubrics along with recommended activities in the ELA curriculum. The guiding principles of critical literacy, critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory, with all of their benefits and detractions, will be the lens through which this close-reading is made. Extremely individualistic branches of Reader Response theory that absolve the reader from what Rosenblatt identifies as an ‘efferent’ understanding (Rosenblatt, 1998; Chaplin, 1982), ones such as the psychological form that implies that a ‘fantasy’ is interplayed between reader and text (Holland, 1985) will be bracketed out of this inquiry.

In that sense, the theories themselves provide the framework through which the curriculum can be criticized. This study works with an assumption that the curriculum has a profound effect on what is implemented in the classroom, and a further assumption that a democratic classroom is a desirable commodity. It strives not only to check if the curriculum contains specific critical literacy terms and relevant tasks. It also attempts to consider the entire presentation of the instrument along with the order, juxtaposition and arrangement of the outcomes. Certainly, outcomes and standards that pertain to transformation, reflection and meta-cognition are of particular interest, especially if they reward students for ‘investigation’ and ‘inquiry’ into social conditions or provide opportunity for what Friere calls ‘transformative learning’ (Friere, 1970). Like an advocate of critical literacy would do, this thesis will also consider how these terms are presented and in what context.

Subsequently, the curricular instrument will also be read for relevant Reader Response terminology (ones such as ‘aesthetic’, ‘interpretation’, ‘equivocation’ and ‘transaction’). Here too, it may be necessary to read the documents with a sense ‘of the forest’, not just the trees. That is, while the presence of terms and words will provoke attention, a close reading will be used to evaluate whether or not they are being presented in a ‘cohesive’ or ‘salient’ way. In the case of the ELA curriculum, the declared values of the framework must be considered in conjunction with the outcomes and standards.

### *Significance of the Study*

More than ever, schools are devising mission statements that reflect secular - democratic ideals. The most popular calls are for increased awareness of multi-cultural issues or the procurement of global citizenship and critical thinking. One supposes that with the loss of traditional authorities, the need to clarify our intents in plain English has become of an issue of immediate importance. Who would have thought this could be so difficult? These days schools can be seen forming think tanks to devise statements such as ‘our school is committed to developing global citizens with inquiring minds and compassionate hearts’ (Sturgeon Heights). And while some schools emphasize the development of ‘responsible citizens’ others remind us that their values include fostering the ‘spirit of life-long learning’ (Kildonan East Collegiate). Some schools mesh the various lofty values into one succinct statement, with lines like ‘encouraging life-long learning and social responsibility’ (Fort Richmond Collegiate). While some schools aim for a less imposing goal - that their children will learn in a ‘safe environment’ (Oak Park High School), many maintain loftier visions. Even independent schools of higher levels

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of social and cultural capital have websites with glossy images of students stating ‘I will participate as a global citizen.’ (Balmoral Hall) Schools are increasingly requiring teachers to write their own personal mission statements. In short, this is not just a growing trend, it is a bonafide phenomenon (there are even books and web-resources designed to help schools write mission statements). And as Canada’s population demographic continue to ebb and flow – lower birth rates, more immigration, aging population, etc, and as the world continues to be increasingly connected economically, socially and geographically, the more schools must create mission statements that reflect this global ‘currency’. Amidst this, it seems that educators are continually asked to promote tolerance and the positive blending of class, cultures and ethnicity (Kehoe and Mansfield, 1994). One has to wonder if we are up to the task, or whether many of these maxims are just lip service.

*Chapter 2: Literature Review:  
Critical Literacy and the Democratic Classroom*

Before it can be determined if the tenets of our curriculum work within the definitions of critical pedagogy, critical literacy and Reader Response theory, those terms must be further defined. An important starting point would be to remind the reader that since critical literacy and pedagogy lie underneath that greater operating principle ‘democracy in education’, it follows that they should contain the same sense of moral purpose. This ‘moral’ purpose is summed up by Levin:

‘The connections between democracy and education have to do with a common interest in a particular moral view of human life and human agency. The purposes of education are essentially moral, for they are based on attempts to realize certain ideals about human beings’ (Levin, 1998, 62)

Although considerable challenges within the academic and professional communities have fractured and stayed the democrat through much of the twentieth century (Levin argues that there is no acceptance of democratic values having improved student learning (Levin, 64)), critical pedagogy has acted as a kind of recharge to the ideal. It tends to recall the principles of democracy with fresh insight. It revitalizes the teacher interested in tackling moral issues and questions within the educational system by offering a process-based practice (Beck, 2005, 393) and a call to act outside of the administrative forces and dominant school culture. This is all underscored with the purpose of becoming a better ‘global citizen’.

As indicated, this globalized world itself, however, presents many stumbling blocks for this pedagogy. The sheer variety of social, religious and cultural backgrounds within the average public school is daunting to say the least. Difficult problems like ‘the totemic authority of only French and English’ within a multicultural society like Canada,



for example, requires considerable context, background and expertise to comprehend (Wilson, 1993). Alas, schools are reflectors of grander paradigm shifts, problems and paradoxes. However, most critical pedagogues cannot get lost in sentimentalizing or lamenting. And fortunately critical literacy does not require such a rote knowledge of political affairs - we are asked to be 'co-investigators' alongside our students (Friere, 1970). Critical pedagogy/literacy is an attempt to face these social justice issues, contradictions and issues head on, even within one self. To be clear, critical literacy is a revolution in praxis, a renegotiation of the student-teacher relationship. The goal of these classrooms seems to face socio-political issues with an awareness of the classroom as a 'microcosm' of society - one that is constantly up for transformation (Friere, 1970; Beck, 2005).

Critical pedagogues usually put their hopes in developing a culture and rapport of social and oral discourse with their students. The critical literacy lesson often contains a stronger base of discussion, interrogation and enquiry than seen elsewhere:

All critical literacy lessons are student centered and involve lively, sometimes heated, discussion about controversial, provocative issues; encouraging this strong engagement with and discussion of subject matter that is deeply relevant to students' lives beyond the classroom is arguably at the core of critical literacy: a critical literacy approach places in the foreground issues of power and explicitly attends to differences across race, class, gender, sexual orientation and so on." (Beck, 2005, 393)

Beck advocates for critical literacy from a fairly unusual vantage point - she is a teacher at a maximum security penitentiary. Interestingly, her paper does provide some good advice for the school system. That is, when the approach was presented with care and commitment, pandemonium did not break out, prisoners did not riot and valuable learning actually took place (Beck, 2005, 395). And what is her most vital lesson for the

average school teacher? The greatest obstacles to democracy might come from the institution itself (Beck, 2005, 397). In Beck's case, prison guards and wardens were the ones to oppose her methods, not the prisoners. Despite this, she was still able to assert 'that schools are potential sites for interrogating social conditions.' (Beck, 393)

'This interrogation takes place when teachers establish the conditions under which students are encouraged to discuss and debate the issues they deem relevant to their lives. Through this interrogation, students become educated in the responsibilities and rights that accompany active citizenship in a democracy. Critical pedagogy, then, is a movement to connect the development of individual ethical responsibility to social change through education.' (Beck, 393)

So while critical literacy helps orient the moral compass of a classroom and reinstitute a feeling of citizenship, it also presents ethical challenges and potential confusion to school leaders and administrators. This may be a larger challenge than one might think. As Beck perceived in a rather extreme circumstance, institutions can be disinterested or even dismissive of any style that may appear at first glance to be at odds with the appearance of maintaining established power structures (Beck, 398).

Pioneers of critical literacy were very aware of this conflict, perhaps even fuelled by it. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Friere suggests schools are not only complicit in the oppression of individual freedom, they may even take deliberate action to maintain a power structure that invalidates creativity, 'problem-posing' and human rights (Friere, 1970, 68). Granted, Friere's clientele were mainly adults, individuals who had experienced life-changing 'oppression', something not necessarily identifiable for the average Canadian student. That, however, has not prevented many scholars from reapplying Friere's teaching to a more western context (McLaren, 1999). The application of his model to western youths may be valuable and salient as they too can recognize in their own way that education could be active, alive and 'in transformation' (Friere, 1970).

In fact, it is possible that contemporary western ‘oppression’ might be worse because of its insidiousness. That is, we tend to submit dispassionately to ‘Rousseau-like’ social contracts without knowing it. This is evidenced through the general malaise, apathy and alienation of students and teachers within the system and the vigorous contribution of school bureaucracy to that alienation (Anderson, 1973, 331).

Historically speaking, Rousseau suggested ‘civilized persons’ bargain for these social contracts to become part of a societal order, that education is rooted in this contract of an agreement rooted in order and conformity (Rousseau, 1762). This agreement has grown to new dimensions in our era. That is, now more than ever these contracts are no longer being made openly and no one really understands what we’re agreeing to! Some would say that now this social contract is not just for establishing and procuring a sense of order, but many contest that it is a contract rooted in greed. Undoubtedly this is the ‘anti-chaos’ rationale of which Barlow writes (1994). As Barlow contends, our bargaining for ‘social order’ has mutated into capitalist indoctrination, often a kind of unfettered consumerist ethos. Crick argues that even the church did not demand a position of singular authority as economic authority does in today’s schools (Crick, 2007). Thus, we now write our ‘social contracts’ at the expense of our environment, our health and numerous ‘others’. As Friere states, we ‘buy in’ to the system so that we can become the future oppressors or ‘sub-oppressors’ (Friere, 1970, 30).

It is important to point out that Friere not only demonstrates how this conformity may compromise an individual classroom, he shows how this may infect an entire society (Friere, 1970, 5). While recognition of the ‘oppressor-oppressed’ paradigm is a key starting point for Friere (Friere, 1970, 15), it is clear that doing anything about it is

difficult because schools ‘stock-pile’ ambivalence to their own indiscretions and impositions over time (Friere, 1970). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he demonstrates how the oppressor can only be made to have ‘solidarity’ with the oppressed once he or she can see them as ‘real persons’. In a sort of mutual way then, through intensive human contact, he suggests the teacher and learner can be liberated (Friere, 34); no easy feat – a revolutionary act, in fact. Until that very construct is dismantled, Friere contends, ‘the passive man’ will continue to populate our world (Friere, 63).

Dualities were also of concern to Dewey. For him it was thoughtless practices like the arbitrary separation of sciences and humanities that prevented actualized and practical learning (Dewey, 1916). Dewey’s concern over class reproduction in schools was not quite so poetically phrased, but much of it has a similar intent. Dewey warns that without an emphasis on critical thinking, including an attention to ‘inductive’ reasoning and ‘sceptical’ and ‘scientific’ enquiry (Dewey, 1916, 330) teaching in the humanities would be rendered vague and pointless and would invariably reinforce pre-existing social conditions, especially established inequities and intolerance based on class (Dewey, 335). Interestingly, Dewey also warns of the generally limited role school plays in the education of youth. He cautions that schools are only ‘one of means, and compared with other agencies, a relatively superficial means’ in which the immature are groomed (Dewey, 5). He contends that the primary function of an education is to develop and enhance individual social agency. Because our minds are controlled by the ‘deposits’ and ‘spoils’ of prior experiences, information that is tedious and ‘bulky’, democratic education may appear to be more of a release or unleashing than the gaining of new information (Dewey, 220). This image has epistemological ties to venerated philosophies

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and writings of Plato (380 BC), Locke (1692), Rousseau (1762)). It is also a powerful foreshadowing of Friere's banking metaphor. The point is resonant between them: Without rigorous attention to the context of the student and constraints of pre-existing conditions, education can be largely irrelevant and misguided, perhaps even immoral (Dewey, 1916). It may follow then that a democratic curriculum, even a well-devised one, can fail - especially if it does not allow for the dynamic quality of the teacher-student relationship. It is the same reason that "what we say" is almost always trumped by "what we do" from a student's perspective (Evans, 2006).

But while Dewey provided some technical suggestions of practice, Friere is more enigmatic. Basing a curriculum upon these ideas might be trickier than imagined, as Taylor points out: 'Educators who work within a Freirean inspired critical pedagogy are indebted to Freire's philosophical insights more than to his commentaries on teaching methodologies.' (Taylor, 1993). Meanwhile new tensions have emerged such as the contradiction between the values espoused by many teachers and the culture of schools. Apple clearly outlines that despite any good intentions of any one teacher to socialize or 'teach' a student, there is a powerful 'hidden curriculum' that may serve as constant trump card against these intents (Apple, 1990). Most teachers are complicit to this hidden curriculum as it comes with the benefit of a clearer sense of order, even if it has a negative effect on democratic principles (Wotherspoon, 2009). In that sense our authoritarian, hierarchical culture is relayed to students on an insidious level, through specific oppressive actions - a much stronger message than any democratic platitudes that might be present in a curricular document.

Other idealistic initiatives have been stymied in the same way. For example, many official documents suggest that an official multi-cultural education might be part of a curricular solution for racism or a pro-active way to deal with our ever pluralizing society. However, when implemented these lessons ended up looking much more like Canadian propaganda than an effective reckoning (we are a ‘mosaic’, the US is a melting pot, etc). In fact, the more one delves, the more one realizes that multi-cultural education implementation is full of its own tedious contradictions. Some even contend that as a policy it legitimizes racist mandates and procures more of a ‘smelting pot’ than a mosaic (Wilson, 1993). With plurality on the rise, one would think schools see a practical benefit to an education full of such encounters. If we are all to live here amidst our differences, open discussion of values and differences is supposedly necessary. But as asserted, even with curricular validation multi-cultural education is problematic (Wilson, 655). And there is a growing concern that our schools are increasingly homogeneous groupings (Barlow, 1994). Independent schooling, academic or language-based streaming, inaccessible catchment schools in privileged neighbourhoods might all be contributing to increased homogeneity amidst a pluralized state. All of this may make ‘celebrating diversity’ a vital and necessary task (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000).

*How do you define democracy?*

Not long ago democratic education operated under the mantle of ‘citizenship’ education. It was largely focused on our single nation-state amidst other nations and emphasized ties to a monarchic commonwealth. It was essentially patriarchal and non-pluralistic (Osborne, 1991). Not to say this citizenship education was completely non-critical, but it certainly was not discursive. Now, with the major changes in the geopolitical landscapes, a decreased sense of patriotic nationalism and increased feeling of plurality, the situation has demanded a renegotiation of this term ‘citizenship’, with many opting to place the word ‘global’ in front.

In fact, a pervasive hope has been that there could be great benefit to institutions and even democrats who embrace the ‘spread of supra-territoriality’ (Scholte, 2000, 185). After all, improvements could be made to the overall human condition with increased communication and awareness of ‘issues’ on a macro-level. That, coupled with some level of self-doubt, some of what might be termed ‘reflexive rationalism’ at the source and head of institutions, might make global citizenship possible. But these larger globalized movements involve paradigm shifts that could come with collateral damage including the rise of various kinds of religious sectarianism, fundamentalism and general reactionary behaviour (Scholte, 193). In Canada local communities have not often been allowed to operate much outside the bounds of provincial or state curriculum. It has likely been perceived that constituent control of curriculum is problematic because they may use it to further their local agendas and in some cases fuel petty propaganda. But things do get stymied when larger curricular guidelines clash with extremely religious or patriarchal political views. Here there can be a negative effect for everyone involved

including the polarity of groups of citizens within a single nation, hardly the purpose of education.

In urban environments there have been different problems such as the usurping of democratic education with working values. This may be understandable as Dewey himself called for education to take on more pragmatic functions and roles (Dewey, 1916). But as Osborne points out, there has been considerable misinterpretation and exaggeration of this point in recent history. There has been a kind of massive, unacknowledged paradigm shift in schools, turning them into cogs of the capitalist machinery:

Policy-makers in education now think terms of producing workers, not citizens, their mandate is to retool Canadian schools so as to produce the kind of workforce that will guarantee success in the new global economy. (Osborne, 1991, 40)

Although the vocational, technological or career cooperative schools were once seen as cohesive with democratic ideals, they now must pay homage to their corporative and capitalist masters. It was bound to happen, Osborne states, as there is an implicit 'tension between the demands of democracy and the imperatives of capitalism' (Osborne, 1991, 37). As Barlow suggests, workforce culture has overtaken pragmatism (Barlow, 40, 1993), something Osborne calls the 'democratic deficit' (Osborne, 47). Osborne shows how 'social capital has markedly declined' in recent years and has led to an education system 'whose role is to prepare citizens for a global economy; a concentration on economically oriented subjects at the expense of history literature and the arts' (Osborne, 47). He puts at least some of the responsibility on the 'vocalization of the curriculum', something that was initially part of a democratic initiative (Osborne, 48).



Even so, critics in many other nations suggest that curricular reform is the last best hope against the impending threats. In the UK, as Crick contends, curriculum may be the only tangible force in education that can prevent an all out hijacking by economics (Crick, 2007). But curriculum reform is a dubious enterprise; it is very political and demands sensitivity to those regional disparities. Certainly in the United States, curricular reform has also exposed tension between nationalistic, regional and localized controls on education leading to an impasse in many regions. This tension has been particularly vivid in the states where curriculum was 'up for grabs' by local and state governments and subsequently replaced by dogmatic national standards like 'No Child Left Behind' testing:

Specifying what teachers do through national curricula, state wide testing, and curriculum guidelines and frameworks is to force them into the educational cul-de-sac of being technical operatives. Although this may appear to be an attractive administrative-bureaucratic solution to the relation between schooling and the economy and may seem to enable "re-skilling" of teachers so that schools can meet new requirements for international competitiveness, it actually fails to acknowledge that educational ends are highly contentious, contested, negotiated, constructed, and resisted. (Smyth, 2000, 240)

In that light, movements like 'school effectiveness' have been well-nigh intolerable for most democrats. With its over-zealous focus on practical outcomes, these work-force oriented curricula are mostly focused on subduing young people (and school teachers) into agreement with the principles of market forces (Wrigley, 2003). It may be then that teachers acting as 'technical operatives', imposing a capitalist curriculum under the guise of democratic values is the real result of these types of broad-based reforms (Osborne, 1991). But as mentioned, it is not so easy to leave things up to local educational groups as there could be a loss of larger nationalistic or globalized perspectives in doing so, a kind of regional myopia.

As Smyth states, the real danger is that those ‘ends of teaching’ are not being formulated or contended in the classroom itself, a very demoralizing assertion. He shows that many classrooms are operating with a prescribed agenda with the locus of power outside the individuals far from the room (Smyth, 2000, 241). As such, many democrats contend that education must endow the teacher, not constituents or large-scale curricular reform, as the most vital and capable agent of devising democratic direction. While constituent control of classrooms proved problematic in terms of pettiness and large-scale curricular reform can be very political or insensitive to specific needs, the professionalization and development of competent teachers may be the most realistic avenue of democratizing schools. In that vein, some regard technology and cyber communication as a potential inroad for democrats. After all, it has been an area of consistent growth in education over the past decade with the presentation of technology and electronic media as educational tools becoming evermore ‘user-friendly’. However, as one may suspect, there are serious doubts as to whether the ‘communication revolution’ can facilitate the procurement of democratic values, that it may rather present a false sense of progress. As Barlow purports, capitalist values in education are some of the most insidious of values because they are prescribed constantly in so many ways outside the classroom and are constantly making inroads into the free public sphere of education (Barlow, 1994). Technology may be a compromised instrument because it will ‘serve those who design it’ (Barlow, 1994, 93). Barlow and Crick claim that although other hierarchical and patriarchal authorities have laid claim to schools, they never did so with such false pretences. Capitalistic indoctrination operates under the guise of a ‘free’ and ‘equitable’ and ‘public’ system, but the real agenda is being withheld. Considering

the unfettered righteousness of this new ‘supra-territorialist’ ethos of capitalism (Scholte, 2000), one might argue we are navigating our way through uncharted waters:

The ‘defeat’ of the USSR and the ‘victory’ of the West also appeared to imply the rejection and then the demise of ideology. However, political prudence and pragmatism did not take over, rather there emerged the rapid, almost wildfire spread of the belief that market forces will resolve all major problems on a global scale, or at any rate cannot be resisted. So it matters little whether regimes are autocratic or democratic so long as they are capitalist in the full-blooded sense of being part of a global economy. Economics itself becomes an ideology. (Crick, 2007, 237)

With that in mind, it is understandable that education critics like Barlow and Crick have sounded such dire warnings about the impositions of globalization in schools. In *Class Warfare*, Barlow suggests that schools themselves have become the battleground for a larger ideological war. According to Barlow, it is very hard to fight capitalism as it operates above other ideals. Globalized capitalism (‘supra-territorialism’) is even worse, as it forms bedfellows with politically correct aspects of education (like multi-culturalism or anti-racism). It is relentlessly pervasive in its mandate to govern, exerting control through whatever channels available, even using altruism for its own advantage and our expense. In the case of schooling, Barlow demonstrates how these forces participate in the devaluing of the educational currency while simultaneously providing resources for ‘cash-strapped’ schools. Their impositions on schools are both direct and indirect, but invariably undesirable. They present the ‘ruse of freedom’ but act like tyrants. And Barlow warns they will utilize their tremendous influence to whittle down state-run organizations or dismember public institutions (Barlow, 1994). One stunning example is how Mobil Oil sponsored the California state science curriculum. In so doing, they were given the power to dictate what was taught. Children who have gone through the program have learned that oil companies are not necessarily contributing to global

warming and that environmental disasters are generally well managed (Barlow, 77). Because these global players are so powerful and possess ever-increasing agency within our society and schools, Barlow argues that teachers have a 'moral duty' to 'take risks' (Barlow, 237).

In this sense, the shift from democracy as 'nationalism and citizenship' to democracy as 'critical thinking and social action', something that could be initiated by competent and caring teachers is a bold counter-active manoeuvre by democrats. Not only does it get students participating in a globalized world, it allows for a critical examination of the tyranny within our own society. But are teachers capable of steering this ship to 'co-investigate' this problem? Are students willing to go on this venture? And do curricular documents help or hinder this shift? Because critical pedagogues may be asking young people to ask difficult questions? Are we ready to utilize democratic teaching as 'counter-culture' rather than 'civic duty'?

Indeed, this is why redefining democratic education has become problematic. Nation-building over broad ideological conflicts like the cold war (which Dewey identified as a kind of moral distraction (Dewey, 1916)) used to present a universal backdrop for citizenship education. Those conflicts along with the moral authority of the church, the united position of our nation in grander conflicts of history and the traditional notion of curriculum gave us a clear definition as to the enemies of democracy, the hordes of infidels that we must repel. Our subsequent indoctrination was into the benefits of democracy as a political system, part of a patriotic appreciation for our nation. When seen against other less desirable political systems, or undesirable 'others', it became nothing more than a cathartic enterprise. With the end of the cold war and a heightened

sense of plurality our definition of citizenship and duty changed. The new advocacy for democracy is not pitting our society against some 'other' system. Critical pedagogy evolved into this shift as an attempt not to force us to discuss some far off problem, it is increasingly an engagement with the tyranny within. A kind of malpractice within the implementation of critical pedagogy is the condoning of our present system by becoming overly sympathetic to or focused on world-wide strife or being overly philanthropic.

Crick contends this newly bred colonialism could be related to the fact that pragmatism, as Dewey proposed it, has failed (Crick 2007). What has been left behind is an adherence to the 'workforce' nature of education that has eroded liberal arts education to a significant degree. These initiatives have diminished the teaching of values in education, reducing democracy to politically-correct platitudes such as 'anti-racist' education. While it is true that Dewey called for a curriculum that combines liberal and vocational education and enlarges personal experience "by furnishing their context, their background and outlook" to the present community life (Dewey, 1916, 247), the 'anti-chaos rationale' (Barlow, 1993) is not what he meant. Dewey advocated for a pragmatism that supported a liberal education, not simply a rationale to 'buy in'. Because of this change of emphasis, vocational education may now contribute to this 'class reproduction' rather than prevent it. It seems like Dewey foresaw some of this. He warned that without strong 'socialized' curriculum and liberal arts education, a purely vocational education would be inadequate, pointing out that some leaders might wish to present lower class children a 'no frills' education at the expense of the humanities (Dewey, 1916, 178). For the newer and more local democrats like Osborne, there needed to be balance between the dual purposes of pragmatic and liberal arts education for

'democratic' learning to occur (Osborne, 1991). This combination is part of an overall purpose to offer a meaningful yet practical education to the young, not merely deliver them to a purely common sense work-oriented approach to school and life. This reinforcement of class is seen in the way vocational schools appear more readily in lower class neighbourhoods and schools with a high number of classrooms engaged with philanthropy and social action or ones doing literary criticism are in middle-class and upper middle-class neighbourhoods, an issue outlined by Tsui (2003).

It has been pointed out that the anti-chaos rationale (the anti-racist education etc.) that came to be a moral feature of many schools seemed to coalesce with capitalist values (Barlow, 1994). Schools operated work-force mandates under the guise of being 'equitable' or 'non-sexist' only to cement their grander design. Barlow asserts that capitalistic doctrine managed to operate under the guise of being part of a progressive society (Barlow, 1994). Osborne too suspects 'curricular reform' might not be so much a good play for democracy as much as it may be a trump card for capitalism and economics. An education that focuses on vocational skills and practical concerns, promoted thoughtlessly with everything but the interest of the student in mind, piggy-backing on a democratic curriculum could be the result (Osborne, 1991, 45). Barlow goes further to suggest that there is a war being fought, with the hearts, minds and souls of young people as casualties. Certainly for her, the stakes are much higher and the problem more insidious than most will admit (Barlow, 1994).

This insidiousness does play out within the curricular instrument in ELA. Consider how many of the students actually engaged directly in critical literacy and responsive elements (as advocated by Rosenblatt - reflecting, reader-response, evocation,

transaction (Rosenblatt, 1998; Chaplin, 1982)) may live in higher capital neighbourhoods and go to wealthier schools. Meanwhile the students in lower capital schools might be 'adapting' or 'modifying their materials to fit within the workplace requirements of their school. This is because a caveat of the curriculum is that individual schools and divisions are able to adapt the curriculum up to 50 % for any one student without applying for a modified credit (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). Thus, in places of lower socio-economic status, there is virtually so much 'adapting' of the curricular 'instrument' that democratic values (or any aspect of the curriculum) can be avoided. In many ways flexibility is a good thing and can be seen as a guiding principle of good teaching. It allows the teacher to recognize the specific needs of their group or individuals. But too much flexibility in this instrument could decrease its agency as a document with 'guiding principles' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). To state that students who embark in higher level tasks like 'synthesis', 'aesthetic responses' or cultivate 'social action' from course work live in neighbourhoods with higher social and cultural capital is a kind of social injustice unto itself.

*The Value of Reader Response*

As suggested, there is a natural cohesion between Reader Response theory and the tenets of democratic education vis-à-vis Dewey. This is because Reader Response criticism allows for the reader to bring forth all of his or her personal and cultural memories and associations or "mnemonic relevances" (Rosenblatt, 1998), a veritable multitude of readings can take shape and a greater variety of readers might gain voice or exercise their own take. Much like the ideals of the democracy in education movement, Reader Response criticism followed a similarly difficult and circuitous path from academia to schools, even with its natural pedagogical benefits and saliency (Harkin, 2005, 419). It makes sense then that when curricular reform took place in Manitoba in the late 1990s, measures were taken to include the theory within the documents (with considerable caveats and footnotes). Much of the description of response theory seems to live quite comfortably alongside the redefined notion of democratic education. Quite appropriately, Reader Response activity has been seen as a great benefit for what the curriculum calls the 'aesthetic' texts or anything that lies on the aesthetic side of the 'pragmatic-aesthetic continuum' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 9). But there has been provision for it to be utilized on other materials, particularly other student responses (which are identified as 'texts' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000)).

Critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism, if presented congruently and non-contradictorily, should have mutually edifying effects and improve critical agency in our students. When the Manitoba English curriculum was revamped in the late 1990s this must have been the thought. It was called 'student-centred', 'democratic' and containing a broader sense of literacy than previous documents with considerable homage



to response theory throughout in the wording of outcomes and suggested activities (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2). While the previous document was a scattered set of recommendations focusing mostly on essay writing and canonized English literature, the new curriculum allows for a greater variety of response methodology ('expressive', 'aesthetic' and 'pragmatic') on a wider variety of texts (from 'pragmatic' to 'aesthetic'). This has considerable appeal to developments in social research like Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999).

There are difficulties in this wholesale adoption of response theory. One obvious problem is the need to establish and procure 'efferent' readings with an ever-weakening student population, seen by many response theorists as a necessary evil to prop up the more desirable 'aesthetic readings' (Rosenblatt, 1998, 894; Chaplin, 1982). How far down the road should we go? Also, there are many other factors within schools that may compromise the use of response theory. As mentioned earlier, schools are not exactly harbingers of democracy, they have vested interest in the status quo (Filson, 2000). As such, the reliance of teachers on bureaucratic, impersonal authority (Clifton, 2004) may prevent recognition of the power and capacity of 'social' learning that is actually occurring right under our noses (Wertsch and Sohmer, 1995), a capacity that is key ingredient for building a culture of Reader Response criticism which orients itself towards 'transaction' (Rosenblatt, 1998, 890). And much like critical pedagogy, response-based criticisms have a kind of rebellious energy that may make them difficult to work with in the school system the way it is set up.

*What is a text?*

A liberating but potentially confusing facet of the revamped curriculum is the broader definition of ‘text’. Now literary forms and genres outside the so-called ‘canon of literature’ are openly included. This move means that most upper grade students in university-bound English classes will read a variety of literature, not just Shakespeare, Dickens and Twain. A certain implicit ‘democratic’ message is sent by debunking the notion of ‘high’ literature as imminently more worthy of study. Art, for these post-modern readers is everywhere. This means that texts that were not considered high literature - texts that present limited literary quality but reflect global plurality – are now accepted and well-utilized. Although the Manitoba curriculum does not demand any particular texts to be studied, there is a broadly recommended selection of literary texts that represent a multitude of genres and forms (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 5). Certainly, many teachers may even step outside of these ‘suggested’ texts and bring in their own; movies, journals, oral literature, editorials, blogs –anything that suits and piques student interest is eligible (one teacher I knew had students bring in their own scrapbooks and utilized them as ‘texts’, something not formerly done in grade twelve). Does anyone really think that a marginalized inner-city kid in our day and age would benefit from reading Dickens (even if *Oliver Twist* is surprisingly similar in status and circumstance to the individual reading about him)? So, on the matter of texts, the message of the new curriculum is: Why not choose items that contain relevant social messages, ones that can inspire them to engage with books that are written in ‘plain English’? Wouldn’t students have an easier time ‘responding’ to easier texts?

As mentioned, oral discussion is vital to both the critical pedagogue and the democrat. Subsequently, 'speaking' is one of 'variety' of response strategies that students should be capable of by the end of their schooling (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 3). Although the standards are a tad evasive on skills like 'speaking', there are suggestions on how to procure an oral culture in the classroom (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). Clearly, the intent to have students 'engage orally' with 'pragmatic and aesthetic texts' has appeal for a teacher delivering an interactive, socially-relevant classroom (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 15). Other general outcomes, ones like 'celebrating and building community' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 10) practically require oral culture (and also have benefits for the critical pedagogue). Even specific learning outcomes such as 'explaining opinions', 'considering diverse opinions' or 'exploring ambiguities' have obvious saliency with the oral culture present in a democratic classroom (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 22). All of this is compounded by the clearly stated shift of curriculum from concentrating on reading and writing to the additional focus on speaking, listening and representing (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). Moreover, many of the specific tasks suggested, like 'analyzing the way language and texts reflect and influence values...in diverse communities' (Outcome 5.2.3) or the act of 'responding personally and critically to perspectives and styles of a variety of Canadian and international texts practically ooze connectivity with Friere and Rosenblatt and require oral culture to flourish (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 31).

This redefinition of text and new emphasis on oral culture does suggest that the Manitoba ELA curriculum interfaces well with adages of critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism. It certainly provides enough justification for implementing critical

pedagogy and reader response together in today's classroom. It has even been suggested that by familiarizing oneself with the ELA curriculum, a teacher might have a handle on many good strategies for implementing critical pedagogy. For example, what Beck articulates as 'disrupting the commonplace' and 'interrogating multiple points of view' (Beck, 396, 2007), an important ethic of critical literacy, may be a required element of Reader Response as well (exemplified in the word 'transaction'). These values are seen across the board in several general and specific learning outcomes in the Manitoba curriculum (1.1.2, 2.2.2). But to be sure, there is more to democratizing a classroom than meeting such requirements and checking off outcomes as though curricular outcomes are like a grocery list. The congenial, yet probing and critical tone of the teacher, the general atmosphere of empathizing and sympathizing with some 'other' are probably factors that matter more.

So it seems that Reader Response theory should be a cohesive aid to the advancement of those democratic values expressed in the framework mainly because with it, students can respond from their own context and utilize their own particular form of intelligence (Gardner, 1999). But here is yet another emergent dilemma: for a critical pedagogical approach to flourish in an ELA classroom, texts that cultivate variant readings may not be desirable. If 'social action' is the end goal of the critical literacy experience (Beck, 2005), how can variant readings be dealt with or included that do not 'go there'? With Reader Response theory, the responder is not interested in an objective meaning or lesson that is being rendered. For them, meaning comes from the reader him or herself. It is an inherently and sometimes unapologetically subjective process. What's more, texts that serve the purpose of critical pedagogy do not always do well under the

crucible of Reader Response criticism. Perhaps critical pedagogy is not necessarily operable within a post-modern context where truth is changeable and relevant to personal experience.

‘Can critical pedagogy function under these conditions...accepting the "in-betweenness" of all things?... (It) represents an aesthetic understanding of the human condition. But in driving a position of "unknowingness" forward to its unnatural extreme, we may be left in a state of paralysis...’ (Dillabough, 2002, 207)

That the curriculum might lumber along oblivious of this tension might be worse than an oversight. If much of the art, culture and story that our students perceive has ‘no answer’, what social action could possibly be unearthed? Is it possible that these are debilitating contradictions? Are they in any way accounted for within the curricular frameworks? What might this reveal?

### *Reading aesthetically*

Rosenblatt’s terms ‘equivocation’ and ‘transaction’ (Rosenblatt, 1998), words that are at the very heart of response theory seem to have a kind of wonderful cohesion with social learning theories. One might imagine that the transaction of ideas and individual interpretations, something Rosenblatt argues is at the heart of reading (Rosenblatt, 1998), would likely occur best in a student-directed learning environment, one with oral cultural values that might be instilled with critical literacy practices. Here at least, critical literacy and reader response criticism are largely symbiotic in theory and practice – they are socially-based and student-centred. They are also both born out of a pragmatic calling. As Rosenblatt forwarded, reading and writing must have a ‘practical anchor’ to resist ‘abstractions’ that ‘blur the empiric nature of linguistic acts’ (Rosenblatt, 1998, 886).

This is likely why individualized and psychological interpretations of response theory do not work as well in this context. Certainly the branch of criticism that suggests that the reader is pervading his/her own 'fantasy' while reading may fly in the pragmatic saliency of the framework (Holland, 1985). In that sense, Rosenblatt's interpretation is still grounded in reality, the text still does 'exist' and an efferent reading is valued (Chaplin, 1982). For more radical interpretations (like that of Holland) any prolonged preoccupation on the plot or facts of a text would be truly treasonous pedagogy.

Generally, all advocates of Reader Response theory value pragmatic activity, but they are all more deferential towards 'cognitive activity' and 'aesthetic' readings (Chaplin, 1982).

While one can certainly read any text 'against the grain' individually, it may be more interesting for students to entreat other responses. In this sense, a valuable strategy, pedagogically speaking, is for the reader to take part in communities of responses and interpretations (*Reviving Ophelia* or *Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* can be viewed together with *Hamlet*, for example). Additionally, it may be very useful for a critical literacy classroom to encounter these rebellious readings and deconstructions as part of an overall approach to the text, one that may continue the disruption of the commonplace. That is not to say students should have to read scholarly criticism or should be expected to counterpoise an established text to have success, but the participation with any dialectic, however small or seemingly insignificant, may be essential fodder for interpretive communities. In that sense, here we see a nice co-opting of values between critical literacy and Reader Response criticism.

To bring up a matter from earlier, there is an indelible connection between Reader Response criticism and other more activated readings and criticisms that could be part of

a critical literacy classroom. Post-colonialists utilize much of the same personal and critical agency. Said, for example, utilizes this agency to characterize much of the literature (even much of the recommended body of texts suggested after curricular reform in 2000) as patronizing, unfair or stereotypical. As he forwarded, the tendency to ‘orientalize’ (apply western stereotypes and values upon non-white, non-western belief systems) goes all the way back to the Greeks. Hence, much of the canon of western literature, art and culture is skewed by an intrinsically ‘partisan ideology’ (Said, 1991, 211). This may sound like radical scepticism, but it may be useful for us to ‘take our medicine’ and include such readings in our interpretive communities. We may want to consider that so much of the canon, even when ostensibly sympathetic, is so insidious and relentless in its portrayal of the colonized ‘other’ – one who is either ‘passive’ or ‘dependent’ - that it practically requires us to ‘read against the grain’. Otherwise, as Said contends, the western canon leaves an indelibly oppressive mark on the literary landscape in the same way colonists left literal ones (Said, 1991).

Some would even say that the canon is so polemic and authoritarian that it is at least partially responsible for the lack of diverse representative works from other traditions:

‘The histories, traditions, societies, texts of "others" are seen either as responses to Western initiatives and therefore passive, dependent - or as domains of culture that belong mainly to "native" elites’. (Said, 212)

That would suggest that the degree of misinformation on any of these orientalist, marginalized or disenfranchised parties may be much wider and deeper than previously imagined. Though curriculum reform has brought forth a greater variety of writers and this has led to some counter-balance, there may be still some distance to go before the

field is levelled. Is a democratic classroom able to include such a wide variety of literary and historical perspectives and readings? Perhaps the hope lies in the fact Said spoke personally from his experience as a Palestinian, his statements emphasized a polemic western bias towards the orient, the transfer of this domination to the native experience, female experience or any other 'colonized' voice can be inferred. Even Friere forwarded, the 'oppressor' (aka colonizer) must allow the 'oppressed' (aka colonized) to gain agency through discovering their own story, their own voice. In turn, this deepens the oppressor's encounter with their own hypocrisy, his or her own 'colonialism'. Probably this is necessary before we can participate unabashedly in discussion of far-off problems (Vickers, 2002, 245).

Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* could present an opportunity for developing critical interpretations. After all, it does appear in the Manitoba Curriculum list of recommended texts (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). In fact, it has been lauded by many formalist critics as one of the half dozen best short novels in the English language (Guerard, 1950, 9). Yet, more recent readings have revealed many cultural oversights and presumptions, like the one written by Chinua Achebe. From Achebe's post-colonial perspective, Conrad's image of Africa as a larger metaphorical construct of the dark side of human nature rather than a real place presents unsalvageable difficulties. Perhaps Achebe borrows language from Said when he says it 'projects the image of Africa as the *other* world.' (Achebe, 1978, 10) That is, Africa is only presented as 'the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality' (Achebe, 3). Although there is a sympathetic plight in the end, a kind of bleeding heart 'liberalism' to the tale, Achebe



finds no redemption in this. Presenting Africa as a ‘prop’ or backdrop for a larger human conflict, one that contains massive stereotyping of this ‘other’ is still a glorifying of colonialism (Achebe, 9). Africa is again used and abused, in this case to tell of the larger conflict of which it is not a real player.

Achebe’s criticism is not just a vague response, for it cuts deep into the structural and narrative marrow of the text. He aptly dismisses the notion that Marlow’s racism is any different from Conrad’s as there is no clear differentiation of Marlow’s voice from his own on any occasion (Achebe, 8). This narrative shortcoming is enough to solidify the offensiveness of the novella but interestingly, he does go on to make it personal. Achebe forges his own connections to the tale, direct connections between the oppression experienced by his Nigerian father and the people in the backdrop of the story. It is this personal connection that gives Achebe the licence to call Conrad a ‘bloody racist’ (Achebe, 9). In short, he moves from an acknowledgement and understanding of the shortcoming of the text given a kind of formalist critical perspective and moves to challenge it from a post-colonial reading along with a dynamic personal response.

Obviously, expecting our students to conduct a scintillating three-part critical approach might be expecting a bit much. Yet it may be that encountering the spirit of such a critique might elicit equally strong-spirited responses from students. Undoubtedly, modelling responses has been touted as a beneficial strategy by many educators, including those advocating for feminist pedagogy. Thus, to respond to *Heart of Darkness* is only one potential avenue for students. To respond to *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe together invites the learner into ‘a community’ and could procure a ‘synthetic’ response, a prescribed value across the curricular framework, especially

general learning outcomes one and two (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). In fact, such synthetic writings are supposedly the benchmark of 'above-level' writing in the standards of the Manitoba Curriculum (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000).

Although a dose of Said or Achebe might strengthen the platform and rationale of the critical pedagogue along with the 'reading against the grain' and interpretive community aspect of Reader Response, it seems equally necessary to remind the reader that the stringency of 'politically correct' etiquette works against Reader Response theory. In fact it is possible that 'political correctness' becomes the great danger within democratic education, for it makes strangely good bedfellows with a 'common sense' education that Osborne warns is so anti-democratic (Osborne, 1991). Political correctness, it would seem, circumvents discussion, promotes pat answers and discourages honesty. It flies against the goals of the critical pedagogue and Reader Response critic alike. So while some students could engage with responses like those of Achebe and Said for a variety of purposes that are cohesive with critical literacy, others may not possess the cognitive dissonance to utilize such responses. But if inviting students into an 'interpretive community' and reading aesthetically is a value of Reader Response criticism, and response criticism is considered salient with a post-modern interpretation of democratic education, then it is not an activity that can be ignored, even if it is beyond the capability of many students.

*The problem with allegory*

The curricular framework does suggest some texts that are fairly ‘denotative’ and allegorical (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). As mentioned, under the mantle of a broadened definition of text along with the model of the pragmatic-aesthetic continuum, these types of texts have achieved great popularity. Yet it is unclear what benefits they may hold for the purpose of democratic education. In fact, they may expose a fracture in this new curricular fortress. Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a primary example. It tends to get taught as political allegory, mainly because it weighs in well on the historical dualities like the cold war, but is still applicable to today’s more post-modern dilemmas. In fact, it works so well today on many fronts, as there are many present applications for the text that were not apparent in the year 1984 (or in 1948) such as the dispersal of universal rights and freedoms under the guise of a greater good, privacy laws, Guantanamo Bay, to name but a few. This has instituted Orwell’s novel from a criticism of totalitarian regimes of the mid-twentieth century to a critique of the threat of capitalism in the new millennium. It can, however, still be utilized to study historical varieties of totalitarianism (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000).

It is exciting that students can find so many connections between the novel and historical and current conflicts. Indeed, there is plenty of fodder for a critical pedagogue. In fact, literature, particularly controversial texts such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could be means by which ‘schools teach values’ (Osborne, 1991, 45). It may be that with the loss of religion in schools over the past century, it is even more important for these controversies to be illuminated. Literature, or more particularly a critical approach to literature, could be one of the most vital avenues by which morality is presented in

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schools (Van Brummellen & Franklin, 2004). For many, this push to make something happen beyond the curriculum is the reason they teach, the most necessary part of a school experience, but one that doesn't come without some struggle (Van Brummelen & Franklin, 251). In the case of Orwell's novels, the strongest political vibrations may lie in its diatribes about language itself. Most will say to miss the semiotic oppression present in Orwell's novels is to miss the point:

If a man sought truth, his first concern was to take care of the precise meaning and ordering of his words, "or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime twigs, the more he struggles the more belimed. In other words clear and rational thinking and expression are prerequisites for a rational choice of action. (Mahanta, 1983, 929)

In that way, studying *Nineteen Eighty-Four* helps foster a key point of critical pedagogy, that 'rational thinking' (like critical thinking) is based on precision with words and an awareness of their political function and implication. Because of this, it may be asserted that theoretically this text may be utilized for a very dynamic critical classroom.

Orwell's text might not, however, be as useful for procuring aesthetic readings. That point could be expanded to state that there are texts that serve well as fodder for the critical pedagogue but they do not necessarily allow a multitude of readings. Is this a serious dilemma? Only so much as to say there is slippage and that this slippage reveals that the two theories do not always make good bedfellows. For that matter, other popular political allegories such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* or very denotative stories like Beah's *A Long Way Gone* might be part of this same dilemma.

### *The Standards*

It is important to remember another conundrum in regards to a survey of the entire curricular framework; it includes ‘standards’. These standards serve at least two purposes: One, the language and terminology contained within these standards are supposed to help teachers determine scores and student achievement on those outcomes, they are supposed to provide ‘practical guidelines’ for assessment. Two, they offer additional insight into the ‘values’ inherent to the curriculum. Since standards are a systematic set of rubrics and scoring principles that are worded alongside the outcomes, they offer a sort of ‘second point on the diagram’ with which to plot the intent of a curricular goal.

In Manitoba we talk about student work as ‘at level’, ‘above level’ or ‘below level’ on a particular outcome. When it is time to write exams, conduct assignments or attach marks to student work, Manitoba ELA teachers are supposed to use the standards as their first and foremost tool for assessing a score. The standards are designed to bracket out subjectivity by utilizing an objective set of terms. An ‘at level’ score can be improved to ‘above level’ with a slight addition of adjectives. For example, the at-level student ‘responds critically to a variety of perspectives while the above-level student is ‘responding critically and *creatively* to a variety of perspectives’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 70). Imperfect scores or ‘below-level’ marks are found to have similar combinations of negative adjectives.

While some teachers post the outcomes on their classroom wall or include them in course outlines, the majority of our students harbour little awareness of the nature of this outcome-based curriculum. Even now, a decade after curricular reform in ELA, I can tell

you that many students believe the myth that the ‘the curriculum’ is the text selected, an obviously blatant misconception. From a Frierean perspective, this pervasive miscommunication about what we are doing and how we evaluate must be circumventing good pedagogy and perpetrate the ‘oppression’ (Friere, 1970). How can we ‘co-investigate’ with our students if the instrument of oppression is held away from our students and utilized with punitive vigilance? And even when students are familiarized with the outcomes, too often the standards withhold scoring guides away from the writer. In other words, if the student has little or no familiarity with particular wording in the standards for assessment, the teacher makes judgements behind a one-way mirror as it were and basically nullifies the notion of this being a ‘student-directed’ curriculum (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2). If that happens, it no longer matters how democratic those standards may be.

Additionally, after standards exams there is no post-mortem, no follow-up, and little meaningful response from the teacher to the student. So it may not be the wording of the standards that are as much a disservice to the critical pedagogue as the way they are controlled and presented to students. That is, because the standards sit outside of the locus of control of the students, even though they contain saliency with the theories in question, they may still be utilized in an oppressive way (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000; Friere, 1970). Furthermore, it is possible that catering to standards might arbitrarily impose upon students a preconceived idea of what his or her work must look like. In that way, standards may inhibit creativity, prevent the student from taking risks and even favour certain races, classes or cultural perspectives.

Standards may still reinforce many principles of critical pedagogy. For example, there are many attempts to integrate reflective questions in both outcomes and standards, growing into new perceptions, what Friere calls ‘perceptions of previous perceptions’ (Friere, 1970, 108). These are really good things from a critical literacy standpoint. But one has to wonder how we can throw an inherently personal and meta-cognitive activity into an externally-imposed paradigm. It seems the way the standards are set up, because they prevent ‘humility’ and lessen ‘dialogue’, attributes necessary for emancipating both oppressed and oppressor in a critical classroom, their pro-critical literacy vernacular may be irrelevant (Friere, 1970, 78). Yet, for the purposes of this thesis, the ‘standards’ must be given a chance. They are in themselves a measurable set of words that should be scrutinized. And so just like the outcomes, they will be viewed as potential harbingers of critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory. When put up against those theories and viewed alongside the general and specific outcomes, the standards may prove to be helpful assets or debilitating contradiction.

Although it will not be discussed in any great detail, it should be noted that the standards exam does contain some congruency with the democratic thrust of the curriculum. That is, the process of the exam includes tasks centred on growth, reflection, connection and current topics, ostensibly democratic modes (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000; Friere, 1970). Also, the widening of options and tasks does make student empirical knowledge and abilities important. Yet, a quick look at the scores and performance on the exam (provincial urban averages in the 65 % range; rural and aboriginal scores lower still) suggest that the language contained in the standards is a tall order for most

adolescents. It is possible that this shortfall indicates a larger problem with the coalescing of outcomes and standards.

### *Other difficulties*

One of the dilemmas raised earlier is that with critical pedagogy there is a pervasive feeling that it appeals more to ‘the rebels’ - it loses traction when it is incorporated by the mainstream. Reader Response mavericks have reported a similar paradox: Harkin laments, ‘I also miss the affect - the productive emotions that attended the notion that readers make meaning. Now that that notion is thoroughly normalized, it has more or less ceased to be exciting’ (Harkin, 2005, 413). This emotive element is an intangible difficulty of implementing any idealism that challenges the status quo. What if the status quo is democratic?

One supposes that the wiggle room allowed for implementation might keep teachers emotionally engaged. That is, not only do individual interpretations vary on the wording, it is entirely personal preference on the part of the teacher as to which outcomes will be hit, what order they will be delivered and for how long they will be dealt with. A quick survey of the ELA and humanities teachers in any school will show that many teachers do not hit all of the outcomes equally, much of their emphasis being personal or school preference. But this wiggle room might be more of a problem in that even when democratically-charged outcomes are faced, teachers are able to play avoidance because, well, they are difficult to face. This may occur because of pedagogical inexperience, a lack of what Dewey calls ‘very high level of skill’ on the part of teachers (Osborne, 1991, 36) or other complicating factors including the sheer busyness of the job (Clifton, 2004).



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Academics have pointed to a simple fact: School culture and immediate requirements of the teaching almost always override curricular goals, however pragmatic (Evans, 2006; Clifton, 2004; Anderson, 1973). Additionally, there will always be semantic and interpretive gaps between the teacher and the curricular instruments.

Thus, even though the curricular documents have democratic theory embedded in them, because of this semantic open-endedness along with the sheer cacophony of terms and words within the instruments, the number of teachers willing to focus on those outcomes consistently might be fairly small. And although there is a tendency to give critical attention to, say multi-cultural issues, in many humanities classrooms in Canada (Evans, 2004, 419), it is not clear whether there are similar formal professional avenues for issues like class, religion or sexual orientation. Meanwhile, teachers who do co-investigate with their students upon a broader swath of critical issues (say class, sexual orientation or religion) might find themselves alienated, not only from the culture of the school despite any democratic platitudes that may be present (Braa and Callero, 2006). Besides that, it has been stated numerous times that curriculum reform may not be enough:

Teachers work in institutions where the stated goals and ethos may conflict with the expected goals and practices. Schools, organizationally, have tended to reinforce norms of hierarchical control, and in doing so, have undermined curricular reform that encourages democratic citizenship (Evans, 2006, 429).

In Canada, where perhaps more pointed curricular reform has taken place than most states, the conflict is just as pervasive. In Ontario, Filson argues, the expectations of administrators and schools boards must be even more counter-active in policy and practice with our stronger ethos of democracy in curricular documents that are gaining shape. Perhaps this is why teacher 'professionalism' must be increasingly presented as a

‘conservative ideology’ designed to subject teachers to ‘bureaucratic domination’ (Filson, 1988, 305; Wotherspoon, 152). In that way the battle lines are drawn. In fact there is clear evidence that teachers forwarding critical pedagogy are alienated by bureaucracy. The cross-pollination of ideas and ideals between teachers is thus ameliorated and the number of teachers implementing critical literacy lessons. All of this leads to fewer truly democratic classrooms appearing in your son’s or daughter’s school and a lower level of implementation competency when it does happen (Evans, 2006, 430). When one factors in the complexity and busyness of classroom teaching, the varying wills of parents and the impositions of bureaucracy, it becomes obvious to a teacher seeking job security that there is more to life than meeting high-minded ideals. It has been asserted that for most teachers, simply maintaining authority is a major undertaking and those who rely on ‘persuasive’ techniques experience a high degree of burn out (Clifton, 2004). Although most teachers are aware of the benefits of democratic education, their understanding or willingness to utilize the critical pedagogy required is lessened by factors such as classroom management (Clifton, 2004), the mitigating quality of ‘standards’ and what many see as the emerging workforce culture of schools (Barlow, 1993)

While this can of worms is open, I may add that the lack of implementation of critical pedagogy may be due to other more insidious nuances. First, as a theory it attempts to encourage action beyond the educational system. That is a tall order. It makes one wonder if a critical classroom, one that fosters conscientious citizens, might be unattainable during the allotted time of a school day or year. It may even require us to look at the person ten or twenty years after graduation – to genuinely consider actions that student takes outside the classroom. Critical pedagogy not only goes against the

workforce nature of schools, but many of the other attributes of western school culture (McLaren, 1999). So on a deeper level, there is not just a gap, there is a chasm. For the critical pedagogue, applying a curricular model with standards and rubrics may in itself contain difficulties for the essential reason that ‘a commitment to critical pedagogy moves us beyond concern for individual student achievement’ (Braa and Collero, 2006, 357). In that sense, the standards exam may be a hindering factor despite the good intent (the democratic features aforementioned). For the critical pedagogue those standards may be simply defeating the purpose. The critical pedagogue operates from a need to move towards the ‘social justice’ and ‘creative and personal’ goals necessitating from his or her particular students and may become resistant to any intrusions to that goal, whether they be administrative, school-cultural or even curricular.

Yet another insidious but taxing dimension to the problem is the general apathy within the profession of teaching coupled with the overall lack of teacher agency in this province. A teacher’s lack of understanding of their own rights, citizenship responsibilities, or sheer lack of interest in democracy in their own lives weakens not only their own desire and ability to implement critical thinking with their students, but their willingness to provide necessary resistance against school culture that compromises those initiatives from taking hold (Friere, 1970, 10). Their own unwillingness to foster a personal sense of justice and empowerment in their professional life leads to a classroom that reflects that impotence (Friere, 1970). One might even state that there is a general distaste towards human rights education in many schools. This general conservativeness and indifference amongst teachers themselves is discussed in numerous reports and studies, including ones by Evans (2006), Van der Berg (2002), Wotherspoon (2009),

Filson (1988). Friere also noted that it would be impossible for a teacher to advocate emancipation from oppression if he or she is systematically compromised, stressed and oppressed by their own complacency or lack of will to 'become human' (Friere, 1970). The result is that the pedagogue falls perilously into the oppressor-oppressed polarity that obliterates any chance of emancipation and circumvents any possibility of 'co-investigation' (Friere, 1970, 43, 92).

This unwillingness might also stem from the fact many pedagogical initiatives, even such grass-roots ones like 'critical literacy' are used (or abused) for favouritism, 'one-upping' over other teachers or fracturing teachers from each other. Schools will often take on a 'token' advocate methodology for a period of time. Yet, they are often not received as openly as school leaders would like. This may be due to several factors such as the already taxed teacher, the token feeling of the undertaking, or the lack of respect for what teachers are already doing in the training. It might be no different with critical literacy. In that sense, valuable philosophies can be marginalized within schools. They are dubbed 'special interest', often brought in from the top and taught down to the teachers. They are controlled, contained, pre-packaged and even politicized within the institution. When critical pedagogy is reduced to a sideline, a sort of interesting idea amongst other interesting ideas, it may be diluted. Clearly, institutions are very cautious about bringing any truly 'transformative' ideology to the forefront for any serious length of time in a truly transformative way (Wotherspoon, 2009; Apple, 1990; Friere, 1970).

And so we hit upon the crux of the problem: Is constructing a critical curriculum even plausible given these conditions? Does the implausibility of making such a curriculum mean it shouldn't have even been initiated? We know that while salient and

worthwhile on paper, critical literacy is stronger in ideals than proofs. As such, building a democratizing curriculum may be daunting. If democracy vis-à-vis pragmatism has been co-opted by capitalism, if pragmatism as Dewey defined it has failed (Crick, 2007; Barlow, 1993), then can critical literacy reinvigorate that pragmatic purpose and be expressed in a curricular document with standards of assessment?

It may be of some relief to the reader that many teachers are increasingly asking vital epistemological questions in both training and on the job: What is the present purpose of our public education system? Is it to promote skills or to humanize the citizenry? Those teachers may be very realistic in their consideration as to whether or not curriculum can help or hinder any high-minded purpose. They may wonder why the curriculum, with all the platitudes to a democracy, would contain standards exam attached to the end of it, something that many would see as undermining democratic classrooms. Perhaps they recognize that the contradiction here is widespread – yes, there are critical-type questions in the response section of these standards tests but because they also demand that the student be able to regurgitate the content of the reading, activity that may work against the spirit of democracy and Reader Response theory, those critical questions are reduced in value. Even if there are questions encouraging critical perspectives, like interpreting a piece along gender or class lines, the questions are perhaps totally alienated from the processes and experiences of that student in their individual classroom. Yes, they realize the mere notion of an outer body devising and implementing a test on a particular classroom is shockingly contrived. Thus, successful critical pedagogues quickly avoid teaching to any imposed exam, or at least deemphasize

its importance. By doing so, perhaps they raise the ire of parents, colleagues, administrators, etc, again further marginalizing innovative teaching.

Yet, as suggested, it is unlikely individual teachers can make this critical shift on their own. Individuals are left to their own devices and these ‘critical classrooms’ become ‘odd-ball’ environments where students and teachers end up feeling as if they are going against a larger macro-culture or even acting subversively against their own school. That has made for an overall sense of futility for the majority of teachers who have attempted to include aspects of critical literacy in their teaching. And because they lack overall support, the majority of teachers who attempted to work with critical pedagogy without a reforming curricular framework ‘failed to fully implement...most of the dimensions of the theory’ (Beck, 2005, 396).

Given these conundrums, it may be perfectly understandable then that teachers give up on implementing critical literacy, especially when one considers that they are inordinately preoccupied with tasks such as maintaining authority. Certainly, bringing up controversial topics in a classroom of difficult students seems like it could be a recipe for disaster. Since behaviour management represents a seemingly ever-increasing part of a teacher’s job, (Clifton reminds us that now more than ever; teacher authority is linked to the bureaucratic nature of the institution, that teachers rely on impersonal appeals for maintaining power (Clifton and Roberts, 1990, 384)), it is perhaps unrealistic for many teachers to utilize a method that actually might decrease role distance or make authority personal. Critical pedagogy could easily be dismissed because it might mean undesirable methods of gaining and maintaining control, ones that sociologists call ‘charismatic’ and ‘persuasive’ (Clifton and Roberts, 1990, 391). One must remember that teachers and

students will often struggle with role reorientation in a critical literacy-type classroom. Beck demonstrates how students will even yearn for the teacher to reclaim overt control - 'this retrenchment demonstrates that the shift to a critical classroom is often a disorienting and frustrating one to students with an extensive history of experience in traditional teacher-centered classrooms' (Beck, 2005, 395). That is probably why many students have to be content to engage with critical literacy as a kind of 'unit of study' or as a style of one individual teacher that is attempted for a limited amount of time.

In general, although critical pedagogy is being given considerable attention in many universities and amongst academia as a point of study, it is clear that school leaders are not necessarily picking up the signal, that the curriculum is only viable agency at this point for those who wish to implement it. This point is held by many, including Osborne, who notes the general apathy of local constituents towards their own school boards in securing any fundamental position, democracy or otherwise (Osborne, 1991). It seems that if the constituents and administration ever get passionate about anything, it is about general platitudes and inconsequential political tussles. This malaise, of course, is also connected to a general apathy and meekness amongst teachers about their own rights and empowerment. In Manitoba, the collective agreement is fraught with all sorts of impositions on teachers, and continual violations that hinder their ability to do their job, leaving them unable to facilitate democracy within their profession, let alone in their classroom. The disempowerment and subsequent apathy is like a contagion. For how can teachers who operate within a fairly oppressive system possibly invoke the vitality of democracy amongst the young. Teaching *Nineteen Eighty Four* in a school that acts like Big Brother serves up some pretty delightful ironies and class projects, one supposes.

To be accurate, it is additionally doubtful that teachers are receiving the necessary training and professionalization to implement critical pedagogy or any interpretation of a democratic teaching philosophy. Whether it is because of a gap between university faculties and school administrators or simply a lack of adequate preparation and training, the bottom line is that teachers are left with a feeling of ‘impracticality’ or disconnection with their professional life and the work itself (Van den Berg, 2002; Filson, 2006). Dewey and Friere appear in many faculties and training programs in Canada but their ideas do not necessary receive enough emphasis to be considered vital. University faculties must shoulder some of the burden of responsibility for this shortcoming.

The literature is conclusive on one point – democratic and values-based education is a good thing and is still worth striving for. Public institutions do not have to be cold heartless enterprises that coalesce with supra-territorial democratization for the purposes of the ‘bottom line’. They can be places with humanizing synergy. By allowing curriculum to serve the teachers and students, and by providing good discourse on the purpose of education, teachers can help bring forth generations of conscientious citizens who will do some of things that schools advertise they do. It is even possible that the values inherent to a critical literacy classroom along with the cognitive activity described by Reader Response theorists could be a vital part of this ideal.



*Chapter 3: Methodology*  
*Conceptual Framework*

A systematic close-reading of the curricular documents with the principles of critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory close at hand is the proposed path of this thesis. I will be notifying their presence by searching for key democratizing terms amidst the outcomes and standards. Upon finding those terms I will assess their validity and saliency with the appropriate theory or sub-theory. A couple of key caveats have been built in the literature review that will need critical evaluation upon examination of the curriculum: First, if critical pedagogy is a transformative experience with ‘social action’ and ‘transformation’ at the end of it, Reader Response theory must be utilized as a cohesive aid, not a sort of post-modern hindrance. Second, if there is any sense of mutuality between the democratizing forces of critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory in the general and specific outcomes, they must be reinforced by meaningful standards that do not circumvent their own presence.

A close-reading of the curricular instruments will include the general and specific outcomes and the standards, with the exam receiving only minor consideration. Once the key words are highlighted and assessed for connectivity and meaning, the documents will be looked at for a sense of overall purpose and effect. This study will be conducted with an awareness of the shortcomings of curricular documents and their vitality in education but will do so with an awareness of their potential value as well. This ‘critical investigation’ is a consideration, a ‘weighing’ if you will, of the benefits of both educational and literary theory and their potential mutual workability in curriculum. The problem of critical pedagogy as incongruent with a post-modern context, and that

Reader Response activities might amplify that incongruence will be a serious consideration.

As demonstrated, Reader Response can be procured, modelled and implemented through a 'synthetic' approach, one that considers 'multiple points of view'. This can be done with students in the classroom with a variety of texts. This approach ensures a plurality of responses, preventing the notion that there is a prevailing 'right answer'. In order to do this, questions need to be set up in a way that may elicit a variety of responses. Clearly, a curriculum that is able to bend to all of the possible readings present would have to contain much ambiguous language. In order to be democratic in any post-modern sense of the term, the document will have to be ambiguous. But with increased ambiguity may come increased confusion. How much ambiguous language can the document contain, one will wonder?

Interestingly, 'New Critical theory' (a scientific reading) is what is being used to evaluate the curricular instruments. It is perhaps a bit ironic that this is the case, as the documents are rather void of formalist perspectives. Also, New Critical theory as Ransom defined it (Ransom, 1937) was never really meant to be used with pragmatic text like curricula. However, as a style of reading it is valuable because it allows one to explore the documents as they are - at face value. Essentially, one must determine whether they contain enough reward-incentive to provide democrats with the opportunity for 'social action', 'co-investigation' and 'transformation' (Friere, 1970). They also need to contain enough provision for 'cognitive activity' and 'aesthetic reading' (Rosenblatt, 1978). If they do it may be deemed that the curriculum is democratic. Then Dillabough's paradox must be considered (Dillabough argued that Reader Response

activities might be too ‘post-modern’ for a critical literacy classroom (Dillabough, 2002)).

### *Data Analysis*

As indicated, the curricular documents, including outcomes both general and specific along with the standards will be the subject of this study. Their workability as a tool for pedagogy, more particularly critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism, will be scrutinized. And as mentioned, documents surrounding the curriculum, including recommended text lists will be deemed as relevant fodder as well. With those instruments in hand, the words most prevalent to the forms of criticism studied must be gauged for presence, workability and cohesion. Ransom’s notion of a scientific reading, while not being ‘exact’, will be utilized to sift the texts for pervasive motifs, prevailing diction and syntax and overall tone (Ransom, 1937). Data analysis will include an overview of the consistency, accuracy and prevalence of particular words and language within the curriculum (see objectives). Some of the finer points will be reliant upon a rather instinctive assertion of the presence, workability and cohesion of the theories. In a way the document will reviewed and challenged in the same way a literary text might be sifted under the scrutiny of a scientific reading, with a clear and methodical attention only to the language and inference contained within the document, not a presumed notion of purpose. Syntax and language in the outcomes that procures the theories and has a reasonable set of standards associated with it would suggest that the document could be worthwhile. Presence of the approaches without special attention and provision to particular problems such as Dillabough’s aforementioned paradox (2002) could be seen

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as compromising. That paradox may appear if critical pedagogy is presented with politically correct language that prescribes the ‘transformations’ and social action that will take place.

### *Hypothesis*

It is possible that these two philosophies, critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism could cohabitate within curricula. Democratic education and Reader Response theory were part of a similar philosophical thrust and Rosenblatt and Dewey both attended Columbia University (not quite at the same time), often appearing in the same articles and arguments. They also shared considerable correspondence. To state that Reader Response criticism has been verified as pedagogically desirable and that it has much potential to be utilized with the principles of critical pedagogy is not exactly going out on a limb. But that the connection between democratic education and Reader Response criticism is not necessarily mutually beneficial under the guise of curricular reform as presented is a more delicate and vital argument. This more querulous question can even make for interesting academic speculation beyond the sphere of education. That is, it may present a kind of sign and semblance of the state of democracy in the public sphere.

The ‘critical boom’ that took place in the 1970s and 1980s in post-secondary academic institutions took a while to find its way to the public sphere. The paradigm shift that opened the doors of the university to critical perspectives outside of the formative had an intellectual and emotive value (Harkin, 2005), and they are hard to contain within a scoring guideline. The fact is that Reader Response theory has found its

way into schools through bureaucratic channels; teachers were 'told' to implement aspects of these new theories. This may have led to some of the awkwardness of implementing teaching that allows for the presence of individual background and context in the reading of texts and offering 'points' for doing so. It was contrived from the get-go.

Although it may be asserted then that in general the new ELA curriculum has returned agency to the reader/student in its text and subtext, there may be potential shortcomings because of this contrived nature. Although the very medium of the 'process writing' structure of Manitoba's provincial standard exam makes it palatable to critical literacy and the reader response critic, there are so many conditions and aspects of it that keep it from eliciting authentic personal response. While divergent and aesthetic readings of the texts are promoted through some questions and activities, others seem to be suggesting an 'ideal' reader to the point where divergent readings may be oppressed. Interestingly, many 'streamed' programs and independent schools can side-step some articles of this debate. That is, the most rigorous and broadly accepted streamed programming for motivated schools and students, the International Baccalaureate Program (IBO), has been and continues to be deeply entrenched in New Critical perspectives and Formalism within its English A1 program. The critical boom that swept through academia in most universities in the 1970s and 80s has yet to envelop the thousands of Manitoba students and hundreds of thousands worldwide who complete their IB certificate and diploma. The attention to the text as something with its own distinct value, something that should be gauged and appreciated entirely on its own merit, is the hallmark of the IB program. As such, the training, certification and

professionalism of teachers implementing this program are much like that of professors and academics in the 1950s and 60s, one that contains a fairly hierarchal and text-bound evaluation of all literature with literary terminology used to evaluate significance and success. Contrarily, Manitoba's curriculum supposedly offers considerable homage to the reader's ability to envelop meaning for him/herself and share this meaning with the group. In that sense, there has been a kind of blending of promotion of social learning theories (Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978) with Reader Response theory to ensure viability and visibility of student interpretations. This is seen through a variety of assignments, recommendations, texts, exams and curricular documentation that attend to the group process and identify other point of views as equal to texts (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000).

To be clear, Reader Response theory and critical pedagogy should make good bedfellows both in theory and practice – they come from the same social learning stock. While Reader Response theory returns agency to the reader, critical pedagogy returns agency to the learner in general and by necessity they must acknowledge and utilize 'social constructs'. That is visible in the regard for social context in both Fish and Iser's descriptions of the reading process. For Fish it was what the sentence 'does' to the reader (Fish, 1970, 127)); Iser discusses response theory more in terms of 'effects' (Iser, 2000). Both connote a use of social learning theories. 'Aesthetic response,' Iser states, 'is the hallmark of reception theory and is to be conceived in terms of interaction between text and reader' (Iser, 2000, 311). Fish takes this even further, suggesting that an interpretive community contains and forms the meaning collectively and culturally, that an efferent reading may be largely impossible, unnecessary or at least a distraction (Fish, 1970,

1981). Fish's view is that Formalism misses the point, if one is to 'consider the utterances apart from the consciousness receiving it is to risk missing a great deal of what is going on.' (Fish, 1970, 134) This is not a tidy assertion, however. Fish comments that in recent years 'the reader's activity becomes more strenuous...' because of the sheer volume of other responses out there. This, along with the many readings possible with the new plurality, demonstrates that with all the visions of the text, coordination of interpretive communities may not come easily (Fish, 1981, 5). So while the very notion that these interpretive communities are the way to procure a valid response milieu, that they increase the feasibility and mutuality between social learning theories and democratic education, they also can present difficulties because of so much increased plurality, not to mention the broadened definition of text that goes with that.

In this way, there may be a kind of insensitivity stemming from these Reader Response critics to the average reader. They seem to disregard the fact that many of us struggle to attenuate an 'aesthetic' reading without deliberating over our literate understandings. For some frustrated readers this may be seen as 'guessing'. Even for the versed critic, any lucid response to the intent and purpose of a text is very difficult. Yet this is what is required under the mantle of doing of aesthetic reading: 'The author's intention, the work's message, the value manifested in the harmonious reconciliation of textual ambiguities - all of them constituted the background to the theory of aesthetic response' (Iser, 311). Besides that, response critics believe that 'readers should have competence in the phonemic, syntactic, and visual systems of the language so that cues can be correctly decoded' (Chaplin, 154). It seems like this is expecting a lot compared

to a Formalist approach, which focuses on a singular, unsentimental reading of a text. Clearly, Reader Response criticism is not an easy way out.

There are more dilemmas for response theorists. As suggested, pragmatic texts gain popularity in critical literacy classrooms and can be very denotative. Yet, Iser and Fish both suggest that an aesthetic reading is attainable only through engagement with rich imaginative literature (Iser, 2000) with an emphasis poetic language (Iser, 1970). So while the curriculum opens up the definition of 'text' to include a variety of pragmatic and non-aesthetic materials, this inclusivity is to the detriment of some interpretations of Reader Response and may subsequently compromise democratic ideals themselves. Scholes verifies Fish and Iser's notion that the implied reader might be closely connected to poetic language than other literary forms (Scholes, 14), mostly because of the intensity, ambiguity and sophistication of the potential connections present in those forms. Iser sees 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction as an enlarging of that process of identification, a move from allegorical texts to ones that require 'cognitive reevaluation' (14). So clearly, in Iser's view a real response might be impossible without the right texts:

Thus the history of English fiction from Bunyan to Beckett can be seen as a progression from a writer just breaking free of allegorical subservience to the idea (saved by Calvin from Popish dogma, but barely saved) to Joyce, Faulkner, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Beckett, who offer the reader less and less guidance, thwarting the reader's desire for the illusion of certainty and leaving him in increasingly agonizing postures of frantic cognitive activity without any hope that this activity will prove fruitful except as an end in itself (Scholes, 2000, 14).

In this sense, a Reader Response culture might be too scholarly, too refined for a critical literacy classroom. How many texts of merit used by a critical literacy teacher (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* or Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, as examples) would come across as denotative or even 'dogmatic' to an advocate of Reader Response? Still, some would



maintain Reader Response criticisms mutuality with critical literacy, as they may see it more as 'the reader's act of "realizing" or interpreting a text, of making it consciously one's own, whatever the period of its creation', deemphasizing the high-minded notion of 'aesthetic readings' (O'Hara, 88). They may contend that although *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2008) or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949) are limited in terms of cognitive activity as defined by Rosenblatt (Rosenblatt, 1998), but that the Reader Response critic still can make meaning and inference in a personal way (O'Hara, 2005). This tension in Reader Response theory is mimicked somewhat in the curricular framework. It would seem that, broadly speaking, if the brand of Reader Response criticism that emphasizes a supportive efferent reading while still promoting interpretive communities is set forth in the document then there could be reasonable co-habitation between the potentially contradictory philosophies. It would probably be additionally helpful if the brand of critical literacy does not contain many heightened goals that may be squirreled into a politically correct mandate. Additionally, the pragmatic sensibility of democratic education must be checked in case it intrudes upon the freedom and post-modernism within a Reader Response milieu.

*Chapter 4: Findings - Manitoba's ELA Curricular Framework*

**GENERAL OUTCOME 1**

***Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences***

This, the first general learning outcome (GLO) in the framework, appears full of 'transformative' qualities (Friere, 1970) and looks to be very salient with the aforementioned ideals regarding critical literacy. The outcomes therein read as rooted firmly in the context of the learner (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000), a value held highly by Reader Response critics and critical pedagogues alike (Friere marks the experience and context of the learner as key to the implementation of a non-oppressive pedagogy (1970)). If one supposes to 'explore' is tantamount to 'inquire', then the connection is even more apparent, as it contains a foreshadowing flair of inquiry, a value highly touted by traditional democrats (Dewey, 1916), one that critical pedagogues and curricular reformers also acknowledge as vital. While it may be that turning the act of 'exploration' into a measurable act may be problematic (Beck, 2005), the language of this outcome and standard contains strong connectivity with many of the attributes of democratic learning, especially the emphasis on meta-cognitive and process-based teaching as outlined and advocated by Friere (1970), Shor (1992), McLaren (1999), Rosenblatt (1998) and a host of others, that it almost seems forgivable. When one considers that in the preface, the curriculum claims the importance of teaching values and ideals in order to participate in this globalized society (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 1), this kind of exploration may contain a clear moral sensibility.

For the critical pedagogue a key may be the word 'experience', a word that reminds the critical pedagogue that student empirical knowledge must be valued as much as any notion of an external belief or information held by the teacher or school (Friere,

1970; McLaren, 1999). Also of interest are words that may enhance transformative properties - words like ‘reconsider’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). When one adds that this ‘consideration’ and ‘reconsideration’ may be done orally, then there is further connectivity between the general learning outcome (GLO) and the principles of critical pedagogy. That the student is able not just to consider a ‘range of ideas’, but that he/she might consider their own and other’s ‘emotions’ may make this outcome multi-faceted enough to appeal to many types of learners and thereby further democratic saliency.

***Express Ideas (1.1.1)***

*Weigh and assess the validity of a range of ideas, observations, opinions, and emotions to reconsider and/or affirm positions*

There may be politically-correct culpability in the term ‘reconsider positions’, but since these types of activities are set forth within the curriculum ubiquitously as ‘skills’, this outcome may avoid some of that culpability. That this specific learning outcome (SLO) could digress into a teacher rewarding students for changing of opinion towards a particular sanctioned belief is also mitigated by the fact that there should be consideration of a ‘range of ideas, observations, opinions and emotions’.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in considering the relative merits of a range of ideas, observations, emotions to reconsider position	Considers the relative merits of a range of ideas, observations, opinions, and emotions to reconsider positions	Demonstrates limited skill in considering the relative merits of a range of ideas, observations, opinions, and emotions to reconsider positions

One might suspect that a student able to express his or her tolerant, open-minded point of view would probably not be asked to ‘reconsider’ their position. But since students who ‘reconsider’ their opinions and weigh a ‘range of opinions’ seem to be acquiring and utilizing skills advocated by democrats (informed with a sense of scientific hypothesis and inductive reasoning), it seems acceptable here. So at the very least, this standard

reads as a kind of primer for critical pedagogy and inquiry, an attempt to get students to at least consider other points of view, something furthered in 1.1.2 and later in GLO 3.

***Consider Others' Ideas (1.1.2)***

*Invite diverse and challenging ideas and opinions through a variety of means to facilitate the re-examination of own ideas and positions.*

It doesn't take an in-depth reading of the outcome to observe its lucid connection with critical literacy. This critical literacy focus is contained with the words 'invite' and 'facilitate', a challenge to both the student and teacher. This spirit of mutual responsibility in the curriculum is in itself hall mark critical pedagogy/literacy from practically any interpretation.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in inviting and weighing diverse and challenging ideas and opinions and demonstrates superior skill in re-examining own ideas and positions through a variety of means	Invites and weighs diverse and challenging ideas and opinions through a variety of means to re-examine own ideas and positions	Demonstrates limited skill in inviting and weighing diverse and challenging ideas and opinions through a variety of means to re-examine own ideas and positions

One might contest that a 'variety of means' may not be clear enough to qualify this outcome as 'specific'. This is not the only case of a kind of vagueness that may compromise usefulness. Also, the repetitive nature of 're-examine' and 'reconsider' from the previous SLO in the first two specific learning outcomes may hold import. That is, the 're' prefix has meta-cognitive value here and elsewhere. While the activity is clearly strong in critical literacy values, it also has connectivity with Reader Response theory with the seemingly innocuous add-on of 'own' ideas. If one is to interpret 'variety of means' as a strategy to differentiate instruction or appeal to a variety of learners then the democratic quality may be further amplified. Another theme becomes clear: the common standards do reinforce democratic outcomes most often as a 'skill'. This may have

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considerable traction with Dewey's argument for a pragmatically endowed democratic education (Dewey, 1916). But one may wonder how skill is being defined, whether mastery learning is being advocated or does mere competency suffice. This is one of many examples of how the standards are left open for interpretation and ambiguous in order to procure democratic education.

***Experiment with Language and Forms (1.1.3)***

*Vary language uses and forms of expression to discover how they influence ideas and enhance the power of communication.*

Not an overtly critical literacy-based outcome here except that it does reinforce the notion of the 'power of communication' which one supposes is at the root of democratic education or perhaps many kinds of education in Language Arts at the High School level. One supposes that any writer will benefit from discovering and experimenting as to how one should 'vary their language uses' (At level Standard). Process-based and pragmatic literacy qualities are the rub here:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in varying language uses and forms of expression to discover how they influence ideas and enhance the power of communication and/or expression	Varies language uses and forms of expression to discover how they influence ideas and enhance the power of communication and/or expression	Demonstrates limited skill in varying language uses and forms of expression to discover how they influence ideas and enhance the power of communication and/or expression

The student who is able to reflect or think about his/her writing as a process or progression is at a practical advantage in our world today, one supposes. The words here seem to recognize and include many types and discourses of communication and make them equally desirable ('power of communication' versus 'expression'). This recognition of diverse writing and learners is ostensibly pragmatic and cohabitates well with the philosophies on democratic schooling held by Dewey (Dewey, 1916) and

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Gardner (1999). And as seen in earlier outcomes, there is process-orientation seen in words like ‘discover’ that is congruent with the meta-cognitive theme that is replete throughout the curricular framework.

***Express Preferences (1.1.4)***

*Explore how personal experiences influence the selection of particular texts [including books] and how texts influence perspectives*

Given that ‘expressing preferences’ might have saliency with New Criticism, that many Formalists would rate or rank texts based on their objective qualities (see Dr. Pritchard’s introduction to poetry in *Dead Poets Society*), it is interesting and perhaps indicative that this SLO steers so clearly back towards a Reader Response paradigm in both the wording of the outcome and the standards. Here the connection between experiences and perspectives is not the only key. The ‘selection’ of texts is also vital to this activity, implying the teacher might have something to do with student’s success on this outcome:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in exploring how personal experiences influence the selection of texts and how various texts influence perspectives, pursuits, and awareness of self	Explores how personal experiences influence the selection of texts and how various texts influence perspectives, pursuits, and awareness of self	Demonstrates limited skill in exploring how personal experiences influence the selection of texts and how various texts influence perspectives, pursuits, and awareness of self

To declare ‘preferences’ in terms of the responder’s experiences, position or context (one’s ‘awareness of self’) could be an invitation to critical literacy. Additionally, awareness as to how the ‘selection of texts’ influences ‘perspectives’ presents strong affiliation to Reader Response Theory (Achebe, 1978). The confluence of critical literacy and Reader Response theory could provoke Dillabough’s contradiction (Dillabough, 2002). However, it seems equally conceivable that the student could respond out of their context without necessarily falling into some kind of politically

correct diatribe. Because this SLO requires tapping into a priori knowledge for both the individual and the group there must be a congenial yet controversial atmosphere towards the sharing of experience. As elsewhere, competent instruction may be imperative.

Equal opportunity for sharing might be an example of this competency.

***Set Goals (1.1.5)***

*Reflects on personal growth and successes in language learning and consider the role and importance of language learning when developing personal goals and plans.*

This outcome, in both the phrasing of the intention and standards, reaches out to the ‘transactional’ learner (as defined by the Foundation for Implementation (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000)) and is geared more towards ‘pragmatic’ literacy activities on the continuum. It may target new English speakers, immigrants or ones who are more focused on vocational activities:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in reflecting on personal growth and successes in language and in developing goals and plans for future language learning based on anticipated language needs	Reflects on personal growth and successes in language learning; develops goals and plans for future language learning based on anticipated language needs	Demonstrates limited skill in reflecting on personal growth and successes in language learning, and in developing goals and plans for future language learning based on anticipated language needs

This pliancy of terms ‘language learning’ and ‘needs’ makes the outcome very salient with democratic education. Clearly the words, phrases and values set forth are meta-cognitive, complying Rosenblatt’s views on transaction (Rosenblatt, 1978) and Friere’s emphasis on reflection (Friere, 1970). Teachers are once again implicated, as clearly they must facilitate students in thinking in very real terms about their own literacy and ‘personal growth’. For certain, it does not reward students who are further along some hierarchal sense of learning. That is, it is conceivable that a weak writer who is aware of

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his/her position as a learner might score better than a good writer who lacks self-perception, a fairly heinous idea in previous notions of curricula.

***Develop Understanding (1.2.1)***

*Explain how new knowledge, ideas, experiences, and perspectives reshape knowledge, ideas, and beliefs.*

Like 1.1.1 and 1.1.2, this SLO recognizes that a kind of socializing transformation is always taking place in student encounters with texts and other students:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in explaining how new knowledge, ideas, experiences and perspectives reshape and clarify understanding of own and others' texts	Explains how new knowledge, ideas, experiences and perspectives reshape and clarify understanding of own and others' texts	Demonstrates limited skill in explaining how new knowledge, ideas, experiences and perspectives reshape and clarify understanding of own and others' texts

Here is more meta-cognitive language, as 'new knowledge' along with 'own and others' suggests that the student is to explain their thoughts from before, during and after a textual encounter. While this would be quite a different experience to do with one's 'own' text, it is still very congruent with Rosenblatt's emphasis on post-reading activity (Rosenblatt, 1998). Also, the suggestion he/she may be better off doing so in cooperation with other students allows for this to be a constructed or shared experience, something emphasized by Fish (Golden and Guthrie, 1986, 410). This is another ostensibly reflective and meta-cognitive outcome, enough so that there may be saliency with the 'transformative' pedagogy as espoused by Friere (Friere, 1970). Discussion of one's own text is especially interesting as a measurable outcome, as it is conceivable that a student may be able to 'revisit' their own writing with new knowledge and awareness, revealing a fairly solvent blend of critical literacy and Reader Response.



***Explain Opinions (1.2.2)***

*Explore the strengths and limitations of various viewpoints on an issue or topic and identify aspects for further consideration; evaluate implications of particular perspectives when generating and responding to texts.*

The saliency of this outcome vis-à-vis critical literacy is glaringly apparent as it demands critical tolerance, careful regard of ‘various’ point of views and the weighing of ‘assumptions and premises and their implications’. Once again a pragmatic tone is inferred in that the standard emphasizes the ‘skill’ by which the student ‘explores’ those views (as opposed to an aptitude). Of central interest is the focus on ‘responding to texts’, as it seems to provide critical guidelines for that kind of cognitive activity.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in exploring various viewpoints, assumptions, and premises and in evaluating their implications when generating or responding to texts	Explores various viewpoints, assumptions, and premises and evaluates their implications when generating or responding to texts	Demonstrates limited skill in exploring various viewpoints, assumptions, and premises and in evaluating their implications when generating or responding to texts

What may be interesting is the continued emphasis on student assumptions, context and premises. The attention to the empirical knowledge in students has obvious traction with both Reader Response criticism and critical pedagogy (Chaplin, 1982; Friere, 1970).

This is yet another activity that pushes the responder and the teacher away from any scientific reading into an experience that has ‘personal’ or individual quality, or at least allows that the meaning may be not just in the text (Rosenblatt, 1998). Like all of the outcomes in GLO 1, it discourages teachers from conducting lessons focused on the blunt memorization of facts. As mentioned in the hypothesis of this thesis, the degree to which efferent readings should be utilized is a point of some contention among advocates of Reader Response. In this section at least, the framework contains affiliation with a more subjective or culturally relativist avenue of Reader Response criticism as advocated by

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Iser (2000). That is, an efferent reading is not very valuable. Much like 1.1.4, this activity teases out the commonality between Reader Response criticism and critical pedagogy without necessarily aggravating any of the meddlesome contradictions.

***Combine Ideas (1.2.3)***

*Consider ways in which interrelationships of ideas provide insight when generating and responding to texts.*

Most would agree that Friere was less interested in the ‘interrelationships of ideas’ than the ‘interrelationships of people’, but nonetheless this outcome may be another that contains some traction with a critical literacy perspective while keeping its focus on getting students to respond to (a wide variety of) texts. Although this kind of activity can be fairly esoteric and formal (‘combining ideas’), it can also prompt interrogation into social conditions, etc. It is when one replaces ‘ideas’ with ‘conflicting ideas’ or ‘opposing ideas’ that this outcome might benefit from a critical literacy approach. The term ‘ideas’ is further clarified in the standards as ‘viewpoints’ and ‘interpretations’, suggesting that an atmosphere of multiple takes, meta-cognition, discussion and reflection is practically required, enhancing it’s congruence with critical literacy.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in considering the ways in which the interaction of ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations provide insight when generating and responding to texts	Considers the ways in which the interaction of ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations provide insight when generating and responding to texts	Demonstrates limited skill in considering the ways in which the interaction of ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations provide insight when generating and responding to texts

Thus, this outcome is yet another that has traction with both critical literacy and Reader Response criticism. Once again, it does not seem to aggravate Dillabough’s (2002) mentioned contradictions because of process-oriented non-judgemental terminology like ‘considers’. For example, a student responding to *Heart of Darkness* could be dismissive

of Achebe’s response and still score ‘above level’, as long as they demonstrate ‘superior skill in considering’ aspects of an interpretation.

***Extend Understanding (1.2.4)***

*Extend breadth and depth of understanding by considering various experiences, perspectives, and sources of knowledge.*

1.2.4 has a tone of deference for ‘various experiences’, critical literacy sentiment for sure (Friere, 1970). With the focus verb ‘explore’, this outcome leaves some room for the student to be a ‘work in progress.’ One may imagine that this outcome has good conduction with a multi-cultural class or a generally diverse group, as the student ‘extends understanding’ to ‘various experiences’. There is more that could be said on the issue of multi-culturalism on this point.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in exploring and extending understanding by considering various experiences, information, and perspectives when generating and responding to texts	Explores and extends breadth and depth of understanding by considering various experiences, information, and perspectives when generating and responding to texts	Demonstrates limited skill in exploring and extending understanding by considering experiences, information, and perspectives when generating and responding to texts

As with others, this standard demands the learner generate a response, likely a personal response, from a variety of perspectives. It only differentiates the ‘at level’ from the ‘below level’ by the ‘skill’ the student possesses in doing so. That is ostensibly pragmatic and democratic wording, one might imagine. The word ‘considers’ is also well-placed and would likely help teachers and students avoid politically correct diatribes. How a student induces these various particulars to a general might be of more interest for teachers following this framework, tying this into the Dewey-based focus on formulating hypothesis and reasoning in general learning outcome 3.

**GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOME 2**

***Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts***

A coarse reading of the framework may reveal the fact that ‘media texts’ are the most overtly mentioned form of text even though they are only one of many forms that the teacher is encouraged to utilize (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). It may make sense given that the highly current aspects of ‘media texts’ may foster the kind of ‘currency’ desired in a critical classroom (Semalio, 2003). Despite the appeal to utilize a variety of current texts, there are no clear or pointed suggestions of currency in a host of other areas, including on how to conduct readings using current critical perspectives (Feminism, Queer Theory, etc.). Of course, one can imagine that they could be utilized within the ambiguous wording of many of the outcomes and standards (various interpretations and diversity, etc). But with that ambiguity there is a loss of clear direction, a lack of specificity. Here too, the diversified approach is potentially ambiguous, the wording of this GLO being to ‘comprehend and respond’ both ‘personally and critically’.

***Prior Knowledge (2.1.1)***

*Analyze connections between personal experiences and prior knowledge of language and texts to develop interpretations of a variety of texts [including books].*

Discussion over the connections between personal experiences and texts is not usually considered scientific or analytical (even if it includes books) but there is a tone of rational or even heightened logic here.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of connections between personal experiences and prior knowledge of language and a variety of texts to develop interpretations and perspectives	Analyzes connections between personal experiences and prior knowledge of language and a variety of texts to develop interpretations and perspectives	Demonstrates limited analysis of connections between personal experiences and prior knowledge of language and a variety of texts to develop interpretations and perspectives

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This standard starts off with ambitious logic in ‘analyzes’ but goes on to value ‘personal experiences’ and a ‘variety of texts’. It seems that an interpretation is rewarded only if the connection between personal experiences, prior knowledge of language and a variety of texts comes through. In general, the activity outlined here is consistent with Reader Response criticism in that the meaning is inferred to be in between the reader and the text, clear observance of the theory (Rosenblatt, 1998; Chaplin, 1982; Iser, 2000; Fish, 1981).

***Comprehension Strategies (2.1.2)***

*Apply a broad repertoire of appropriate comprehension strategies to monitor understanding and extend interpretations of a variety of texts.*

Like many others, this outcome does infer a currency in that the teacher should be utilizing a ‘variety’ of texts. ‘Variety’ most likely means from the broad band of the ‘pragmatic-aesthetic continuum’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000), but may also mean ones that contain a variety of points of view and perspectives.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in applying a broad repertoire of appropriate comprehension strategies to monitor and develop understanding and extend interpretations of a variety of texts	Applies a broad repertoire of appropriate comprehension strategies to monitor and develop understanding and extend interpretations of a variety of texts	Demonstrates limited skill in applying a broad repertoire of appropriate comprehension strategies to monitor and develop understanding and extend interpretations of a variety of texts

Along with several others, this outcome is pointed as much towards the teacher as the student in that it provides the pedagogue with the clear sense that they should be utilizing a variety of texts and encouraging the use of a variety of comprehension strategies. This is a fairly complex task that would have to be tracked across several reading experiences. As such, articulating this skill as a ‘specific’ outcome becomes questionable. Importantly, these ‘comprehension strategies’ are utilized to eventually ‘extend’

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interpretations. Thus, this outcome may be used to extenuate activities conducted in other outcomes. The purpose of utilizing those strategies in previous outcomes seems ultimately for devising a ‘reading’ of a text that is ‘aesthetic’. This is Reader Response delineation to be sure.

***Textual Cues (2.1.3)***

*Use textual cues and prominent organizational patterns to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts.*

Whereas this outcome might focus more on the process of fostering functionally literate students, the continued use of the word ‘interpret’ and ‘construct and confirm meaning’ maintains connectivity Reader Response criticism vis-à-vis aestheticism:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior use of textual cues and prominent organizational patterns to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts	Uses textual cues and prominent organizational patterns to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts	Demonstrates limited skill in using textual cues and prominent organizational patterns to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts

This continued attention to response theory in these ‘red herring’ outcomes reveals the pervasiveness of commitment to the theory within the framework. I say ‘red herring’ because here the pedagogue should encourage the confirmation of meaning only so that the student may eventually ‘interpret texts’. This may be a bit of a slip, but it serves as more than a glib reminder of the philosophical bent of this framework. To be clear, there is at least some recognition here that an efferent reading must be utilized as fodder for the aesthetic one, or at least a realization of the tension within Reader Response criticism (Rosenblatt, 1998, 889; Chaplin, 1982).

***Cueing Systems (2.1.4)***

*Use syntactic, semantic, graphophonic, and pragmatic cueing systems to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts*

Like 2.1.3, here is perhaps less fodder for the critical literacy approach and more covert mandating of Reader Response criticism where the ultimate goal is to ‘interpret’ texts and ‘construct and confirm meaning’.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior use of syntactic, semantic, graphophonic and pragmatic cueing systems to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts	Uses syntactic, semantic, graphophonic and pragmatic cueing systems to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts	Demonstrates limited skill in using syntactic, semantic, graphophonic and pragmatic cueing systems to construct and confirm meaning and interpret texts

This SLO can be read as providing checks and balances for a common interpretation of the text, affiliating it with the branch of Reader Response that allows a supportive but not dominant efferent reading. That is, even a Reader Response critic may believe that students/readers need to come to some level of agreement as to what the text really is about, or that there may be a tangible stratagem to ‘confirm meaning’. This is operationally desirable within many interpretations of Reader Response theory, most notably Rosenblatt’s (Rosenblatt, 1998). Not to state that any flank of Reader Response criticism wouldn’t promote the use of ‘cueing systems’, but they may find it pedagogically undesirable to dwell on such things or to attach standards to it. Clearly, this SLO suggests that the framework does value an objective realization about the ‘meaning’ of the text used, that an ‘efferent’ reading still has value, although it quickly moves to the operational verb to ‘interpret’.

***Experience Various Texts (2.2.1)***

*Experience texts from a variety of genres and cultural traditions; examine and analyze various interpretations of texts to revise or extend understanding.*

This outcome may contain more clear directions to the teacher than to the student:

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Experiences texts from a variety of genres, forms, disciplines, perspectives, and cultural traditions; examines and analyzes various interpretations of texts to revise or confirm understanding and to achieve insight	Experiences texts from a variety of genres, forms, disciplines, perspectives, and cultural traditions; examines and analyzes various interpretations to revise or confirm, or extend understanding	Experiences texts from a variety of genres, forms, disciplines, perspectives, and cultural traditions; examines and analyzes various interpretations of texts with limited revision, confirmation or extension of understanding

The subtlety of difference between the ‘above level’ and the ‘at level’ response might make the marker wonder, when the only difference is on the final bit of ‘insight’ versus extending understanding. Meanwhile, the push to include texts from a ‘variety of ... cultural traditions’ could be considered advantageous within the framework of critical literacy. And once again the ‘re’ prefix is present, meaning that for a student to engage in a confirmation and even potential revision of their understanding there would need to be well-designed pre-reading (contextual) and post-reading activities, something discussed by Golden and Guthrie (420, 1986), Rosenblatt (1998) and even Friere (1970). Thus, this SLO maintains a reflective, meta-cognitive and process-based ethos that shows vitality and congruence with both critical literacy and Reader Response criticism. Like some other specific outcomes, it is somewhat ambiguous and surprisingly non-specific. This makes detecting contradictions between democratic theories rather difficult.



***Connect Self, Texts, and Culture (2.2.2)***

*Respond personally and critically to perspectives and styles of a variety of Canadian and international texts.*

What may be interesting at this point to the reader is the recognition of the sheer number of outcomes, both specific and general, that attend to the dual purpose of personal and critical response. In many ways, the arrangement of ‘personally and critically’ is a microcosm of what the Reader Response critic fosters as valid and necessary discussion (Achebe, 1978).

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in responding creatively, personally and critically to perspectives and styles of a variety of Canadian and international texts	Responds creatively, personally and critically to perspectives and styles of a variety of Canadian and international texts	Demonstrates limited skill in responding personally and critically to perspectives and styles of a variety of Canadian and international texts

Obviously this SLO has syntactic and diction similarity to many other outcomes, especially with the emphasis on a ‘variety’ of texts and forms. Here ‘Canadian and international texts’ are mentioned specifically, representing another cue to the teacher. And once again it is a fairly difficult task - the notion that a student could respond both critically and personally to such a wide variety of texts would likely require the ‘expertise’ in pedagogy that Dewey (1916) and Friere (1970) advocate. To respond both ‘personally’ and ‘critically’ to ‘perspectives’ and ‘styles’ may be a solvent blend of personal and objective material, but it may be too ambiguous. It leaves the teacher and student with many possibilities of what to do (respond personally to perspectives, respond critically to styles, etc) and may disqualify this outcome as specific, especially when one considers the great variety of Canadian and International texts!

***Appreciate the Artistry of Texts (2.2.3)*** Analyze how language and stylistic choices in oral, print [including books], and other media texts communicate intended meaning and create effect.

Discussing stylistic choices in a literary text is a possible glint of objective literary theory, especially with the verb ‘analyzes’. However, the ‘style’ of a text is likely of considerable concern to any critic, regardless if they are utilizing an objective model or not. In this case a ‘variety of texts’ and focus on ‘intended meaning’ and ‘impression’ may be enough to steer this outcome far away from an objectivist model.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of how language and stylistic choices in oral, print, and other media texts communicate meaning or intention and create effect and overall impression	Analyzes how language and stylistic choices in oral, print, and other media texts communicate meaning or intention and create effect and overall impression	Demonstrates limited analysis of how language and stylistic choices in oral, print, and other media texts communicate meaning or intention and create effect and overall impression

Once again, allowing for inventiveness on the part of the teacher on the choice of text is congruent with the emphasis on ‘currency’ in the critical literacy camp (the inclusion of oral and media texts on par with print texts would be additional evidence of this). This also goes along with critical literacy’s inference that the student should be part of a living educational experience, one that is relevant to their lives (Friere, 1970). Also, there is allowance that Reader Response criticism may value an efferent reading of a pragmatic text as much as an aesthetic reading of a literary one (Chaplin, 1982), as long as the context and experience of the reader is valued.

***Forms and Genres (2.3.1)***

*Evaluate the effect of forms and genres on content and purpose.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior evaluation of form and genre on content and purpose	Evaluates the effect of form and genre on content and purpose	Demonstrates limited evaluation of the effects of form and genre on content and purpose

This SLO certainly does not have overt traction with critical pedagogy. In fact, this outcome deviates away from the tonal nuances established thus far. Notably, the term ‘evaluate’ invariably has a connotation of objectivity. Yet this particular evaluation, on the ‘effects of form and genre’ is not present so much as objectivist literary theory, but a reflection of the pragmatic nature of the framework and the exam where students must conduct inquiry and realize how different genres work well with variant purposes. And certainly, New Critics do not spend too much time surmising on the supposed purpose of the text (Ransom, 1937). Still, the tonal shift in this outcome is apparent and noteworthy.

***Techniques and Elements (2.3.2)***

*Analyze how various techniques and elements are used in oral, print [including books], and other media texts to accomplish particular purposes and create and overall impression*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of how various techniques and elements are used in oral, print, and other media texts to accomplish particular purposes and create an overall impression	Analyzes how various techniques and elements are used in oral, print, and other media texts to accomplish particular purposes and create an overall impression	Demonstrates limited analysis of how various techniques and elements are used in oral, print, and other media texts to accomplish particular purposes and create an overall impression

Similar to 2.3.2, this SLO might represent a continuation of a tonal shift. From words that are connected and rooted in Reader Response theory (words like ‘respond’, ‘experience’, or ‘interpretation’ and ‘connection’), this SLO demands a weighing of techniques used to achieve varying levels of success. This type of evaluation of a text and its ability to ‘accomplish’ various ‘purposes’ may have ties to other theories like Formalism and New Criticism (Ransom, 1937). Of course the word is ‘analyze’ not ‘evaluate’, so that theoretical connection is made tentative. It may be further ameliorated by the pragmatic intent behind this section of the curriculum along with a very broad notion of text. Still, this is one of the more Formalist-rooted outcomes in the framework.

***Vocabulary (2.3.3)***

*Analyze the impact of vocabulary and idiom in texts; identify how word choice and idiom vary and are used in language communities.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of the impact of vocabulary, idiom, and expression when responding to and generating text to communicate complex ideas and evoke responses; demonstrates superior skill in identifying how word choice and idiom vary and are used in language communities	Analyzes the impact of vocabulary, idiom, and expression when responding to and generating text to communicate complex ideas and evoke responses; identifies how word choice and idiom vary and are used in language communities	Demonstrates limited analysis of the impact of vocabulary, idiom, and expression when responding to and generating text to communicate complex ideas and evoke responses; demonstrates limited skill in identifying how word choice and idiom vary and are used in language communities

Here is another one of those ‘red herring’ outcomes. It begins to read as fodder for an objective criticism. However, upon examination of the standards, one realizes its saliency with a critical literacy and Reader Response approach. Recognition of the vocabulary and idiomatic qualities of ‘language communities’ within a variety of texts are once again intentional steps away from choosing texts from a prescribed literary canon. The fact that a student could respond in such a complex analysis does not mean it is not part of a Reader Response perspective, but the affiliation to that theory is suggested in the wording ‘communicate complex ideas and evoke responses’. Overall, because the wording is ‘language communities’ not ‘interpretive communities’, this outcome implies that the teacher should be utilizing texts that contain real voices from a variety of ethnic or linguistic groups that are outside of the mainstream voices. But that word choice ‘communities’ could also indirectly enhance Fish’s brand of response theory - that meaning is socially constructed and enhanced (Fish, 1970).

***Experiment with Language (2.3.4)***

*Experiment with and use language, visuals, and sounds to influence thought, emotions, and behaviour.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Experiments with and uses language, visuals, and sounds to articulate ideas, create desired effect, and to influence thought, emotions, and to enhance the power of communication	Experiments with and uses language, visuals, and sounds to articulate ideas, create desired effect, and to influence thought, emotions and behaviour	Experiments with and uses language, visuals, and sounds to articulate ideas, create desired effect, but with limited influence on thought, emotions, and behaviour

The emphasis in 2.3.4 seems to be more on presentations, particularly creating visual representations, but it still might have good saliency with critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory especially given the context of its placement in the curriculum. The hinge verb ‘experiments’ shows that like so many other outcomes in the framework, this SLO is bent towards a reflective, meta-cognitive or process-based teaching. That is, the product should be of less import than the student’s willingness or capacity for trying things. This process-orientation may allow for richer development and infusion of artistic potential, not just in writing or speaking, but in all creative arts. It is probably worth mentioning that ‘representing’ and ‘presenting’ as a form of literacy is clearly reinforced in the curricular framework (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2). It is also interesting that there has never been a standards exam that has clearly given permission to students to create ‘representations’ as their final writing piece.

***Create Original Texts (2.3.5)***

*Create original texts to communicate ideas and enhance understanding of forms and techniques.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Creates original texts to communicate ideas effectively and to enhance understanding of forms and technique	Creates original texts to communicate ideas and to enhance understanding of forms and techniques	Creates original texts, but with limited communication of ideas or limited understanding of forms and techniques

It may suffice to state that for advocates of critical literacy and most democratic sub-theories creating ‘original texts’ contains enormous potential. It may also be intimidating for many, especially to make a required activity. Undoubtedly, it has a transformative potential but is not for everyone. The flexible notion of this curriculum document, as outlined in the introduction probably was necessary given these impositions of ‘creativity’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2). Surprisingly, some servitude towards objective critical theories is contained in the culminating purpose of this outcome, to ‘enhance understanding of forms and techniques’. However, this is probably done so as to provide wording that includes students creating pragmatic pieces.

***GENERAL OUTCOME 3***  
***Manage ideas and information***

This outcome is largely designed to help students and teachers formulate inquiry. It is supposed to be ‘student-directed’ and was designed to help with either the development of a literary or pragmatic inquiry (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000). Clearly, activities in the humanities around inquiry are seen as highly democratic. The affiliation here to a kind of scientific method reveals considerable traction with the philosophies of Dewey (1916). In this GLO, students are to investigate based on the induction of information from a variety of sources stemming from personal, literary or pragmatic interests. What follows is the most singularly focused section of the curriculum, representing a clear answer to the call from pragmatics to infuse humanities education with scientific hypothesis and useful inquiry.

***Use Personal Knowledge (3.1.1)***

*Consider own and others' expertise to explore breadth and depth of knowledge, and focus inquiry or research based on parameters of task.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior exploration of the breadth and depth of personal knowledge and other information sources to identify topics and ideas or focus inquiry	Explores the breadth and depth of personal knowledge and other information sources to identify topics and ideas or focus inquiry	Demonstrates limited exploration of the breadth and depth of personal knowledge and other information sources to identify topics and ideas or focus inquiry

Delving into ‘personal knowledge’ to ‘focus inquiry’ has clear connectivity to Dewey’s recommendations for devising a student-centred, skill-based education (Dewey, 1916). The fact that the student is to explore the ‘breadth and depth’ of their own knowledge may be an imposing task for many young people, but one supposes that the atmosphere of critical literacy would have improved their abilities. ‘Other information sources’ may be other students in the room, the teacher, anecdotal evidence or other artistic sources, essentially anything that may have spurred this inquiry. The wording of this outcome suggests that students are to work on projects that are interesting to them personally and this is further evidence of a curriculum that is pragmatically democratic.

***Ask Questions (3.1.2)***

*Formulate focused inquiry or research questions and refine them through reflection and discussion of topic, purpose, and context.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in formulating and refining questions to understand the imagined world of texts or to focus inquiry	Formulates and refines questions to understand the imagined world of texts or to focus inquiry	Formulates focus questions, but demonstrates limited skill in refining these to understand the imagined world of texts, or to focus inquiry

Refining essential questions in ‘discussion’ may reflect not just recognition of speaking as a form of literacy in the curriculum (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2) but a push to maintain reflection and meta-cognition as mainstays of the curricular framework. This

outcome and standard outlines that the student will not arbitrarily ask rudimentary questions but formulate and then refine questions during and after engagement with a text or as part of a particular investigation. The emphasis on pre and post reading has considerable traction with Reader Response criticism (Rosenblatt, 1998; Chaplin, 1982), but also seems reminiscent of the democrats’ call to utilize inductive reasoning through ‘refining’ (Dewey, 1916). Asking questions might be a very good strategy to provide and promote engagement within an interpretive community, as the student understanding and response about an ‘imagined’ world would invariably be defined and enhanced with rich social engagement with others (Iser, 2000; Fish, 1981).

***Participate in Group Inquiry (3.1.3 )***

*Collaborate with and support group members in adapting procedures to achieve inquiry or research goals.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in collaborating and supporting group members in developing creative approaches or in defining topic, focus, and intent	Collaborates with and supports group members in developing creative approaches or in defining topic, focus, and intent	Demonstrates limited skill in collaborating with and supporting group members in developing creative approaches or in defining topic, focus, and intent

This outcome provides a caveat for those who wish to work on inquiry projects in groups. To evaluate the ability of an individual to ‘collaborate’ with a group is a difficult but necessary task. The process-oriented nature of this curriculum may make it easier to evaluate. But in many ways, this task reflects a difficult paradox of democracy; there is implicit tension between the needs of the group and the individual, but both must be recognized and valued. Interestingly, a student who receives an ‘above level’ score demonstrates ‘superior skill’ in working in groups may not necessarily have the best product to show for it. This is a clear deviation from how group projects used to be evaluated (based on product). Furthermore, the use of both ‘defining topic’ (pragmatic)



or ‘developing creative approaches’ (aesthetic) allows for a variety of learners to score well on this outcome, more democratic appeal to be sure and further recognition of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999).

***Create and Follow a Plan (3.1.4)***

*Develop and select from a repertoire of inquiry and research strategies, and adjusts plan according to changes in audience, purpose, and context.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Develops a broad repertoire of personal strategies and demonstrates creativity in developing a plan to satisfy the unique requirements of a task; demonstrates superior skill in adjusting plan as required	Develops personal strategies and a plan to satisfy the unique requirements of a task; adjusts as required	Develops personal strategies and a plan; demonstrates limited skill in adjusting plan to satisfy the unique requirements of a task

Once again, it appears as if Dewey’s and Friere’s views have been made into a curricular manifesto. Here the student is to shape a plan, one that may have objective or personal tenets, is both proactive and reflective and allows the student and pedagogue to view the inner workings of the machinery of their own inquiry. This is process-orientation to the highest degree as the student must be able to ‘adjust’, and the teacher should be in a position able to view this. This strategizing is allowed to be ‘personal’, a word that infers an atmosphere of freedom. It also suggests flexibility and expertise on the part of the pedagogue. This continued emphasis on process over product amplifies praxis of discovery teaching within critical pedagogy (Friere, 1970; McLaren, 1999).

***Identify Personal and Peer Knowledge (3.2.1)***

*Evaluate and select ideas and information from prior knowledge of inquiry or research topic appropriate for audience, purpose, and personal perspective or focus.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skills in evaluating and selecting ideas and information from prior knowledge appropriate for audience, purpose, and form, or for their usefulness in understanding, developing, and enhancing texts	Evaluates and selects ideas and information from prior knowledge appropriate for audience, purpose, and form, or for their usefulness in understanding, developing, and enhancing texts	Selects ideas and information from prior knowledge but demonstrates limited skill in evaluating appropriateness of these for audience, purpose, and form, or for their usefulness in understanding, developing, and enhancing texts

This SLO does seem a tad repetitive given the amount of other outcomes devoted to connecting ‘prior knowledge’ to response, but since it is being used as part of a process to conduct inquiry one supposes it makes some sense to repeat it. Indeed, there are benefits in doing such an activity as it is a part of a student’s delving into their topic. With an emphasis on ‘usefulness’ it may be too pragmatic-phrased to be connected with ‘response theory’ directly. Whatever the project may be, it is assumed that he/she can ‘select ideas’ for the chosen ‘audience, purpose and form’. Again, the teacher must be a proficient facilitator, an expert in the field in order to help students realize the feasibility of a wide variety of projects. In order to help a student alter their style and form to meet the needs of a particular audience or context, one would imagine that the teacher would help students construct interesting and relevant projects within the student’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

***Identify Sources (3.2.2)***

*Identify and discuss diverse information sources [including books] relevant to particular inquiry or research needs.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in determining the relevance and value of diverse information sources for a particular task	Determines the relevance and value of diverse information sources for a particular task	Demonstrates limited skill in determining the relevance and value of diverse information sources for a particular task

As I can attest, weeding through information sources and determining their relevance to an inquiry question is a crucial step in the process of writing a research piece. Rewarding

students for achievement in this process of writing, however, is a difficult job for the teacher, as students may balk some of these crucial steps in favour of finishing the project. Plus, students work at such varying speeds that evaluation on this might become muddled. Yet, this step has connectivity to facets of democratic education, as it allows for meta-cognition (learning about learning), reflection and the honing of their project. Checking sources for ‘bias’ and ‘accuracy’ helps foster a healthy scepticism, a clear feature of a critical student. It is also noteworthy that this is a deductive evaluation here, rather than an induction as seen in earlier outcomes. This focus of scientific reasoning and checking for validity of a hypothesis is followed up in the next outcomes. This next section is probably the most planned part of the framework and can be read in one swoop:

***Evaluate Sources (3.2.3)***

*Evaluate factors that affect the credibility, authenticity, accuracy, and bias of information sources for inquiry or research.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in evaluating factors that affect the credibility, authenticity, and bias of information sources for a particular task	Evaluates factors that affect the credibility, authenticity, and bias of information sources for a particular task	Demonstrates limited skill in evaluating factors that affect the credibility, authenticity, and bias of information sources for a particular task

***Access Information (3.2.4)***

*Access information to accomplish a particular purpose within the topic parameters and time available.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in accessing information for a particular task using a variety of tools and sources	Accesses information for a particular task using a variety of tools and sources	Uses a variety of tools and sources but demonstrates limited skill in accessing information for a particular task

***Make Sense of Information (3.2.5)***

*Use knowledge of text cues, organizational patterns, and cognitive and emotional appeals to extract, infer, synthesize, organize, and integrate ideas from extended texts [including books]; adjust reading and viewing rates according to purpose, content, and context.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in using knowledge of text cues, organizational patterns and cognitive and emotional appeals to extract, infer, synthesize, organize, and integrate ideas from extended texts	Uses knowledge of text cues, organizational patterns, and cognitive and emotional appeals to extract, infer, synthesize, organize, and integrate ideas from extended texts	Demonstrates limited skill in using knowledge of txt cues, organizational patterns and cognitive and emotional appeals to extract, infer, synthesize, organize, and integrate ideas from extended texts

***Organize Information (3.3.1)***

*Organize and reorganize information and ideas to clarify thinking and to achieve desired effect.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in organizing and re-organizing information and ideas to clarify thinking and to achieve desired effect	Organizes and re-organizes information and ideas to clarify thinking and to achieve desired effect	Demonstrates limited skill in organizing and re-organizing information and ideas to clarify thinking and to achieve desired effect

***Record Information (3.3.2)***

*Synthesize and record information, ideas, and perspectives from a variety of sources; document sources accurately.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Records and demonstrates superior skill in synthesizing information, ideas, and perspectives for a particular purpose	Records and synthesizes information, ideas, and perspectives for a particular purpose	Records but demonstrates limited skill in synthesizing information, ideas, and perspectives for a particular purpose

***Evaluate Information (3.3.3)***

*Evaluate information for completeness, accuracy, currency, historical context, relevance, balance of perspectives, and bias.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in evaluating the appropriateness, completeness, accuracy, currency, historical contexts, balance of perspectives, and bias of information for a particular purpose	Evaluates the appropriateness, completeness, accuracy, currency, historical contexts, balance of perspectives, and bias of information for a particular purpose	Demonstrates limited skill in evaluating the appropriateness, completeness, accuracy, currency, historical contexts, balance of perspectives, and bias of information for a particular purpose

***Develop New Understanding (3.3.4)***

*Assess the effect of new understanding on self and others; evaluate the effect of inquiry or research plans and procedures on conclusions.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in assessing the effect of new understanding on self and others and evaluating the methods of inquiry or creative process for effectiveness and impact on conclusions	Assesses the effect of new understanding on self and others and evaluating the methods of inquiry or creative process for effectiveness and impact on conclusions	Demonstrates limited skill in assessing the effect of new understanding on self and others and evaluating the methods of inquiry or creative process for effectiveness and impact on conclusions

The final activity amongst these inquiry-based outcomes, to ‘develop new understanding’ seems to be a logical culmination of all of these activities but disappointingly focuses only on ‘conclusions’. Overall, this outcome is clearly attentive to the vitality of the scientific method in the arts. Response theory is quite absent in this section. That is, although the student is supposed to utilize ‘extended texts’ to develop their understanding (3.2.5), this is only to ‘make sense of information’, hardly an aesthetic response. Overall, this inquiry project takes up at least six specific outcomes. Generally, this part of the curriculum reveals a strong bent towards the older principles of democratic education as outlined by Dewey (1916). The very specific guideposts set forth in this general learning outcome surprisingly still contains some seemingly pointed repetition of activities, especially around checking for bias and reliability of resources (3.2.3 and 3.3.3). For certain, this GLO represents a deviation from the overall tone of the framework where there is much choice of how to arrive at outcomes. That point, along with GLO 3’s positioning in the apex of the framework does seem to suggest that critical literacy and response activity from GLO 1 and 2 is conducted for a purpose, and that purpose is this culminating activity of a fairly pragmatic inquiry.

***GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOME 4***  
***Enhance the clarity and artistry of Communication***

This part of the curricular framework is devoted to rudimentary aspects of student literacy. While not overtly democratic, it does infer there is much choice for the student who is generating original work and uses wording that ensures student work is self-evaluable, clearly desirable tenets from a democratic perspective. Although there is not much influence here from Reader Response criticism, there is continued attention to meta-cognition and reflection, which infers there is not a contradiction either. The first group of specific outcomes are slanted towards that student awareness of the writing variables and ability to reflect on choices made in that regard. They read as follows:

***Generate Ideas (4.1.1)***

*Generate, evaluate, and select ideas to focus and clarify a topic and perspective appropriate for audience, purpose, and context*

***Choose Forms (4.1.2)***

*Adapt and use forms appropriate for audience, purpose, and context*

***Organize Ideas (4.1.3)***

*Evaluate the potential impact of various organizational structures, techniques, and transitions in oral, written, and visual texts to achieve specific purposes for particular audiences and to ensure unity and coherence.*

The next group of specific outcomes do demand student interaction and so there is a sense of shared purpose in the group. This does not necessarily connote any use of critical literacy principles, although the choices regarding those variables and forms mentioned may lead in that direction. Application to Reader Response criticism are not worth discussing here in any detail except to state that they do not seem to contradict a Reader Response classroom, but challenge students and teachers to contain some degree of perfectionism around implementation of skills:

***Appraise Own and Others' Work (4.2.1)***

*Appraise and discuss the effectiveness of own and others' choices relative to content, form, style, and presentation.*

***Revise Content (4.2.2)***

*Evaluate and revise drafts to ensure appropriate content and language use and to enhance precision, unity, and coherence.*

***Enhance Legibility (4.2.3)***

*Select text features to enhance legibility and artistry for particular audiences, purposes, and contexts.*

***Enhance Artistry (4.2.4)***

*Use effective language, visuals, and sounds, and arrange and juxtapose ideas for balance, effect, and originality.*

***Enhance Presentation (4.2.5)***

*Use appropriate strategies and devices to enhance the impact of presentations.*

***Grammar and Usage***

***(4.3.1)***

*Analyze and edit texts for appropriate word choice, grammatical structures, and register to achieve clarity, artistry, and effectiveness.*

***Spelling (4.3.2)***

*Know and apply Canadian spelling conventions for a broad repertoire of words and monitor for correctness; recognize and use creative spellings for special effects.*

***Capitalization and***

***Punctuation (4.3.3)***

*Know and apply capitalization and punctuation conventions to clarify intended meaning, referring to appropriate style manuals and other resources.*

***Share Ideas and Information***

***(4.4.1)***

*Demonstrate confidence and flexibility in meeting audience needs when presenting ideas and information; adjust presentation plan and pace according to purpose, topic, and audience feedback.*

***Effective Oral and Visual***

***Communication (4.4.2)***

*Select and adjust appropriate voice and visual production factors that take into account audience*

***Attentive Listening  
and Viewing (4.4.3)***

*Demonstrate critical listening and viewing behaviours to make inferences about presentations.*

All of GLO 4 works with basic or traditional literacy skills, but the wording does not imply that students and teachers embarking on critical literacy or reader response activities would not be stymied by these tasks. While these particular skills seem to reinforce activity on the ‘pragmatic’ side of the continuum, they still may count for betterment on the ‘aesthetic’ side. The last one, 4.4.3, does have some more connectivity with critical pedagogy, not just that the word ‘critical’ is used, but that there is valuing of the shared experience of the students and consideration of ‘inferences’. Once again, the process-orientation in these cursive tasks may reveal an affiliation to critical pedagogy in the framework. That is, the final edited project is not the rub but rather that the student performs certain duties along the way. In that sense, teachers can feel quite comfortable conducting ‘assessment for learning’, not ‘assessment of learning’. A potential downside to this section, as with some others, is that ambiguous language is set forth to appeal to a variety of learners in a variety of writing situations that leads to a watering down of the meaning and readability of the outcome.

***GENERAL OUTCOME 5  
Celebrate and build community***

On the surface, at least, this general outcome would not only co opt nicely with the principles of critical pedagogy, critical literacy and most interpretations of democratic education – it may be an essential part of the definition. As suggested, it is the tendency of a school to act as a society unto itself that is behind so much of the democracy in



education ideal. However, ‘building community’ (and celebrating it for that matter) may happen for a variety of purposes, ones that may even circumvent the ideals behind democratic education. Furthermore, critical literacy may run in contradiction with this outcome – to ‘celebrate and build community’ may be done to reinforce the status quo community of the school. Clearly this GLO could also stray quite far away from the response theories, as a particular bias and doctrine may be set forth and very little ‘cognitive activity’ fostered. That this general outcome may be for building the social conditions necessary to conduct critical literacy and develop interpretive communities would be a logical assertion.

***Cooperate with Others (5.1.1)***

*Use language to demonstrate flexibility in working with others; encourage differing view-points to extend breadth and depth of individual and group thought.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Uses language to enhance and facilitate positive group interaction, listens actively to, and initiates and promotes the expression of diverse ideas and viewpoints to extend breadth and depth of individual and group thought	Uses language to demonstrate flexibility in working with others, listens attentively to, and encourages a variety of viewpoints to extend breadth and depth of individual and group thought	Demonstrates limited flexibility in using language to work with others, listens attentively to, and accepts a variety of viewpoints to extend breadth and depth of individual and group thought

This is another outcome that reads as ‘directions to teacher’. But given that this curriculum is ‘student-directed’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000, 2) one must assume that this outcome may also help students who embark on the more pointed and controversial topics so often associated with critical literacy. Indeed, students and teachers may need some helpful guidelines such as these to have a chance of success. And it seems this outcome does provide those limitations. Its stated regulations are for instilling balance

between the needs of ‘individual and group thought’. Students that move towards social action (especially if that means group-based inquiry) would undoubtedly benefit from some work with this outcome. Additionally, the fact that listening is once again marked as part of this measured standard is interesting or student assessment. A criticism: Perhaps this outcome should appear earlier in the framework, as it may provide a useful foundation for work on outcomes that are more discussion oriented (1.1.1, 1.1.2, 3.1.2).

***Work in Groups (5.1.2)***

*Demonstrate commitment and flexibility in a group, monitor own and others’ contributions, and build on others’ strengths to achieve group goals.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates leadership, commitment, and flexibility in groups, supports others’ participation and risk taking; demonstrates superior skill in adjusting roles and responsibilities according to purpose	Demonstrates commitment and flexibility in groups, supports others’ participation and risk taking; adjusts roles and responsibilities according to purpose	Demonstrates limited commitment and flexibility in groups and in supporting others’ participation and risk taking; demonstrates limited skill in adjusting roles and responsibilities according to purpose

It does seem difficult and contradictory to democratic principles that the only student who should receive ‘above level’ marks on this SLO is the one who ‘demonstrates leadership’. This is contrary to social learning theories that amplify multiple intelligences (Vygotsky, 1978; Wersch & Sohmer, 1995; Gardner, 1999). Considering that in group work not everyone can be a leader, this SLO comes out as very difficult to infuse across an entire class, especially upon reading the standards. It seems that the student who achieves the ‘at level’ standard should be rewarded with full marks, as they have demonstrated the necessary ‘flexibility’. In any case, this SLO does reward the student for participating in a social process, and emits process-oriented language. These

proposals recognize that for many young people, their greatest motivation to learn is through how they are perceived by their peers or how they ‘fit in’ to a classroom milieu.

***Use Language to Show Respect (5.1.3)***

*Recognize how language choice, use, tone, and register may sustain or counter exploitative or discriminatory situations.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in recognizing inclusive, respectful verbal and non-verbal language and appropriate tone and register according to context; demonstrates superior skill in recognizing how language choice reveals perspectives, attitudes, and relationships and may sustain or counter exploitative or discriminatory situations	Recognizes inclusive, respectful verbal and non-verbal language and appropriate tone and register according to context; recognizes how language choice reveals perspectives, attitudes, and relationships and may sustain or counter exploitative or discriminatory situations	Demonstrates limited skill in recognizing inclusive, respectful verbal and non-verbal language and appropriate tone and register according to context; demonstrates limited skill in recognizing how language choice reveals perspectives, attitudes, and relationships and may sustain or counter exploitative or discriminatory situations

One can imagine that an understanding of the hurtful nature of racial slurs might be good for many of our students. But to be clear this is another kind of ‘red herring’ outcome, as it is presented more like a traditional ‘oppressive’ doctrine but becomes a solvent blend of recognizing and fostering social intelligence (‘according to context’) with etiquette around language and potentially ‘discriminatory situations.’ It even recognizes ‘non-verbal language’, leaving it open to teaching around how we communicate in a variety of ways. Clearly, this outcome could also add to a feeling of ‘correctness’ or even ‘political correctness’ as a teacher could mark students based on their attitude and behaviour. But the bent of it is similar to 5.1.1; this SLO may be good ground work for work on controversial topics that a critical literacy classroom embraces. One may wonder why this ground work is not laid out sooner in the document (Of course there is no prescription for delivering the outcomes chronologically, but there is a kind of inference). It is somewhat interesting that like some other outcomes (ones that use the word ‘considers’), the wording is hinged upon ‘recognizing’ inclusive communication and the

benefits thereof. That is, it is not asking the student to necessarily constantly write in this fashion, but recognize the benefit of doing so. There does seem to be some avoidance of political correctness by making it meta-cognitive. Similar to 5.1.1, this softening may make this standard invariably difficult to measure.

***Evaluate Group Process (5.1.4)***

*Evaluate the usefulness of group process to achieve particular goals or tasks.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in evaluating the usefulness of group process to achieve particular goals or tasks and uses findings in future learning tasks	Evaluates the usefulness of group process to achieve particular goals or tasks	Demonstrates limited skill in evaluating the usefulness of group process to achieve particular goals or tasks

Meta-cognition and reflection on benefit of the ‘group process’ can only be good for reinforcing critical pedagogy and response theories. In fact, the repeated challenge to reflect and reorganize perspectives and ‘particular goals’ is strongly connected to several other specific outcomes, most notably in general outcome 3. The ideal here is that working together is a good thing, clearly, but one should be able to let some air out of the balloon, to assess benefits and detractions of this particular process. One might wonder if someone could achieve an above level score if they had a negative experience working with their group. By all intents and purposes this would be conceivable, as long as the student ‘demonstrates superior skill in evaluating.’

***Share and Compare Responses (5.2.1)***

*Demonstrate the value of diverse ideas and viewpoints to deepen understanding of texts, others, and self.*

Another slightly repetitious outcome, reminiscent of 1.1.2 and 1.1.3, like those 5.2.1 has tangible saliency with critical pedagogy and response theory. One may surmise that this repetition of requiring the student to broaden their perspective through their encounters

with texts does add increased value to that activity. And as mentioned earlier, this activity would be much more achievable if communal aspects of Reader Response criticism, ones that really value the ‘social construction’ of meaning are utilized in conjunction with critical pedagogy (Fish, 1981). At this point, however, it is not entirely clear why the framework is reemphasizing this value, except to clarify some rules and regulations surrounding it. Like with 5.1.1 and 5.1.2, one may wonder why these activities don’t appear earlier in the framework, before much of the response-based activity in GLO 1 and 2.

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior skill in evaluating diverse ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations to deepen understanding of texts, others, and self	Evaluates diverse ideas viewpoints, and interpretations to deepen understanding of texts, others, and self	Demonstrates limited skill in evaluating diverse ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations to deepen understanding of texts, others, and self

With the hinge descriptor being ‘skill’, be it ‘superior’ or ‘limited’, there is a sense that one can learn this, or teach it. However, one wonders if that is really so. Perhaps it is some relief to know that this is not necessarily achieved only through writing.

Alternative expressive forms like ‘representing’ and ‘presenting’ are equally valued in this framework, and here is another example of how they may increase traction with critical literacy (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000).

***Relate Texts to Culture (5.2.2)***

*Identify and analyze ways in which cultural, societal and historical factors influence texts and how texts, in turn, influence understanding of self and others.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of the ways in which cultural, societal, and historical factors influence texts and how texts, in turn, influence, define, and transmit culture	Analyzes ways in which cultural, societal, and historical factors influence texts and how texts, in turn, influence, define, and transmit culture	Demonstrates limited analysis of the ways in which cultural, societal, and historical factors influence texts and how texts, in turn, influence, define, and transmit culture

To draw connections between the contextual factors influencing a text’s existence and in turn understand how texts might transmit cultural values would be the hallmark of a superior reader and writer. This SLO has considerable traction with critical pedagogy and Reader Response theory because it is pointed towards the social construction of the reader/writer, as well as demanding that those factors be put into the critical lens and awareness of the class – all good fodder for the theories of interest. Not that this SLO advocates for a biographical criticism of the text, but there is an inferred benefit for conducting a reading from many variant critical vantage points. A fairly anthropological sensibility is revealed in the symbiotic nature of cultures and texts as phrased. Another repeating motif: This outcome seems to be directed to teachers as much as students, as teachers should be choosing or allowing students to choose texts that reveal cultural experiences outside the norm.

***Appreciate Diversity (5.2.3)***

*Analyze ways in which languages and texts reflect and influence the values and behaviours of people and diverse communities, knowledge, attitudes, and response.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior analysis of the ways in which languages and texts reflect, reveal, and influence the values and behaviours of people and diverse communities	Analyzes ways in which languages and texts reflect, reveal, and influence the values and behaviours of people and diverse communities	Demonstrates limited analysis of the ways in which languages and texts reflect, reveal, and influence the values and behaviours of people and diverse communities

There seems to be a kind of slippage between the wording of this SLO and the descriptors – a move from a dangerously indoctrinating command ‘appreciate’ to a rather stoic sensibility in ‘analyze’. Essentially, this outcome is very similar to 5.2.2 and many other outcomes, in that it is asking the student to consider texts in all of their contextual glory. As with 5.2.2, there is good traction for the critical pedagogy and Reader Response theorist who is also interested in the context of a text. This may even represent a step

beyond Reader Response criticism as a specific strategy of reading/writing (post-colonial, sociological or feminist criticism), and may benefit student performance. The inclusion of ‘diverse communities’ may be slightly euphemistic, perhaps suggesting ‘marginalized communities’. As critical literacy sets forth, stories that ‘are left out’ are of utmost importance (Friere, 1970). The word ‘values’ has critical import for democrats, and here may reveal how literature has replaced the bible and religion as the mainstay of ethics in schools. There has been quite a stir of controversy over schools’ ‘spiritual’ role in this post-modern age (Van Brummelen & Franklin, 2004), but there seems to be some agency offered to teachers and students here. That is assuming that the framework is utilizing literature not just to prescribe a set of values, but rather to get students to dissect their own and other beliefs through engagement with texts. But of course there is potential for corruptions. This part of the outcome may present some difficulties only if a homogeneity of values and texts are present, something that would be quite difficult given the attention to ‘variety of texts’ in GLO 1 and 2.

***Occasions (5.2.4)***

*Use language and texts to celebrate important occasions and accomplishments and to extend and strengthen a sense of community.*

Above Level	At Level	Below Level
Demonstrates superior use of language and texts to mark accomplishments and significant occasions, and to create and strengthen a shared sense of community	Uses language and texts to mark accomplishments and significant occasions, and to create and strengthen a shared sense of community	Demonstrates limited use of language and texts to mark accomplishments and significant occasions, and to create and strengthen a shared sense of community

This outcome serves to essentially give reward and credit for some of the ubiquitous efforts on the part of many teachers to make community happen in a positive way. It may be that attaching a standard to this, where some students will demonstrate ‘superior’ or ‘limited use of language’, might take some of the fun out of the occasion. Nevertheless,

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an attempt to give credit for the participation of students in their school culture is a bold step to offer real 'brownie points' for students who go above and beyond. Further, it is an implication of the importance of school and class morale, a value that would perhaps strengthen a culture of critical literacy.



Chapter 5:  
*Interpretation and Discussion*

Through this analysis it was found that the curricular framework is highly congruent with various aspects of democratic education including some varieties of Reader Response theory and most interpretations of critical pedagogy/literacy. The phraseology, terminology and diction of the document maintains concern with process, reflection and moral capacities of students, strongly emphasized facets of democratic teaching and critical pedagogy as outlined by the likes of Dewey, Friere and McLaren. Not only is the framework replete with the self-identified 'democratic' ideals and claims (like being 'student-directed' (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000)), it follows up on these values in real and tangible ways. Some of the wording of outcomes and standards even implicate both teacher and student and in so doing the curriculum maintains a sensibility of high teacher protocol and expectation (Manitoba Curriculum 2000), a democratic ethos for sure (Dewey, 1916). A strong sign might be that outcomes that did not seem overtly democratic (most of GLO 4, for example) still seem to support other aspects of the framework that were clear extensions of those ideals due to their syntax, diction and placement in the framework.

In general, it was found that GLO 1, 2 and 5 have very strong connectivity with critical pedagogy/literacy. It was also found that at least two of the general learning outcomes, GLO 1 and 2 have very strong connectivity to Reader Response theory. One outcome, GLO 3 also holds on to a very traditional interpretation of democratic learning and must be considered moderately connected to the theories. GLO 4 does not seem contradictory to the theories, but is not as strong an amplification of the democratic philosophies.

The finer question as to whether various aspects of democratic pedagogy are presented in a contradictory way is more difficult to assert. There does seem to be some potential for a quagmire in some of the specific outcomes. However, when one considers the wording of the outcomes as highly personal and reflective along with the understanding that the document contains a fairly innocuous interpretation on social action (GLO 3 and 5), it must be concluded that there would need to be a substantial effort on the part of the teacher to exasperate this contradiction. It would be fair to state that there is little indication of any lingering quagmire within any general or specific outcome.

Under GLO 1 (Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences) there are nine specific outcomes, all of which had strong connectivity with both critical literacy and Reader Response theory. Reader response criticism was found to be most apparent in 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 where the student is supposed to be ‘responding to texts’. Since responses are not designed to be benign, but consider how ‘the interaction of ideas...provide insight’ (1.2.3), something achievable through student interaction and probing, there are many opportunities to reinforce this with critical literacy strategies, especially utilizing the philosophy of Friere regarding praxis, interrelationship and origins of ideas, and dialogue (Friere, 1970, 99). Certainly, this is not the only occasion where it seems critical literacy could be utilized to help prod readers on an aesthetic stance. So clearly there is, at least theoretically, a co-habitation of the two democratic theories. Although some of the other specific learning outcomes - 1.1.3 (experiment with language and forms) and 1.2.3 (combine ideas) - had limited connections with critical literacy, the rest of them were more unequivocal. In fact, those less relevant outcomes like 1.1.3 could

still be tied into other democratic theories as they contain a commitment to ‘experimenting’ with language to achieve an effect, part of a pragmatic milieu across the framework that represents a more venerated kind of ‘democratic’ pedagogy. In the other ‘weaker’ outcome, 1.2.3, there seems to be some attention to inductive reasoning, one that may be a foreshadowing of GLO 3 (another salient democratic activity vis-à-vis Dewey’s interpretation (Dewey, 1916)). In any case, it may be said that GLO 1 is ‘democratic’ across the board.

As indicated, in the majority of specific outcomes across the first GLO (1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.4, 1.2.2, 1.2.4, 1.2.1 to be exact), there were rich and discursive connections to critical pedagogy and critical literacy. For example, in 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 the student is to ‘consider the merits’ of other’s ideas (1.1.1) and ‘weigh’ the relative merit of a proposition or belief (1.1.2). Here there is considerable opportunity for the teacher and student to co-investigate social conditions and to tackle the ‘controversial issues’ (Beck, 2005), or to analyze the social construction of self. Much of this amplifies ‘critical tolerance’ of others as well, another hallmark of critical literacy. Not only are the activities across GLO 1 strongly agreeable to the ideas and principles of critical pedagogy spun brought by Friere, but they are congruent with all of the redefinitions as forwarded by McLaren (1999), Beck (2002) and Crick (2007).

As mentioned, there are in fact mutually beneficial and supportive bridges between critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism in GLO 1. In outcome 1.1.4, for example, students are to explore ‘personal experiences’ and their influence on the selection of texts. Interestingly, this inferred cooperation over the selection of texts implicates both teacher and student, not the only time we see this in the framework. In

any case, one may state that GLO 1 is strongly attenuated towards critical pedagogy and contains response theory to lend support. Although there is not much ‘social action’ to go with it, there is enough challenge and currency within the outcome that it serves as a promotion of critical literacy in Manitoba’s classrooms.

General learning outcome 2 also has a high degree of democratizing principles written in specifically and implied throughout. Generally speaking, it seems to be connected more strongly to Reader Response theory (it is titled ‘comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts’) but does contain some overt connections to critical pedagogy. Of the twelve specific learning outcomes in GLO 2, it was found that there was strong saliency with Reader Response theory in the general design and most of the specifics. The more efferent-based outcomes were largely the first section: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4. Even here however, the overall goal would be to ‘interpret texts’. So although the tasks were efferent, there is clear indication of other praxis vis-à-vis aestheticism. The next groups were less efferent and more aesthetic, giving the student an opportunity to ‘develop’ interpretations based on personal experience (2.2.1 and 2.2.2) or even conduct individual interpretation (contracting this part with Iser and Fish’s notion of Reader Response). Finally, outcomes 2.2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.3.3 steer the student toward creativity and originality, with the added emphasis of ‘generating’ texts.

Any way it is sliced, the activities in GLO 2 are very salient with Reader Response criticism in a way that does not seem to conspire against aspects of critical pedagogy. Most of the outcomes (2.1.1, for example, gives the student the opportunity to ‘analyze connections between...prior knowledge and texts’), demand that the student to

go beyond an efferent reading and in many ways this GLO promotes and reflects a social constructivist approach of Reader Response criticism (Fish, 1970). Outcomes 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 are probably the strongest section in furthering advanced branches of Reader Response as they reinforce the notion of an 'interpretive community' and present the reader's work and activity as highly dependent on student empiricism and communal values. When one adds that all of these activities are designed to give the student the opportunity to respond to a rich variety of 'international and Canadian' texts, GLO 2 forms a logical and clear amplification of post-modern democratic theories. In addition, the directives to the teacher here are that the student experiences 'texts from a variety of genres and cultural traditions' (2.2). This infers that a critical notion of multi-cultural education. This is not the only time this GLO contains a revisiting of perspectives - a democratized student should 'analyze various interpretations of texts' (like Achebe's response to Conrad) and by doing this, the student develops capacity to 'revise understanding' (2.2.1).

In the latter half of this GLO, student and teacher are steered away from aesthetic interpretation and towards creating original texts with an awareness of 'purpose', 'audience' and 'form'. While aesthetic interpretation might have been possible with the previous specific outcomes and is certainly still doable, the attention to creativity and originality in outcomes like 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 may mitigate the usefulness or validity of interpretive communities for the purpose of aesthetic interpretation in this section. This turn to individualism at the end means that although the connectivity with Reader Response criticism is very strong, it cannot be asserted that the top priority is for the student to produce aesthetic interpretations in this GLO. Rather, it seems that Reader

Response mechanisms are being used to help the students activate their own individual skill-base, ultimately leading to a fairly pragmatic and individualized approach. While there is not quite the controversial aspect normally associated with critical pedagogy, the numerous calls for 'current' literature and media literacy do seem to tie GLO 2 in with the currency aspects of critical literacy emphasis presented in GLO 1. Certainly, experimenting with language and being creative are themes that are quite in line with the thinking behind critical literacy. However, it also seems like the creativity and originality that allows for the procurement of pragmatic texts (2.3.4 and 2.3.5), not just poems and short stories, makes this outcome salient with Dewey's call for a pragmatic education.

It is possible those first two specific outcomes are foreshadowing of general outcome three, one that rearticulates 'democracy' in practical terms and in some ways represents the defining moment of the curricular document (in a sense this document is to be read geometrically, with GLO 3 forming the apex of a pentagon). There is some logic to its placement here, as this area largely focused on formulating a larger investigative project and thereby seems to utilize the response strategies learned in the first two outcomes to help focus and develop this inquiry. It directs teachers and students through a clear and purposeful path of induction and then deduction, making for a kind of scientific method within the humanities, as Dewey advocated (Dewey, 1916). Clearly, it is the most pointed of the general outcomes, seemingly able to exist on its own as a defined unit of study, which solidifies this feeling of pinnacle or apex. It starts in SLO 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 by both broadening and honing the perception of the student, where he/she is to gather information from immediate and pointed sources on practical and relevant topics occurring in their world or from texts. This 'gathering' is also accounted

for as a group process in 3.1.3, providing the student a chance to opt in or out of a solo inquiry. SLO 3.1.4 focuses the intent of the student(s), but keeps those questions 'personal' so as to endow the learner with their own choices of topics. This inducing from formal sources and peers takes place across the 3.2 outcomes, with 3.2.5 demanding the student infer greatly from a wide variety of sources using a wide variety of strategies. The attention to the process of inquiry probably encourages the pedagogue to tailor their activities for careful understanding along with pragmatic and student-centred objectives and does reveal an affiliation to response theory in earlier parts of the framework. There is also a glint of critical pedagogy in this section, especially in the tone of 'balance of perspectives' and attention to 'prior knowledge' and 'peer knowledge.' The overall summation and response to the inquiry which takes place across 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4 is both meta-cognitive and reflective, making it not only relevant to democratic learning but also very demanding. Terms like the evaluation of 'the effect of inquiry or research plans and procedures on conclusions' must be considered a very challenging mandate for even the most seasoned researchers.

Interestingly, GLO 3 contains an emphasis on thorough ethical action throughout the investigation and in this sense does contain some of the social action prescribed by critical pedagogues like McLaren (1999) and Beck (2005). This section is not only replete with careful wording and orientation towards other students in the room (identifying 'peer knowledge' for the purposes of inquiry), but pushes for cognizance of the difficulties of research. But clearly, there is a kind of pragmatism at the root of all actions in this GLO which can be gleaned through words like 'identify', 'evaluate', 'organize' and 'record'. Thus, all thirteen specific learning outcomes amidst general

learning outcome 3 are strongly reminiscent of Dewey's call for pragmatic inquiry and scientific method to be utilized in the humanities. Because topics can be current and vital to the students' self-knowledge as a product of class, race or gender, etc. it is assumed that there is connectivity to critical pedagogy through this inquiry focus. Also, it could be that the responses and interpretations conducted in GLO 1 or 2 tie into this activity, giving clear use for responses and interpretations made by students when encountering texts, enhancing this pragmatic appeal. This may serve to drum out tenants of the Reader Response theory that are not communal or based on a cultural interpretation of a text.

From that broader lens, when brought together with the critical literacy focus of GLO 1 and the Reader Response focus in GLO 2, it is obvious that there is not only a large quantity of democratically related material, but that the tenets of Reader Response criticism are placed in such a way so as to invigorate authentic inquiry. The placement of an inquiry-focus in GLO 3 after those first two response-charged GLOs may tip the balance of the macro-purpose of the curriculum towards a rather pragmatic democratic one. That is, the framework is utilizing the tenants of response theory and critical literacy to promote a pragmatic focus of inquiry. Another interpretation might be that teachers and students are conducting a variety of pragmatic and aesthetic activities, all supportive of democratic education. Any potential contradiction or difficulty is somewhat ameliorated by this understanding. That is, response theory is presented in the framework as part of a grander purpose, for an end. As such, the framework loses much of its post-modern ambiguity with that perspective.

At first glance, general learning outcome 4 does seem to sit in an odd position in the document. It pushes for a more conventional interpretation of literacy one that does



not necessarily co-exist with some of the tenants presented. It seems to put onerous grammatical, syntactic and diction demands on student writing. Its demand, ‘to *enhance* the clarity and artistry of communication’ could be seen as a way to improve the writing, speaking and presentation skills that are outlined and teased out in the conduction of the first three GLOs. But upon deeper reading and contextualization with other GLOs, honing original material to ‘audience’ and ‘purpose’ and to allow appropriate colloquial language does in fact have a democratic connectivity. Because of its procurement of student choice and recognition of pragmatic needs of writing, it fits particularly well with GLO 3. Thus, one supposes that as an ‘enhancement’ for the previous GLOs, its promotion of good spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation and even ‘attentive listening and viewing’ may be necessary capital for the democratized student. So, interwoven throughout an outcome supposedly attending to conventional literacy education are the values of listening, expressing and exchanging points of view (another representation of a kind ‘red herring effect’ in this curriculum). In this sense, GLO 4 appears in a fairly logical place – necessary lubricant for a democratic engine that is already running.

General outcome five represents the culmination of the document from a linear perspective, although from the pentagonal view of the framework may be more of a foundational activity. Either way, this outcome is perhaps the most democratic vis-à-vis ‘values’. It is also fairly cohesive with the rest of the document in that it demands that the teacher and student conduct activities that support the values presented in the first three outcomes. It suggests that a classroom must be fair, tolerant and fun. It outlines standards on how to ‘work in groups’ (5.1.2), activities that help contain the controversial

or soul-searching activities taking place in the first three GLOs. Here, merely recognizing and complying with the rules of freedom of speech or expression are enough to pass, where the student must simply acknowledge and listen to ‘diverse ideas and viewpoints’ (5.2.1) or use language to ‘show respect’ (5.1.3). GLO 5 also lends credence to a multi-cultural milieu and an ELA classroom that is utilizing works in translation or from other cultures, as seen in 5.2.2 (relate texts to culture) and 5.2.3 (appreciate diversity). Once again, instructions for both student and teacher are apparent. And there is a tie-in, once again, to response theory and critical literacy, as the student must examine ‘ways in which cultural, societal and historical factors influence texts’.

It may be noteworthy that previously favoured critical theories including Formalism and New Criticism were not utilized to any great degree in any part of the framework with the exception of the latter half of GLO 2. With virtually no literary terminology propelled, and with little attention to techniques and elements of figurative language within canonized literary works, one would be hard-pressed to suggest there’s much there. While the term ‘purpose’ could be connected to some branches of Formalism, here it largely utilized in relation to texts and the student’s own work, with often a pragmatic appeal. And with the constant meta-cognitive and reflective activity, along with the notion that the students could evaluate their own and each other’s work, it is hard to suggest that these ‘purposes’ are of the same value contained within Formalist critical theories. Without a doubt, new critical theory and structuralism have little impact on the wording within the framework.

As mentioned, contradictory aspects between critical literacy and Reader Response criticism do not seem to be apparent within the general learning outcomes. As

for the specific outcomes, it seems that they would become contradictory only if based on problematic teaching or an attempt to steer students into a particular side of the equation. This could depend upon things like whether or not a student devises an inquiry project that challenges some of the ideals of GLO 5, or if there is a re-interpretation of some of the actions in GLO 5 as being necessarily belonging to a particular political view. In other words, one would have to make an effort to bring out the contradictions. As such, the curricular framework reads as pliant in its pragmatism. It could be that the paradox does not apply because the version of Reader Response theory presented is largely designed for the purposes of inquiry and democratic idealism, not the other way around. In other words, the emphasis on aesthetic interpretation is just not intricate and important enough in this document so as to procure extreme versions of Reader Response criticism (there is no room for Reader Response theory vis-à-vis Holland in this document, for example). Thus, there is little chance that student response would step outside of any of the prescribed values of ethical social behaviour in GLO 5 either.

While it has been asserted that the brand of Reader Response criticism presented might not prompt too much cognitive activity, or that it seems to only be utilized as a prompt for inquiry, it is perhaps equally important to point out that the brand of critical pedagogy advocated within the framework is unlikely to derail the ‘cognitive activity’ that response theory provokes over the long haul. Depending on the interpretation, it probably does not prescribe the level of social action that may exasperate Response freedoms. Since the closest activity to ‘social action’ as advocated by many critical pedagogues (Beck, 2005) comes through in the fairly subdued scientific modality in GLO 3 and the well-intended celebration of community in GLO 5, it is conceivable that any

post-modernity of Reader Response theory that may be teased out of the curriculum and live alongside this social action quite comfortably. It may be noted, as well, that Friere did not envision critical pedagogy as a kind of syrupy philanthropy or bold student activism, but rather as a concrete praxis of critical thought based upon reality (Friere, 1970). Certainly, when one adds the point that Reader Response theory has many pragmatic caveats within this framework, that opportunity for aesthetic readings are always buffered by pragmatism, and that the framework is delivered over the long term, then this potential conflict is further mitigated.

In this thesis, Manitoba's ELA framework has been critically examined for its ability to be used to support democratic education. Critical pedagogy and Reader Response criticism, despite their potential for contradiction, have been the most significant philosophical through lines that have been detected and utilized. Clearly, I have asserted that the writers of the curriculum have been able to balance these theories and present our teachers and students with something that is potentially ideal and useful. In essence, the document itself does comply and exemplify some of the criticisms and recommendations of the likes of Friere, Dewey, Apple, McLaren, Osborne and others. While not perfect, with the pentagon-oriented lens on the framework (with enquiry as the 'top' of the pattern), the framework avoids overt contradiction and awkwardness. Although not overly ambitious or revolutionary in a Frierian sense of the term, it still must be considered a successful attempt at curricular reform given the suppositions of the scholars mentioned.

Because it could be seen as such, it immediately gains momentum not only as a teaching tool, but as a political document. As a publically funded challenge of the status quo, it represents a desire from within the system itself to contradict and perhaps even counteract many of the oppressive acts of school culture. This rebellion from within is laden with many pitfalls, too many to discuss at this point. But one thing this politicization does is raise the stakes high enough for it to be quashed in equally bureaucratic ways. Not to sound conspiratorial, but given the oppressive cultural attributes of schools outlined in some of the research (Wotherspoon, 2009; Osborne, 1991; Clifton, 1990; Barlow, 1994, Bowles & Gintis, 1976), one can see how it could be deemed unrealistic or even dangerous to the more traditional purposes of schooling.

Notwithstanding the most difficult antithesis to such a reform - that democratic schooling may not be achievable through any curricular instrument but only through major managerial and cultural changes (Wrigley, 2006) - there are other dubious obstacles which may be enough to stymie the feasibility of the document. Notably, in the literature review it was pointed out that teacher training and professionalism (argued most notably by Filson (2006) but displayed also by Wotherspoon (2009)) is largely a conservative regime, one that is quick to dismiss reforms that may jostle the status quo. Of course, with the professional obligation of teachers to utilize the framework, it may be less easy to justify this resistance in teacher training, but as Apple points out (1990), school structures are largely bound to this conservative ideology through a hidden curriculum that are designed reproduce class structures (see also Wotherspoon, 2009, 41) and that hidden curriculum is invariably more potent than the real one. In that sense, students and teachers are much better off relying on educationally expedient platforms

and stratagem in the interest of time, practicality or simplicity, ones that generally foster complacency and promotion of the status quo. In this and many other ways teacher training and professional development may still indirectly support the ‘social reproduction’ prevalent in many of the more dominant school cultures, a powerful alliance against nattering curricular ideals (Wotherspoon, 2009).

Another obstacle for the development of this particular ELA curriculum may be the over-flexibility of the document and the potential for misinterpretation. For example, it may be easy, as Friere (1970), Osborne (1991) and Barlow (1994) warn, to misinterpret a pragmatic appeal as capitalist doctrine. Although the revised ELA curriculum strongly promotes pragmatic values (most clearly in GLO 3), it is clear that because of its nature of being a ‘framework’ there could be considerable room for misinterpretation, that turning pragmatic tasks and outcomes into pro-capitalist ones would not be inconceivable. The move to reinterpret practical functions of schools and ‘furnishing the context of the student’ (Dewey, 1916) to coalesce with unabashed workforce or market forces of schools and society is a small misstep but one that could have a lasting negative effect (Osborne, 1991; Barlow, 1993). And truly, this could still occur with the revamped curricular ‘framework’ in hand. Cultural aspects of schools are already in place that could support this misstep including the trend towards large magnet schools, office-like environments, the blind use of technology and the internet, the continued move to sort and stream of students, and the repetition of tasks and assessment (Wotherspoon, 2009). It is possible that the idiosyncratic nature of this curricular document along with its size and complexity may not send enough of a clear message to help avoid these pitfalls.

Yet another shortcoming of the framework (despite my general approval of it on a democratic platform) is that it provides little insight on how to deal with cultural challenges to democratic education (other than some parts of GLO 5). For example, the move away from religious or patriarchal models of authority have been positive from a democratic standpoint, but have negative impacts as well such as the increasing reliance of teachers on bureaucracy and impersonal claims for authority (Clifton, 1990). These claims, although safe can have a stifling effect on student engagement and ultimately on any attempt to utilize critical pedagogy (Braa and Collero, 2005). As indicated in the literature review, this reliance is somewhat understandable given the complexities and dimensions of the job. Yet, the framework's largely academic approach in securing a vibrant critical classroom may be naïve - it completely leaves out recommendations for progressive classroom management strategies.

Although it seems exciting that the curriculum can now become the contrarian's tool rather than a tool for conformity, this new territory could be professionally daunting for many teachers. Giving educators agency to create critical classrooms is a new and unique phenomenon, one that has not been adequately measured, something that could mean all sorts of new difficulties and missteps. For the first time in Manitoba, curriculum becomes the 'capital' which goes against the values and ordinates of the school and may expose schools' oppressive tendencies. Certainly, if the curriculum becomes a rationale for rebellion or even questioning, how do administrative forces really feel about supporting it? While these implications of reform are exciting, one has to wonder if it they are sustainable or wise without active reinforcement from administration. Given all of this, one supposes that the greatest obstacle to a well-written

contrarian curriculum (more than a poorly devised one) is that it will be and must be quashed - that those conservative or capitalist forces will directly or indirectly push teachers to go back to what they were doing. And in many ways this is exactly what is happening; the curriculum may receive deference and acknowledgement, but be quickly relegated to a loosely utilized tool, one that is often seen as 'counter-intuitive', or one that is seen as an obstacle to expedient, efficient teaching practice that has been 'working fine' for a long time now.

#### *Recommendations – Further Studies*

Because the potential contradictions between aspects of democratic theory do not seem overly problematic, that there is a kind of feeling that it 'reads well', it is tempting to give the framework a passing grade vis-à-vis its democratic saliency and leave it at that. And in most ways I suppose that is what I have done (with aforementioned caveats). However, there may be loopholes to making such a claim, the largest of which is the inclusion of standards and assessment as a key part of this post-modern educational experience. This may be a most difficult contradiction for many democrats, including myself. Why does this framework impose external criteria that mitigate risk-taking and formalizes learning to the point of awkwardness? It is noteworthy that so many of the standards infer a shared sense of purpose between teacher and student, but they do not go far enough in that direction to make it a shared sense of duty.

Much of the literature suggests that progressive schools, ones that endeavour to apply critical pedagogy for example, cannot evaluate in a conventional or fiercely competitive way, else it becomes 'oppressive' in the same way as the normal



methodology (Friere, 1970; McLaren, 1999). Critical praxis, we are told, must be attuned to the context of the student - knowledge can never be disseminated too far from this proximal zone (Friere, 1970). In a sense, democratic schools or classrooms must by practical definition adhere consistently to the a priori and empirical formations within. As such, the dominant paradigms (evaluation, grades, etc) are very much deemphasized or even disregarded by democrats. The locus of control over those evaluations cannot be held by a recommending body or even in a rubric – they should be open for negotiation and re-development. No matter how fair and lucidly democratic the outcomes may be, no matter how individualized exceptions and differentiation be utilized, extending a blanket standard on an outcome may be simply defeating the purpose – you cannot ‘impose’ any real learning in this way. Although there is much attention to reflection and meta-cognition in the framework, the haggling over what constitutes an ‘above level’ versus an ‘at level’ performance becomes a distraction. Yes, evaluation should still be done with great care and expertise, but it should not be the focus of a teacher’s professional life. The energy expenditure on this sort of facilitation may in fact detract teachers from more important professionalisms like actually implementing those democratic values, critical literacy and such into the classroom.

I don’t entirely agree with Beck that the implementer of critical literacy must be mostly set apart from the institutional beliefs and mandates (Beck, 2005, 399). While she has a point - that schools must ensure that teacher freedom and ability to interrogate multiple points of view, or even to take ‘social action’ that may not go along with the positioning of the school on that issue and that classrooms need room to act as ‘uncoerced’ environs (Braa and Corello, 2006) - I also think that without the cooperation

of school officials and administration, it may be impossible to achieve the goals set forth in a rebel curricula. A study into any positive symbiotic teacher-administrative relationship in the implementation of democratic curriculum would likely be helpful.

Another fairly ominous contradiction that is not clearly dealt with in this framework, one that could still be professionalized alongside this instrument, is the paradoxical nature of the pragmatic-aesthetic continuum (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000), one that presently seems to be a bit of a misread of Rosenblatt's recognition of the variant purpose of reading from an efferent or aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1998). That is, Rosenblatt suggests that response theories can be utilized with any genre, but the curriculum does not seem to as clearly share this view. The writers seemed to have changed the terms 'pragmatic' and 'efferent' from Rosenblatt's supposition of a reader's position to 'pragmatic' and 'aesthetic' as a type of text. Thus, as it stands, it seems that response activities (GLO 1 and 2) are more attenuated for aesthetic texts and enquiry seems devoted to pragmatic ones. Although advocates like Rosenblatt seem to be cautious in this particular duplicity of response theory, language surrounding this should be reconciled and clarified.

In my view, there are some simple recommendations that could improve the usefulness of this framework for both teacher and student. One would be, in the spirit of many earlier school reformers like Dewey, teacher and professional life should be enhanced to meet the needs of not just the democratic nature of any curriculum, but to stabilize and improve teacher imagination in utilizing the resources that may abound, including the critical resources of other professionals with whom they work. Clearly, without a high level of professionalism and insightful sensibilities in the teacher

population, such a document will not be utilized to its potential. It may be that professionalism vis-à-vis curricular knowledge must be more closely tied to the cultural and administrative life of a school, or at least between professionals within departments and even between faculties. The curricular values in this framework do seem to extend out in that direction (GLO 3 and 5 in the ELA curriculum have connectors in this area), but a lack of specific connectivity are probably be inadequate to deal with this separation of curriculum and culture. Truly, this occurs from the top down. Writers and implementers of curriculum work mostly independently of school managers and administrators, it would seem. Administrators leave the curriculum to the teachers. Departments in secondary schools work in isolation. This needs to change.

The ramifications of beginning curricular reform in this province may be larger than one might initially suspect. On a broad level, this revised curricular framework could be seen as one of the first attempts to articulate, activate and delineate those values for the general populace entering a new century of demographic changes and paradigm shifts. The ability and willingness of the education system to conduct such activity with such a valuable commodity as ‘the next generation’ may reveal the depth of our conviction to those values not just in the school system but in our own society. The fact that such a curriculum has been revised and devised does bode well for our core values vis-à-vis ‘democracy’, but the lack of implementation and commitment may reveal our hypocrisy.

I suppose one must consider that most of the attempts at democratic curricular reforms in other countries have been usurped by the strange bedfellows which are vocational curriculum and capitalism or they have not occurred at all (Crick, 2007). The

mere fact that this document has been forged must be considered a kind of success for our province. The writers have managed to attenuate to the values of critical pedagogy by holding on to process-based ideals, meta-cognition and implication of both teacher and student in the framework, overtly suggesting that the document be ‘student-directed’ (Manitoba Curriculum, 2000) and constructing it more as a ‘framework’ than a formal idea of curriculum. The standards notwithstanding, it can at least be said that there is some level of commitment to procure democracy in ELA classes in Manitoba schools. One simply wonders if classrooms are really doing it, and if they are if it is enough to do any good. The problem of implementation could have several entries of investigation that could shed light on the reasons for and results of this. A study in this area would serve not only answer the question of the day-to-day value of this curriculum in Manitoba schools, but it may serve useful fodder for those in other regions thinking of implementing similar reforms.

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