

**Exploring Critical Thinking Development**  
through  
**Dialogic Discussion of Literature**  
in  
**English for Academic Purposes**

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## **Declaration**

I, Clifford Kast, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, explicit attribution has been made in the thesis.

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I would like to thank my students, who entered fully into the ethos of this project and imbued it with so much more of a 'critical spirit' than I had anticipated. Their commitment, enthusiasm, and often startling insights made our reading circle sessions richly rewarding.

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## Abstract

Critical thinking is a key objective of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Relevant elements of criticality in this pedagogical context include inference, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. These are also important elements of argumentation which, in an EAP context, are typically addressed through engagement with expository texts. For effective critical thinking development, instruction should be purposeful, persistent, explicit, contextual and personalized.

Against this backdrop I conducted a qualitative study in a foundation EAP university class, which explored ways in which critical thinking may be expressed in dialogic discourse about and around literary texts. Central to the study was a six-month classroom intervention, which took the form of a weekly reading circle. This discursive context allowed participants to engage in Quality Talk, a dialogic approach to text-based classroom discourse designed to enhance critical-analytic thinking and argumentation skills. A multiple case study design facilitated examination of the critical thinking development of three focal participants. To analyze the data I employed a triple-pronged interpretive strategy which drew on Quality Talk, relevance theory, and abductive inference.

The findings revealed several ways in which the focal participants expressed critical thinking. Chief among these was a progressive development in argumentative reasoning, evident in the steady qualitative improvement of participants' elaborated explanations over the duration of the course. This increasing sophistication in reasoning appeared to be fostered by the lively dialogic atmosphere, in which divergent viewpoints were both encouraged and challenged. Not only did participants' arguments become more substantive as a result, but notably more cogent. Another key finding was an improvement in participants' critical thinking dispositions, reflected in an increased propensity towards inquiry and reflection. These outcomes demonstrate both the value and efficacy of a literature-based discussion forum in EAP pedagogy, which bolsters the case for making such an instructional approach an intrinsic part of an EAP syllabus.

## Impact Statement

This study is grounded in the discipline of education, as its principal concern is pedagogical. Interdisciplinarity features prominently throughout, however, with theories and concepts engaged from fields as diverse as collaborative learning, literature reading, formal logic, political philosophy and legal argumentation. Imbued as the project is with this spirit of consilience, it is psychology which informs and elucidates most of the analytical insights into critical thinking development.

EAP as conceptualized in this study is oriented far more towards the ‘academic’ than the ‘English’ component of the term, with the most conspicuous point of departure from standard EAP praxis being its use of literature as the textual basis for critical-analytic dialogic discourse. In this way it challenges EAP’s utilitarian insistence on the near-exclusive status of expository materials in the classroom. And in the particular pursuit of critical thinking development, the thesis advances a sustained argument for literary texts to be considered a viable supplement—even equivalent—to expository texts.

The study also presents Exploratory Practice as an effective and versatile approach to practitioner research in EAP. Given workload and other demands on teachers, a classroom reading circle is a conducive format for Exploratory Practice as it readily facilitates the integration of instruction and research. It also fosters a congenial environment of collaborative inquiry<sup>1</sup> and constructive argument while prioritizing learner autonomy and classroom quality of life. Complementing this environment is Quality Talk, a comprehensive, research-based approach to collaborative discussion. It is both structured and flexible, which enables it to be used in a wide range of EAP contexts.

Where this study has the most impact, however, is in fostering students’ critical thinking dispositions. The findings suggest that the aforementioned factors, while complementary, work optimally with students who actively choose to participate in these sessions, that is they are already disposed to critical inquiry, and regular reading

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<sup>1</sup> To disambiguate the term, the AmE form of ‘inquiry’ as it refers both to questioning and investigation (as opposed to the narrower BrE form of ‘enquiry’) is used throughout this study.

and discussion. EAP programmes which put on such a course would derive the most benefit from offering it as an elective reading class parallel to a standard in-session EAP syllabus, and having it run for at least one semester. Overall, this study's findings demonstrate both the 'academic skills' value and efficacy of a literature-based discussion forum. It encourages an EAP praxis which extends beyond pragmatic constraints to embracing a broader, more creative and rewarding pedagogical palette.

What delight! — How glorious! — in self-knowledge and self-rule  
To ... Build social freedom on its only basis: The freedom of the individual mind (William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805)

... in an imperfect state of the human mind, the interests of truth require a diversity of opinions (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859)

... in order to learn you must desire to learn, and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think (Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898*, 1898)

... the individual response emerges from the forms of collective life (Lev Vygotsky, *The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions*, 1981)

A good place to look for wisdom, therefore, is where you least expect to find it: in the minds of your opponents (Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, 2006)

Once the familiar turns strange, once we begin to reflect on our circumstance, it's never quite the same again. This is the tension that animates critical reflection and political improvement and maybe even the moral life as well (Michael Sandel, *Justice*, 2009).

... subjective confidence is a poor index of the accuracy of a judgment (Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 2011)

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>BALEAP</b>	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
<b>CEFR</b>	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>EAP</b>	English for Academic Purposes
<b>EFL</b>	English as a Foreign Language
<b>EGAP</b>	English for General Academic Purposes
<b>ELT</b>	English Language Teaching
<b>EP</b>	Exploratory Practice
<b>ESAP</b>	English for Specific Academic Purposes
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>ESP</b>	English for Specific Purposes
<b>FL</b>	Foreign Language
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HTCA</b>	Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment
<b>QT</b>	Quality Talk

## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1 A Storied Journey of Learning and Teaching**

The beginning of the trajectory towards my doctoral studies can meaningfully be traced to my initial experience of teaching, which took place at the University of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) in Durban, South Africa, during my Master's studies in English literature. Among the conditions of my postgraduate scholarship was a requirement to conduct weekly seminars with English literature students in their Honours year. In South Africa, this is a postgraduate pre-master's degree where, having completed a three-year Bachelor's degree majoring in at least two subjects, students can then choose to specialize in one subject. My own majors had been English (language and literature) and psychology, with philosophy and law among the additional subjects I had studied during my undergraduate years. The significance of this combination of disciplines for my doctoral studies is explained briefly in the following section, and will become clearer as this thesis unfolds. It is sufficient for now to express accord with Wilson's (1998) conceptualization of *consilience*—the coalescence of normatively discrete branches of knowledge—in how I have come to understand my thesis, and indeed in how I will explicate it.

The aforementioned seminars were supplementary to the core lectures, and served as smaller forums for Honours students to explore ideas and issues of interest generated by their lectures and reading. I had not undergone any teacher training by that point so was at first quite apprehensive about conducting the seminars. However, the congenial atmosphere of these classes fuelled by the participants' enthusiasm for literature made for stimulating and memorable discussions, a situation which quickly dispelled any nervousness I had felt. The seminars not only confirmed my aspirations to be a university teacher, but they also implanted a nascent conviction in me about what constituted education in its best form. Even with relatively little knowledge of pedagogical theory then, I recognized intuitively that certain elements in those sessions pointed to the way I wanted to teach. These elements included fostering a collegial classroom atmosphere, personalizing the ideas at issue, and exploring these ideas through in-depth collaborative discussion before and after other aspects of language were addressed.

Discussion at this fine-grained level entailed the (re)negotiation of ideas and often led to novel, even surprising understandings of these ideas. An agreeable feature of these discussions was that any target language was naturally contextualized—how narrowly or broadly could be modified, again depending on the need. Also at that time I realized the importance of asking questions in pursuing ideas as far as needed, a practice I encouraged, and which permeated every session.

I later discovered that this utilization of discourse is considered dialogic, and involves teacher and students. According to Alexander (2008), dialogic relations in the classroom can be characterized more specifically, namely as interactions between participants and resources which are collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and deliberate. In a literal sense then, dialogic pedagogy is opposed to monologic teaching, which sees the teacher as the sole repository and dispenser of truth in the classroom (Bakhtin, 1984). Monologic teaching is most commonly associated with the recitation approach, which focuses on establishing topics through a one-way transmission of information. Lotman (1988, 1990) terms such one-way discursual utterances *univocal*. According to Nystrand et al. (2003), dialogic and univocal modes of discourse necessarily vary classroom dynamics and, employed together judiciously, can make for a productive discursive environment. This approach itself draws broadly from Vygotsky's (1981, p. 165) sociocultural theory, in particular the notion that cognitive development entails 'the conversion of social relations into mental functions'. Essentially, learning proceeds from the social to the individual, an idea which for me would come to fruition in my doctoral studies many years later.

Yet students socializing in a classroom does not translate necessarily to *productive* talk, which in a learning environment can generally be taken to mean guided discussion which fulfils a predefined pedagogical aim. Granted, unproductive 'aimless' talk can and does happen in class; there may be space for unmonitored talk of this kind, but it would not feature as part of a typical lesson aim. The reality is that classroom talk, whether productive or aimless, rarely elicits nuanced considerations, even in pedagogical praxis. On the contrary, it seems readily to invite prejudiced perceptions which feed into uninformed notions of whether it should be prioritized in education. Alexander (2020)

ruefully notes UK Education Minister Gove's reticence in 2012 to foreground the profile of classroom talk as exemplifying an attitude held by many education authorities globally, even today. This is an obstinate mindset, reflected in what Gove dismissed at the time as 'idle chatter in class' (cited in Alexander, 2020, p. 2).

Classroom talk with a predefined pedagogical aim could be designed to address a specific need in a particular class or mapped to broader descriptors, such as those of the revised *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2018). What excited me intuitively about the kind of talk I sought to foster in my teaching was something beyond the typical discussion format of 'arranging the chairs in a circle and discussing social issues' (Pennycook, 1999, p. 338) in the vague hope that learning of some kind would magically take place. My preferred discussion format even then was text-based directed deliberation which aimed ultimately, through considered questions and elaborated explanations, to promote deeper, more reflective thinking. These principles, among others, I would also learn later are encapsulated in an approach to classroom discussion developed by Wilkinson et al. (2010) called *Quality Talk*. My very first favourable intuition about the value of classroom discussion has thus proved prescient, in that it has since found its most accomplished expression in the pedagogical approach described in this project: the dialogic discourse of literary texts within a reading circle.

Following a year-long assignment as a postgraduate tutor, my first professional appointment was as an English literature teacher to several groups of undergraduates at a neighbouring university. Despite being larger, averaging 20 students, these classes were also post-lecture seminars. When my contract terminated after one year, I took up a position as a lecturer in English literature at another university in the same region. Thrust immediately into the vibrant workings of a thriving English department, I found this role fulfilling as a young teacher, called as I was to participate in all aspects of academic life. My classes ranged from 200-strong lectures to intimate seminars of 6-8 participants. While I did find the lecture an appealing forum in its way, I was drawn far more to the proximal dynamics of small group discussions, where ideas related to—



though sometimes digressive from—the core lectures could be broached and then probed as far as the participants’ interest took them.

Soon afterwards, however, significant political events in South Africa impelled a change of direction in my teaching trajectory, leading me to turn decisively from literature to language teaching. The main reason behind this resolution was not a sudden disenchantment with literature. Instead, it was the sense that providing students access to language as a functional tool—rather than to literature as a relative luxury—would be of more pragmatic use in a global-facing, aspirant South Africa only recently made wholly accessible to all its own citizens. I felt I could contribute more effectively to the newly reconfigured educational landscape if I taught English language to students for whom it was not their mother tongue. Life took another unexpected turn, however, and within the year I had relocated to Britain. Fortuitously, my decision to focus on language education led me straight to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), first as a private tutor but then as a teacher in independent language schools and Further Education (FE) colleges in west London. Throughout all this personal and vocational movement, my teaching continued to revolve around making classes as personalized, contextualized and discursive as possible.

After spending the next fifteen years in FE, I returned to university teaching as a pre-sessional tutor of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In this high-stakes environment of mostly short courses, language learning is largely utilitarian: students take EAP to improve their academic English and skills to a level sufficient to gain admission to their preferred core courses (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). In a typical twelve-week summer course, for example, the scope for learning much beyond what the instrumental objectives prescribe is severely limited. Even so, I strove consciously in my EAP sessions to reserve a space for collaborative discourse, primarily to interrogate relevant issues which may have emerged naturally from a given activity or text and flowed beyond its designated constraints. I began on reflection to notice that this kind of (exploratory) talk seemed to function not so much as a supplementary activity, but effectively as a vehicle for thinking in itself (Wegerif, 2006). Among the noticeable features of such talk was the perceptible effort participants made to understand what was in their fellows’ minds on a given topic

of discussion, a cognitive phenomenon I later discovered is known as *theory of mind* (Wellman, 2014). Indeed, the more the students attempted to understand each other's motivations in this way, the more productive and congenial their discursive interactions seemed to become (Kuhn, 2022). What often resulted from this dynamic process of perspective sharing was what Mercer (1995; Littleton & Mercer, 2013) calls *interthinking*, a social mode of thinking which began increasingly to interest me. Enthusiastic as I was about these pedagogical 'discoveries' I was making, my discussion-centred approach inevitably encountered occasional ambivalence from students convinced that only a continuous round of practice tests would improve their chances at achieving the requisite entry score for their intended core course. My usual response to these instances of reservation was to frame them as opportunities for critical discussion, inviting scrutiny of these very issues by the whole class but particularly by those students most resistant to discussion.

Though rare, these occasions of scepticism prompted the stirrings of my interest in the psychological dimensions behind education and the need to identify and evaluate my own assumptions in this respect. I clearly recall reflecting on a possible correlation between cognitive capacity and decision making, for example—or in how I articulated it at the time: do intelligent people make better decisions or does bias override intelligence to any degree? Thanks to my doctoral reading, I have come across fascinating research into that very question (e.g. Ballantyne & Dunning, 2022; Stanovich et al, 2013; Toplak & Stanovich, 2003). In sum, this research suggests that myside bias in particular—which Stanovich (2021, p. ix) characterizes as occurring when 'we evaluate evidence, generate evidence, and test hypotheses in a manner biased towards our own prior beliefs, opinions, and attitudes'—is not attenuated by intelligence or indeed by thinking disposition. With neither of these two predictors accounting for additional myside bias variance, what *has* been consistently found to predict myside bias is a person's strength of opinion on a given issue. (Strength of opinion was also found by Kuhn & Iordanou (2022) to impose constraints on balanced thinking in at least two ways: by leading people to infer single-cause explanations for complex events, and by promoting motivated reasoning.) A further interesting feature of myside bias is its domain specificity, where people 'who display high myside bias on one issue do not

necessarily display it on another, unrelated issue' (Stanovich, 2021, p. 66). Such findings have important implications for critical thinking pedagogy, not least that collaborative discourse moderates any excessive biases which may emerge from solitary reasoning (Mercier, 2017; Mercier & Sperber, 2017). These and other questions and answers have factored significantly in how I approach teaching today.

Although I had grown increasingly confident about the pedagogical effectiveness of critical-analytic discussion around core topics in the classroom, this conviction was based on personal observation, and I still wondered whether there was any basis in research for such an approach. This curiosity prompted a cursory review of the English language education literature, which revealed that a wealth of research had already been done. Undeterred, I began to unearth fascinating new pedagogical ideas, though was reassured to find that there were strong theoretical foundations for many elements of teaching with which I was already familiar. Ideas and approaches which seemed to represent my voice as a teacher included Freire's (1970) problem-posing critical pedagogy, Widdowson's (1983) wide-angle, process-oriented educational approach, and Thornbury's (2000) conversation-oriented Dogme. A further discovery was that these pedagogies seemed to display several similar features which, taken together, broadly constitute a dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2008, 2020; Bakhtin, 1981). It was with this impetus that I applied to study for a PhD.

## **1.2 Consilience**

Interdisciplinarity has played a significant role in this project. This does not mean that my research formally incorporated two or more distinct disciplines. It refers rather to a more flexible though informed endeavour: a judicious utilization of theories and concepts from several related disciplines to fortify my thesis overall and my data analysis in particular. While interdisciplinarity formally construed is not a novel approach to research, the idea of building epistemological bridges between the scholarly disciplines is relatively recent. Over the last two decades, collaborative inquiry across the disciplines has increased, along with a proportionately expanding literature (see Klein & Newell, 1997, and Bronstein, 2003 for useful early overviews of interdisciplinarity as a burgeoning educational phenomenon).

Consilience as conceptualized by Wilson (1998) seems a relatively holistic construal of interdisciplinarity, advocating not merely a collaboration but a unifying of disciplines. Although Wilson's focus is largely on the sciences, I assume a broader interpretation of the term. My impression of consilience is that various related disciplines such as language education, psychology, philosophy and law do not exist simply and contiguously in separate boxes. Rather, they converge and overlap in problematic yet ultimately integral and complementary ways. (The 'problematics' reside, I suggest, in *our* cognitive limitations in apprehending the world.) This immanent integrity is after all what characterizes the real world, much of which it must be conceded lies beyond our capacity to understand and express in terms authentically representative of its holistic nature. To make sense of our environment and our place in it, we find it easier on balance to perceive, abstract, and compartmentalize reality into different branches of knowledge which we then characterize as intellectual domains or disciplines. In my view, these distinctly demarcated subject areas are neither sufficiently representative nor explanatory of the world as it actually exists; rather, they are 'modules' of knowledge, intellectual artefacts designed to aid our understanding of reality. This summary theorization of how we humans mediate our understanding of the world is not to disparage the modular approach to acquiring a universal knowledge. On the contrary, the fact that this approach to making sense of our environment is so established suggests it has been beneficial to our collective understanding.

Wilson (1998), however, sees this approach as divergent, to the extent that it has led to the fragmentation of knowledge into artificial domains of scholarship. To achieve a more convergent and authentic apprehension of reality, he advances the notion of consilience, the unifying of discrete disciplines. In practice, this would entail 'the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines' (Wilson, 1998, p. 7) with a view to constructing a shared foundation of explanation. This, he contends, is the most effective way of attaining a more certain grasp of the human condition. Throughout his account, and aware that the very idea is audacious, Wilson is careful not to trivialize the numerous difficulties of implementing consilience. Nonetheless, he puts forward a persuasive argument for this idea as being the closest to an accurate understanding of reality as could be managed—if indeed it is possible at all. There are, predictably, several

arguments countervailing consilience (e.g. Ceccarelli, 2010). One of the more interesting charges is laid by Carroll (1999), who argues that Wilson's account, in its relative marginalization of the arts and humanities, renders a reductionist representation of human nature. In foregrounding the complexity of these issues, Hooker (2017) contends that the problem of unifying knowledge is ultimately a pragmatic one and, on this basis alone, insuperable. For me, however, consilience has a more ideational, even abstract, appeal; it reflects the way I understand knowledge acquisition and in fact how I view good education: as cohesive, integral and contextual. Consilience in this sense may not be practicable, but we should not shrink from it in principle. As I have come to appreciate in my doctoral journey and as I hope to show in this study, even just the *spirit* of such an endeavour is worth endorsing.

### **1.3 Context and Rationale**

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which critical thinking is developed through the dialogic discussion of literature in the context of an EAP classroom. I adopt a broad pedagogical perspective centred on dialogic interaction, an approach which assumes comprehensive engagement with all learning resources, including fellow students and texts, the virtual learning environment, and external materials. The dialogic process informs my instructional approach to both EAP and critical thinking, and it is to EAP pedagogy that I turn first.

While the notion of dialogism appeals to many EAP practitioners, several researchers (e.g. Bloome et al., 2020; Hirvela, 2016a; 2016b; Macbeth, 2010) rightly advise practitioners to be discerning in their attempts to implement dialogic approaches to instruction. The concern is that dialogic teaching and learning is not automatic, so does not happen as easily or as much as may be assumed. With respect to classroom talk, for instance, Burbules (1993, p. 144) cautions against what he characterizes as a simplistic conceptualization of student discourse, which can result in 'the failure of dialogue'. This failure can be seen in classes which engage in either of two extremes: overly orchestrated, target-driven activities or in unguided, 'meandering chat that leads nowhere important or interesting' (Burbules, 1993, p. 143). Alexander (2008) is similarly disparaging in his evaluation of expansive claims made by advocates of dialogic

education, referring to some attempts at dialogic teaching as ‘pseudo-inquiry’. This may be exemplified by a series of general, undemanding questions ‘coupled with habitual and eventually phatic praise rather than meaningful feedback’ (Alexander, 2008, p. 3). Even with the best intentions, therefore, dialogic pedagogy is in fact ‘rare, sporadic, and difficult to achieve in today’s schools’ (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 446).

A secondary concern about aims to engage in dialogic teaching is that it should not be uncritically endorsed as appropriate in every situation (Alexander, 2008). As discussed earlier, there is a place for versions of recitation or ‘univocal’ modes of discourse in the classroom (Nystrand et al., 2003). Kilinc et al. (2017), for example, make a persuasive case for this kind of monologic pedagogy in science teaching. This study found that, while teachers of socioscientific issues (SSI) recognize the importance of dialogic activities in their teaching, the science classroom is a particularly traditional and complex educational ecosystem. Many SSI teachers are therefore resistant to change and prefer monologic discourse in their classrooms. Foremost among the reasons for this resistance are traditional belief systems, limited educational opportunities, naïve epistemologies, and personalities which prefer to avoid argumentation.

My pedagogical approach to critical thinking is also predicated on dialogism. The assumption is that, through multi-faceted dialogic engagement, my students may develop a disposition towards good thinking which is relatively transferable from one similar academic context to another (Tardy & Jwa, 2016). While I believe critical thinking is generalizable across contexts, I also think it must involve explicit instruction, and deliberate, consistent practice—and, in line with Perkins and Salomon (2012), even the contexts must be similar. On balance, I agree with those theorists who posit critical thinking dispositions as habits of mind which are able to be fostered and are thus transferable (e.g. Facione, 2000; Halpern, 2014). I am less persuaded by the idea of teaching students a decontextualized set of thinking ‘skills’, a notion also contested in critical thinking circles (Bailin et al., 1999). I will elaborate and evaluate the theoretical and methodological frameworks for both EAP and critical thinking in later sections of this thesis.

Another key aspect of this study is literature. The intersection of literature and critical thinking has garnered a growing following in the research community (e.g. Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Garzón & Castañeda-Peña, 2015; Ko, 2013; Schmit, 2002). Simply including literature in a lesson, however, does not translate to an automatic ‘turning on’ of critical thinking in students. On the contrary, critical thinking is a developmental process (Kuhn, 1999). It is also difficult, and requires ‘the conscious exertion of mental effort. In other words, it is cognitive work’ (Halpern, 1998), a view shared by most researchers in the field (e.g. Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996; Mulnix, 2012; Van Gelder, 2005). Why then should we want learners—particularly learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who, as Hall (2015) cautions, may well encounter initial difficulties with just the basic linguistic and cultural processing of literary texts—to acquire critical thinking skills and attitudes? Taking a broadly philosophical view, critical thinking obliges us to seek a reasonable basis for our values and beliefs which in turn fundamentally enhances the meaning of our lives. After all, Socrates has it that ‘life without this sort of examination is not worth living’ (cited in Gibbard, 1992, p. 4). For this study, a more relevant reason is the current pre-eminence of critical thinking in higher education, and its putative worth in the workplace afterwards. It is an integral part of a university teacher’s brief to understand the role of critical thinking in the interrogation and evaluation of texts, and to dispense this understanding by employing ‘tasks, processes and interactions that require students to demonstrate critical thinking skills’ (BALEAP, 2008, p. 3). This educational process promotes general personal autonomy which then empowers individuals to make both learning and real-life decisions more confidently (Butler, 2012; Butler et al., 2012).

Although the influence of literature on the development of critical thinking has been examined previously (e.g. Schmit, 2002), it has been done primarily in general English language education. There has been relatively little research in this area in a university setting with EFL learners. The current study took place in an EAP university class. It was conducted as a classroom intervention in the second semester of a year-long foundation (pre-first year) course, and utilized the instructional frame of a literary reading circle, consisting of a small group of participants. The sessions were collaborative and had a dual aim: to read and discuss literary texts for pleasure and, in doing so, to cultivate

participants' critical thinking habits of mind. To foster these aims, the atmosphere of the reading circle was made conducive to members feeling sufficiently comfortable to augment discussion with contributions informed by their personal experiences and perspectives. Paran (2008, p. 13) consistently argues that 'literary texts are suitable [for language learning] because language is learned by human beings, and the interest and love of literature for its various qualities is a human characteristic'. This is a stance which invokes an affective element of collaborative learning I was concerned to investigate. In exploring the intersection of critical thinking and literature within the collaborative learning context of a reading circle, therefore, this study sought to make a compelling case for literature to be recognized as an authentic resource in the EAP classroom by demonstrating its efficacy as a viable pedagogical tool in the development of critical thinking.

#### **1.4 My Pedagogical Approach**

As implied above, this study's pedagogical approach is unconventional for an EAP course in two main ways: in its primary aim (critical thinking development in EAP) and in its choice of learning materials (literary texts in EAP). With regard to critical thinking development, EAP programmes seek generally to improve students' academic expression, and particularly their writing. Some courses focus on argumentation skills, perhaps with an intuitive expectation that critical thinking will somehow follow. As to materials, these very rarely veer away from expository 'model' texts which reflect the target genre. The following is a brief discussion of both these conventional aspects of EAP pedagogy relative to my more unconventional approach.

Critical thinking is touted globally as a key competency in EAP teaching and learning (BALEAP, 2008). However, the pedagogical path towards achieving this objective is not always clear in the EAP classroom, as critical thinking instruction per se does not typically command specific prominence. This lack of clarity can be seen in the wildly different degrees of importance certain educational cultures and indeed individual EAP practitioners place on critical thinking instruction. American universities, for example, commonly offer critical thinking modules designed to complement composition or academic writing courses. Even with this provision, however, an influential study by



Arum and Roksa (2011) found that students emerge from undergraduate studies in the US with only minimal improvement in critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing.

On the other hand, UK universities suffer from a comparative dearth of dedicated critical thinking programmes, with even fewer designed specifically to complement EAP. One of the few HEIs in the UK which does offer an EAP-oriented critical thinking course is University College London (2022). Its full-time International Pre-Masters (IPM) programme consists of three modules: EAP, plus two modules on Research, Argumentation and Criticality, the first following a generalist approach and the second focusing on students' specific disciplines. Otherwise, critical thinking courses related to EAP in the UK are often temporary constructions, and usually developed as the practical component of an individual doctoral research project (e.g. Aston, 2021; Salvi, 2017). Although the situation is changing, one of the main reasons for the traditional paucity in the provision of such courses is that critical thinking is still largely assumed by both teachers and students to be incidentally 'picked up' in the process of learning other academic skills, such as reading and writing. According to Arum and Roksa (2011), this widely-held assumption, that critical thinking can develop 'osmotically', is wrong. There has not to my knowledge been a similar study done in the UK, but taking the current situation and Arum and Roksa's (2011) findings into account, it is reasonable to expect UK graduates to leave university with comparatively lower levels of critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills.

Given the ramifications of the information revolution in the twenty-first century workplace (Robertson, 1990), this is cause for concern, as critical thinking has assumed centrality on many employers' lists of essential skills. Aside from its obvious utility in expediting basic tasks such as distinguishing irrelevant information from pertinent knowledge (Rauch 2021), critical thinking is widely seen as a desirable strategy in facilitating solutions to actual occupational problems, an example being good business decision-making. Accordingly, much influential research into how the construct can be productively applied in the workplace has been done in such areas as behavioural economics (Kahneman 2011), occupational and political psychology (Sniderman et al., 1991), and expert prediction and judgement (Tetlock, 2017). Also identifying critical

thinking as a key contemporary occupational skill, Trilling and Fadel (2009) explore the construct's applicability through a multifocal lens comprising three primary categories: learning and innovations skills, digital literacy skills, and life and career skills.

The importance of critical thinking has not been lost on HE educators either. The term can be seen enshrined in post-secondary discourse and documents, ranging from assignment rubrics and programme syllabuses to university mission statements (Moore, 2015). Because the disparity between instruction and application is typically underestimated (see e.g. Abrami et al., 2008; 2015), however, what is needed at a fundamental level is to approach critical thinking as a matter of *practice* rather than principle. In general, this means increasing dedicated critical thinking provision for both teachers and students—if not stand-alone courses, then supplementary ones. For optimal effectiveness, at least two principles should be realized. The first, argues Kuhn (2018), is that the construct should be conceptualized concretely in terms of common, cross-contextual kinds of thinking which occur both inside the classroom as well as in the socially-situated exigencies of real life. Importantly, inquiry and argument emerge as key dimensions in such an integrated account of critical thinking. The second principle involves implementation: what has been shown to improve critical thinking significantly is *instruction*, whether it be explicit and recursive (Marin & Halpern, 2011) or inquiry-based (Ernst & Monroe, 2004; Battersby & Bailin, 2018). With neither of these divergent modes of instruction displaying much advantage over the other, Kuhn (2007) contends that the effectiveness of any instructional approach depends on its theoretical assumptions, implementation, analysis, and goals. Following Kuhn's argument, Ku et al. (2014) conducted an interventionist study integrating direct and inquiry-based instruction, which led to impressive gains in students' critical thinking skills and dispositions.

My own project was motivated by the initial assumption and then discovery of the above studies that teaching was fundamental to improving my students' critical thinking. As will be seen in Chapter 4, I chose to conduct a classroom intervention employing an inquiry-based mode of instruction which, within the analytical terms of my study, also

appears to have yielded findings reflecting critical thinking gains. This is an outcome which Chapters 5, 6 and 7 seek to elucidate.

The second unconventional approach taken by this study relates to its primary learning materials, literary texts, which are hardly ever used in EAP, if at all. EAP programmes use expository texts almost exclusively in order to focus on the most common and thus most useful academic writing features or elements. Learning to identify and reproduce these features in writing and speaking is the basis of the most popular approach to teaching EAP, genre analysis, introduced by Swales (1990). An even narrower approach is adopted by ESP courses, using materials which display writing elements specific to a given discipline. It is clear therefore that literature is not the genre of choice in EAP.

Overall then, the unconventionality of this teaching approach lies in the use of literature to develop criticality in the context of an EAP classroom. While counterintuitive by some reckoning, the intersection of literary texts and EAP can be likened to an athlete's use of cross-training to improve their overall performance. To optimize performance in the 100-metre dash, a sprinter also needs to do longer runs, swimming, and gym work. These activities are not merely additional but *complementary* to the core progressive sprint exercises. This is the rationale behind my approach. It seeks to enhance students' critical engagement by focusing on analysis and evaluation of texts through dialogic discussion. The fact that the texts are literary is not an impediment to these ends. On the contrary, my thesis explores the extent to which literary texts encourage students to become more *disposed* to interrogating texts. This interrogation entails, for example, identifying assumptions and authorial intention, and extrapolating issues from texts and generalizing them to situations in real life. My contention is that such practices are potentially transferable from contexts using literary texts to those using expository texts because the underlying intention is the same: to subject a text to critical scrutiny through the dynamic process of inquiry and argumentation typical of a discussion group. This activity draws on the same cognitive processes, whether it is a literary or an expository text being read.

## 1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters which cover different sections of the study. To elucidate the thesis as it unfolds, it is necessary at this point to summarize the study itself.

My research aim was exploratory and sought to explore the potential of classroom discourse about and around literature to enhance students' critical thinking. Here is the research question which governed this study:

***In what ways, if any, does dialogic discussion in a literature reading circle contribute to the development of critical thinking?***

To address this question, I conducted a qualitative study of my own foundation EAP university class, adopting the practitioner research approach of Exploratory Practice. This meant occupying three roles simultaneously: teacher, participant and researcher. Central to the study was a six-month classroom intervention, which took the form of a weekly reading circle. This dialogic environment allowed participants to engage in text-based classroom discussion designed to enhance high-level comprehension, critical-analytic thinking and argumentation skills. Using literary texts in this way gave participants the opportunity to engage personally and intellectually in discussing a range of human issues within appropriate and recognizable contexts. The reading circle in turn provided the basis for a multiple case study research design, which facilitated examination of the critical thinking development of three focal participants. The reading circle was also the site of the data collection process, which involved several sources, including audiovisual recordings and transcripts (see Appendix F), and field notes (see Appendix E). To analyze the data I employed a comprehensive strategy of inference and interpretation, drawing on three major theories of communicative analysis. This triangulation of approaches enabled in-depth interpretations of the focal participants' discursive transactions as they progressed through the course.

This first chapter has so far broadly contextualized the research project. What follows is a brief outline of the rest of the thesis. Due to the wide-ranging interdisciplinary nature of the study, the literature review is divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the

research literature on critical thinking, and discusses the construct both in light of its central debates and as they relate to my thesis. This discussion leads to the definition of critical thinking and theoretical framework governing the study. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on the principal elements complementary to this study: EAP, literature in English language education, and collaborative learning. It examines the evidence for the utility of literature in EAP and, on this basis, assesses the potential of literary texts to develop critical thinking in an EAP context. This chapter also evaluates the research on collaborative learning pedagogies with a focus on reading circles, and concludes with a reiteration of the research question. Chapter 4 presents the empirical framework underpinning the conceptual examination of critical thinking, EAP pedagogy and dialogic discussion carried out in previous chapters. The chapter concludes with a consideration of ethical issues pertaining to the study. Chapters 5 to 7 interpret and analyze the data recorded in the reading circle sessions, with each chapter studying a single case. All three of these analytical chapters conclude with a discussion which summarizes and evaluates the focal participants' contributions to the reading circle. Chapter 8 briefly reviews the primary findings and discusses the main implications and limitations of the study. The thesis concludes with recommendations for further study in this area.

## CHAPTER 2 - Critical Thinking: a Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Critical thinking in the western intellectual tradition can be traced back to Socrates, who found in dialogue with his peers that many of their self-assured claims to knowledge were based on inadequate evidence and thus did not often withstand rational scrutiny (Paul et al., 1997). Socrates discerned this psychosocial phenomenon through a self-developed system of low-key but incisive questioning which, importantly, was always responsive to and even invited challenge. In this way he demonstrated the effectiveness of systematic reasoning in the pursuit of truth, that is of recognizing propositions in their essential form, and inexorably tracking their assumptions and implications to logical conclusions. One drawback for unwary dialogists was that Socrates' probing mode of questioning exposed the potential of rhetoric to mask semantic vagueness and ambiguity, which in turn concealed logical fallacies and paradoxical beliefs. A significant benefit for all involved, however, was that these argumentative defences or *apologia*<sup>2</sup> both drew on and honed participants' reasoning, a cognitive-behavioural discursive dynamic central to this study's argument.

Socrates also emphasized the merits of both scepticism (especially in relation to authority) and reflection in helping to moderate the deep-seated human intuition to seek justification for *a priori* convictions and personal interests, a propensity Kunda (1990) would identify over two millennia later as motivated reasoning. Following their mentor, Plato and Aristotle elaborated Socrates' interrogative approach to knowledge acquisition and highlighted the utility of rationality in other ways, including employing deliberative inference to avoid the natural tendency to rely on perception as the sole signifier of reality (Paul et al., 1997). These ideas and practices were taken up and developed over the centuries by various thinkers from Aquinas to Descartes, Machiavelli to Voltaire, and Marx to Freud (Paul et al., 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> See Plato's account of Socrates' trial, which depicts the failure of the latter's final *apologia* (Tredennick & Tarrant, 2003). What appears ironic in fact reveals an epistemological commonplace: that engaging critically with those unreceptive to such engagement is difficult if not futile (Kahneman, 2011).

Personally, critical thinking as a distinctive construct had been of fairly peripheral intellectual interest to me until it began to crystallize into the central element of this project. As a university teacher I had always been aware of criticality as an academic objective but, as with many other educators, my grasp of the concept was fuzzy (see Moore, 2013, for an illuminating study in the HE context). Given the imprecision surrounding the conceptualization of critical thinking, which I address in the following section, my personal lack of conceptual clarity was not surprising. I had read Socrates and Plato, however, and often attempted in my teaching to implement aspects of those and other favoured philosophers' insights into my classes wherever I gauged they might fit. A pedagogical epiphany occurred when I encountered the idea of Socratic questioning. Paul and Elder (2007, p. 36) define Socratic questioning as 'disciplined questioning that can be used to pursue thought in many directions and for many purposes: to explore complex ideas, to get to the truth of things, to open up issues and problems, to uncover assumptions, to analyze concepts, to distinguish what is known from what is not known, and to follow out logical implications of thought'. Such endeavour reflects much of what critical thinking purports to do.

Appreciating its obvious benefits in logical reasoning, I theorized that Socratic questioning would potentially be adaptable to a classroom setting involving small group discussions around and about text. My rationale was that this mode of questioning exhibits *dialogical* reasoning (Paul, 2001), a fairly broad term encapsulating discussion which accommodates and sustains multiple points of view. A narrower form of reasoning which can emerge from such discourse is *dialectical*. Where they diverge conceptually is in the latter's observation of *conflict* as a central characteristic of deliberative dialogue. Conflict in this sense is not necessarily negative, but refers to discursive exchanges which usually involve 'criticism, objections, responses, and, frequently, revisions to initial positions' (Bailin & Battersby, 2018, p. 70). Given my aforementioned pedagogical proclivity towards small group discussions, Socratic questioning seemed to provide the epistemological sanction my teaching needed to explore ideas in a more dialectical, critical manner. In practice this meant engaging in discourse which frequently transgressed and challenged conceptual constraints imposed by given disciplines, resulting ultimately in rich, consilient conversations.

## 2.2 The Problem of Definitional Consensus

Although the cognitive construct of critical thinking has been a highly valued educational objective for several decades (e.g. Abrami et al., 2015; Bailin & Siegel, 2003; Davies & Barnett, 2015; Facione, 1990), its conceptualization remains the subject of continual debate. The difficulties in consensus over the essential nature of this construct could at least partially be explained by the tenuousness of its conceptualization. Any putative definition or interpretation of critical thinking is precariously contingent on a range of purposes which are not necessarily commensurate with each other. This is because these purposes are themselves informed by the disciplines in which they are rooted, chief among which are philosophy, psychology and education (Davies & Barnett, 2015).

How critical thinking is conceptualized in these disciplines points to a related issue, which is that the construct is addressed in broadly divergent terms: normative<sup>3</sup> and empirical. Philosophy is typically informed by normative principles, psychology appeals to both normative and empirical considerations, while the educational practice of teaching critical thinking is governed by empirical concerns. Incidentally, this epistemological tension is not exclusive to critical thinking, however, but to analytical accounts of most if not all aspects of human behaviour. Weinstein (1997, p. 285) neatly sums up this enigma in relation to how critical thinking is conceptualized: ‘To think critically is to have fulfilled to some extent or other the demands made upon thinkers as exemplified by human practices—practices that have to some extent been codified and theorized about by both philosophers and psychologists. Noting this phenomenon does little to resolve the definitional problem, however.

A profitable route to at least contending with the various—often contradictory—approaches to defining critical thinking may lie in a return to first principles, a prescient argument originally advanced by McPeck (1981; 1990) over four decades ago. The thrust of this argument was that the quintessential concept of critical thinking was being treated by many at the time as almost self-evident, when in fact it was not. In McPeck’s

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I employ the term *normative* as it is generally construed in philosophy and cognitive psychology: as relating to a performance or state of cognition in its optimal form (see, for example, Stanovich, 2021).



(1981) view, the conceptual development of critical thinking had been given rather short shrift, compared with the inordinate volume of research and industry generated in its name. As a result, assumptions founded on and conclusions drawn from persistently vague, ‘overworked and under-analysed’ (McPeck, 1981, p. 2) conceptions of critical thinking were at best open to further question and at worst misleading. An unresolved assumption, for example, was whether clarifying what critical thinking is would account for further implications, such as whether the construct was teachable. Having broached these concerns, McPeck called repeatedly for a thorough conceptual analysis of the term itself. Johnson (1992) went further, proposing a moratorium on further conceptualizations of the term if deficiencies in extant definitions could not be demonstrated, and appropriate alternatives were not offered. More recently, and taking a different tack towards resolving this problem, Ennis (2018, p. 166) has elected to subsume several other definitions under his overarching seminal notion of critical thinking as ‘reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do’. Co-opting such well-known definitions as those by Scriven and Paul (1987), Siegel (1988), Facione (1990), Fisher and Scriven (1997), and Kuhn (2015), Ennis contends that they all employ a conceptual basis very similar to that of his seminal definition. This indicates that while the construct is still contested from various perspectives, there is now much more consensus on its conceptualization. Even so, any research into critical thinking is obliged to select and justify a specific definition in order to construct an appropriate framework for that study. Such a definition can be termed *stipulative*, if by that designation we mean one which is usually distinct from its established meaning, and which ascribes a new meaning for use in a specific context (Johnson & Hamby, 2015).

This chapter examines conceptualizations of critical thinking relevant to this study, locating them within the context of the most salient contemporary debates in the field. I begin with John Dewey’s (1933) pioneering work, followed by a critique of several important definitions, including those from what Johnson (1992) has called The Group of Five, a group of pre-eminent theorists in the field, namely Robert Ennis, John McPeck, Richard Paul, Matthew Lipman, and Harvey Siegel. What distinguishes these from the numerous extant definitions of critical thinking is that they are not isolated, but rather subsist contextually within comprehensive theories. Therefore, each of these definitions

of the construct encompasses ‘the concepts, principles, arguments, and assumptions which support that definition, as well as the interests which fuel the theory and the broader agenda’ (Johnson, 1992, p. 40). I then review key contemporary conceptualizations of critical thinking in light of more recent empirical concerns, and conclude the chapter with an exposition of the central definition and theory chosen for this study.

## **2.3 Towards a Definition of Critical Thinking**

### **2.3.1 Conceptual Foundations**

Most theories on critical thinking in education have been informed by the work begun with Dewey’s seminal treatise *How We Think* (1933, p. 9), which defines reflective thought as ‘active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends’. This definition foregrounds reflection, an essential element of most current conceptualizations of critical thinking. This element is most evident in the extensive research literature on dual-process theories of cognition, which characterize reflective or deliberative thinking under a range of labels, including System 2 thinking and Type 2 thinking (see Evans & Stanovich, 2013 for a comprehensive survey).

Dewey’s definition also invokes a central aspect of the construct endorsed by this study, which is that critical thinking is not an academic subject or a discrete domain of knowledge one learns from scratch. On the contrary, it is, at its simplest, good thinking. Holyoak and Morrison (2012, p. 1) define thinking as ‘the systematic transformation of mental representations of knowledge to characterize actual or possible states of the world, often in service of goals’. This comprehensive definition is of course conceptually dense, as it attempts to account for the full range of several different kinds of thinking, including thinking ‘based on content, effort, the desired outcome, underlying cognitive processes, and function (Minda, 2021, p. 5). What is clear, however, is that critical thinking is not a foreign entity but an extension of a familiar one; it is a kind of phenomenon we already know. It is thinking as we ordinarily conceive it—but enhanced. When it is employed specifically ‘in service of goals’, that is consciously to attain a

desired end, it represents a dimension of thinking which is deliberative and effortful. It is thinking of a higher order than the more intuitive, non-reflective kind (Baron, 1993; 2008; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2010). Since people already know how to think, therefore, critical thinking entails thinking *better*. The 'goodness' of such thinking is assessed against a set of normative criteria, independent of an individual's beliefs or opinions. In sum, 'It is the *quality* of thinking which distinguishes critical from uncritical thinking, and this quality is determined by the degree to which the thinking meets the relevant standards' (Bailin, 2002, p. 363-4; my emphasis). From this perspective, it follows that any aim to foster critical thinking through teaching arises from an implicit assumption about its assessment: it is not that thinking can be taught, but rather that a student's quality of thinking can be improved. This is the fundamental aim of the current study: to cultivate my students' habits of mind towards an appreciation of the value of reflective thought in the pursuit of learning.

Contemporary interest in critical thinking was initiated by Robert Ennis, whose original definition, 'the correct assessing of statements' (Ennis, 1962, p. 83), was rooted in the theoretical discourse of formal logic and located this kind of thinking within the realm of reason. To support this definition, Ennis presented a list of aspects of statement assessment, together with criteria for the correct assessment of various kinds of statements. Eventually applying the construct to broader real-world situations, Ennis's final conceptualization of critical thinking was 'reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do' (Ennis, 1985, p. 45). To provide some specificity to a definition he conceded might still be perceived as too broad, Ennis offered an interdependent list of abilities and dispositions, which he contended was especially important for guiding critical thinking assessment (Ennis, 1993). Over time he came to realize that, if it was to be profitably applicable to education his initial reasons-based definition would need to be expanded as it was both limited and vague. He therefore included creative aspects of critical thinking, such as devising alternative solutions, developing hypotheses and concepts, and formulating strategies for experimental projects. Even as his ideas have developed, what still constitutes the basis of Ennis's theorizations are the precepts of formal logic, which are closely connected to rationality and problem-solving.

Although Ennis's 1985 definition remains the most widely employed in contemporary use, it has been criticized. It was perceived by Lipman (1988), for example, as limited and vague (see also Paul, 1989). Lipman has advanced a more holistic and nuanced conceptualization, complemented by the values of creative and caring thinking. As such, he defines critical thinking as 'skilful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgement because it relies upon criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive to context' (Lipman, 1988, p. 39). Significantly, Lipman distinguishes between self-correction and metacognition on the basis that metacognition can still be uncritical, while self-correction connotes criticality and volition. Lipman's definition is itself subjected to some critical scrutiny by Paul (1989), even though both theorists' notions of what constitutes critical thinking are similar.

Clearly cognizant of the challenges in wording the definition, Paul, together with Michael Scriven, had presented a detailed conceptualization of critical thinking (Scriven & Paul, 1987), which he then crystallized independently as 'disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking' (Paul, 1989, p. 214). Paul purveyed a dual conceptualization of criticality: weak sense and strong sense thinking. If one's thinking is consciously directed to serving one's own interests or those of people one favours while excluding those of other relevant individuals or groups, this is critical thinking in its sophistic or weak sense. Conversely, thinking deliberately geared towards supporting the interests of a range of people or groups is what Paul terms fairminded or strong sense critical thinking. The distinguishing feature of Paul's account of critical thinking in its ideal form, according to Johnson (1992), is its emphasis on individual and group dialogism. This focus on dialogic thinking is in fact the value of Paul's perspective to my study, with its emphasis on dialogic discourse. Another strength of Paul's theory is its insistence on fairmindedness, which aspect is substantiated by a taxonomy of intellectual virtues, including empathy and a sense of justice. However, given the almost intuitive association of both empathy and justice to morality, Mulnix (2012) cautions against intellectual virtues being construed as moral ones. Also relevant—like the values of creativity and caring which Lipman (1988) posits as complementary to critical thinking—is accommodation in Paul's

(1996, p. 33) theory of ‘the role of emotion, intuition, imagination, and values in thinking’.

However, affective traits such as emotion and imagination have been largely eschewed by the other conceptualizations of critical thinking from the Group of Five. Although Siegel (2015, p. 57), for example, has stated that emotions ‘play a crucial role in motivating critical thinking’, this was a single reference in response to new work on critical thinking, so it comes across as an incidental concession rather than an appreciation of importance. This position is understandable, given Siegel’s ‘reasons conception’ of critical thinking, first presented in his book *Educating Reason: Rationality, Critical Thinking, and Education* (1988). This theory has several distinguishing features, of which the most notable is its uncompromising prioritization of the power of reasons and rationality to warrant beliefs, claims, judgements and actions. On this view, certain normative criteria are necessary to assess the quality of reasons towards substantiating a belief or determining a course of action. Inextricably linked to reason in Siegel’s theory is the concept of rationality, posited from the outset as coextensive with critical thinking. Indeed, the two concepts are characterized throughout as educational cognates. Rationality is located in the notion of a hypothetical critical thinker, epitomized as the sort of person who embodies a ‘critical spirit’ as a character trait. Siegel maintains that a critical spirit provides a fertile motivational matrix for the development of critical thinking skills, which underscores its potential for application in educational practice. To support this idea, Siegel introduces the characteristic of ‘self-sufficiency’, a quality suggestive of critical thinkers who understand rationality to the extent that they recognize its contribution to independent thinking and self-determination. This point is bolstered by anticipating a concern rooted in Freire’s (1970; 1973) thesis—which is that all rationality and, by extension, all education is ideologically tainted. Siegel’s counterargument is that an advanced critical thinker would be sufficiently rational to identify their initial ideological position with negligible bias. They would then evaluate this stance without prejudice and control for it in confirming any final beliefs or actions. At the very least, functioning at this level of rationality would result in mitigating the influence of inappropriate ideologies on one’s thinking.

Siegel's characterization of rationality has strong echoes in prior and current intellectual arguments concerning humanity at its best. Kant's (1787/1999) conception of pure practical reason, for example, posits rationality almost paradoxically as both an intrinsic and objective feature of the human condition. For Pinker (2022, p. 340), the capacity to invoke reason against the seemingly unassailable influence of cognitive bias is extraordinary, and can be evaluated through evolutionary considerations: 'Our ability to eke increments of well-being out of a pitiless cosmos and to be good to others despite our flawed nature depends on grasping impartial principles [of rationality] that transcend our parochial experience'. This reflexive ability to critique our own reasons for accepting or resisting personal and sociohistorical conditions suggests that rationality in its most advanced form transcends all extraneous influence and is ultimately intellectually neutral. In Siegel's view, it is this far-reaching potential which confirms critical thinking as the foremost educational ideal.

While Siegel's account is theoretically sophisticated and eloquently expressed, it raises several practical questions around the teaching of critical thinking. One question which emerges from the idea that rationality is capable of transcending ideological influence is the effect of cognitive biases on human judgement and decision-making. Since Tversky and Kahneman's (1974; Kahneman et al., 1982) groundbreaking experimental studies on heuristics and biases in the early 1970s, a wealth of research in cognitive psychology has established that it is immensely difficult, if not impossible, for even practised critical thinkers to divest themselves entirely of the effects of cognitive biases. Indeed, a common assumption that highly intelligent individuals are naturally good critical thinkers is itself a fallacy, with Isaac Newton and Arthur Conan Doyle among the many intelligent minds who have displayed public instances of poor thinking and decision-making (Lilienfeld et al., 2020).

With regard to education in practice then, a non-philosophical evaluation of Siegel's theory may have grounds for questioning critical thinking viewed through such an abstracted, idealized lens, the most obvious being that normative arguments are not what actually matter to teachers and students at the chalkface. In short, philosophical accounts may be thought to have little meaningful application in considerations of how

people actually think and behave in the real world. In a classroom setting, for example, how does a teacher recognize a student with a latent critical spirit? Of course, the *a priori* (and problematic) assumption in such a situation is that the teacher in question would be a sufficiently good critical thinker to discern this spirit in students. But even if such critical thinkers were noticed in a classroom, what would be done with those unfortunate students who were not deemed to possess this intellectual virtue? Would they be consigned to a classroom for non-critical thinkers? What then would be the ethical implications of this? Such practical scenarios do not seem adequately addressed in Siegel's epistemological account of critical thinking.

Epistemology also forms the basis of McPeck's (1981) theory of critical thinking, due to his insistence that deep subject knowledge is essential to good thinking. The central element of McPeck's (1981, p. 8) definition of critical thinking is 'the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective scepticism'. This focus on scepticism signals an important area of divergence between McPeck's and Siegel's (1988) theories, in that the latter does not equate critical thinking with scepticism. Yet this is precisely where McPeck's conceptualization converges to some extent with others' (e.g. Dewey, 1933) in that this definition positions reflection and scepticism as constitutive criteria of critical thinking. Another difference between McPeck and Siegel's accounts is that, while both perceive *good* thinking as integral to rationality, McPeck views criticality as a dimension of rationality and not, as Siegel has it, coextensive with rationality. This view of critical thinking entails a disposition towards unbiased reasoning, which is generally considered a characteristic of good thinking (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2010). As noted above, however, the most important aspect of McPeck's account is its epistemological basis. This is encapsulated in a crucial conception that introduced the idea which was to evolve into the basis of the schism between the generalist and specifist approaches to critical thinking: 'since it involves the skills necessary for engaging in an activity, critical thinking cannot be divorced from the skills that make the activity what it is' (McPeck, 1981, p. 9). This theoretical divide will be elaborated later. It is sufficient for now to point out that the proposition above suggests that the ability to think critically is contingent on a thorough knowledge and semantic understanding of the epistemology—the specific content, including theories, concepts and procedures—of a particular discipline.

Another conceptualization which underscores rationality and marginalizes emotion is the consensus definition delivered by Facione (1990). The American Philosophical Association convened an interactive panel of 46 experts in 1990 with a view to working towards a consensus on the role of critical thinking in educational assessment and instruction. The outcome was the Delphi Report (Facione, 1990). As with the other conceptualizations by The Group of Five, the Delphi definition is philosophical in its orientation and as such presents a normative exposition of criticality. In its attempt to cover all possible scenarios where critical thinking may occur, it is also deliberately comprehensive—though arguably to the point of being unwieldy:

We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based . . . . The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. (Facione, 1990, p. 2)

For all its detail and ambitiously broad scope, however, this conceptualization was not without detractors, who pointed out significant limitations. One of these was stridently highlighted by Walters (1994), whose basic objection was that the skills and dispositions identified by the Delphi Report are predicated exclusively on rationality and reason. In contrast to its aims at comprehensiveness, argues Walters, such a definition turns out in fact to be exclusionary as it seems to reflect the disciplinary biases implicit in philosophical considerations of critical thinking. By directing attention to the philosophical grounds of the definition, Walters underscores a broader but fundamental point: all thinking is contextual and thus informed by the ideological situatedness of each thinker. The implication here is that the Delphi definition's assumptions of neutrality and catholicity are erroneous, the most obvious example of this being its cultural limitations: it cannot reasonably claim to account for the critical thinking potentials in



humans from all cultural backgrounds. Another implication is that this definition's very attempt to abstract the construct of critical thinking, to indicate what it should be in its ideal form, renders it inauthentic as a meaningful signifier of the construct as it operates in real terms. In short, this conceptualization is detached from the very phenomenon it purports to signify, so sits in what McLaren (1994) calls 'antiseptic isolation'. This is a state detached from both the real-world context to which critical thinking applies and the heterogeneous everyday discourses in which thinking actually occurs.

In a further criticism, and one shared by other theorists, Walters (1994) characterizes the Delphi definition as reductive as it collapses the construct of thinking into a computational system of objective argumentation expressed in propositional and even syllogistic form. In this normative environment, concepts such as universality, objectivity and abstraction are lionized while more intuitive, though for Walters no less important, modes of understanding such as imagination and empathy are construed as at variance with good thinking. This would not play out constructively in the classroom, argues Walters, as such an approach to teaching would result in the *vulcanization* of students. This is a reference to the fictional character of Spock from the Star Trek television series, an alien from the planet Vulcan whose relatively superior intellect was governed exclusively by an unassailable system of logic. Ironically, this intractable (and dare we say it, unreasonable) deference to logic meant Spock was often unable to grasp the dynamics, variations and nuances of *human reasoning*, which he considered flawed by its being motivated by emotion and other intuitions. Thayer-Bacon (2000) takes a similar position to Walters, contending that the Delphi definition does not take into account the full spectrum of factors which motivate critical thinking and it is therefore too narrow. It precludes without sufficient warrant important cognitive propensities such as emotion and imagination, which are located in the affective domain rather than that of reason. In response, Thayer-Bacon advanced the notion of 'constructive' over 'critical' thinking, arguing that a comprehensive conception of constructive thinking must include roles for affective traits such as intuition, imagination, creativity and emotion.

Like Thayer-Bacon, Lipman (2003) and Kuhn (2015) have also claimed a space for emotion in their conceptions of critical thinking, with Lipman arguing from a

philosophical stance for the complementary values of critical, creative, and caring thinking; and Kuhn demonstrating, from a psychological perspective, the significant gains in reasoning proficiency obtained by collaborative, affective engagement among learners. Lipman and Kuhn's positions on the importance of emotion may seem surprising, given that the discipline each theorist represents is ostensibly concerned with defining critical thinking in terms either of potential capacities of thought or observable behaviours and skills, respectively. However, both positions can be understood in terms of their strong focus on education, a discipline intrinsically concerned with personal and social motivations. This affective aspect of critical thinking is elaborated in Marshall's conceptualization (2011), which examines individuals as social beings continuously mediating their social environment by assessing assertions and conclusions in the process of critically analyzing discourse. Arguing from a self-professed Foucauldian perspective, Marshall's idea of critical thinking nonetheless suggests an inherently more robust style of critique which actively questions and challenges widely accepted social norms and systems, a notion clearly located within the purview of Freirean critical pedagogy. In all these conceptions of the critical thinker, then, there appears to be little recognition of any fundamental conflict between emotion and the 'pure' rationality sought and expected in traditional philosophical conceptions of criticality. Indeed, Paul (2011) calls for a wide-ranging theory of critical thinking incorporating 'a comprehensive concept of logic which accommodates the role of emotion, intuition, imagination, and values in thinking. It needs to make clear the leading role of thinking in the shaping of human feelings and behavior'.

Another compelling objection to such traditional rationalist notions of critical thinking is made by Biesta and Stams (2001), who note that any definition of the construct emerges from a theorist's individual conception of criticality. Proceeding from the premise that the goal of argument is to persuade, they assert that arguing one's own case inevitably leads to a state of 'critical dogmatism', which involves the application of idiosyncratic criteria to the developing definition or theory. The problem lies in an author's fundamental but unjustifiable belief in the validity of an unproven claim. Under scrutiny, an argument based on such criteria cannot normally be justified without regress into circularity. Nonetheless, Biesta and Stams (2001) concede that it is necessary to adopt a

deliberate theoretical position to proceed from a specific premise. Ennis (1982) argues that making an implicit assumption when advancing the initial propositions of a theory is conventional epistemological practice, in that theories can only be confirmed by hypothesizing first.

While recognizing Ennis's point in relation to theory development, Norris (1990) suggests that a reliance on hypothesizing poses a peculiar problem for researchers of critical thinking pursuing empirical outcomes. The problem is that the very fabric of the experimental research enterprise is characterized by a fundamental provisionality as it involves the complex relationship between mental and physical activity, the abstract and the corporeal. Consider on the one hand a research participant's cognitive capacity and disposition, which gives rise not just to the conception of an action but to its execution; and on the other, a researcher's observation, inference, analysis and explanation of that action. From one end of that spectrum to the other, 'there is no straightforward way to pass from the observation of people's behaviour to the ascription of *specific* mental abilities to them' (Norris, 1990, p. 69; original emphasis). This problem is encountered not only in theorizing about critical thinking but also in experimental research into the construct. In such inquiry, the most effective approach to dealing with the mental-physical activity conundrum is through theoretical modelling. In seeking to enable the attribution of causal relations between observable activity and mental processes, models make it possible 'to go beyond observables and imagine a world not yet seen' (National Research Council, 2012, p. 50). (I elaborate on the importance of causation in this respect in Chapter 4.)

Apart from reinforcing this point, Bailin et al. (1999) have cautioned against widespread use of the term 'processes' when referring to cognitive operations, precisely because of its semantic ambiguity. In considering explanations of psychological phenomena, Bechtel (2007; 2008) makes the following distinctions: a *mechanism* is a given cognitive phenomenon (say, critical thinking) while *operations* are the working components of this phenomenon (for example, analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing). It is clear from these perspectives then that any initial theoretical position taken on critical thinking is

necessarily mediated by a certain measure of ambiguity. It therefore follows that no conceptualization of critical thinking can be wholly objective.

### **2.3.2 Contemporary Conceptions**

The aforementioned theorized definitions purveyed by the Group of Five are argued from a philosophical and therefore normative orientation. That they are theoretical may go some way to explaining critical thinking's 'definitional problem': no conception of critical thinking theoretically elaborated can be definitive simply because it cannot adequately encapsulate the practical dimension of the construct. With a view to covering this epistemological space, there has over the last thirty years been an increasing emphasis on empirical research into all aspects of critical thinking. Two such researchers germane to my study are Diane Halpern and Deanna Kuhn, both of whom investigate critical thinking from a psychological perspective. Theoretically, they share the view that metacognition—the conscious monitoring and regulating of one's own thinking (Flavell, 1976)—is central to the development of critical thinking. More than that, metacognition expands possibilities for learning transfer due to its operating 'beyond' the constraints of cognition.

In pedagogical terms, however, Halpern and Kuhn differ. Kuhn's instructional methodology is inquiry-based and offers learners minimal guidance. It is also experiential in that learners are observed conducting online dialogues over an extended duration (e.g. Kuhn 1991, 2018). In contrast to Kuhn's preference for minimal intervention by the teacher, Halpern's instructional approach prioritizes explicit instruction of critical thinking. To maximize opportunities for learning development and transfer, Halpern advocates teaching which is explicit, consistent, and persistent (Marin & Halpern, 2011). However, much recent research has demonstrated that an infusion of explicit critical thinking instruction as well as inquiry-based content optimizes the potential for beneficial critical thinking outcomes (e.g. Alfieri et al., 2011; Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Klahr, 2009; Ku et al., 2014; Mayer, 2004). The merits of this kind of 'balanced approach', where direct instruction precedes inquiry-based activities in the same lesson, are convincingly demonstrated by Ku et al. (2014), whose empirical study documented notable improvement in both critical thinking and learning transfer tasks.

In challenging this long-held, apparently incompatible bifurcation between top-down, structured, direct instructional approaches versus bottom-up, constructivist, 'discovery' methods, these recent studies reveal the potential for innovative routes to critical thinking pedagogy.

Since the early 2000s, Kuhn has been engaged in a sustained empirical inquiry into dialogic argumentation, exploring the effectiveness of collaborative argument as a vehicle to metacognitive development (Kuhn & Crowell, 2011). Her theoretical approach is rooted in sociocultural theory and, as such, much of her work has been conducted in collaborative classroom contexts. While Kuhn does not provide a specific definition of critical thinking, she has long advanced a developmental conceptualization (Kuhn, 1999) which suggests that thinking competencies, managed by metacognition, follow an extended developmental trajectory, becoming more explicit and effective as an individual gets older. Her recent research includes a joint 3-year longitudinal study (Crowell & Kuhn, 2014; Kuhn & Crowell, 2011), which reported significant gains in dialogic argumentation skills among adolescent learners. These studies are important as they represent part of the emergence of 'a contemporary trend to regard critical thinking and indeed all reasoning as falling under the heading of its functional purpose and goal, which is argument' (Kuhn, 2018, p. 122). Prominent advocates of this perspective are Mercier and Sperber (2017), who have developed a persuasive theory which characterizes reasoning as argumentation, a perspective they frame as 'interactionist'. Their account challenges the dominant 'intellectualist' dual-process theories of reasoning (see Evans & Frankish, 2009, for a comprehensive exposition of the state of the art), which posit reason as a tool to improve individual cognition with the goal of arriving at better beliefs and decisions. Mercier and Sperber (2017), by contrast, contend that reasoning evolved as an argumentative strategy for social interaction, and serves a dual purpose. One is to produce reasons to justify and convince others of our beliefs; the other is to evaluate others' reasons for their beliefs. This perspective of argumentation as subsuming critical thinking, held by Kuhn and others, will generally inform my approach to analyzing the data from the reading circle.

Turning to the work of the second important researcher mentioned above, Halpern (2014, p. 8) defines critical thinking thus:

Critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed—the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions, when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task.

While this conceptualization is often considered quite broad, it manages in my view to encapsulate the proactive, goal-directed dimension of critical thinking particularly well. As neuroscientists Operskalski and Barbey (2017, p. 238) argue, other advanced cognitive constructs such as causal representations are strongly implicated in this dimension of critical thinking: ‘goal-directed behaviour would be incoherent without some understanding of causality to predict the consequences of actions and adapt behaviour accordingly’. Halpern’s conceptualization also accommodates both sides of the generalist-specifist divide. The first point in the definition above is central to critical thinking instruction, underscoring as it does Halpern’s perspective that critical thinking is generalizable across domains. The final clause is equally important as it acknowledges the significance of specific context for optimal effectiveness. Evident throughout Halpern’s account of critical thinking, however, is the crucial assumption that a person should be disposed to deliberative, effortful thinking in pursuit of their desired outcome: ‘Critical thinkers use these skills appropriately, without prompting, and usually with conscious intent, in a variety of settings. That is, they are predisposed to think critically’ (Halpern, 1999, p. 70). This aspect of Halpern’s account, developing students’ consciousness of the value of reflection and questioning, has particular resonance with my thesis and becomes apparent in the data analysis chapters. As noted earlier, a feature of criticality closely related to thinking disposition is metacognition: ‘When we think critically, we are evaluating the outcomes of our thought processes—how good a decision is or how well a problem is solved’ (Halpern, 1999, p. 70). To improve critical thinking, therefore, Halpern proposes that the aforementioned aspects of the construct

be integrated into a comprehensive four-part teaching model (Halpern, 1998; 2014; Marin & Halpern, 2011) grounded in theories and research in cognitive psychology.

Overall then, the primary goal of Halpern's research into critical thinking is the transfer of learning and training (2014). Similarly, Kuhn's concept of 'meta-knowing' competencies (1999) suggests that transfer can occur across domains. For both researchers there is potential for learning transfer, provided critical thinking skills and dispositions are deliberately and consistently developed through focused practice. That certain characteristics of critical thinking are generalizable across contexts is a central implication for the current study too. Of all the accounts of critical thinking so far evaluated, Kuhn and Halpern's theories and research come closest to how I see my research aims being realized. I will therefore use Kuhn's empirically informed theory and Halpern's definition to underpin this study.

## **2.4 Significant Debates**

As observed above, critical thinking inspires vigorous debate on various broad fronts, including on its conceptualization, theory, pedagogy, and assessment. More specific disagreements concern the connections between critical thinking and creativity (Bailin et al., 1999; Halpern, 2014; Lipman, 2003), critical thinking and problem solving (Johnson, 1992), and critical thinking and emotional intelligence (Moon, 2008). While it is inevitable that differing perspectives on critical thinking across the disciplines fuel these controversies, even working within the same discipline does not preclude contrasting theoretical positions on the nature or teaching of the construct. What is ultimately important for the purposes of this study is how critical thinking can be implemented in the EAP classroom. Of the several extant debates within the literature then, two are relevant and particularly contentious: whether critical thinking should be regarded as an aggregation of skills, and whether critical thinking is generic or subject-specific.

### **2.4.1 The Skills Debate**

To a large extent, the skills debate has arisen from various interpretations of the concept of 'skill'. Smith (2002) presents a useful elucidation of the nature of general skills,

indicating the accepted dual connotations of either acquired ability or unique proficiency. In elaborating the core meaning of skill, he touches on some related elements in critical thinking, which themselves have given rise to several further strands of continuing theoretical inquiry. One element referred to is the association of skills with *procedural* knowledge (or 'knowing how') as opposed to *declarative* knowledge ('knowing that') which, considered together, supports the notion that skills can be ordered or sequenced. The most obvious evocation of this idea is Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956; revised by Krathwohl, 2002), a highly influential model of cognitive development which traces a progressive acquisition of cognitive skills from a 'lower order', such as memorization of facts, to a 'higher order' of skills, including analysis, evaluation and synthesis. This model is developmental as it stipulates attainment of a higher order skills level only after successful mastery of previous lower order cognitive processes. Another significant element of critical thinking arising from Smith's (2002) discussion is that of volition, where the subject *initiates* an action by *deliberately* drawing on a *particular* skill or set of skills with the *intention* of facilitating a desirable outcome (my emphases). Quite evident in the words italicized is the suggestion of choice or purpose, theorized more commonly in the critical thinking literature as metacognition (Flavell, 1976; Kuhn, 1999), or what Lipman (1988) terms 'self-correction'. Significantly, this purposive initiating, monitoring, and adjusting does not preclude apparent 'automaticity', born of repetition. This is because a large part of skill acquisition derives from 'strategies and methods that have been internalized, seamlessly incorporated into a performance routine' (Smith, 2002, p. 661). A third notable element in Smith's consideration of skills is that of scope. Viewing skills in terms of being broad or narrow can lead to uncertainty about how the concept may be applied. This has particular implications for critical thinking skills, with generalists and specifists respectively divided on how widely or narrowly such skills can be developed and applied.

In terms of how critical thinking skills are conceived, theorized, taught and assessed, interpretive differences can range from relatively benign to problematic (Bailin et al., 1999). Being proficient at performing a task by meeting the criteria for good thinking required in that instance is, for Bailin et al. (1999), an acceptable notion of skill. Skill is aligned here with specificity. A more problematic proposition for many theorists and



practitioners is a set of critical thinking skills taken to be generically applicable to any field of endeavour, not to mention discrete from subject knowledge and from attitude or disposition (see McPeck, 1981). Incidentally, most general-skills advocates, including Ennis (1981), acknowledge that subject-specific conceptual, content, and procedural knowledge is a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for critical thinking within a subject. (The generalist-specifist debate will be discussed in more detail later.)

The view of critical thinking as a set of general skills is also seen as symptomatic of an increasing focus on promoting vocational skills development in preparation for a suitable role in the workforce (Crossley & Watson, 2003). Such an approach has been adopted in recent years by many national education authorities. This increasingly functionalist view of university education is rejected by those who favour ‘education’ over ‘training’ (see Widdowson, 1983, for a useful distinction between the two). Yet another view is that of higher order skills, including critical thinking, as a nuanced process calling on mental strategies far more complex than an effortless procedural acquisition of concrete competencies for rote application (Halpern, 2014). On this view, skills are perceived as intricate, flexible, deliberate, and dynamic strategies which individuals can choose to use, and which are contingent on prevailing circumstances, prior experience and relative situational knowledge. This view does not dismiss the idea of an individual acquiring and developing competencies, but it does assign a more central role to an individual’s disposition in the critical thinking equation.

#### **2.4.2 The Generalist vs Specifist Debate**

Apart from the longstanding problem of defining critical thinking, arguably the most contested is whether critical thinking is a general or a domain-specific phenomenon. While this epistemological problem has become less contentious, the initial schism recalls Kuhn’s (1962) original notion of *incommensurability*, where different scientific communities elaborate divergent paradigms or ‘thought styles’; each paradigm purveys its own concepts, norms and practices, which tend to exclude those shaped by other scientific collectives. If not incommensurable, the complexity of the generalist-specifist bifurcation becomes evident when even the terms describing it are subject to scrutiny. Johnson (1992), for example, cautions against confusing the terms *general* and

*generalizable* when referring to critical thinking, arguing that the spirit of criticality is general in the sense that it is applicable to any knowledge domain, that is, any subject area is open to critical examination. Yet it does not necessarily follow that the critical thinking skills learnt in and for one specific area can be as effectively applied in others. That is, they are not necessarily or equivalently generalizable. Johnson (1992, p. 39) makes a further semantic distinction concerning generalizability and *transferability of skills*: 'A skill may be transferable from one area to another without being generalizable, that is, transferable from one to all (or most)'. This distinction invokes the notion of 'near' versus 'far' transfer of critical thinking skills (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, 1989, 2012; Salomon & Perkins, 1989), which is a useful consideration in this study since it relates to a central question of my thesis: whether critical thinking skills developed through the use of literary texts are similarly applicable when using EAP texts. As noted earlier, critical thinking is hard, whether its application is attempted generally or specifically (Kuhn, 1991; Van Gelder, 2005). This is true not only because of entrenched egocentric and sociocentric habits of thought rooted in personal experience (Paul, 1981) but also because of the sheer breadth of knowledge available to think about. With so much 'territory into which [it] can fail to transfer' (Van Gelder, 2005, p. 43), critical thinking is particularly sensitive to the challenges of generalizability.

Using language learning to exemplify this point, Johnson (1992, p. 39) claims that learning 'one language does not allow us to generalize to others: having learned English does not empower us thereby to speak French'. While this example is ostensibly appealing, it does seem to reduce the learning of different languages to a somewhat rigid process, precluding *any* overlap or transfer of language learning skills. This echoes, to some extent, McPeck's (1985) apparent inflexibility on the separateness of knowledge domains. While valid in the broadest terms, Johnson's (1992) point is not entirely convincing, which may be due to his choice of languages. Arabic versus Russian would perhaps have provided a stronger contrasting pair. The obvious distinction between English and French is in their grammar, in that the former is largely Germanic and the latter Romance. Yet they are not wholly discrete domains, so just an intermediate proficiency level in the grammar of the one language would give a learner some leverage, if desired, in the learning of the other. Recognition of grammatical

patterns in English could then be applied to improve understanding of the grammar of French. An even stronger argument for similarity—and so ease of learning—could be made on the basis of vocabulary, given the steady lexical borrowings of these languages over the past several hundred years. In any event, the aforementioned (in)flexibility is an important consideration in estimating the extent, if any, of critical thinking skills transfer.

Interestingly, the generalist-specifist bifurcation as described by Moore (2004) is challenged by Davies (2006) as a possible fallacy of the *false alternative*. This is a fallacy which misrepresents an issue as limited to two options (in this case, of interpretation) and demands subscription to one, to the exclusion of any possible alternatives (Morrow & Weston, 2019). Bolstering his view with reference to several persuasive studies, including Ikuenobe (2001) and Solon (2001; 2003), Davies argues that both generalist and specifist positions should rather be marshaled as complementary approaches towards a constructive and practical conceptualization of critical thinking. Theoretical differences notwithstanding, apprehending the fundamental generalist-specifist debate is crucial to making sense of any other associated epistemological questions; for example, can critical thinking skills developed in one discipline be transferred and applied to another, or not? And if they can, which ones—and to what extent? A brief overview of each side of the debate follows.

The concept of critical thinking was framed originally in generalist terms. John Dewey (1933, p. 4), whose work pioneered many current theories on critical and reflective thinking, argued in the early twentieth century that ‘the various ways in which men do think can be told, and can be described in their general features’. This position is indicative of Dewey’s generalist leanings and is one which many theorists have subsequently espoused. Ennis (1962), for example, based his original conceptualization of critical thinking on the praxis of philosophy and informal logic, which propounds the notion of several generic reasoning strategies apparently applicable to any argument. While modifying his original position several times over the years, Ennis has retained the belief that critical thinking is a generic phenomenon, able to be developed in one domain, and then readily transferred to others (Ennis, 2016). However, he has

consistently refined a systematic list of discrete skills which he proposes as a legitimate basis for implementing independent generic thinking skills courses.

Another notable early generalist is Norris (1992), who explicates the notion by offering four reasons for the generalizability of critical thinking. The first is that the concept of 'thinking-in-general' is philosophically plausible; one can think about something involved in a particular situation as about that thing in a broader situation or application. Another reason points to the common cognitive elements in the thought needed for the full range of life's concerns, including the thinking required for different disciplines. A third reason is that critical thinking offers a 'fund of resources' for managing these various subjects effectively—though Norris is not clear on what these resources might be. The final reason Norris advances invokes disposition, and suggests that the capacity and willingness to think critically in one domain lends itself positively to thinking critically in others.

Arguing from the perspective of scientific inquiry, Ryan (1992) takes a strong position on the importance of empirical research in advancing the issue of generalizability. One of the key questions he suggests needs to be answered is the unit of knowledge studied: would the focus of study be as narrow as a school subject or as broad as a field, for example? Another question is about the nature of the results sought: would researchers be looking for skills, strategies, dispositions? Aiming to outline a framework for research into scientific reasoning, Ryan locates his inquiry within the context of a theoretical debate in geology. In this setting Ryan (1992, p. 76) examines the operation of three 'lines of reasoning': the credibility of nontextual devices as evidence supporting a hypothesis; causes and effects; and the interpretation of the common scientific concept of simplicity. Ryan argues that lines of reasoning such as these are not specific to geology but in fact exemplify how debates are defined across 'a variety of fields, disciplines, and areas of knowledge'—and are therefore generalizable. His conclusion from these findings is that there is no empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that critical thinking skills are uniquely applicable to given disciplines.

At variance with the notion that cognitive traits can be generalized across all contexts is the specifist stance. The most prominent exponent of the domain-specific argument is

McPeck (1990, p.19), who views thinking per se as a necessarily attributive act, as 'always about some particular thing or subject'. By the same token, he dismisses thinking about nothing as a 'conceptual impossibility' while thinking about 'everything in general' is deemed 'incoherent' (McPeck, 1981, p. 3). Consideration of a certain *kind* of thinking as a mental activity, therefore, does not invalidate or even modify the fundamental nature of thinking conceived above. Thinking retains its essentially attributive nature, whether it is prefaced by 'critical' or any other adjective so, for McPeck, *critical* thinking is simply another aspect or 'gear' of thinking. However, it is one that is deliberately called on—though due to its difficulty, only when necessary—to evaluate evidence independently of *a priori* assumptions and beliefs. In this respect, McPeck conceptualizes critical thinking as integral to rationality. To achieve this level and focus of rational thought, one needs to develop sufficient awareness and control of one's biases, which reduces the risk of them interfering with the process of argument and evidence evaluation. On this basis therefore, McPeck characterizes critical thinking as reflective scepticism, an active disposition which demands a thinker assume an interrogative stance as they evaluate a problem mindfully and purposefully. The meaningful application of this special kind of thinking is entirely contingent on the critical thinker being steeped in the epistemological parameters of a particular domain.

An important implication of this proposition for teaching is that critical thinking cannot profitably be taught independently of the specific domain to which it pertains. McPeck considers it impossible for a set of 'general' critical thinking skills applicable to any and all fields to be taught as discrete from subject knowledge, as any skills developed are epistemologically bound up with the subjects in which they are generated: 'Skills in general, we might note, are born of knowledge of, and experience in, specific areas' and as such, 'skills, like critical thinking in general, are parasitic upon detailed knowledge of, and experience in, parent fields and problem areas' (McPeck, 1981, pp. 9-10). While contemporary thinkers (e.g. Sternberg & Halpern, 2020) generally agree with McPeck's idea that gains in critical thinking are most effectively achieved within a specific domain, they advocate the possibility that certain aspects of criticality, notably students' thinking dispositions, can be cultivated towards application wider than just a single domain. However, McPeck (1981, p. 13) remained committed to the view that teaching critical

thinking ‘in the abstract, in isolation from specific fields or problem areas, is muddled nonsense’.

As expected, McPeck’s forcefully expressed argument has met with considerable opposition, chief among whom is Siegel, whose generalist conceptualization of critical thinking in its ideal form is based on universal principles of rationality which transcend not only intellectual but cultural boundaries. Siegel (1992, p. 101; original emphasis) contends that McPeck’s entire account fails as it is predicated on an erroneous conceptualization of epistemology:

Let us grant the undeniable: it takes *this* sort of evidence to establish *this* sort of claim, and *that* sort of evidence to establish *that* sort of claim. Nevertheless, to say that we therefore have *two different epistemologies* at work in such situations is to fail to distinguish between different epistemologies and different criteria of reason assessment. When we have two different criteria of reason assessment, which we utilize to establish two different sorts of claims, we nevertheless have only one epistemology. In both cases, a good reason is that which warrants a conclusion. The *epistemology* across these alternative and varied criteria of reason assessment is the same.

Other more recent advocates of the domain-specific perspective include Moore (2004; 2011), who suggests that modes of argumentation and judgement differ depending on the field under investigation. Although a committed specifist in his early work, and wary of ‘a hardline generalist position [where] there seem to be few doubts, and not much thought of “complications”’ (Moore, 2004, p. 14), his approach has gradually become slightly more accommodating. He has since appeared to adopt a ‘relativistic’ position which acknowledges the possibility of overarching patterns of criticality (Moore, 2011). However, Davies (2006; 2011; 2013) an advocate of the generalist position, seems to view Moore’s more recent ambivalence as disingenuous, chiding him for adopting ‘the comforting illusions offered by specifism and relativism’ (Davies, 2013, p. 543). Expanding beyond judgement criteria, some have argued that cognition itself is always context-bound, as cognitive processes depend on both the subject matter and the authenticity of the task to which they are applied (Anderson & Bloom, 2001).

At the heart of the generalist-specifist debate lies the practical issue of learning transfer, arguably the central goal of education (Franco, Butler, & Halpern, 2014; Halpern, 1998; Perkins & Salomon, 2012). Thorndike's (1913) pioneering research at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found that transfer, though typically difficult to achieve, is more likely to take place when there are similarities between the original learning context and the target transfer context. Contextual similarity of learning is a hallmark of what Perkins & Salomon (1988) call *near transfer*. This phenomenon is one of the implicit claims advanced by my thesis: argument analysis, evaluation and synthesis, highly valued skills in EAP, can be developed through dialogic discussion of texts. My specific contention is that the choice of using either literary or expository texts is ultimately of little significance *if the pedagogical aim is to develop students' dispositions to thinking critically about texts*. In such a scenario, analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing texts in one university classroom are features of a habit of mind which can be transferred to another such classroom.

Near transfer of the kind I hope to foster in my students is much more common than *far transfer*, which refers to the application of previous learning to new tasks which differ from the original specific training (Webb et al., 2016). It is conceded in the research literature that far transfer is a rare phenomenon which goes beyond ordinary learning or specific training (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). Indeed, in a recent second-order meta-analysis, Sala et al. (2019, p. 1) concluded that, regardless of population type or psychological intervention, far transfer effects of cognitive training across multiple domains were negligible and 'the lack of generalization of skills acquired by training is thus an invariant of human cognition'. The dearth of empirical evidence of far transfer ostensibly supports the long-held specifist argument that critical thinking is negligibly generalizable across knowledge domains, and even less so to the real world (Brown, 1998; McPeck, 1981; 1990). This view is largely uncontested by generalists, who generally appreciate the difficulties of far transfer. What generalists do maintain, however, is that transfer is a continuum and is variously possible if certain conditions are optimized. Pedagogically, contributory factors could include the explicit teaching of specific strategies for transfer to various situations (Halpern, 1998; Kuhn, 2005) and associating lesson activities clearly with past or future applications (Cowan, 1994). In

conducting a comprehensive review of the extant literature, Nussbaum and Asterhan (2016) explore the psychology of far transfer and argue that students engaged in argumentive<sup>4</sup> learning environments discover and practise *proactive executive control strategies*. Recognizing the utility of these strategies leads to their being called on repeatedly, which eventuates over time in strengthening students' thinking dispositions and consolidating their self-perceptions as proactive thinkers who exercise conceptual agency. Nussbaum and Asterhan's (2016) argument draws on various substantive theories, though most notably on Kuhn's (2000; 2022) account of metacognition as a key driver in the transfer of critical thinking education and training.

Generalists also hold that the specifist view does not take account of all potentialities of transfer. Perkins and Salomon (1989, p. 118), for example, distinguish between two fundamentally different types: low road transfer, involving 'spontaneous, automatic transfer of highly practiced skills, with little need of reflective thinking' and high road transfer, where the connection of one situation to another involves an 'explicit conscious formulation of abstraction'. Environmental factors may also play a part in transfer efficacy. Miller (1995), for instance, made an unexpected but significant finding in a 4-year-long empirical ethnographic study spanning the trajectory of a university degree. Having investigated the extent to which learners were able to transfer general reflective and metacognitive strategies learnt in earlier literature discussion groups as they moved into new classes in different subject areas, she concluded that

students distinguished classes on the basis of which social contexts invite or require active engagement in thinking. Differences in students' inclination to respond to, elaborate, question, and monitor understanding of the content of class lessons was not related to specific disciplines, but to students' interpretations of the purposes for and the nature of class talk and activity. (Miller, 1995, para. 7)

This finding suggests that theorists advocating domain-specific critical thinking, such as McPeck (1981; 1990), may have misapprehended a crucial aspect of transfer: according to Miller's empirical study it is not the depth of subject knowledge per se that motivates

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<sup>4</sup> Nussbaum and Asterhan (2016) are among several researchers who prefer to use the term 'argumentive' rather than 'argumentative' to reflect dialogue which typically is not adversarial.



learners to retrieve previously learnt thinking strategies, but the presence or absence of dialogic opportunity in a specific class. The extent to which learners adapt their metacognitive strategies is largely influenced by the nature of the specific learning environment in which they find themselves. In other words, the more comfortable students feel in being able to express themselves, the more they feel it worth expending the effort to re-engage their thinking strategies in order to transfer them to the new environment.

Overall then, although the generalist-specifist divide is maintained by many theorists and researchers, it is worth noting that most generalists—including Ennis (1981), Paul (1981; 1987), and Sternberg and Halpern (2020)—acknowledge that a good grasp of subject-specific knowledge is a conducive condition for thinking critically about a given subject. Even Siegel (1992, p. 99; original emphasis), who consistently argues for a level of epistemic neutrality at which certain general principles can be applied to reasoning within any disciplinary context, concedes that ‘it does not follow that [these principles] enjoy a high degree of transfer or are, pedagogically, usefully *generalizable*’. Specifists, on the other hand, also concede that there are certain cognitive skills which can be broadly applied to all domains (McPeck, 1981, 1990; Moore, 2011). Both camps have thus begun, albeit tentatively, to acknowledge the relative merits of each other’s perspectives (Kuhn, 2018).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Critical thinking construed normatively is now generally agreed to comprise three primary elements: substantial subject knowledge, a disposition to effortful thinking, and relevant reasoning skills (Halpern & Sternberg, 2020). Its development up to this point has been a process of epistemic iteration characterized by ‘successive stages of knowledge, each building on the preceding one’ (Chang, 2004, p. 45), and the concept at the very least is settled in many respects. While the disciplines of philosophy, psychology and education occupy well-established positions in critical thinking research, there has been increasing interest in the construct from other disciplines, such as the health sciences and business studies. The focus of the current study is teaching, the effective practice of which is informed by concepts and theories from many varied but

associated domains. Implementing critical thinking in the dialogic approach I advocate in this project therefore entails drawing on a range of interrelated areas of knowledge. The next chapter will critically review the literature of the most important areas implicated in this study.

## CHAPTER 3 – Literature-based Discourse in EAP

### 3.1 Introduction

Much in this study is drawn from my experience as a university student of English literature, an implicit but significant contribution I came to appreciate only in the final phase of writing up this thesis. This phase entailed sustained reflection on the entirety of the project, which included reviewing the discursive exchanges of all the reading circle participants through a much wider contextual lens. Foremost among my realizations was the considerable extent to which the participants' lived experiences informed not just their initial individual interpretations of the given texts, but also their observations and responses collaboratively expressed within the reading circle. Considering this further, a question which came repeatedly to mind was: would the participants have been sufficiently motivated to respond *in the ways they did* had these texts been expository and not literary fiction (which of course implies the prior question: what 'ways' do I mean)? Very simply, I am referring here to verbal responses which were consistently motivated by emotion—and this affective motivation was sparked by young people reading about aspects of life they genuinely recognized and understood. In short, when participants gathered for a reading circle session, they had arrived with a personal 'stake in the game'. Admittedly, such recognitions and understandings were sometimes fairly simple, and expressing insightful perspectives on them was constrained by a range of factors, no doubt including language proficiency. Yet many observations were remarkably incisive, often rising to the level of sophisticated, multi-layered arguments. As I argue in my analysis chapters, such responses were informed by much more than affective motivation, not least the vibrant dialogic atmosphere of our reading circle. What cannot be discounted, however, is the significance of members of the reading circle personally recognizing issues to the degree that they felt able and sufficiently *moved* to express meaningful views on them. These are the kinds of responses a literary text is arguably more effective than other texts at generating, and I am concerned in this study to examine the role of such responses to polysemous literary texts in enhancing criticality through broader dialogic discourse. This chapter will review the theories and

concepts framing the utility of dialogic discourse around literary texts in the context of an EAP classroom.

### **3.2 English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

EAP emerged in the early 1970s from the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement. ESP had begun with a narrow professional orientation, focusing on linguistic features typical of a given profession, such as business or engineering, and operating in that specific environment (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). The primary aim of EAP, on the other hand, was to help improve university students' academic English and study skills in order to facilitate progress within the core courses of their various disciplines, a goal it retains. EAP developed with the rise of the communicative approach to general ELT. In this climate, the focus on study skills in ELT at university level rapidly became *de rigueur* in materials development, instruction, and research (Jordan, 1997). EAP has since witnessed remarkable growth, with the demands of expanding markets such as China and India establishing English as the 'leading language for the acquisition, dissemination and demonstration of academic knowledge' (Hyland & Shaw, 2016, p. 1).

Although the status of English as the lingua franca of academic discourse contributes to the expanding profile and strength of EAP, this position also exposes its limitations. One issue is the persistent complaint that it has failed to engage with and include non-anglophone academic cultures (Jenkins et al., 2017), disregarding the difficulties for those learners and scholars to study and publish in English, respectively. A related question is the extent to which EAP is a pragmatic or a critical discipline. It has been consistently criticized for adopting an unquestioning stance towards the power relations extant in academic institutions and particularly in EAP theory and practice (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002). Largely characterized by what Cherryholmes (1988) calls its 'vulgar pragmatism', EAP faces an appreciable challenge to mitigate such disparaging perceptions. This raises another related issue: the marginalization of EAP due to its practical orientation, which relegates it to assuming what Raimes (1991, p. 420) terms 'the butler's stance'. These limitations have together fuelled EAP's determination to emerge from being perceived as vendor of a service enterprise to being a respected

research-driven discipline with a legitimate place in the academic community (Pennycook, 1997). While Hyland and Shaw (2016) suggest that progress is being made towards this goal, EAP remains resolutely pragmatic. In this fraught equation of overlapping and competing demands in EAP, where does literature figure? It is this relationship which interests me as I would argue that literary texts can play a meaningful role in EAP. It would therefore be useful at this point to preface the specific issue of working with literature in ELT and EAP teaching by identifying broader distinctions between these disciplines.

### **3.3 English Language Teaching versus EAP**

In de Chazal's (2014) view, there are several typical differences between English language teaching (ELT) and EAP. On the one hand, ELT is globally established, with classes taking place in various learning environments. It appeals to a wide range of ages, aims to develop generic language proficiency, is open-ended and progress-oriented, continues over extended time scales, delivers a variety of tests and examinations, and utilizes a wide range of texts and materials. Conversely, EAP is an expanding enterprise, and most often takes place in universities. It typically serves adults, focuses less on language proficiency and more on academic skills, has stringent time constraints, is associated with a limited number of tests, and employs a narrow range of text types or genres. While there are many overlapping features, if there is a single factor distinguishing ELT from EAP, it is perhaps the latter's largely utilitarian approach to teaching.

Although ELT does cater to learners with functional needs, according to Hyland (2016, p. 17) learners choose to study EAP for a very 'particular practical need'. This in turn has given rise to a significant pedagogical implication: general and specific EAP. While the notion of specificity in this context is a response to the particular instrumental needs of its learners, there is at the core of EAP an unresolved issue among all stakeholders over just how specific its purview should be. This dilemma has thus compelled practitioners 'to take a stance on how they view language and learning, and to examine their courses in the light of this stance' (Hyland, 2016, p. 17), which has resulted in two camps arrayed

along a continuum: English for general academic purposes (EGAP) and English for specific academic purposes (ESAP). EGAP attempts to teach the academic language forms and study skills believed to be generic and thus transferable to all disciplines. ESAP on the other hand seeks to tailor its syllabus to address the needs of students proceeding to or already in specific disciplines (Sloan & Porter, 2010). All the ramifications of the broader differences between EFL and EAP and the even narrower ones between EGAP and ESAP considered, it is clear that there is much to reflect upon for curriculum designers, practitioners, and researchers. With globalization effecting an attendant increase in international research activity, English language education is not alone in becoming increasingly specialized, with each discipline developing and purveying its own conventions, practices, genres and, arguably, ideologies.

### **3.4 Literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

Since its tentative re-emergence in the late 1980s, literature has gained increasing recognition as a legitimate component of English language education (Carter, 2007; Paran, 2008). Over a decade earlier, communicative teaching methodologies had begun to prioritize the use of authentic resources and activities in the classroom to promote learners' communicative competence and functional skills in the real world. This effectively rendered literary texts superfluous in the ELT classroom, marking the beginning of what Rutter (1985, p. 59) called a 'generation of neglect'. Interest in literature was rekindled with the publication of several practical and accessible classroom texts which became popular with teachers and learners alike (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000). Maley's (1989) distinction between the *study* of literature and the *use* of literature also proved useful in this context, as the latter notion clarified the purpose of the nascent stylistics-based 'language-through-literature' approach. Other significant works representing this new use of literature were Carter, Walker & Brumfit (1989), Collie & Slater (1987), Maley & Duff (1989), and Duff & Maley (1990).

However, the practice of using literature to teach language has not been without its detractors. One of the more vociferous is Edmondson (1997), who has propagated a 'non-essentialist' perspective on literature's role in ELT. His main contention is that there

is no ‘special and specific function for literary texts in the business of language teaching’ (Edmondson, 1997, p. 53). This claim has been deftly rebutted by Paran (2006), who characterizes Edmondson’s stance as ‘isolationist’ due to his insistent focus on target language proficiency as the sole aim of English language education. While such a utilitarian approach is still preferred in some education systems—in Japan, for instance—there are persuasive arguments for acknowledging literature as an equally authentic alternative to vocation-oriented expository texts (see e.g. Takahashi, 2015). But this debate is not new. As far back as the early 1990s, Tate (1993, p. 321; original emphasis) was urging teachers of composition studies in US universities to reconsider their pedagogical choices and ‘adopt a far more generous vision of our discipline and its scope, a vision that excludes *no* texts’. I would suggest that this argument is equally applicable to university EFL and academic skills contexts, given the diverse needs of second language (L2) learners.

The issues above revolve broadly around ideological approaches to English language teaching. New problems of a far more pragmatic nature have been introduced by the information revolution of the early 21st century. With literacy levels in schools and universities struggling to meet the demands brought on by the relentless profusion of information distinctive of the past twenty years, education authorities have begun to seek ways of addressing this problem (Lee & Goldman, 2015). English language educators in the US, for example, have started using more complex texts in the classroom. For language-literature students, this has meant reading more unexpurgated literary texts than abridged versions. This initiative draws on fairly well-established research in psychology and education that reading literary fiction can benefit human personality on an individual level (e.g. Djikic et al., 2009) as well as in social interactions (e.g. Mar & Oatley, 2008). While literature’s potential to influence cognition, and specifically critical thinking, is less widely acknowledged, it too has a firm foundation in research (e.g. Miller, 2003). Indeed, Vygotsky argues in *The Psychology of Art* (1971) that teachers should build on individual readers’ perceptions of literature through judicious social activities in the classroom. In this way, the aesthetic excitement literature intrinsically generates will gradually enhance students’ reflective consciousness—which, after all, is the foundation of critical thinking (Dewey, 1933).

As noted in the discussion on text selection in Chapter 4, one of the main reasons I chose short stories to be examined in this project was that these texts are complete and unabridged. While there is merit in episodic reading, which a class could do with a novel (see Duncan, 2012), mine was a foundation class so I attempted to accomplish several things with our selection. The texts chosen needed to be linguistically accessible to accommodate the participants' relatively low level of English proficiency. They also had to be short enough not to be daunting to new readers, yet self-contained and satisfying as a result. The overarching idea of both the aforementioned educational initiative and my particular project, therefore, was to challenge students to shift beyond basic comprehension to a deeper and more critical engagement with text.

Questions nonetheless remain as to *how* literature should be used in language teaching. Zyngier and Fialho (2010, p. 13), for example, wonder whether 'the focus [should] be on textual interpretations, on historical perspectives, on sociological implications, or on the language of the text'. A sanguine response to what could seem a lack of methodological coherence is that it actually represents a broad palette of pedagogical opportunity. Indeed, in a recent survey of global progress in work with literature in language teaching, Hall (2015) describes a field thriving in its variety. Significant developments noted include the expanding diaspora and continuing vernacularization of English literatures; the democratization of access to literary texts due to technological advancements; a surge in empirical research activity in innovative teaching approaches to L2 reading and writing; creative classroom engagement with affective issues such as migration, acculturation, and identity; and the increasing popularity of EFL reading circles. While there remains a need for more rigorous reporting of data to support the growing number of studies being published in various aspects of the field (see Fogal, 2015; Paran, 2008), the overall condition of literature in general English language education appears sound. But what of the utility of literary texts in more specific pedagogical contexts, such as EAP?



### 3.5 Literature in EAP

#### 3.5.1 Introduction - General Challenges in Teaching EAP

Before addressing the use of literary texts in EAP, it is important to discuss the main features of the 'scene' which will serve as the pedagogical context of my project. According to Moran (2010), academic praxis in HE has undergone rapid changes over the last two decades. Keeping pace with these developments, which range from continuous technological innovation to increasing interdisciplinarity, is a perennial challenge for most HE instructors. Specific difficulties are exacerbated by the overarching reality that 'there is no single image of academic literacy within the university' (Anderson et al., 1990, p. 11). Proficiency and assessment standards of academic literacy vary widely, contingent as they are on the divergent expectations of departments, disciplines, lecturers, and assignments. Students, particularly international undergraduates, also face similar challenges to instructors. In this respect, Bartholomae's (1986) seminal observation that academic discourse is essentially foreign to most new students, both home and international, pertains.

With the rapid growth of interdisciplinarity, for example, international students in particular are confronted with 'increasingly varied contexts and practices of academic communication' (Hyland & Shaw, 2016, p. 2) delivered, to varying degrees, in a foreign language and in a largely unfamiliar academic environment. EAP practitioners are at the coalface of this flux and, as such, are uniformly aware of the urgency of the accompanying challenges. One of the primary aims of EAP teaching, therefore, is to alleviate the pressure on students by helping them develop the relevant knowledge and skills to engage pragmatically with both the increase and evolution of academic discourse practices. In this atmosphere of practical exigency, creating a meaningful space for *innovative* pedagogic approaches to EAP then becomes a secondary consideration for practitioners, and arguably even an indulgence. What this means for EAP itself, argues Pennycook (1997), is that it remains susceptible to both the prosecutions and ramifications of vulgar pragmatism (a term borrowed from Cherryhomes, 1988). Given the circumstances sketched above, however, it is no surprise that many EAP practitioners retain a narrow, almost utilitarian conception of the remit

of their discipline. It is to a discussion of arguments for and against this stance, particularly in relation to the use of literary texts in EAP teaching, that I now turn.

### **3.5.2 Arguments against Literature in EAP**

Although EAP is broader in its pedagogical scope than ESP in that its primary goal is to improve learners' generic academic English and study skills in order to facilitate progress in their core courses at university, the focus is still on relatively specific, functional, even context-reduced uses of language (Hyland, 2016). In such a pragmatic context, literature can have no meaningful place in the stringent teaching conditions which typically govern EAP. Its dominant instrumental orientation seems to leave relatively little room for alternative pedagogic approaches, which do 'little or nothing to help students to become competent users of the target language' (Robson, 1989, p. 25). In light of this, Horowitz (1990) examined the extent to which literature has a place in the EFL/EAP classroom, interrogating several major claims of those who advocate such an approach. In a trenchant but constructive analysis, Horowitz's purpose finally was not to dissuade teachers from working with literary texts at all. Rather, it was to enjoin them to make critically informed pedagogic choices and 'to think hard about how the actual activities performed in class fit in with their students' needs and wants' (Horowitz, 1990, p. 167). This is a fundamental concern in a discipline as potentially expansive as EAP, the curricular focus of which can range from teaching language such as relevant grammatical structures and the four basic literacy skills to raising awareness of more practical academic skills such as essay structure and referencing.

In view of this, choosing the most appropriate materials for any course is a key consideration for any practitioner and this is no less true in EAP. Since texts occupy a central place in EAP instruction, text selection is key. However, finding the right text is seldom straightforward, especially for learners of mixed disciplines and proficiency levels, a situation fairly typical of EAP classes. According to McKay (1982), literary texts represent a particular challenge as, before any other concerns, they need to be examined for their potential linguistic and conceptual difficulties. While good practice in any course presumes that texts are 'carefully selected and judiciously applied in accordance with the overall aims' (Hirvela, 1990, p. 243), EAP is characterized by its

materials and tasks being informed primarily by the instrumental needs of its students, a key feature of which is authenticity. Measured against this pragmatic criterion, literary texts would not qualify as authentic as they are not model texts or exemplars (unless of course they were used as such on a literature course).

Authenticity is not, however, a newly contested concept. Almost four decades ago, Crofts (1981) argued persuasively for using materials both of intrinsic interest to learners and supportive of their primary studies, rather than insisting on materials with 'authentic' content. Shifting the conceptual focus, Widdowson (2000) suggested that authenticity consists not in model texts per se but in the way a given text best fits its intended learning purpose. Pulverness (2002) agreed with this notion, contending that the pedagogic purpose of the activity is more important than the nature or genre of the text—that is, the process should be prioritized over the product. On this view, authenticity in EAP should reside in the linguistic functions and skills learners derive from the text rather than in the putative authenticity of the text itself. A similar case is advanced by Alexander et al. (2008), who argue that content or text authenticity can validly be superseded by task authenticity. It is not difficult therefore to accommodate these perspectives as a rationale for my research approach, especially with critical thinking as the projected outcome. Provided the activities are pedagogically appropriate, it is entirely plausible that academic reading skills—both macro (e.g. predicting, skimming and scanning) and micro (e.g. recognizing rhetorical functions)—could be developed by using a literary text in an in-session academic reading context over an extended period, as my study seeks to do.

Perhaps the strongest objection to using literary texts in EAP would come from advocates of John Swales' (1990) influential genre analysis instructional methodology. Taking learning through discourse as its premise, genre analysis is designed to develop learners' communicative competence in academic contexts. Central to Swales' thesis are three key interrelated concepts: discourse community, genre, and language-learning task. In practice, learners apprehend a range of academic discourse principles by identifying the linguistic features of specific genres, and practising the regular patterns peculiar to these text types. Yet even Swales (1990) is careful not to dismiss alternative

approaches to genre literacy. Adapting Candlin's (1987) elaborate conceptualization of task, for example, Swales (1990) explicates the place of the task in genre-based academic English teaching, and redefines it as a goal-directed activity *relatable* to an emerging awareness of genre. In this construal, Swales himself tempers his genre-centric claims by choosing to use the word 'relatable' instead of the more compelling 'conducive'. This choice 'allows the task-designer some freedom to experiment with various kinds of analysis and to explore unusual combinations of texts and tasks' (Swales, 1990, p. 76). There are strong implications in Swales' thinking here for my research approach, including my choice of texts and tasks.

Interestingly, while the genre analysis model is highly regarded by many HEIs in the US, the UK and Australia as the most efficient means of familiarizing international students with the genres they (will) encounter in these environments, this endorsement is not universal. Dudley-Evans (1997), himself a leading proponent of genre analysis, questions its ubiquitous implementation and warns against its uncritical acceptance as the sole model for appraising academic reading and writing texts. One of his strongest arguments in this respect is that as EAP matures as a discipline, its original pragmatic purposes are naturally branching off into more nuanced concerns. A significant instance of this is that the traditional focus on formulaic discourse patterns—frequently referred to as 'moves' (after Swales, 1990)—has gradually broadened over the last two decades to accommodate the natural evolution of academic discourse. EAP practitioners have responded favourably to complementary advances in the field, and largely embraced more recently introduced discursal elements, particularly those which foreground criticality, such as moves demonstrating argumentation. These developments, by implication, expand the potential for innovative instructional frames to be introduced, particularly in relation to academic reading and writing. In view of this, the model text—the artefact itself or even its form—need not invariably command primary focus. Indeed, Macbeth (2010) cautions that, while model texts can serve a clarifying purpose, they often do little to foster effective transfer of learning to other academic contexts. Instead, models make 'deliberate false provisions' (Macbeth, 2010, p. 33) in that they artificially foreground specific rhetorical elements which learners later find do not apply uniformly to other academic domains. For the purposes of my study, more important would be

the discursual and semantic discoveries brought about by what I call the *transactional dialectic* inherent in text-based group discussion, and how these could profitably be incorporated into the skillset typically promoted in EAP classrooms. The term transactional dialectic refers to an interrogative process of dynamic verbal exchanges which occur generatively in vibrant text-based dialogic discourse. These exchanges in turn give rise to cognitive arousal and disruption, which may or may not result in cognitive equilibrium.

### **3.5.3 Arguments for Literature in EAP**

It again bears emphasizing that the rationale for using literature in EAP is to complement rather than substitute traditional EAP pedagogy, which is usually utilitarian in both its aims and execution. My contention is that the remit of EAP thus construed imposes undue constraints on the creative potential of its pedagogy. That a utilitarian focus is warranted in the high-stakes context of a typical 15-week pre-sessional EAP course is not at issue, however. A pragmatic context such as this is legitimately informed by very specific learner needs and related practical constraints. Such exacting conditions necessarily preclude the sustained use of literary texts. But this is certainly not the case in the less constrained, more amenable environment of, say, a full-time in-sessional course spanning a whole academic year. Strategically placed in the timetable, a discussion group would afford learners a well-earned variation in their study routine as well as an opportunity to apply skills learnt from the usual more direct EAP instruction. It is in this spirit that literary texts have filtered steadily into EAP praxis over the last thirty years. Alan Hirvela (1990; 1993; 1998; 2001; 2005; 2016a, 2016b), for example, has long advocated an integrative approach to EAP/ESP reading and writing by using both literary and non-literary texts, and has demonstrated this successfully in various university contexts. Through his and others' research and practice (e.g. Carrell & Carson, 1997; Kim, 2004, Pally, 1997), literature has built a case for inclusion in contemporary EAP syllabus design.

Before examining that research, strong premises for such an argument can be found in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe (COE), 2001; 2018). This is a standardized instrument consisting of an extensively

researched framework of language learning, teaching and assessment criteria which promotes 'quality in second/foreign language teaching and learning as well as plurilingual and intercultural education' (COE, 2018, p. 23). All the major English language proficiency exams are now mapped to the CEFR descriptors. Substantially revised in 2018, these descriptors reflect key contemporary developments in language education such as online interaction, text mediation, young learners, and plurilingualism. Two further developments identified by the updated CEFR are *collaborative learning* and *reactions to literature*. These distinctly communicative activities are crucial components of my research project, and appear consistently in newly extended descriptors throughout the CEFR as salient markers of higher-order learning across all four of the broader principal learning activities: reception, production, interaction, and mediation. Collaborative interaction is presented as a fundamental facilitative process in the mediation of knowledge, with group participants dynamically engaged in the co-construction of meaning by managing communication, promoting conceptual talk, and negotiating pluricultural space (COE, 2018, pp. 100-102; 117-123; 209-217). Of the four primary language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) spoken interaction is afforded prominence and is organized into interpersonal, transactional and evaluative macro-functions. Significantly, the descriptors for these functions feature many similarities to the Quality Talk codes (Soter et al. 2006/2016) I will use to analyze the data from my reading circle discussions, which highlights both the pedagogic and research relevance of such an approach.

If collaborative learning represents the educative context for the fostering of text-based argumentation skills such as analysis, evaluation and inferencing, reactions to literature indicate the presence and development of these skills in language learners. Covering the four primary skills, the CEFR sets out three new scales relevant to learners' mediation of creative and literary texts: reading as a leisure activity, expressing a personal response to creative texts, and analysis and criticism of creative texts (COE, 2018, pp. 51; 65; 115-117; 206-208). The descriptors in each of these scales display a marked similarity to those of my proposed coding system for analyzing learners' critical thinking through collaborative argumentation. Significant instances of these descriptors are learners' ability to articulate both emotional and reasoned responses to the form and content of

a literary text; comment on the extent to which the text engages the reader and vice versa; and relate textual to real world events (Halpern, 2010). In both the CEFR (COE, 2018) and the Quality Talk teaching approach (Wilkinson et al., 2010; 2018) that I utilize for my reading circle discussions, these descriptors indicate learners' analytical, evaluative, and inferential skill levels. Given that such skills are also essential constituents of the critical thinking skillset—itsself a highly valued learning objective in EAP—there are clear advantages to using literature judiciously towards an improvement in criticality. Employed as such, literature in EAP potentially offers a richly rewarding trajectory for receptive learners and creative teachers alike (Hirvela, 1990).

In light of the CEFR's evaluation of literature in English language education, the question which arises is how important the distinction is, if any, between general ELT and more specific English language disciplines such as EAP and ESP. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 18-19), the answer is unambiguous:

ESP is *not* different in kind from any other form of language teaching, in that it should be based in the first instance on principles of effective and efficient learning ... ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular kind of teaching material. (original emphasis)

If this is accepted as a viable pedagogical premise, further pragmatic questions could follow. For example, what would engagement with literary texts look like in an EAP classroom? Ideally, it would involve initiating analysis and evaluation of text through individual reading tasks, followed by dialogic activities pursuing deeper inquiry through reasoning both collaborative (Sun et al. 2015) and argumentative (Iordanu et al., 2016). Instead of the usual activities around literary texts such as plot recitation and character description—which, while useful, are more appropriately located in a 'pure' literature class—students could engage in dialogic debate about related contextual issues. As an example, Lee and Goldman (2015, p. 213) suggest exploring not just the various characters in a narrative but the societal forces they represent, while adducing 'patterns of images and language use in the text as evidence'. Students could then be encouraged to evaluate these societal forces in terms of both their personal experience and the human condition more generally. Just such activities, I contend, have utility in the EAP

classroom, and this is because they move beyond literary reading to literary reasoning. Precisely this approach is adopted by Hirvela (e.g. 1990; 1993; 1998; 2001) in the strongest consistent argument for incorporating literature into EAP/ESP.

### **3.5.3.1 Hirvela's Contribution to Literature in EAP**

The importance of Hirvela's argument for my study lies in its conviction that the apparently rigid methodologies employed by EAP/ESP are able to accommodate teaching approaches and materials other than the ones routinely used in these contexts. In building his case, Hirvela draws on several related concepts introduced by Widdowson (1983) as a model from which to gauge the place of literature in ESP. The critical concept in Widdowson's consideration of ESP course design and pedagogy is the scale of specificity, along which are arranged the purposes of the course. At one end lie narrow-angle designed courses, which offer training; at the other, wide-angle designed courses provide education. Conformity—where learners follow established discoursal conventions to learn specific language patterns and features—is related to training, while creativity—where creative application of learnt language elements is encouraged—is associated with education. Extensions of the conformity/creativity dichotomy are goal-oriented versus process-oriented approaches to teaching. Respectively, learners are instructed to rigidly defined outcomes to promote competence, without opportunities to potentially enable post-course transfer, for example; or they are equipped with the means to continually practise the language as the course proceeds, enhancing their capacity. In a general reflexive assessment of this conceptual account of ESP pedagogy, Widdowson (1983) insists that neither approach is inherently preferable. The choice is rather to be defined by considerations specific to the course in question. Taking this into account, Hirvela (1990, p. 243) thus sees potential for locating literature 'within wide-angle, process-oriented, capacity-defined ESP courses found somewhere along the educational portions of the scale of specificity'.

One of his first studies (1990) involved the use of a science-themed short story in a science-oriented ESP class, which generated several positive outcomes, setting a strong empirical foundation for the use of literary texts as complementary to other more customary EAP/ESP materials. From this, Hirvela (1990, p. 248) tentatively concluded



that not only does creative use of literary texts address the pragmatic concerns of EAP/ESP learners and teachers, but it actually enhances the learning experience by providing ‘stimulating, thought-provoking content that may enrich [learners’] thoughts and perceptions concerning their target subject and other subject areas within a wider context’. Yet Hirvela has remained typically moderate in his claims, along with other practitioners and researchers who advocate the development of competencies seemingly incongruous with ‘literariness’ (after Carter & Nash, 1983; 1990) such as academic writing. There is no suggestion, for example, that literary works serve as exemplars of expository writing, but rather as alternative texts for generating and modelling the same critical thinking processes that underpin expository writing (Gajdusek & van Dommelen, 1993). However, invoking Tate’s (1993) argument that language learners should be afforded opportunities to explore the rich potential of the written word, literary or otherwise, Hirvela (1998, p. 325; my emphasis) proposes that any future debates on literature in EAP/ESP ‘should center on the core question of *when* might literature help, not whether to use it at all’.

In a later study focusing on students’ attitudes towards different text types employed in an undergraduate EAP context, Hirvela (2001) reported that his students ascribed value to both literary and non-literary academic texts. Their preference for a balance of text types suggests learners are more receptive to a wider range of approaches using texts than is favoured by conventional EAP pedagogy. While conceding that its inclusion must be supplementary to core course aims, Hirvela nonetheless submits that even the more narrowly focused discipline of ESP appears to have profited from work with literature.

### **3.5.3.2 Additional Arguments for Literature in EAP**

With spoken interaction viewed as ‘the origin of language’ (COE, 2018, p. 81) by the CEFR, academic speaking is becoming an increasingly important aspect of EAP, principally manifested in the contexts of seminars and presentations. This is particularly relevant to East Asian learners, often considered reticent in class speaking activities (Kim, 2006), as well as new students in first or foundation years. In a study to explore the efficacy of a literature circle in improving university L2 learners’ speaking and reading skills, Kim (2004, p. 145) found that learners developed diverse, insightful

perceptions from and responses to the text, involving 'literal comprehension, personal connections, cross-cultural themes, interpretation, and evaluation'. This is commensurate with findings which indicate, perhaps counterintuitively, that L2 readers who experience difficulty in certain areas of literary reading—such as vocabulary—may compensate in other areas by reading more strategically: they may, for instance, need to engage their metacognitive processes more readily (see Reichl, 2009, pp. 175-190, who provides an insightful synopsis of the research on L1-L2 differences in literary reading). Returning to Kim's (2004) study, the opportunity for freedom of expression among participants without fear of ridicule about their language proficiency resulted in highly dialogic social interactions which generated enjoyment, motivation, satisfaction and confidence. Given the importance of speaking in academic success, this study demonstrates that the congenial atmosphere generated by a literature discussion group can benefit learners immensely, by generally increasing their motivation to speak and their desire to continue reading, improving their textual comprehension, as well as contributing to their overall communicative competence by offering opportunities for them to produce extended output.

Attempting to develop critical thinking skills in EAP, Pally (1997) implemented a sustained content multimodal instructional approach, using forms such as popular films and literary texts. Pally's approach to critical thinking development was located within three domains (EAP, cognitive psychology and critical pedagogy), making it more rigorous than one rooted in a single domain. Classes involved dialogic and dialectic discussion of literary texts, of which several are socioculturally oriented and foreground complex ethical issues. Relatable themes such as personal insecurity and self-deception promoted high levels of interest among learners. This affective engagement, together with explicit critical thinking instruction and an emphasis on contextual considerations to complement logic, led to significant gains in both critical thinking and language proficiency. Importantly—and much like Halpern's (2014) insistence on persistent explicit instruction of content—Pally's (1997) focus on sustained content appears to have been a key factor in her study's positive outcomes.

To maximize the instructional effectiveness of EAP reading programmes, Carrell and Carson (1997) argue for the combination of both intensive and extensive reading. While recognizing that intensive reading in EAP classrooms allows learners to read strategically to acquire relevant academic skills transferable to the broader university context, the authors contend that extensive reading improves fluency and stamina with longer texts. Significantly, they dispel the oft-presumed bifurcation of intensive versus extensive reading, noting that these are 'not just two contrasting ways of reading, but an infinite variety of interrelated and overlapping strategies' (Carrell & Carson, 1997, p. 52), which are most effective when used together, providing judicious differentiation strategies obtain.

The aforementioned research, together with evidence accumulated from various text-based classroom discussion approaches (see Murphy et al., 2009), would suggest that alternative texts—such as literature—could achieve outcomes as effective as those using genre-specific texts. Generally speaking, the more engaging the task, the more productive the learning. Indeed, the dialectic endeavour involved in learners collaboratively uncovering 'academic' linguistic features through critical analysis of a literary text could be at least as cognitively and metacognitively engaging as, say, the standard EAP classroom scenario of using an authentic exemplar text to identify such features. As noted above, a potential pitfall of the text-as-product approach 'is that both EAP teachers and students begin to believe that such models are the only way in which academic [texts] can be presented' (Dudley-Evans, 1997, p. 352). In the alternative approach I propose, consistently highlighting academic linguistic features and pointing explicitly to their usage in both literary and academic texts could bolster the learner's apprehension of these features. This dual reinforcement could in turn lead to an improvement in the EAP learner's ability to read all texts encountered at university critically and purposefully, to evaluate what is read, and to apply it—by making notes or reinforcing an argument, for instance—at a later stage. Again, providing the activity is well-constructed, there are compelling reasons to believe that a well-chosen literary text would be at least as effective as a model expository text in achieving target academic skills outcomes.

### 3.6 Literature and Critical Thinking

That a relationship exists between literature and critical thinking is neither a novel idea nor an uncontested one. Comparing the cognitive resources necessary for effective engagement in both disciplines, Lazere (1987, p. 3) declared literature ‘the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking’. Two decades on, Bennet and Royle (2016, p. 7) claim sufficient evidence to dismiss as a myth the notion of an ‘elevated’ literary reading experience ‘unsullied by any critical thinking or complexity’. Citing T.S. Eliot’s (1975) contention that reading critically is akin to breathing and Roland Barthes’s (1990) insistence that even the fabled status of the ‘first reading’ of a literary text is just that—a fable—Bennet and Royle (2016, p. 7) argue strongly against the idea of ‘a completely unadulterated reading experience’ devoid of critical thinking.

The basis of Lazere’s assertion lies in the idea that literature reflects human experience in all its nuanced permutations, so to read a quality literary text is actively to transact with the infinite experiential potentialities which the text offers, real and imaginary. Expanding on this idea, Gillespie (1994) argues that literature allows readers simultaneously to find and lose themselves. They find or discover more about themselves through the judgements they make about characters and events encountered. This process often requires readers to look back on their personal experiences through a re-evaluative lens, resulting in fresh perspectives of self. On the other hand, readers lose themselves in the foreign worlds created by literature, any meaningful habitation of which demands active and purposeful engagement of inferential resources. The most important of these resources is imagination, a type of inference which is informed by experience but has the capacity to extend to imaginary realms.

Also an advocate of the literature-critical thinking connection, Tabačková (2015, p. 726) asserts that ‘it is in the essence of a literary text to challenge the critical thinking of the reader’. She draws an intriguing distinction between critical reading and critical thinking about reading: going further than the inferential, interpretive, analytical and evaluative skills involved in the former, critical thinking about reading necessitates *active reflection*

by readers on the text. For Tabačková (2015), this additional metacognitive effect of reading literature strengthens the link between the fictive world within the literary work and the real world without. While literature often signifies the outside world, its textual representations cannot actually *be* that reality. Indeed, it is this ontological impossibility which compels the reader, in an attempt to understand the world in the text, to dynamically—cognitively and metacognitively—engage elements of critical thinking such as prior knowledge, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

In the language classroom context, Schmit (2002) conceptualizes literature as an interrogative tool for critical inquiry, suggesting that critical thinking can be cultivated through questions arising from the critical analysis of literary texts. Predicated on the assumption that the depth of our understanding of the world is mediated by the kinds of questions we ask, well-conceived pedagogic inquiry into literature depends, for Schmit, on learners being receptive to questions likely to emerge from discussion around literary texts. Preparation for such questions involves careful scaffolding to fulfil both necessary and sufficient conditions for productive inquiry, an objective achieved by addressing issues first of content, then of interpretation, and finally of affective relevance. This considered ordering of questions functions to bridge the potential gap between teachers' and learners' implicit assumptions, and shifts the lesson focus from knowledge, comprehension and application to analysis, synthesis and evaluation. These six cognitive tasks were based on Bloom's (1956) original taxonomy of educational objectives. Notwithstanding the extent to which the assumptions of Bloom's taxonomy have since been questioned (see Pring, 1971, for an early philosophical critique), Schmit has constructed a useful framework of questions for practising critical thinking in the classroom using literary texts.

Turning to empirical studies, Garzón and Castañeda-Peña (2015) sought to implement Rosenblatt's (1982) reader-response theory in a literature reading university class of L2 pre-service teachers. Working from the epistemological premise that literature stimulates critical thinking, the authors used reading tasks also informed by the fundamental concepts of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. These tasks were designed to encourage the process of 'meaning seeking' and to develop higher order cognitive

skills—in short, to promote critical thinking. Infused overall by a combination of aesthetic reading and sociocultural theory, the study establishes a concise but credible argument for the development of critical thinking through the use of literature.

Another empirical study which employed an interesting pedagogic turn was conducted by Ko (2013). This was a qualitative case study of a teacher who delivered an English reading class at a Taiwan university. The class adopted a format similar to a literature circle (Daniels, 2002) and ran for one semester. Focusing on critical literacy, it sought to offer students with Confucian-based cultural and educational backgrounds opportunities to develop a language of sociocultural critique. Improvement was tracked through students' increasing awareness and subsequent articulation 'of how texts are constructed in ways that serve particular interests' (Ko, 2013, p. 97). Though Ko recognized the students' unfamiliarity with critique, he considered such opportunities necessary and important. Although several challenges were noted, such as students' initial resistance (based on their established beliefs about learning) and the lack of appropriate teaching materials, these were gradually overcome. Overall, the study reported positive results, one of the more encouraging outcomes of which was the teacher's transformation from information-giver to critical facilitator. His pedagogical approach shifted, respectively, from transmission to transactional (Neilsen, 1989) or, in Freirean (1970) terms, from banking teaching to empowering teaching.

Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) also applied a critical literacy approach to teaching critical thinking skills to MA trainee teachers using the medium of literary texts. Given literature's diverse interpretive possibilities, the authors highlight text selection which 'privileges those elements of the literary work whose analysis contributes to the acquisition of critical thinking skills' (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 681). With this in mind, they combined critical reading with critical literacy pedagogy, arguing persuasively that the intersecting strategies generate a dialectic interaction which leads to optimum conditions for critical thinking skills development. Applying this model in a detailed real lesson using Kipling's poem 'If' produced positive outcomes overall.

### 3.7 Collaborative Learning

My conception of collaborative learning does not observe the semantic distinctions between ‘collaborative’ and ‘cooperative’ routinely drawn in North American educational research (Bruffee, 1995; Matthews et al., 1995; Oxford, 1997). I apply the term more broadly, as used in sociocultural theory (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1986). From this perspective, collaborative learning involves knowledge construction within a social context, which encourages acculturation of participants into a learning community. Peer collaboration thus construed is widely acknowledged nowadays (e.g. Cazden & Beck, 2003) as sound pedagogical practice, from primary through to tertiary education. In such social constructivist approaches to learning, promoting collaboration between learners leads to dialogue, which in turn generates new ideas, thus affording learners opportunities to actively negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge. This interactive discursive process involves the reciprocal delivery, consideration, analysis, interrogation, clarification, and evaluation of multiple perspectives, drawn from each respondent’s unique sociocultural background, past experiences and personal values.

Language used in a dialectic mode such as this functions not simply as a communicative medium between learners but as a primary instrument in their cognitive development, in that it forms and shapes new ways of thinking and knowing (Vygotsky, 1986). By observing, emulating, and then selectively appropriating suitable dispositions and useful linguistic skills from each other, participants are able to explore complex issues more profoundly—often to resolution—than if they attempted to resolve such issues individually. Even a generic discussion group examining a text in a language classroom can develop thus into a richer *interpretive community* (Chinn et al., 2001; Fish, 1976), in which communal meaning making is enhanced by the continuous transaction of diverse viewpoints. It is important to note that while all interpretive communities allow participants sufficient leeway to present their unique interpretations in the construction of communal understandings, there are constraints on interpretive relativism, around which the community exercises an element of vigilance (Fish, 1976). As a result, argues Neilsen (1989, p. 10), ‘within any interpretive community there are not only limits on what meanings will be accepted but also constraints that tend to shape the meanings

that can be constructed'. This is because knowledge is ultimately understood within shared parameters which usually conform to agreed rules of evidence.

In collaborative learning contexts then, discussion between participants may be characterized as dialogic (Alexander, 2008; Bakhtin, 1981; Paul, 1986), referring to ways of thinking which evolve as they are shaped by the thoughts and perspectives of other members. According to Bakhtin (1984, p. 110), dialogic discussion is 'born between people collectively searching for truth' and is informed by an exchange of ideas conducive to this end. Alexander (2008) conceives of dialogism more specifically, namely as interactions which are collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and deliberate. Although the extent of learning generated by dialogic communication depends on a group's specific dynamics and objectives, a considerable amount of recent empirical research has demonstrated a compelling link between dialogic discourse in classrooms and significant learning outcomes. Notable results include improved reasoning across domains (Crowell & Kuhn, 2014), deeper conceptual apprehension (Reznitskaya et al., 2009), and enhanced inference and argumentation skills (Murphy et al., 2009; Soter et al., 2008).

Interestingly, however, collaboration in the classroom does not enjoy unequivocal sanction. As mentioned in the Introduction, dialogic pedagogy in particular should be judiciously implemented. Reznitskaya (2012, p. 449) cautions against dialogic teaching being perceived as a panacea, warning that it 'should not become dogmatic' at any level of education. Kuhn (2015, p. 51) is similarly circumspect about the uncritical acceptance of peer collaboration as the 'silver bullet' of learning. Noting the dearth of rigorous empirical research in this area, Kuhn cites studies on collaboration which demonstrate no benefits, with a few even reporting negative outcomes. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that research into the cognition of collaboration remains important. The cognitive benefits can be seen, for example, in educational contexts where argumentation is the focus (Kuhn et al., 2020). An even more robust objection to constructivist-based instruction is raised by Kirschner et al. (2006, p. 75) who, drawing on several decades of substantial empirical evidence, advance a credible argument that 'minimally guided instruction is less effective and less efficient than instructional



approaches that place a strong emphasis on guidance of the student learning process'. This point is reinforced by Alexander (2017) whose earlier comprehensive comparative study (2001) suggested strongly that cognitive scaffolding is necessary for learning, but is insufficient for *learning to a specific cultural purpose*' (2017; original emphasis). While a reading circle properly conducted would follow an established set of research-based pedagogic principles—including the teacher ensuring an activity is appropriately set up before transferring control to students—it would nonetheless be prudent for practitioners to be mindful of the above caveats as collaborative classroom activities continue to grow in popularity.

### **3.7.1 Collaborative Learning in Reading Circles**

Alternatively known as book clubs, literature circles or literary discussion groups, reading circles focus on the communal experience of members who meet regularly to read a literary text together, leading to discussion and other collaborative activities based around the text (e.g. Duncan, 2012). The different designations, while often interchangeably used, do sometimes suggest deeper variations in structure and practice, which together constitute what Green et al. (1988) call instructional frames. These frames set specific boundaries for the norms followed by participants in a given discussion group. In an educational context, instructional frames are important in that they usually have substantive implications for learning and assessment. Daniels' (2006) conceptualization of a literature circle, for example, has a more prescriptive instructional frame than the reading circle format I envision for my research, the parameters of which are explained later in this section.

With regard to collaborative learning, the act of reading is quite often a more communal activity than generally thought. Reviewing research on text-based classroom interaction, Miller (2003, p. 291) points to the 'persistence of classroom recitation as the major way of talking' about texts, an approach now generally thought to restrict thinking in learners. In the UK, it was only relatively recently, in the 1970s, that the 'language across the curriculum' (LAC) movement emerged in the UK as a response to recitation, advocating exploratory but purposeful talk among students as a key component of learning and of developing higher cognitive functions (e.g. Barnes & Todd, 1977; 1995).

The benefits of communal reading in the context of collaborative learning have led to a remarkable growth in reading discussion groups in contemporary American and Australian classrooms too. Known variously as book groups (Eeds & Wells, 1989), book clubs (McMahon et al., 1997) and literature circles (Daniels, 2002), these peer-led formats are routinely reported to generate more meaningful and elaborate responses among members than teacher-led speaking activities (Almasi, 1995). These outcomes have assuaged initial fears that teachers may be consigned to the periphery of their own classrooms. A key reason advanced for these successes is peer scaffolding, which is a central feature of discursal collaboration. Scaffolding is the practice of using a variety of instructional techniques to support students in the first stages of learning something new, thereby helping them progressively to achieve greater independence in the learning process (Bruner, 1983). Although scaffolding is usually expected to begin with the teacher, there should be a gradual transfer of control from teacher to students (Applebee, 1986), leading to the latter eventually facilitating their own interaction. This in-built peer support—demonstrated through cues and prompts, assistance with recall, decoding and interpretation, and constant feedback—is a co-operative effort which usually results in more being achieved than would be possible individually.

However popular the format of peer-led discussion groups, optimal results are neither automatic nor invariable. This is reflected in the relative inconsistency of the pedagogical gains documented. One reason for this variability, according to Miller (1997), is the ongoing 'problem' of the teacher's role in classroom discussion. Maloch (2002), too, sounds a cautionary note in this respect. She points out that making the transition from a traditional recitation-style structure to a more decentralized mode of interaction can be difficult. Her findings suggest that collaborative work is not inherently productive; that proper consideration should be given to potential problems arising from the shift in responsibility from teacher to students; and that the teacher's effectiveness as facilitator should not be underestimated but acknowledged and utilized. Overall, Maloch (2002) suggests that the process of shifting to a more 'democratic' discussion structure, particularly shifting control of turn taking and topics from teacher to students (Chinn et al., 2001), is often more complex and difficult than anticipated, and therefore needs careful planning, scaffolding, and flexibility. Another reason advanced for peer

talk not yielding consistent gains is simply that generic text-based discussion does not necessarily lead to optimal talk (Alvermann, 1995; Ku, 2014). This finding challenges a widely held assumption by contemporary instructors: that classroom talk naturally, organically promotes learning. This is in itself an understandable misapprehension, given that current pedagogy is predominantly located within the rich sociocultural and dialogic traditions of theorists such as Vygotsky (1978; 1986) and Bakhtin (1981), who suggest that learning is intrinsically social. Such exigencies notwithstanding, the general trend towards learner-led configurations at both primary and secondary school levels is that a growing number of reading groups are being formed to facilitate dialogic communication.

Accompanying this growth is an attendant rise in the number of empirical studies in both L1 and L2 classrooms (e.g. Chinn et al., 2001; McElvain, 2010). These report an extensive range of positive outcomes, including development in comprehension, general language skills, learner autonomy, and interpretation and argumentation skills. These last two skills represent literary analysis and critical thinking respectively (though not exclusively). While apparently discrete, they are among the several higher-order learning skills I expect to be coextensively developed in the transactional dynamism of the collaborative reading process. Indeed, Nguyen (2014) suggests that apparent differences in aesthetic<sup>5</sup> and critical-analytic reading should not make them mutually exclusive. Such an integrated approach to collaborative learning, entailing the combination of different reading stances, is a fundamental aim of my thesis.

To achieve this integration of aesthetic and critical–analytic reading, a particular kind of talk is necessary. Although Reznitskaya et al. (2001) found text-based talk to have variable potential to develop metacognition, comprehension, critical thinking, and general argumentation, consistent positive outcomes are not necessarily linked to the amount of talking which takes place (e.g. Ku, 2014 above). *Productive* talk, by contrast, is characterized by Wilkinson et al. (2010) as text-based talk which promotes high-level

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<sup>5</sup> This follows the concept developed by Rosenblatt (1978/1994) to suggest a stance—or particular focus or approach—adopted by readers towards the reading of a text. In this case, ‘aesthetic’ refers to what is being *lived through* by readers in the course of their transactions with the text.

comprehension of text involving reflective and critical-analytic thinking. Further optimizing productive talk is the chosen instructional frame, how well this frame is implemented, as well as what happens before, during and after the discussion (Murphy et al., 2016). With the intention of synthesizing the best features of those approaches, Wilkinson et al. (2010) developed a new discussion model called Quality Talk. This is the model chosen for this study, and it will be further explained in Chapter 4. It must be borne in mind that the ultimate goal of such dialogic discussion groups is not necessarily to improve the learners' L2. This is likely to occur incidentally and to varying degrees. It is rather for participants gradually to take individual responsibility for actively facilitating their own critical literacy and high-level comprehension through collaborative argumentation and thinking (Kuhn, 1996).

### **3.8 Research Question**

In seeking to explore the potential extent to which reading literature enhances learners' EAP education, this study asks the following primary question:

***In what ways, if any, does dialogic discussion in a literature reading circle contribute to the development of critical thinking?***

To answer the research question, I employed a qualitative methods approach to the study. Qualitative data were derived from the learners' dialogic discourse about and around literary texts discussed in the reading circle. These data were primarily analyzed using an adapted version of the Quality Talk coding system developed by Soter et al. (2006/2016). Further interpretation of participants' dialogic exchanges was informed by elements of relevance theory and abductive analysis. The next chapter provides a detailed account of my methodological approach to this study.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the empirical framework underpinning the conceptual examination of critical thinking, EAP pedagogy and dialogic discussion carried out in the previous chapters. This methodological approach was devised to facilitate the exploration of critical thinking development in a university setting, central to which was a research intervention into an existing EAP foundation class. The intervention took the form of a reading circle which in turn provided the basis for a multiple case study research design and the data collection process. The focal cases were three students selected on specific criteria (discussed later in this chapter) who engaged with their peers in dialogic discursive transactions about and around literary texts.

The chapter begins with a discussion of several philosophical considerations pertinent to the assessment not of critical thinking per se, but of thinking more generally conceived. I then present an overview of the research design, where I discuss the theoretical framework guiding the intervention, Exploratory Practice. An examination of the various stages of the data collection process follows, including an explanation of the instructional framework, represented by the reading circle. This is followed by the data analysis section, which discusses the multiple case study research approach, explaining its specific applicability to this project. Owing to the ineffable nature of critical thinking, the mental construct being examined, the rest of the analysis section provides an extensive rationale for my approach to interpreting and analyzing the findings. This includes a detailed account of my three complementary modes of interpretation: Quality Talk, Inference to the Best Explanation, and Relevance Theory. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the study's ethics.

Before considering any of the aforementioned aspects of the study, however, it is necessary to confront a foundational problem: that of 'measuring' thinking itself. The following section outlines several relevant considerations underlying the general measurement of cognitive processes, thus providing a necessary foundation for the

understanding of both the *a priori* conceptual difficulties and the practical implications of assessing critical thinking.

## **4.2 The Measurement Debate**

### **4.2.1 Causation and the Problem of Measuring Thinking**

The mind has always been a source of intrigue, not least because of its ontological indeterminacy. As a concept, it has evoked deep inquiry into the human condition, along with an inevitable desire to assess or ‘measure’ its workings. Attempts to measure mental processes have come up against a range of difficulties, largely due to the physical inaccessibility of the mind. The basis of these difficulties is perhaps best formulated in the form of a big question: *how can something which cannot be directly observed be measured?* This question, more broadly considered, has engaged philosophers across the disciplines and is also directly relevant to this study. Essentially, the question elicits several related concepts, one of which is causation, itself an object of regular contention across the disciplines (Humphreys, 2017). In experimental psychology, for example, where causal relations between the mind and behaviour are impossible to observe directly, causation has provoked a number of conceptual debates. The reason is simply that any psychological explanations, analyses and evaluations of causation cannot be assumed to be veridical; on the contrary, they depend entirely on inference.

According to Hitchcock (2013), of the diverse perspectives from which to analyze causation, it is epistemology which poses the big question above most persistently. Epistemological attempts to analyze causation invoke the unobservability of causal relations, which Hitchcock (2013, p. 362) illustrates thus: ‘we may observe the hot sun and the soft wax, but we do not observe the sun’s causing the wax to soften’. Applying this to our reading circle, I may as a researcher observe discussion among the participants, but I cannot observe the cognitive processes which generate their discursive transactions. From an epistemological perspective, this should present an insurmountable obstacle to research into thinking. Indeed, Hitchcock (2013) concedes that drawing a causal inference based on observations of the sun’s heat and the softened wax would require the observer to have *direct* epistemic access to the phenomena concerned—that is, essential knowledge of their reality. For a researcher,

access to knowledge of this kind is an implausible expectation. This is true even in the case of the sun and the wax, where one would perhaps have the evidential ‘advantage’ of being able to measure the temperature at which the wax begins to soften.

Comparatively then, inferring causal connections between a reading group’s discursive activity and the unobservable cognitive processes of its members seems an even less tenable proposition.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising that epistemologists contest the plausibility of direct epistemic access and prefer therefore to assess the truth value of causal claims in non-causal terms. However, Hitchcock (2013) views this approach to causation analysis as reductive, and maintains that it can be resisted both theoretically and empirically. Citing the electron as an example of an unobservable entity, he argues that it is unfeasible to translate knowledge claims involving electrons into strictly empirical terms. A reasonable epistemology, continues Hitchcock, can require no more of causal claims than that they be subject to scrupulous empirical corroboration or disconfirmation. Also, findings arising from a research project should be informed by a comprehensive well-established theory—which in psychology is fundamental to advancing the efficacy of causal inference (Eronen, 2020; Eronen & Bringmann, 2021). To underscore his contention that the truth value of causal claims can be assessed in causal terms, Hitchcock (2013) observes that robust evidence supporting causal claims involving unobservable variables is routinely collected through rigorously controlled trials. Such experiments are conducted in the medical sciences, for example, which entail ‘various observational consequences’ or render ‘some observations more probable than others’ (Hitchcock, 2013, p. 362).

However, De Houwer (2011) advances an effective opposing argument to Hitchcock’s, supporting his case by invoking the general principle developed by Hempel (1965) to explain phenomena in scientific terms. Such explanations consist of the *explanandum* (the conclusion, that which needs to be explained) and the *explanans* (the premises, that which is used to explain). In short, the principle dictates that these two components need to be kept separate. Citing the explanandum as the behavioural effect and the

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<sup>6</sup> There are of course even more ineffable pursuits in human inquiry, such as conceptualizing Schrödinger’s *wave function*, an abstruse mathematical entity which seeks to describe the probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics (Aharanov et al., 1993).

explanans as the mental construct, De Houwer argues against the prevailing research practice in cognitive psychology of using behavioural effects as proxies of mental constructs. Bailin and Siegel (2003, p. 181) concur: 'it is impossible to determine whether particular mental operations correlate with particular cases of good thinking'. De Houwer's (2011, p. 203) strongest point is that treating given behaviours as 'equivalent to the presence of the mental constructs themselves' is problematic because this practice is predicated on *a priori* assumptions about direct causal relations between mental constructs and behaviour. To begin to validate such a claim, contends De Houwer (2011, p. 103), 'the mental construct needs to be a necessary condition for the effect (i.e. the effect can be present only if the mental construct is present)'. However, while the behavioural effect may well be explained with causal reference to the mental construct (for example, a cogently expressed argument *can* have resulted from the presence of critical thinking) this does not fulfil a sufficient condition for *substituting* one for the other. It is clear from De Houwer's perspective that if the observed behaviour can plausibly be attributed to a cause other than the designated mental construct, then such a situation cannot provide a justifiable basis for full causal inference. De Houwer's aim in this argument is not to undermine cognitive approaches to psychology per se but to point out the limitations of knowledge claims derived from uncritical attribution of observable behaviour to mental constructs.

Overall then, the notion of inferring causal connections between unobservable and observable phenomena turns out to be extremely complex. Such complexities have fundamental implications for knowledge claims based on theoretical quandaries across the disciplines, including those around the construct of critical thinking. The relevance of the measurement problem in psychology to this study lies in the interventionist nature of the project and how this feature of my research has informed my approach to analyzing the data. In a later section of this chapter (4.5.2) I elucidate several key implications of the measurement problem as it relates to my data analysis.



## **4.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **4.3.1 Overarching Research Design**

#### **4.3.1.1 Methodological Context**

Since Ennis (1962; 1964) introduced the contemporary notion of critical thinking in the early 1960s, theorists and researchers have attempted to address ways of developing critical thinking by exploring a variety of teaching approaches in a range of educational settings. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of prominent pedagogical approaches to classroom talk, Murphy et al. (2009) identified nine contemporary methods as variously effective in fostering high-level comprehension of text, which led to the researchers synthesizing the best aspects of the established methods. The resultant approach, Quality Talk, is the one chosen for this study, and is discussed later in this chapter. In an even wider-ranging meta-analytical study of the impact of instructional interventions on the development and enhancement of critical thinking skills and dispositions, Abrami et al. (2008) found that critical thinking can be taught most effectively when the course aims are made explicit and student awareness of these is sustained in all related activities throughout the intervention. A follow-up meta-analysis by Abrami et al. (2015) focused on the most effective strategies for teaching students to think critically. This study indicated that both general and domain-specific critical thinking skills and dispositions can be taught at all educational levels across the disciplines. Opportunities for dialogue and exposure to examples of authentic situated problems were two key factors which contributed significantly to successful outcomes. Abrami et al.'s findings in both studies were instrumental in influencing the instructional features of my reading circle project.

While the studies involved in the meta-analyses by Abrami et al. (2008; 2015) and Murphy et al. (2009) were different in many ways, they shared a common but important criterion. They were all empirical and, as such, provided significant insights into the practical variables that influence the teaching of critical thinking. These meta-analyses also reveal that many of the studies they examined, like much earlier empirical research into critical thinking, leaned heavily on quantitative measurement based largely on established assessment formats such as multiple-choice tests. While not intrinsically

unsatisfactory, outcomes from such research were often inadequate in providing a comprehensive representation of the potential efficacy and range of critical thinking instruction. What was lacking was a qualitative component which revealed the personal and social ways in which students encountered criticality in the classroom. A subsequent shift in pedagogical approaches to critical thinking, however, has led to a corresponding shift of research focus to mixed-methods and qualitative studies (Tsui, 2002).

#### **4.3.1.2 My Project**

For the current study, I was confronted from the outset by the challenge of how to ‘measure’ critical thinking, a mental construct I would not be able to observe (see section 4.2 above). My intention at first was to employ a mixed-methods approach to obtain such a measurement (see Appendix H for the ethics application outlining my original proposal). After careful reconsideration of my aims, however, I opted to pursue an exclusively qualitative study. This involved exploring a novel approach to reading and discussing literary texts in an EAP classroom, a process which this chapter explicates. The rationale behind my decision to set aside the quantitative component of the study was the wish to mitigate what Eronen (2020) inelegantly calls *fat-handed* research interventions. Fat-handedness refers to the improbability of being able to manipulate only the target variable in a psychological intervention without changing other contributing variables in the causal path. This notion highlights the problem of establishing precise causal connections between variables, and points to the inherent difficulty in accurately attributing an effect to its direct cause. This is difficult because there exists no straightforward method of manipulating just a single psychological variable, such as a thought or an emotion (Eronen & Bringmann, 2021). Instead, the techniques that are used, such as verbal instruction, are indirect and external; and such stimuli are typically not sufficiently specific to prompt a change in just one variable.

In my intervention, a case in point, it was impossible to determine precisely which single criterion of the many that comprise critical thinking was being exhibited at any given moment in the reading circle discussions. My assessments could only be made indirectly, by observing dialogic transactions as part of the reading circle at that initial stage of the data collection process and thereafter by analyzing the audiovisual recordings of these

exchanges and their transcripts. On this basis, achieving accurate causal interpretation of the data in relation to my research aim was an improbable prospect. After all, an intervention on a non-psychological variable (a university classroom) with the aim of developing a psychological variable (critical thinking), validly geared though the research project may have been to interpret the data which emerged, would be open to stringent questions involving the precise attribution of effect to cause. For instance, was the non-psychological variable of dialogic discussion caused by the single broad psychological variable of critical thinking? Might there have been contributing cognitive causes (such as a participant's personal experience or current mood) or indeed extraneous factors in play (such as the classroom being too hot or a participant not having read the story being discussed)? These kinds of questions—which deal, firstly, with unobservable cognitive elements and, secondly, with human features such as emotions—would be very difficult to answer with quantitative analysis. Given these considerations, I found that shifting to a qualitative empirical framework was a more appropriate fit for interpreting the data.

This turn had several implications. One concerned the research setting and instructional approach, which turned out to be my own classroom and the use of Quality Talk, respectively. While many empirical studies on classroom talk have utilized Quality Talk since its inception in 2009 (e.g. Davies & Meissel, 2016; Murphy & Firetto, 2016), relatively little of this research was conducted in university classrooms and, as far as I am aware, none employed the discussion format of a literary reading circle in an EAP foundation programme with the aim of developing students' critical thinking. Moreover, since my instructional focus was dialogic discourse based on literary texts, it made sense to follow a participant observational approach which entailed a classroom intervention. This decision led to my exploring the literature on research within the classroom setting and resulted in the adoption of Exploratory Practice, a form of practitioner research. I found that extensive research had already been conducted on classroom discussion *groups* focused on improving higher-order thinking—for example, the approach of *Collaborative Reasoning* developed by Anderson et al. (1998) and Reznitskaya et al. (2009). I chose therefore to explore critical thinking development in *individual* participants in the form of case studies. The process of selecting my focal participants

led eventually to my seeking a suitable approach to data analysis, a process I recount later in this chapter.

### **4.3.2 Exploratory Practice**

Exploratory Practice is an innovative and principled form of qualitative practitioner research in language education developed by Dick Allwright (1993; Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Exploratory Practice interests me as a research framework because it is ethically motivated: its overall goal is to encourage collaboration between teachers and learners to achieve better understandings of their work and each other in the normal course of classroom life. This element of Exploratory Practice reflects its explicit recognition of the inherently social nature of pedagogy, a perspective espoused by theorists such as Dewey (1963) and Freire (1973). In doing so, it implicitly rejects criticisms levelled at practitioner research generally as 'limited, naïve and descriptive' (Hanks, 2017, p. 54). Indeed, it was conceived in some measure as a response to such assumptions about qualitative approaches to education research. Exploratory Practice foregrounds the *humanness* of learners, a priority exemplified in its emphasis on learners as equal to the teacher in their status as collaborators, and on learners' agency in research practice as a form of development for them as much as for the teacher.

Since its beginnings in the early 1990s, the Exploratory Practice framework has evolved over three major developmental stages. Hanks (2017) identifies the first stage as approximately 1991-1997, which saw the framework's conceptual characteristics emerge, including the increasing use of the definitional term 'exploratory practice'. The second period (1997-2003) shifted focus more towards the notion of 'working for understanding', while the third (2003 to date) began to highlight 'quality of life' as a key objective. Presented as necessarily open to theoretical and practical development, the original themes of Exploratory Practice were condensed into a set of seven general principles. After a few years, this set of principles developed into what Allwright and Hanks (2009) saw as a more inclusive research approach, which had assumed the following more definitive configuration:

#### **The 'what' issues**

1. Focus on quality of life as the fundamental issue.

2. Work to understand it, before thinking about solving problems.

**The 'who' issues**

3. Involve everybody as practitioners developing their own understandings.

4. Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.

5. Work co-operatively for mutual development.

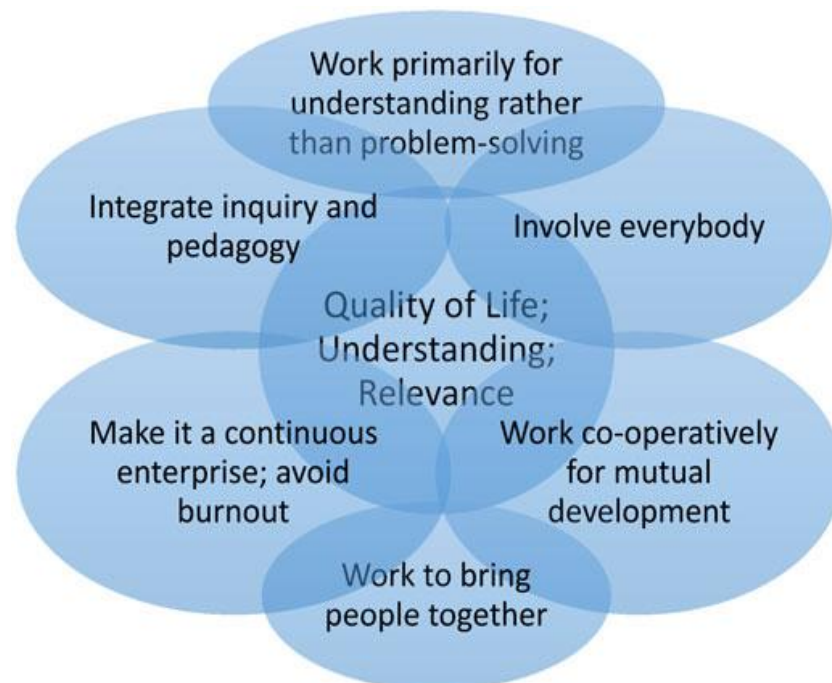
**The 'how' issues**

6. Make it a continuous enterprise.

7. Minimize the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

While 'quality of life' undergirds the entire research enterprise, the rest of the principles subsist in a collegial atmosphere generated by participants interacting organically in what Candlin and Crighton (2013) characterize as a discourse of trust. Figure 4.1 (from Hanks, 2019) represents in its ideal form this ongoing dynamic of reciprocal support geared towards the achievement of all participants' goals.

**Figure 4.1 Exploratory Practice Principles as an Interconnected Whole**



Possibly my most important reason for choosing Exploratory Practice is its seventh principle: '*Minimise the burden* by integrating the work for understanding into normal

pedagogic practice’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260; original emphasis). With large classes, few contact hours and heavy schedules, teachers often have difficulty finding time to fit in classroom research, either to improve lessons or to engage in vocational development. For learners too, the demands of core courses and their lives outside the classroom make any extra work undesirable. Various research projects led by this seventh principle have received positive feedback from learners (e.g. Gunn, 2005).

Exploratory Practice is comparable in some respects to other practitioner research frameworks such as action research (AR) (Burns, 2005; 2010), teacher research (TR) (Borg, 2009; 2013) and reflective practice (RP) (Edge 2011; Mann & Walsh, 2017). These approaches share a view of education as fundamentally social and the classroom as the site for research. To varying degrees they seek to empower practitioners and encourage among participants an awareness of reflection as integral to their learning (Hanks, 2017). However, several features in particular set Exploratory Practice apart from these other models. One is that *understanding* of ‘puzzles’ within classroom practice is both preferred and prior to attempts at problem-solving. While action research, for example, aims to identify problems which need to be solved in order to rectify a situation, Exploratory Practice is exploratory and inquisitive, encouraging ‘an openness to discussing things that might not immediately make sense’ (Hanks, 2017, p. 4). In striving to understand the reasons for existing puzzling conditions in the classroom, its focus is clearly different from that of other practitioner research approaches. A second feature prioritizes learners as co-researchers, with opportunities to explore their own perspectives on the puzzle at hand; collaboration, therefore, is key. Thirdly, inquiry is incorporated into routine pedagogic practice, with a developmental focus—that is, on ‘process’ rather than ‘project’ or ‘stance’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). A fourth distinguishing characteristic is that classroom research and practice are integrated. These are the key principles of a robust set which ‘always remain in the process of development’ (Allwright 2003, p. 129) and are thus open to refinements as necessary.

But how is Exploratory Practice research actually conducted? While there is no precise format governing specific Exploratory Practice projects (see Hanks 2013; 2017), there is always a dual research emphasis: follow its own key principles as well as following

rigorous qualitative research principles, demonstrated through data collection and analysis. In my project, the central puzzle informing the research revolved around the apparently incongruous use of literary texts in the typically utilitarian context of an EAP classroom. Learners were encouraged to explore their own puzzles around this research rubric (although their pursuits were beyond the scope of the current study). The collective research aim was pursued via the reading circle through collaborative reading and dialogic discussion, where all participants sought to understand the workings of critical thinking and develop creative strategies to develop these skills.

#### **4.4 Data Collection – The Intervention**

##### **4.4.1 Overview**

The research intervention took place in the second semester of the year-long International Foundation Programme (IFP), which I had taught on for the previous five years (see Appendix C: Intervention Class Schedule). The Tuesday morning session was designated the reading circle class, where participants would meet for two hours each week for five months. Sessions followed the procedure described in the following section. When the first half of the intervention was completed, an open-class plenary session was held to gather impressions about the previous period's process, refresh the course aims, and confirm its next stage. This session was not included as a formal component of my data collection, though was recorded with a view to maintaining the focus of the reading circle. With the group having completed the final story at the end of the final term, I conducted a summative focus group session to obtain final reflections on the entire process. This too was recorded audio-visually but again did not constitute a formal part of the current study. Rather, it provided valuable feedback and insights into the students' individual and collective experience.

##### **4.4.2 Research setting**

The setting for my research project was a university located in southwest London. The IFP's primary aim was to prepare international pre-first year students for entry into undergraduate university programmes and, more generally, to introduce them to the academic culture of UK higher education. It was a full-time course which started in

September and was run over twenty hours a week, providing sixteen hours of Academic English instruction along with four hours of mathematics and IT instruction. This intensive syllabus was intended to encourage academic and social assimilation, thereby mitigating the various challenges international students inevitably encounter when studying abroad (e.g. Kashima & Loh, 2006; Schartner, 2015; Schartner, 2016). From personal observation, students enrolled for the full year at this level typically had the opportunity to participate and develop in a supportive academic environment. For most students, such an environment leads to increased confidence, which then stands them in good stead when exposed subsequently to the full experience of university life. Indeed, Miller (1995) found that students' inclination to engage actively and meaningfully in class activities depended very much on the extent to which their contributions would be socially valued by other students and the teacher—in other words, how socially supportive their learning environment was. Therefore, establishing a congenial classroom atmosphere in which students felt comfortable expressing their views on various issues was crucial to eliciting the kind of higher-order thinking this project sought to develop.

While creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere should be a priority for all teachers, pursuing my primary aim of exploring students' critical thinking development necessitated a reappraisal of my usual approach to establishing such an atmosphere. This was due largely to the inescapable culture of 'safetyism' (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Twenge, 2017), which for the past several years has been spreading rapidly in American, UK and other anglophone universities around the world. Safetyism is a university campus culture derived from a student-driven 'inclusivist' movement whose general objective is to rid universities of words, ideas, issues and behaviour which may lead to distress, offence, or even just unease—in short, to actively prevent any discourse which leads to students feeling 'unsafe'. Equipped with its own sub-discourse which includes such emotive terms as *triggering*, *microaggressions*, *safe spaces* and *no-platforming*, the growth of this culture has resulted in a significant curtailing of freedom of expression on university campuses, to the extent of 'affecting what can be said in the classroom, even as a basis for discussion' (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015). Given my research aim, therefore, this phenomenon presented me with a seemingly unresolvable paradox: critical thinking



is not coextensive with safetyism. At the very least, they are cognitively incongruent. In stark contrast to the prevailing climate of heightened sensitivity on campuses, the most basic attempt at critical thinking requires an interrogative disposition (Hamby, 2015) and an openness to viewpoint diversity and constructive conflict (Hayes, 2015). Participating in a reading circle means divergent perspectives are shared, with some accepted and others challenged or rejected. There exists in this environment, understandably, a variable risk of offence.

Another anticipated challenge—and so pre-emptively addressed—was the group’s potential difficulty in transitioning between its dual identities as a reading circle and an EAP class, and to relating to me outside my principal role of teacher. Following Duncan (2012), one way I addressed this was through continuous explicit reinforcement of the project’s overall aim: the development of critical thinking. I still taught these students in other classes on the established EAP programme, so raising their awareness of the different aims and modes of instruction of those classes vis-a-vis the reading circle reinforced the distinctions between them. What also helped was precise clarification of the roles participants would assume in the discussion group and the rationale for these roles. For example, the term ‘teacher’ was replaced with ‘facilitator’ in the context of the reading circle, a change which was itself explained in terms of the critical thinking discourse I was already cultivating in the class. In this vein, we also examined the conceptual differences between the reading circle and typical classroom environment with reference to participant identities or roles, interactional dynamics and social space, participant numbers, and pedagogical objectives (Ro, 2018).

Another two-sided concern I had at the time was as an observer. One aspect related to the participants and the possible occurrence of the observer's paradox (Labov, 1972), a self-consciousness about being watched which could lead inadvertently or deliberately to participants modifying an aspect of their behaviour. Chambers (2009), however, argues that this kind of response can be mitigated through unpremeditated and fortuitous interruptions by participants. Although a few participants were initially reserved from suddenly being exposed in a small group, they very quickly became

accustomed to the congenial dynamics of the reading circle, and any incipient self-consciousness soon dissipated.

The other potentially challenging aspect of my observational role was the problem of subjectivity. While intimate proximity to a project focused on people ensures a certain authenticity of interpretation, it also necessarily admits the element of subjectivity. This apparent paradox recalls Wolcott's (1995, p. 96) instructive observation that researchers in the role of participant observers should 'not believe for a minute that there is any such thing as "just observing"'. This statement points to the unavoidable reality that a researcher's active involvement influences and can even determine how events unfold in the field, thereby affecting outcomes. More than that, it underscores the inevitability of the researcher's inherent biases or what Wolcott (1995, p. 96) calls an observer's 'blind spots'. This notion aligns fairly cohesively with Harding's (2013) conception of Standpoint theory, a feminist account of epistemology developed by Smith (2020), which advocates the idea that all knowledge is mediated by one's position in society. Predicated on three principles—that comprehensive, objective knowledge is unknowable; that epistemic standpoints are unique to every individual; and that an individual's standpoint is not self-evident and immutable—Standpoint theory argues that researcher bias can never be fully divested of and this acknowledgement must be the basis of what Harding calls *strong objectivity* (Harding, 2013). Overall, Standpoint theory highlights the significance of identifying and appreciating one's standpoint, and recognizing it as a viable entry point to critical inquiry. The challenge confronting me was the extent to which I could mitigate the incursion of subjectivity into my analytical interpretations in order to ensure my findings were trustworthy. To address this, at least in part, I charged myself mindfully with maintaining a robust reflective vigilance against unconstrained subjectivity.

#### **4.4.3 Research Participants**

The participants in my reading circle were recruited from the IFP. Every year at the start of the foundation course students are placed into small classes, each consisting of between 12-20 learners of similar English proficiency levels. This overall linguistic aptitude is determined through an initial diagnostic test, which assesses the four

primary skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as grammar and vocabulary. An auspicious factor at this initial stage of my project were the learners' English language levels which, due to newly implemented entry conditions, were comparatively high (e.g. IELTS speaking average = 7.0). This, together with the learners' notable responsiveness in speaking activities, boded well for the intervention. Recruitment numbers for that academic year comprised an initial cohort of nineteen students, to whom the project was explained. Nine students expressed interest in participating and were then given a full induction to the intervention course, including consent forms and information sheets (see Appendices A and B respectively).

A group of ten participants, including me, became the reading circle. The remaining students formed the alternative Academic Reading class, whose pedagogic focus would be to develop academic reading skills through the use of expository texts. Both sets of students were happy with the arrangement as all were consulted and informed, and chose their respective classes independently. Since both these classes functioned as electives, potential ethical issues concerning participant choice were addressed. As noted in the Ethics section towards the end of this chapter, throughout the study all names were replaced with pseudonyms. The following table presents an outline of the student participants in the reading circle. Appendix D provides a set of mini-profiles of the participants, which highlight their general operating levels of spoken proficiency.

**Table 4.1 Profile Outlines of Reading Circle Participants**

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Target Course</b>
<b>Selena</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Peruvian</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>BA Business Management</b>
<b>Alyeh</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Iranian</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Fashion</b>
<b>Satya</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Saudi</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Philosophy</b>

Juan	Male	Ecuadorian	20	Primary Education
Dmitri	Male	Uzbek	21	ICT
Shav	Male	Uzbek	21	BSc Accounting
Kolya	Male	Uzbek	23	BA Business Management
Samir	Male	Senegalese	23	BA Business Management
Fernao	Transgender male	Brazilian	32	BA Business Management

#### 4.4.4 Text Selection

Text selection was a crucial feature of this study for several reasons (see Appendix G for a list and synopses of texts). First, literature was not the usual choice for EAP so its use needed to be justifiable in terms of the course objectives. Second, to mitigate any disparities in participants' language proficiency, the texts needed to be linguistically accessible to all. Third, an objective the study sought to cultivate—namely enhancing participants' critical thinking dispositions to levels which potentiated learning transfer—depended on the soundness of my pedagogical assumptions around critical thinking and texts. For teaching critical thinking, I espouse task over text: my assumption is that the *cognitive processes* engaged in dialogic discussion of either literary or expository texts are similar, depending on the aims of the task. For example, if the task requires textual analysis and evaluation, which entails critical thinking, then it does not matter which text is used to engage those cognitive operations.

So why literature? My intentions were twofold: to raise participants' interest by introducing an approach to materials and instruction significantly different from the

standard EAP experience with which they were already familiar; and to draw them in using the appeal of personalization. I hoped that the relative familiarity of the human stories presented in the texts combined with the classroom's relaxed environment would lead to generative discussion. According to Miller (1995), students' discursive exchanges, including those about literature, are able to shape dialogic thinking characterized by 'self-reflexive strategies and the intellectual disposition to use them' (par. 6). And why short stories? This fictional form was chosen mainly for its narrative brevity, but also for being self-contained and linguistically accessible to students. Texts which addressed these factors would leave room for the higher-order cognitive processes to emerge, which I was hoping to discern.

How were the texts chosen? Following Duncan's (2012) text selection procedure, participants were first invited to indicate their genre preferences, a process which involved reflection, list-making, and discussion. In doing so, they were already engaging in what would become the primary mode of learning in the classroom: dialogic talk. Indeed, this dialectical process of text selection was highlighted to learners as the first instance of critical thinking in the research project. The initial discussion culminated in a collective decision to read short stories. Bearing in mind the students' expressed genre preferences, I perused a range of sources, returned with a longlist, and together with the participants selected the shortlist of stories to be read each week. This study being an exploratory exercise, however, I wished to see what data the forthcoming discussions would generate, so avoided stipulating texts with themes and content which might have seemed better suited to eliciting critical thinking. As it turned out, love and relationships organically emerged as popular topic choices.

#### **4.4.5 Instructional Framework - Quality Talk**

Instruction—or more accurately, learning—took place within the context of the reading circle and focused on learners' critical thinking development through collaborative discussion. In framing the instructional approach to be used in my intervention, I drew on Wilkinson, Soter & Murphy's (2010) model of Quality Talk. This is an integrated approach to conducting small-group text-based classroom discussion, which seeks to develop students' aptitude in critical thinking, reasoning, argumentation and

metacognition. Taken together, these function as cognitive tools which contribute to 'critical-reflective thinking about and around text' (Wilkinson et al., 2010, p. 144).

Quality Talk originally derives from nine extant models of classroom talk which Murphy et al. (2009) included in a meta-analysis. These models are Collaborative Reasoning, Paideia Seminar, Philosophy for Children, Instructional Conversations, Junior Great Books Shared Inquiry, Questioning the Author, Book Club, Grand Conversations, and Literature Circles. How these discussion formats play out depends on the aims of the activity, whether they be 'to acquire information on an efferent level, to adopt a critical-analytic stance, and/or to respond to literature on an aesthetic or expressive level' (Wilkinson et al., 2010, p. 148). The importance of each of these aims varies, depending on the task. The statistical synthesis of these comparable and competing discussion models provided the basis for the development of an integrated yet flexible approach to classroom group discussion, several features of which were recognized to be effective in contributing to the achievement of the aforementioned aims. Particularly effective features included students' reading stance towards text, who chooses topics for discussion, and whose textual interpretation is deemed most authoritative. Other elements also influenced outcomes to varying degrees, depending on whether the teacher or students were primarily responsible for making decisions about them. These elements included turn taking, text choice, group size, and leading the group. Wilkinson and Murphy, together with their research colleagues, have since conducted a considerable amount of empirical research refining Quality Talk and consolidating the efficacy of its application in a variety of educational contexts (e.g. Chen & Lo, 2021; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Lightner & Wilkinson, 2017; Murphy & Firetto, 2017).

Quality Talk comprises four instructional components: an ideal instructional frame, which provides parameters important for quality discussion; discourse tools and signs which are discursive elements or features teachers can utilize to both foster and recognize productive talk; teacher modelling and scaffolding, indicating conversational moves to initiate and facilitate talk; and several pedagogical principles, drawn from perspectives on language learning essential for sustaining a culture of dialogic inquiry.

Wilkinson et al. (2010) argue that these pedagogical principles should exhibit the following features:

- rich, generative texts with sufficiently familiar referents to stimulate interest yet encourage interpretive variety
- discussion norms or ground rules e.g. turn-taking, polite interjecting
- ‘big’ or interpretive questions: these initiate new segments of discussion which elicit divergent perspectives, and encourage reflective and reasoned responses
- the idea that language expresses thinking (an essential premise of my thesis, together with the assumption that collaborative language expression—or dialogic discussion—actually *generates* thinking)
- productive talk which combines structure and flexibility
- gradual transfer of discussion control from teacher to students

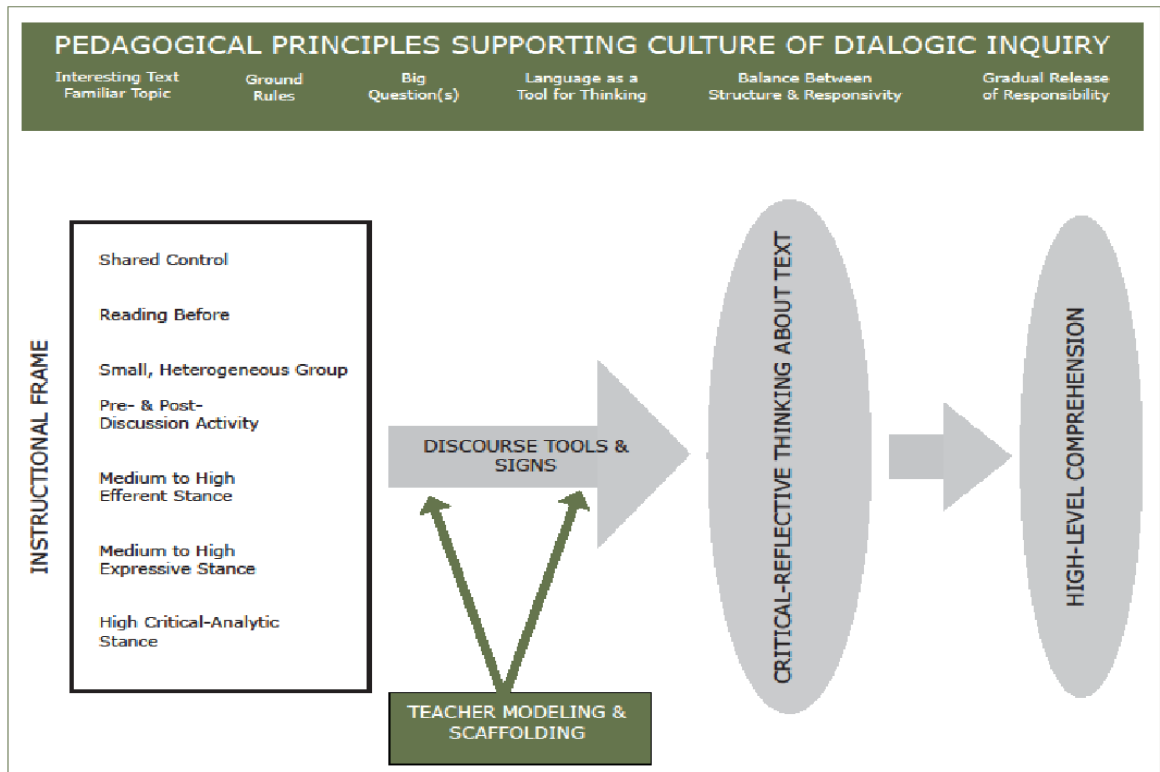
Figure 4.2 below (Wilkinson et al., 2012) illustrates how the four instructional components interact, and how they relate to critical-reflective thinking and high-level comprehension. In summary, the context for Quality Talk discussions is provided by the instructional frame, which is itself subsumed by a broader classroom culture of dialogic inquiry, signified and informed by the pedagogical principles. Together, the context and culture foster the discursive elements of tools and signs, which lead to learners engaging in critical-reflective thinking about and around text. Teacher scaffolding is used to initiate learners into the kind of dialogic productive talk which generates this critical-reflective thinking. Learners’ active critical-reflective thinking, as a result, contributes to their high-level comprehension of text.

My hope was that the culture of dialogic inquiry governed by Quality Talk would sustain an atmosphere of critical interrogation (Abrami et al., 2008). Engaging thus would lead participants to wrestle discursively with open-ended issues, ill-structured problems<sup>7</sup> and authentic contexts thrown up by the texts (Lai, 2011), which would result in critical thinking development.

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<sup>7</sup> Ill-structured problems are those located in authentic contexts but without a definite answer. The answer depends on the respondent’s ability to make judgements based on reasoning and prior experience (King & Kitchener, 1994; 2004; Kuhn, 1991).

Figure 4.2 Summary of Quality Talk



#### 4.4.6 Transcription

An essential component of most qualitative research across various academic and professional domains, transcription is ‘the process of converting recordings of social or communicative human interaction into written text’ (Skrla, 2007, p. 5044). This succinct definition belies to some degree the extensive landscape of transcription, which delineates a growing area of academic interest and inquiry. Researchers in fields as diverse as linguistics, education, psychology, nursing, sociology, anthropology and communication hold varying opinions as to what characterizes transcription, from process to product. While some consider transcription the initial stage of language data analysis and interpretation (e.g. Cameron, 2001; Duff, 2008), other researchers—given the key choices involved in the transcription process—view it even as a form of translation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Several of these different perspectives relate to my study and, as will be seen below, I have synthesized these perspectives to construct a model appropriate to this study’s requirements.



At its most rudimentary, transcription can be considered a method of data collection, with transcripts viewed as written evidence of raw data, equivalent in this sense to field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). My initial notion of transcription was precisely this: it was to be for me simply a written record of the audio and video recordings I had made of the intervention classes. As such, my intention when I began transcribing was to be as ‘accurate’ as possible and attend fastidiously to every linguistic element I was able to perceive in participants’ discourse. I was convinced that only through this kind of detailed representation of every utterance—including fillers, repetitions, interruptions, perhaps even intonation—would the ‘truth’ of the raw audiovisual evidence be realized. It soon became clear that setting down every audible discourse unit, whether comprehensible or unintelligible, was not only going to be inaccurate but also inadequate and inappropriate. For aside from *what* the participants actually said, I also found it important to consider the performative features of our interactions, which are inevitably harder to record. Performative features illustrate *how* participants say things (for instance, volume changes, elongated sounds, tonal emphasis, laughter) and indeed, how things are *not* said (gasps, pauses and longer silences) (Skrla, 2007). In addition, both the pedagogical approach and physical setting had to be borne in mind as they too could influence participants’ oral performance, which in turn would affect the character of the transcription.

Classrooms are singularly complex social settings (Hopkins, 2008; Smeyers, 2001). The learning environment of this study was no different, consisting as it did of widely multilingual EFL learners engaging for the first time with the creative idiosyncrasies of English literature, while grappling with the pragmatic intricacies of English for Academic Purposes in the rest of the foundation syllabus. Given this complexity, all decisions relating to transcription demanded judicious mediation. In the end I decided to focus on moderating detail and optimizing readability. As can be seen in Table 4.2, the list of transcription conventions involved more omissions and fewer inclusions than I had expected—though Harklau (2011) observes that transcription conventions are relatively seldom made explicit in the reporting of research. My approach was partly influenced by Duff’s (2008, p. 155) simple but persuasive insight that ‘a very fine tuned transcription can interfere with readability’. Since their purpose for this study was to reflect the

dynamics of transactional discourse, my transcripts present the data in a form Johnstone (2000, p. 115) refers to as resembling a 'play script'. Omitting conventions related to actual plays such as stage directions and performance cues, for greater ease of reading this 'broad' approach to transcription also dispenses with features such as conversational overlapping and minimizes idiosyncratic fillers such as 'like', a favoured colloquialism in the reading circle. At this point it is again worth emphasizing that this study aims much less to examine the minutiae of language development than to explore *how language reveals cognition*. It follows then that the final transcription format is more akin to 'traditional prose' (Lapadat, 2000, p. 206) or the narrative dialogue of a conventional novel rather than that of a play. And due to the *complexity* of these particular narratives—representing as they do the reciprocal consideration, analysis, interrogation, clarification, evaluation, and delivery of multiple perspectives—their transcripts would need to be easily readable.

Another consideration which determined my preference for readable transcripts was my awareness as an experienced language teacher of the fundamental practical constraints of verbal expression, the case in point here being the linguistic limitations of participants for whom English is a foreign language. Notwithstanding the self-evident barriers to oral expression presented by their limited linguistic proficiency and awareness of a new culture (Hall, 2015), these learners would be attempting to express and respond to potentially difficult ideas drawn from newly encountered literary texts as well as each others' lived experiences. In such a situation, even the most erudite of native speakers would be susceptible to the vagaries of accuracy and fluency typical of animated discussion. Indeed, Kvale (1996, p. 172) cautions against oral discourse being transcribed verbatim, noting that oral expression with all its dysfluencies laid bare on the page 'may appear as incoherent and confused speech, even indicating a lower level of intellectual functioning'. Such a perception could lead to speakers being unethically stigmatized, an entirely plausible scenario with a class of young L2 learners and one I wished to avoid. My decision to optimize readability, therefore, was not motivated by an intention to ignore paralinguistic particulars or participants' grasp of literary devices. On the contrary, my research outcomes would be demonstrated by analyzing and interpreting the semantic content of participants' discourse (Stroud & Wee, 2007). This

objective required relatively fluent, comprehensible transcripts which supported my research aim: very broadly, to explore thinking through discussion.

Green et al. (1997) also perceive transcription as data. However, they underscore the *constructed* nature of the transcript, viewing it as a text which “re”-presents an event [though] is not the event itself. Following this logic, what is re-presented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down’ (Green et al., 1997, p. 172). The recognition here is that transcription, while a widespread and ostensibly simple practice, has material implications beyond just the act of writing down oral interactions. This is not to trivialize the act; it is itself noteworthy, and thus invites brief consideration. For Roberts (1997), the act of transcribing is as political as the act of discussion is social, which means the resulting text is inevitably imbued with the transcriber’s social and political consciousness. In the enterprise of transcription, objectivity is not possible. A related matter in this respect is ethics: what should come through from the transcript, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), is the participant’s ‘voice’. This does not refer simply to symbolic representations of sound and dialect on the page. As the vehicle for that voice, the transcriber should strive not only to convey the participant’s authentic verbal expression, but also the extent to which that expression is influenced by the specific social context in which it occurs.

Following this line of reasoning, what is then bound to arise is a cognitive conflict in the transcriber between, on the one hand, presenting the participants’ voices *sans* prejudice and, on the other, acknowledging a personal stake in the research product. The clear difficulties in such a situation make it implausible for the act of transcription to be anything but inferential and thus interpretive (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). In short, the researcher’s theoretical approach underpins the interpretations drawn from the raw data, which in turn inform key decisions about the transcription process. This was my experience. When I began transcribing, I was concerned to mediate any ‘dissonance’ between the students’ voices and mine as teacher, participant, and researcher. Given the range of diverse characteristics inherent in these roles—as they alternated, overlapped and reconfigured within the course of a single lesson—a prevailing synergy arose naturally between my students and me as we enacted our various roles in the

classroom. The interactional dynamic of these roles and the constructive tension they evoked related directly to the subsequent transcription process in that they broached the question of how to manage and indeed how best to *translate* the nuances of this tension onto the page. This compelled me to make several strategic choices about how my participants' talk was to be transcribed.

Proceeding from the premise that speakers seldom produce grammatically complete units of speech, one of my most important decisions was to perceive and present verbal transactions as units of orthography broadly conceived rather than units of speech (Johnstone, 2000). This is most effectively exemplified by the use of punctuation. Because discursive talk, particularly argumentation, involves expression which carries relatively complex ideas, speakers need cognitive processing time. This is manifested in speech as hesitation, repetition, incomplete phrases, backtracking and fillers. Again to promote ease of reading, I found it necessary to prioritize conventional syntax over attempts to replicate what the discourse actually sounded like. This meant, for example, using full stops to terminate declarative sentences, as would occur in standard orthography, despite the actual utterance ending with rising intonation or 'uptalk', which may have attracted a question mark. Another choice was to minimize interruption and simultaneous talk which, though suggestive of collaborative discussion, would potentially detract from my inferring participants' discursive exchanges authentically—and thus compromise my overall research aim. In view of that aim, these kinds of decisions would have no effect on participants' voices. In fact, they would enhance the reader's ability to apprehend the participants' ideas.

Attempting to remain as connected with the research process as possible, I collected and transcribed all the data personally. While data collection gradually became less challenging as the routine developed, it was still stressful, considering everything 'had to work' in every session over the course of a full term. That discussions in the reading circle typically involved overlapping and fragmented comments made over a sustained period meant that transcription was difficult too. My transcription process involved many more decisions about what to include and exclude than I had reckoned on at the start of the study. However, I was conscious of Lapadat and Lindsay's (1999, p. 82)

argument that ‘analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing’. I quickly became aware that analysis was already and always in progress at some level during these data processing activities. The entire process resulted in the development of a transcription key, presented in the following table.

**Table 4.2 Transcription Key**

<b>Mark</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
.	end of statement
?	end of question
!	exclamation (loud, emphatic tone)
<b>Italics</b>	Words quoted from text
<b>Bold type</b>	very emphatic stress on words
[ ]	aside; non-vocal action; manner of speaking; who is being spoken to
,	continuous intonation; slight pause; inserted to support meaning
_____	interrupted speech
...	paused or unfinished utterance(s)
‘ ’	quoting direct speech from text

## **4.5 Data Analysis**

### **4.5.1 Data Set**

With the exception of transcriptions of reading circle discussions and additional notes, the data set for this study was derived primarily from activity within the sessions themselves, including my first-hand observations of participants’ discursive exchanges, audio and audiovisual recordings, and field notes. In addition to managing the

limitations characteristic of qualitative research such as potential bias and risk of inaccurate inference (Denzin et al., 2023), this study had to confront the prior challenge of assessing the invisible mental activity of thinking, several considerations of which I now discuss.

#### **4.5.2 Measuring Thinking: from Causation to Explanation**

As explained in section 4.2 of this chapter, ‘measuring’ cognitive processes is a problem for researchers. My challenge in this respect—and critical in determining my approach to data analysis—was how to reliably impute verbal expression in reading circle discussions to critical-analytic thought. To circumvent the epistemological minefield of causation, the term *cause* (and all its word-class variations such as causal, causative, causality and causation) is construed very broadly in this study. Indeed, any inferential claims that a student’s comments are proximal indicators of critical thinking are advanced at most as strongly correlational. Where instances of talk appear to display clear causal relations to critical thinking, these connections are presented in *explanatory* rather than fully *causal* terms, an analytical perspective elaborated below. Approaching my analysis this way does not concede a deficiency in its quality as much as acknowledging the limitations of causal inference in explaining behaviour in psychological terms.

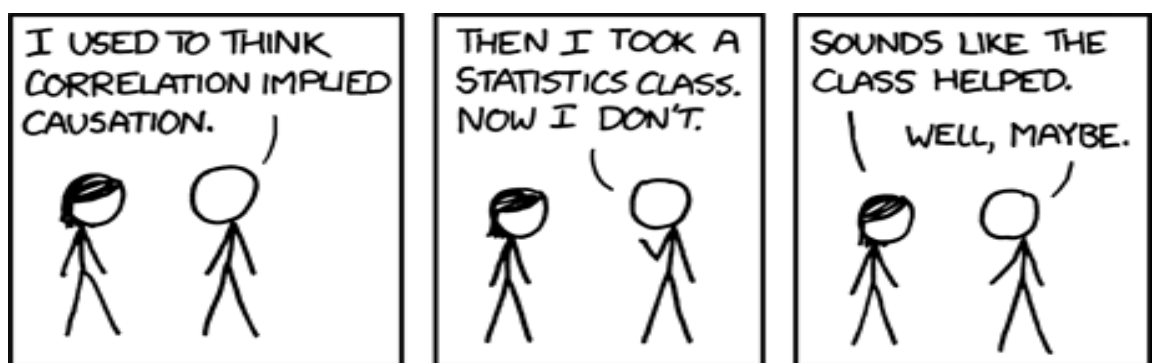
My preference for explanation as the basis for understanding this study’s analytical approach to the cognitive-behavioural measurement conundrum also underscores the exploratory—not confirmatory—nature of my thesis. A related bifurcation is that which describes the study’s dimensions: exploratory versus explanatory. The exploratory dimension of this study refers to its genesis, motivations and pedagogy; the subsequent process of data analysis and evaluation can most constructively be considered its explanatory dimension.

*Explanation* therefore is the conceptual foundation of this study’s approach to analyzing its data and characterizing its findings (see section 4.5.7 for the explanatory role of abductive analysis). As with causation, explanation is a formidable concept in the philosophy of science, and knowledge claims in this regard should be made judiciously.

In view of this, analysis and evaluation of the data for this study are shown to entail considerations of causal explanation, if not causation *sui generis*. So while causal inference in its most comprehensive conceptualization lies beyond the scope of this study's analytical claims, my judgements of participants' spoken observations and my consequent explanations do not necessarily preclude qualified appeals to causation.

One such appeal is through the assignment of *causal responsibility* (Lombrozo & Vasilyeva, 2017), a notion amusingly encapsulated in the following cartoon:

Figure 4.3 Causal Responsibility



Adapted from *Correlation* (xkcd.com, 2009)

Causal responsibility concedes the possibility of multiple causes for a given effect. In any given case, the roles played by putative causes may be variously distributed: they may, for example, be partial, unequal, or even non-existent. How then would causal responsibility play out in interpreting the verbal transactions which occur in a reading circle? The answer is that my judgements would derive from an inference which typically would take the form of a predictive question I would pose to myself: to which cause(s) should I attribute this participant's comment? A judgement which takes account of causal responsibility in this way permits the possibility of a comment or response being fully or partially caused by critical thinking. Indeed, it even allows for the possibility that the comment may be generated by a cause other than critical thinking altogether. For instance, I may infer a participant's use of the clause 'I think' to be a declarative signifier of critical thinking in process at that moment. This could be a completely accurate causal attribution of effect (utterance) to cause (thought). Alternatively, 'I think' may simply be an introductory filler term, allowing the speaker a moment to gather incipient thoughts.

If this was my inference it could be just as plausible a causal attribution of effect (utterance) to cause (pause for thought). Without further context, what is the correct judgement? To which cause do I assign causal responsibility? Could they not both play a partial causal role?

While such attributive questions are frequently cast in causal terms, Lombrozo and Vasilyeva (2017) argue that there are equally good reasons to account for attribution in terms of explanation, an approach which foregrounds how- and why-questions. An explanatory mode of analysis recognizes the possibility of causal *interaction* (where the effect of one cause may hinge on another cause); in doing so, such an approach obviates single-cause explanations. This permits, initially at least, a range of possible explanations in the process of examining the data, a practice I followed in interpreting my focal participants' verbal responses. Importantly, an explanatory approach does not signal a relativist, diffuse understanding of the data. On the contrary, it confers a contextualized, richer, and thus a more authentic understanding of the complex relationship between invisible mental processes and observable behaviour. It is on this explanatory basis, therefore, on appropriate contextual assignment of causal responsibility, that I have made my analytical attributions of discourse (effect) to critical thinking (cause). For the reader, it is explanation and not causation which holds the key to understanding any judgements made of participants' discourse.

A related concept which also shifts the focus of causal reasoning in data analysis from causation to explanation, and is thus central to my analytical approach, is *causal relevance* (Lombrozo & Vasilyeva, 2017). Broadly speaking, this notion refers to the quality or 'goodness' of an explanation when inferring informal explanatory hypotheses for observed phenomena. More specifically, it denotes how persuasive the most plausible explanation of a given phenomenon is within the particular context it occurs. Lombrozo (2012) points out that perceived quality can be augmented by considerations such as simplicity, breadth, goodness of epistemic 'fit' (or consistency with prior knowledge) and coherence. While causal relevance is distinct from causal probability in that the latter indicates the relative strength of an effect's connection to its direct cause, the accretion of evidence in the research literature suggests that in many contexts an



explanation's quality provides a fair approximation of its probability (Lombrozo, 2012). More importantly for my study, related findings (e.g. Thagard, 2006) suggest that the goodness of explanations can have an impact on the perceived probability of *what is being explained*.

In my reading circle, for example, explanations of participants' discursive behaviour can be legitimately evaluated by readers of this thesis in terms of the explanations' relevance to the research aims rather than for their causal probability. Again this goes to the importance of context in confirming a phenomenon's plausibility. The reason a contextualized explanation can be justifiably assessed as an analytical strategy is that, like any interpretive endeavour, it cannot so does not purport to be a veridical representation of an actual occurrence. It follows from this premise that explaining participants' verbal exchanges in the reading circle as proximal indicators of cognitive processes is a step even further away in probabilistic terms. However, part of my analytical brief was to employ abductive reasoning (elaborated later in this chapter) to arrive at the best explanation of any given dialogic exchanges via a process of interpretation involving observation, inference, informal hypothesis and explanation (Lipton, 2004). Although explanatory considerations permeated the whole analytical process, it was only when I had decided on the best explanation for each dialogic spell that I was able to present it in terms most *causally relevant* to the study's aims. In this way, the explanatory approach provided the most plausible interpretation of my data.

#### **4.5.3 Multiple Case Study**

I chose a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018) for this investigation as my objective was to examine the dialogic discourse of three students, who can be considered case studies as they represented bounded contexts or cases, examined 'over time through detailed, in-depth data collections involving multiple sources of information rich in context' (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). In functioning to test an idea (a reading circle as a novel mode of EAP instruction) and offer insights into an existing condition (a standard EAP classroom), these focal cases can be characterized as instrumental (Stake, 2005). They can also be considered explanatory in reflecting my attempt to facilitate understanding of the

processes and anticipated pedagogical benefits generated by a reading circle situated in a university classroom (Yin, 2018).

In the course of my reading I came to realize that case studies of student groups engaged in dialogic discourse were much more common in the research literature than those of individual students (e.g. the range of case study groups adduced by Murphy et al., 2009 in their meta-analysis). However, several studies on individual learning within groups display a wide range of project configurations and research aims. Deanna Kuhn's empirical work (e.g. Arvidsson & Kuhn, 2021; Kuhn, 2018; 2019; Kuhn & Udell, 2003) foregrounds the role of individual competencies in enhancing argumentative reasoning in dialogic settings, while Alina Reznitskaya (e.g. 2009; 2012) attends to individual and social affordances in dialogic classrooms. Examining Kuhn and Reznitskaya's experimental studies encouraged me to reassess my own project, which entailed renewed scrutiny of reading circle transcripts and extended reading, resulting in more articulate reflection on my study. This recursive reading-thinking dynamic induced a shift in my methodological orientation and eventuated in the decision to examine a subset of participants as focal cases instead of studying the whole group as a unitary case. Settling on a multiple case study design for this project finally seemed a good fit, especially with respect to analyzing the data.

Multiple case study research displays several characteristics. The most relevant to my project is that a comprehensive study of several related cases expands the potential for the shared phenomenon—in this context, critical thinking development—to be explored more extensively. This invokes Yin's (2018) notion of replication logic, which suggests that results from a set of individual cases can afford novel insights into a phenomenon or condition common to those cases. Stake's (2000, p. 437) notion of a *collective* case study is similar to Yin's in that he conceives the approach as a 'joint study of a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition'. Given this quality, I would anticipate the present investigation to serve as a platform for further inquiry. An examination of my approach could then lead to improved theoretical and practical understandings of text-based approaches to collaborative talk in general. More

specifically, it could result in increasingly divergent applications of text-based reading circles in university classrooms.

Case study designs are also often characterized by change. Changes may manifest in different ways as the study evolves, for example the sample size may vary. In view of this, Stake's (2000) suggestion that the natural process of inquiry plus the passage of time frequently contribute to cultivating the researcher's understanding of the project. This may involve learning to respond to issues that emerge only at a later stage, which is certainly true of outcomes: a study often yields findings which were unanticipated in the original research design. During the intervention, for example, the levels of animation generated by participants' exchanges necessitated a renewed consideration of the *cognitive character* of collaborative discourse. I had originally conceptualized group discussion as the *vehicle* of expression, discrete from the *thinking* I was keen to explore. In this sense it was effectively the carrier, a secondary unit of analysis. However, I realized almost immediately in the first session that the discourse itself had assumed centrality in the reading circle, something I had not anticipated. A collective—and critical—mode of thinking was evidently generated by the very discursive transactions which constituted the reading circle (Wegerif, 2006 ). Once this became clear, I found my attention drawn to the verbal 'performances' of the individual participants, and to their discursive idiosyncrasies when responding to their fellows.

This experience is borne out by Stake (2000), who contends that cases often offer opportunities to observe other phenomena beyond those of primary interest. In fact, Yin (2018) suggests that these secondary interests are intrinsically constitutive, identifying them as *embedded features* of the cases. As a participant observer in the reading circle, even amidst the liveliness and clamour of group discussion, I was taken as much by the manner of individual participants' expressiveness as by the content of their expression. But it was the contributions of the three students I eventually selected as cases which stood out repeatedly for me in this respect, as it was their vivid discursive performances which emerged as the embedded features of their individual cases.

Another element of the multiple case design which called for deliberation was the kind of data I would require which would most accurately answer my research question. This

is, among other things, an issue of test validity. The established definition of validity in education and psychology denotes the extent to which the measure reflects the designated construct or, in simple terms, whether the tool or method measures what it purports to measure (AERA et al., 2014). Despite this consensus definition, validity remains one of the most contentious issues in educational and psychological research data measurement. As I elaborate in the Data Collection section, one of my main reasons for adopting the instructional format of a reading circle was for its wholly immersive quality and the essential knowledge my direct experience would bring to the data analysis. The research design needed to be receptive to both qualitative and pluralistic ways of knowing, and my data collection methods reflected this.

Interpretation was the dominant means by which I approached comprehension of the selected cases. Broadly conceived, this interpretation entailed awareness, openness and commitment on various levels. As a teacher, awareness was essential: I needed to know the texts and be conscious of my students' pedagogical needs; as a participant I needed to be open to the texts and my fellow participants' perspectives of them; and as a researcher I was committed to managing the study with the aim of facilitating objective outcomes. More specifically, interpretation also meant paying very close attention to my cases. In practice, this meant subjecting the full-length transcripts of all sixteen discussions to recursive analytical scrutiny.

Following the tenor of the entire study, my interpretive approach can be considered essentially dialogic as it encompasses all the elements just described. Dialogic bonds were generated by the study's unique range of reciprocal relationships, the most obvious being those between the different texts, individual students and texts, all participants and texts together, and between focal cases and texts. The findings were analyzed, evaluated, explained and expressed with a combination of my own language and the discourse expressed by participants in the reading circle. In addition, the participants' linguistic expression and perspectives were filtered through my immersive experiences as both a participant and researcher, as well as my wider experience as a teacher of English literature, language and EAP. These various dialogic understandings influenced

my interpretations of the processes and procedures of the intervention specifically and the research project more broadly.

#### 4.5.4 Selection of Focal Cases

Sampling of the students for individual cases followed Merriam & Tisdell's (2015, p. 98) strategy of maximum variation, which meant selecting participants 'who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study'. This approach entails the selection of information-rich individual cases connected by broader homogeneous themes yet characterized by a significant differential across several relevant criteria (Patton, 2002).

My selection focus was rooted in Quality Talk (Murphy et al., 2009), the study's principal instructional and analytical approach. The three students I chose as case studies expressed criticality in various ways when engaged in the inquiry and argumentation of our reading circle. While there was an expected amount of similarity of expression, these differences could nonetheless be distilled into relatively self-contained reading orientations or 'stances' (after Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). In terms of the Quality Talk conceptual framework, the stances routinely generate and correspond to three usual ways of responding to texts. As will be seen in the analysis chapters, and represented in the figure below, these stances very often informed the way in which the focal participants articulated their responses.

**Figure 4.4 The Focal Cases and Their Stances**



Juan's general perspective was informed largely by his personal experience, and so emerged in discussion primarily as a series of affective responses. His stance towards the texts was holistic, receptive to the feelings and ideas they evoked, largely spontaneous so not expressly analytical, and can thus be categorized as *expressive* (Barak & Lefstein, 2021; Soter et al., 2008). Satya's contributions tended to draw from a

broader frame of reference than Juan's, with her arguments driven primarily by the intention to probe the texts' assumptions, motivations and arguments by asking questions. Her approach to inquiry within the reading circle incorporated arguably the widest range of criteria commonly construed as critical thinking in the literature. Satya's stance towards textual engagement can therefore be defined as *critical-analytic*. Kolya's argumentative orientation towards text was similar to Satya's in the sense that his observations in the reading circle were 'appropriately moved by reasons' (Siegel, 1988, p. 32) and not exclusively by emotions. However, his arguments were largely contingent on the availability of textual evidence. In practice, this meant relying almost exclusively for argumentative support on specific references to characters or events in a given narrative. As such, his stance when engaging with the text can be categorized as *effluent*.

While all three stances are dialogic in the sense that they generate divergent perspectives, the expressive and critical-analytic stances have been shown on balance to be more effective than the effluent in fostering higher order thinking and enhancing reading comprehension, among other beneficial outcomes (Alexander, 2020; Reznitskaya et al., 2009). My study is geared to contributing to these outcomes.

#### **4.5.5 Interpreting the Data**

The analysis which follows takes the form of an *interpretive commentary* on participants' dialogic verbal exchanges in the reading circle. This interpretation consists both of my initial inferences as participant observer while examining the sessions *in situ* and of the subsequent process of recursive data analysis. Those first intuitive inferences involved the attribution of intentions to participants as they spoke, and formed an essential starting point for my comprehension and interpretation of the group's ongoing dialogic transactions. My objective throughout was to interpret each speaker's words as precisely and charitably as I could, attributing what I took to be their most authentic intention when speaking. This 'charitable' aspect of interpretation was inspired somewhat by Mill's (1963-1991, p. 52) observation that 'A doctrine is not judged at all until it is judged in its best form'. Overall, I sought to monitor and self-regulate my own evolving process of interpretation so that it resulted in the best explanation of the participants' dialogic exchanges.

Since interpretation is central to my analytical process, it is appropriate to have a stipulated definition of the concept. A useful distinction between comprehension and interpretation is drawn by Wilson (2018, p. 189), who refers to the former as ‘the process of recognizing the intended import of an ostensive act’. In this context, the term ostensive denotes an overt display of communication which signals the communicator’s intention, and may be conveyed by either gestures (showing) or direct linguistic expressions (telling), or a sliding combination of both. Ostensive acts of showing include winking or pointing, while telling is any kind of verbal utterance delivered with the intent to communicate. The term *import* used in this sense refers to the one or more propositions of intended meaning conveyed by the ostensive act. Interpretation, by comparison, indicates a more involved process than mere recognition. It signifies ‘the broader process of drawing one’s own conclusions as part of the overall search for relevance’ (Wilson, 2018, p. 189), where such conclusions may not necessarily have been anticipated, or even endorsed. (The notion of relevance and its application to my data analysis is discussed below.) This definition of interpretation suggests utilization of a far wider range of communicative resources working to support the further processing of received information than those used just for comprehension. While these additional resources are also inferential, they include key perceptual cues such as the addresser’s literal linguistic descriptions, complementary sensori-motor input, and experience-based cues such as the addressee’s knowledge of the real world (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Moreover, communication may be imbued with significant un verbalized—so non-propositional—effects such as images or the speaker’s state of mind, which may be implied or inferred.

In his dialogue theory for critical thinking, Walton (1989; 2007) too underscores the importance of interpretation, particularly in relation to natural language texts of discourse transcribed from dialogic contexts of argumentation (the reading circle is such a context). At minimum, interpretation involves attending closely to at least two points of view: your own and that of the speaker. Walton’s conceptualization of *critical interpretation* in treating a dialogic text of discourse is threefold: to identify, analyze and evaluate an argument specific to the communicative context within which it occurs. Given that this conceptualization applies to the expression of natural language—so

dealing as it must with ambiguity, vagueness, abstraction and implied premises—Walton concedes that an objective standard of interpreted meaning is unattainable. The most one can do towards attaining authentic interpretation is to utilize the evidence particular to the discourse and context under examination to inform one’s assumptions, inferences and judgements.

In the current study, the unit of discourse which provides such evidence is the *Elaborated Explanation*<sup>8</sup>. From the outset, my interpretive forays were mediated by recursive reflection on the extant data, with the intention of identifying areas in the transcripts which stood out as potential moments where critical thinking may have occurred. These areas were first located as dialogic spells of Exploratory Talk. Elaborated Explanations usually occurred within these passages, and emerged as most likely to contain instances of critical thinking. Soter et al. (2006/2016) perceive Elaborated Explanations as detailed communicative expositions signifying apprehension of information, to the extent that participants are able to provide a reformulated cogent account of their position on a given issue. According to Webb (1989; 1992; 2009) and Webb & Palincsar (1996), Elaborated Explanations are most effective when they are expressed in an atmosphere of congenial support towards a collective aim. Also, much depends on individual students demonstrating ‘both a willingness and an ability’ (Webb et al., 2002) to engage in this exacting aspect of transactional discourse.

Because the reading circle’s verbal exchanges are so diversely expressed, I draw on a range of theoretical perspectives to interpret them most effectively. In doing so, I have in principle adopted Walton’s (1989) most important tenet in interpreting dialogue: that every argument should be assessed on its own terms, including considerations such as argument type, text type, and contextual particularities. Every Elaborated Explanation featured in this thesis thus invites such considerations and warrants commensurate interpretations. The most suitable—and the primary—instrument settled on to facilitate this mode of analysis was Wilkinson et al.’s (2010) coding rubric of the Quality Talk analytical framework (see Table 4.3 below), adapted for this study’s purposes. However, I soon became aware that my analytical approach necessitated the incorporation of a

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of clarity the initial letters of the term as used in this thesis will be capitalized.



wider range of interpretive elements than I had anticipated. Also interesting was the realization that any criticality evident in my participants' discourse would be best understood when explained in broadly psychological terms. I often refer for example to Mercier & Sperber's (2017) argumentative theory of reasoning when elucidating a particularly dialectic exchange, or draw where necessary on critical argumentation theory, aspects of which include legal reasoning (e.g. Walton, 2006) and propositional and syllogistic logic (e.g. Hurley & Watson, 2018).

In addition to Quality Talk, two approaches to interpreting discourse contributed to my analysis: Wilson and Sperber's (2012) pragmatics approach to communicative relevance, and abductive reasoning as theorized by Walton (2014) and Tavory and Timmermans (2014). Importantly, I invoked these theories for interpretative guidance rather than practical application—as such, while they contribute significantly to authenticating my interpretation of participants' discourse, they should be considered ancillary to the principal analytical instrument, Quality Talk. Overall then, my approach to data analysis for this study can aptly be characterized as *interpretation*, and consists in a triangulation of the following interpretive modes:

- Interpretation of meaning through analysis of specific discourse features in participants' verbal expression. Adapted from the original Quality Talk coding rubric (Wilkinson et al., 2010), this is the primary mode of analysis as it identifies the discourse features to be interpreted.
- Interpretation of meaning through inferential attribution of intention in participants' verbal expression. This mode is based on Sperber and Wilson's (2002) theory of pragmatics interpretation in the context of verbal communication.
- Interpretation of meaning through abductive analysis of participants' verbal expression, taking into account all extant contextual evidence. This mode is based on the notion of Inference to the Best Explanation or abductive inference (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Walton, 2014).

While all three accounts are grounded in theory, they are oriented towards practice in that they seek to provide ways of coherently interpreting qualitative data and,

therefore, underpin my approach to data analysis in this study. I turn now to an exposition of each interpretive mode.

#### **4.5.6 Coding and Analysis – Quality Talk**

Quality Talk has been shown by numerous studies to contribute to achieving a range of successful outcomes related to classroom discussions, and is particularly effective as a vehicle for promoting higher-order thinking as a social mode of cognition (Soter et al., 2008). It is also effective as an analytical instrument and, as such, served as my primary mode of coding and analysis. Coding of the data largely followed the Quality Talk coding rubric developed by Soter (2006/2016), but was adapted as shown in Table 4.3 below. The first column lists discourse elements which can be considered mini-units of analysis within this framework. Each element is a proximal indicators of critical-analytic thinking and can thus be used to identify potential instances of such thinking in participants' exchanges. The definitions explain which discursive characteristics constitute each element and thus the degree of criticality these may represent. As discussed earlier, Elaborated Explanations are the focal unit of analysis for this study.

My adaptations to the original rubric are shown in the table in green shading, which I will briefly elucidate using the assigned abbreviated forms. UT referred only to uptake questions in the original version, whereas I added a *response* element to the rubric. Similarly with HLR and AR, the original rubric only had question elements (HLQ and AFQ). It became necessary to add the response elements because much of the participants' more complex reasoning emerged as Elaborated Explanations, much of which was expressed in statement form. Finally, TR was an entirely new addition to the rubric, which was necessary to accommodate the many textual references made by participants.

**Table 4.3 Quality Talk Coding Rubric (adapted)**

Discourse Elements	Teacher/ Student	Definition
<b>Authentic Question (AQ)</b>	T&S	A question to which the person does not know the answer or is genuinely interested in knowing how others will answer
<b>Test Question (TQ)</b>	T&S	An inauthentic question that presupposes one correct answer
<b>Other Question (OQ)</b>	T&S	Questions which are aborted (elicit no answer), rhetorical (require no answer), procedural (class management), or which orchestrate the flow of talk (discourse management)
<b>Uptake Question or Response (UT)</b>	T&S	Occurs where a person asks a question or makes a statement in response to something someone else has said previously
<b>High-level Thinking Question (HLQ)</b>	T&S	A question that leads to generalization, analysis or speculation. A question which elicits new rather than old information, or one that cannot be answered through routine application of prior knowledge
<b>High-level Thinking Response (HLR)</b>	S	A response which demonstrates evidence of analysis, evaluation, inference, or synthesis. Does not necessarily rise to the level of argument i.e. elaborated explanation
<b>Affective Question (AFQ)</b>	T&S	A question that elicits information about participants' feelings or about their lives in relation to the text
<b>Affective Response (AR)</b>	S&T	A response drawing on participants' feelings or personal experiences in relation to the text
<b>Textual Reference (TR)</b>	S&T	Thinking and statements are supported with reference to the primary text under discussion
<b>Intertextual Reference (IR)</b>	T&S	A question that elicits reference to or a response which refers to other literary or non-literary works, other works of art, or media, television, newspapers or magazines
<b>Shared Knowledge (SK)</b>	T&S	A question or response which makes connections between current and previous discussions or knowledge that has been shared within the classroom under analysis
<b>Elaborated Explanation (EE)</b>	S	Thinking is explained in a single relatively coherent turn in some detail through extension, sequential building of an idea, supporting statements with reasons, expanding on statements
<b>Dialogic Spell (DS)</b>	S&T	As opposed to a discussion, a dialogic spell is an episode of talk which begins with a learner question (dialogic bid), followed by at least two more questions. The episode may include teacher questions as long as they do not significantly alter the course of the conversation
<b>Exploratory Talk (ET)</b>	S	Instances in which learners co-construct knowledge by co-reasoning or 'interthinking' i.e. engaging collaboratively, critically and constructively to resolve a challenge. Agreement is sought as a basis for joint progress. For an episode to be considered exploratory talk, a challenge needs to occur

<b>Reasoning Words (RW)</b>	S	Conjunctions and other similar phrases showing a reasoning process e.g. if, so, I think, would, maybe, might, how, why, because
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The purpose of this study was to explore the different ways critical thinking may have developed in *individual* members of the discussion group. As such, the selected excerpts prioritized the discursive performance of the focal cases, whose responses were contextualized by the verbal transactions of the other participants. Most of the contextual exchanges contained in the excerpts preceded (so effectively built up to) the focal participant's Elaborated Explanation. Accordingly, while all discursive turns in the transcript extracts were coded, analysis of exchanges other than those of the case under examination were necessarily secondary and contextual. In other words, the breadth and depth of attention given to any other responses was proportionately ancillary to the case under primary analysis. To help trace the development of critical thinking, the excerpts were presented successively, in the order they occurred during the course. The rationale for this decision was that if any development took place, it would be ascribed to deliberate rehearsal of sustained content over time (Halpern, 2014; Pally, 2000).

#### **4.5.7 Abductive Analysis – Inference to the Best Explanation**

A supplementary mode of discourse interpretation I employed in this study is *Inference to the Best Explanation*. I found this to be an appropriate interpretive fit for the study due to its being governed by explanatory rather than causal considerations, an analytical perspective I elaborated earlier in section 4.5.2. Walton (2014) begins his exposition of this theory by condensing it for practical application with the notion of *abductive inference*. The conflation of these concepts is contested in some quarters (e.g. Campos, 2011; McAuliffe, 2015; Minnameier, 2004), but these accounts are philosophical and thus different to Walton's practical perspective. For the analytical purposes of this thesis I adopt Walton's conceptualization, which means I too make no substantive distinction unless specifically indicated between these and related terms such as abduction, abductive reasoning, abductive analysis and the infinitive verb form, abduce.

Walton (2014, p. xiii) defines abductive inference as 'reasoning from given data to a hypothesis that explains the data'. While deduction and induction are acknowledged as

the standard modes of reasoning employed in academic research, abduction is far less familiar and so relatively underutilized in this respect. It is, however, a form of reasoning routinely used in everyday life as well as in disciplines where hypotheses are drawn from initial observations, such as law and science. Although I concede I was not aware of my own reasoning as abductive in the first stages of the analysis process, when I did encounter the research on abduction, I realized that drawing inferences which provided the most plausible explanation for my findings was what I had been engaged in all along. This remained my intention and practice throughout the process of analyzing the data.

To illustrate an instance of abductive legal reasoning, consider this scenario: if shards of a single broken window pane were found on the inside window sill and floor of a locked room which had been burgled, the best explanation for how the burglar(s) had gained entry to the room would be through the window. Further, and at the very least, the broken window would suggest intent to enter deliberately and unlawfully, and the items confirmed as missing would suggest intent to steal. These suggestions equate to hypotheses, inferred from observation of the evidence entailed by the crime scene. Moreover, they amount to the most plausible explanation for a chain of events, from intent to outcome. Science also accounts for many examples of Inference to the Best Explanation, one of the more instructive being Darwin's postulation of the phenomenon of natural selection (Lipton, 2004). In analyzing his biological findings, while the extant evidence did not point overtly to this phenomenon, Darwin hypothesized that natural selection would offer the best explanation for his findings. In all this, note that the focus of reasoning is explanatory, not causal.

A closer examination of Walton's (2014) definitional terminology brings to light an interesting feature of abductive reasoning relevant to my data analysis, namely its peculiar conceptual and procedural circularity<sup>9</sup>. Despite the brevity of this definition, in its repetition of the word 'data' it conveys a sense of the abductive process as self-evidencing, at least in part. According to Lipton (2014, p. 226), this is because 'the phenomenon that is explained in turn provides an essential part of the reason for

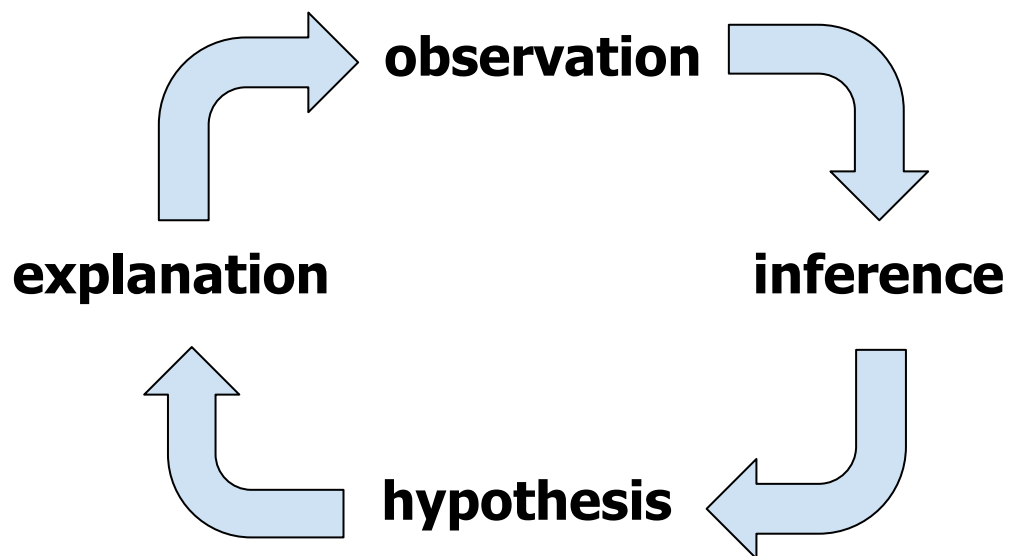
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<sup>9</sup> Circularity in this sense is a neutral descriptor—unlike the pejorative connotation of 'circular reasoning' in formal logic.

believing the explanation is correct'. Considering the crime scene scenario retrospectively, the best explanation for the evidence derives from hypothesis, which derives from inference, which derives from observed evidence. This retrospective sequence quite clearly illustrates Walton's (2014) definition. Another example can be drawn from conventional scientific research practice, where Inference to the Best Explanation has it that hypotheses are informed by the very observations they purport to explain.

As can be seen in Figure 4.4 below, however, this circularity characteristically goes further and consists in the following proposition: not only is a hypothesis supported by the actual observations it seeks to explain but in Lipton's (2014, p. 226) terms, 'the observations support the hypothesis precisely *because* it would explain them' (my emphasis). In the integral way they function, therefore, these elements (observation → inference → hypothesis → explanation) can be considered reciprocally constitutive of abductive reasoning.

**Figure 4.4 Inference to the Best Explanation**



How then did this circularity reveal itself in my study? The following steps sum up the process I followed towards addressing my research aims:

1. I observed participants' dialogic transactions in the reading circle.

2. I inferred participants' intended meanings from these discursive transactions.
3. I formulated potential hypotheses and determined the one which best explained a chosen excerpt.
4. I explained participants' exchanges within the excerpt as plausible indicators of critical thinking in terms of the chosen hypothesis.

While the abovementioned steps illustrate the circularity of my own abductive reasoning process, the ways in which critical thinking occurred in the dialogic context of the reading circle can also be regarded as circular, in that *the process of analysis reflected that of the phenomenon being explored*. The circularity of the critical thinking process consisted in the fluctuating but continuous flow of cognitive (internal) and verbal (external) activity between participants, individually and collectively. For example, any thoughts generated by a student's (let us designate him Student A) initial individual reading of a text would be the first stage of the thinking process. In the subsequent reading circle discussion, he would express his nascent thoughts and his fellows would listen and respond; heeding these responses would lead Student A to reconsider his thoughts in light of the others' responses; at this point he would either suspend verbal expression on the current issue or respond once more. Whether this next response was rehearsed or revised, it would be made in the light of at least one other participant's own thoughts and remarks. Even if Student A opted at this stage to sit out the rest of the discussion on this particular issue, the circular movement of cognitive to behavioural—and individual to group—activity would continue. Even in a hypothetical dialogic process involving personal reading and public discussion of text such as this, therefore, marking a specific instance of critical thinking as located exclusively in an individual's cognition or expression is a difficult task. Any attempt to analyze such a process needs an appropriate analytical model informed by a solid theoretical foundation.

This leads to another reason for my adoption of Inference to the Explanation as an interpretive strategy: it underscores the relevance of theory, both retrospective and prospective, to data analysis. Sociologists Tavory and Timmermans (2014; 2019) argue that abductive reasoning prioritizes theorizing in qualitative analysis, allowing the

researcher to move back and forth between data and extant theory, thereby generating new theoretical insights. Tavory and Timmermans approach abductive analysis both pragmatically and creatively, a stance which aligns with my interpretive approach to analysis. The pragmatism of this approach lies in the ongoing process of identifying evidence which compares with and supports established knowledge, while ‘puzzling through’ novel or surprising findings in an effort to provide the best explanations to account for those findings (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Its creativity, on the other hand, lies in having sufficient knowledge of existing theory to enable the development of innovative theorizations drawn from the findings. Such theoretical development may include rethinking, elaborating, modifying, challenging, and even rejecting previous ideas.

This privileging of theory construction, intrinsic to abductive analysis, relates to my analytical approach in at least two key ways. One is that explanatory considerations govern the entire inferential process, from theoretical knowledge prior to observation right through to the explanatory articulation of new theorizations based on those observations. As argued earlier in this chapter (section 4.2), this study does not presume to advance *a priori* claims for full causal relations between critical thinking (a mental construct) and reading circle participants’ utterances (observable behaviour), let alone justifying either phenomenon as a proxy of the other (De Houwer, 2011). The essence of my analysis was to observe, infer, and hypothesize—and then to offer the best theory-informed explanation of the observed phenomenon as possible.

Another way I apply the abductive principle of theory construction in this thesis is perhaps irregular for a study exploring student learning in a university classroom. As discussed in section 4.7.1, instead of appearing solely in the Discussion chapter, most of my theorizing found expression in the data analysis chapters. In many instances of my analytical process, I found that a particular excerpt of transcribed discourse invited theoretical or conceptual contextualization which required an elaborated treatment rather than just a summary critique. This is in line with Tavory & Timmermans’ (2019) account of abductive analysis which advocates that I as the researcher should approach not just my intervention but the data it yields with as wide a range of theorizations as



possible. (Grounded theory, by contrast, recommends approaching the field with minimal analytical assumptions, looking only afterwards to the empirical evidence to evoke and foster theoretical insights.) Tavory and Timmermans' rationale for 'frontloading' existing knowledge in this way is that it offers researchers a variety of options for interpreting novel data and using these understandings to generate fresh theorizations. For example, my discovery of the vast theoretical literature on causation and explanation proved instructive in guiding the interpretation and explication of my findings. This further explains the broad range of sources and disciplinary perspectives employed in my analysis, many of them in the service of theory construction.

#### **4.5.8 Pragmatics Analysis – Relevance Theory**

Like abductive inference, this mode of interpretation also focuses on making sense of interactive speech. It derives certain conceptual elements from relevance theory, several of which are italicized in this section. This theory, summarized below, was developed by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2012) from a notion of communicative inference previously outlined by Grice (1967). My key concern in using elements from relevance theory to inform a third mode of interpretation was to comprehend and interpret participants' discursive exchanges as authentically as possible.<sup>10</sup> Interpretation of linguistic meaning is the province of pragmatics, whose function according to relevance theory is to examine ways in which 'contextual factors interact with linguistic meaning in the interpretation of utterances' (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 1). In line with this pragmatics approach, while my interpretations derived mainly from intensive scrutiny of the recorded and transcribed data from the reading circle discussions, they were supplemented and *contextualized* by other empirical factors (also noted in section 4.5.5). An essential part of this entire interpretive process was *inference*, a constitutive element of relevance theory. What follows is a brief discussion of the influence of inference and other key elements of relevance theory on my data analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> See section 4.5.5 above for a definition of interpretation stipulated for this study.

Relevance theory is a cognitive model of communication, which has as its central claim that verbal and non-verbal communication constitute a dialogic exercise in metapsychology. This means that comprehension between verbal communicators depends as much on metapsychological inference, on 'reading' a speaker's mind, as it does on linguistic coding. Indeed, much of non-verbal communication depends entirely on inference. According to Sperber and Wilson (2002, p. 7), inferential comprehension 'is ultimately a metapsychological process involving the construction and evaluation of a hypothesis about the communicator's meaning on the basis of evidence she has provided for this purpose'. This capacity in humans for mind-reading in relation to communication is confirmed by a considerable amount of experimental research (e.g. Hilton et al., 2017). Relevance theory contends that the effectiveness of inference as mind-reading is contingent on how clearly a speaker conveys his semantic *intentions* and, to a lesser extent, on how familiar the listener is with the communicative context. By contrast, the other component of communicative comprehension, linguistic coding, denotes an act of communication (such as a phrase or a sentence) in which the speaker's meaning is taken to reflect the exact meaning suggested by the linguistic structure or code of the utterance. According to classical code theory, neither inference nor context is necessary to understand the message. Relevance theory has since shown that linguistic coding delivers an inadequate account of verbal communication, with Sperber and Wilson (2012, p. 37) characterizing classical code theory as 'patently wrong'. Adducing a range of possible semantic ambiguities not explicitly discernible in the linguistic code of an utterance, this judgement is predicated on a previously argued assumption that the linguistic meaning retrieved by a listener's decoding of an utterance 'vastly underdetermines the speaker's meaning' (Sperber & Wilson, 2002, p. 3). What accounts for this gap, they contend, is inference. As such, it is responsible for much of the dialogic comprehension experienced in both verbal and non-verbal communication. This then was the significance of inference in my data analysis. It generally consisted in my inferring speakers' meanings from their utterances in our reading circle discussions. My specific focus was on the inferential attribution of speakers' intentions, which was the key to authentic interpretation of comments. In simpler terms, the function of this approach was to guide me in interpreting the participants' discursive exchanges as

precisely as I could within the context of the reading circle. Practically, this was achieved by combining several actions: reviewing the video recordings of the selected extracts, re-reading my notes on those sessions, re-reading the transcripts, and continuing to read the research literature. This continuous recursive movement between the data and the literature—and my cumulative processing of both—resulted in the creation of a rich, extensive context for each extract under analysis.

This summary of relevance theory has introduced conceptual elements germane to my data analysis, namely *inference*, *intention* and *context*. These terms, together with *comprehension* and *interpretation*, have already made significant appearances in this chapter as they are also routinely invoked in discussions of both Quality Talk and Inference to the Best Explanation. And as with these familiar terms the reader will by now have discerned the intersection of other common features of the three approaches to interpretation I have highlighted. Such intersection is important to this study because diverse but complementary approaches working together towards the same research aim serve to strengthen the analytical process, which in turn reinforces my thesis. A significant example of such an intersection is the initial process of analysis employed by both inferential comprehension and abductive reasoning, which are respective elements of relevance theory and Inference to the Best Explanation. Summarizing inferential comprehension, Wilson and Sperber (2012, p. 2) describe utterances as ‘pieces of evidence about the speaker’s meaning, [with] comprehension [being] achieved by inferring this meaning from evidence provided not only by the utterance but also by the context’. Analogously, abductive reasoning relies on observed evidence to infer hypotheses about the phenomenon under investigation, which leads ultimately to the most appropriate explanation for the phenomenon. While the latter is more broadly applicable, both functions seem in their initial stages to follow a very similar analytical process.

Overall then, the most prominent feature shared by Quality Talk, Inference to the Best Explanation, and relevance theory is their instrumental potential for interpreting discourse. While each mode of interpretation is theoretically self-contained and thus sufficiently comprehensive to fulfil its interpretive function independently, its role is

somewhat different from the other two. Each confers its own distinctive analytical virtue to the study. As discussed above, the primary mode of analysis, Quality Talk, was used mainly to *identify* discourse features in the reading circle, the most relevant of which were then adduced as proximal correlations of critical thinking. The abductive mode of reasoning which characterizes Inference to the Best Explanation served a broader purpose, seeking to provide a rich theory-informed *explanatory* context for the transcribed excerpts under analysis. Combining these two analytical modes with the pragmatic approach of relevance theory, however, resulted in a robust triangulation of complementary instruments which provided both the theoretical foundation and interpretive scope for the best explanations of my reading circle observations.

#### **4.5.9 Approaching the Analysis Chapters**

This section briefly outlines important practical features of the next three chapters (5, 6, 7). These chapters serve two primary functions: as sites of both analysis and discussion.

The analytical function is an orthodox one: it provides in-depth analyses of the discursive transactions of the focal participants as they engage with a range of short stories. Each analysis chapter begins with a brief profile of the focal participant, followed by a detailed, progressive examination of their verbal contributions to reading circle discussions. For contextual reference, summaries for all stories are available in Appendix G in the order they were examined. The focal participants' contributions are presented in the form of excerpts, which were selected on two main criteria: 1) they featured at least one Elaborated Explanation by the focal participant and 2) they were generally chosen from alternate sessions. Since Juan's attendance was lower than the others, his excerpts were drawn from all the sessions he attended. Overall, this selection procedure suited the study's purposes as it covered all the sessions and resulted in a relatively even spread of texts and contributions. Accordingly, the analyzed excerpts turned out to be sufficiently representative of the focal participants' progression through the course.

The second function of the three analysis chapters is perhaps less typical: it *discusses* the study's findings. This means that much of the content typically found in a thesis

discussion chapter will appear in these chapters instead. As noted previously, the consilient nature of this study means that the process of data analysis inevitably involved incorporating sources from a range of disparate but related disciplines. These sources, when synthesized, contributed to the creation of novel theorizations which often amounted to evaluation of the data alongside analysis. Indeed, the final section of each analysis chapter specifically provides a summary and evaluation of each of the participants' analyzed contributions with a view to conveying the various ways that the focal participants' dialogic exchanges contributed to their critical thinking development. In these final sections, Lesson 1 of the course is considered the baseline of Kolya and Satya's critical thinking proficiency (Juan's first analyzed session is Lesson 2). The last analyzed session for each focal case serves as the summative stage of their development—for Kolya and Juan this is lesson 15, while for Satya it is Lesson 16.

#### **4.6 Ethics**

Anticipating any physical, mental or emotional harm which may arise from research investigations involving human participants is of principal concern and needs to be carefully considered and co-ordinated in pursuing a research project (Dörnyei, 2007; Hennik et al., 2011). Along with harm, Gibson and Brown (2009) point out several other issues which merit primary consideration in a research context, including integrity, informed consent, and confidentiality. Given that this study involved young adult university students collaborating closely with me over a fairly long period, I took a number of steps based on a series of ethical considerations in order to mitigate any potential ethical challenges.

Even before the study began, issues of quality and professional integrity needed to be contemplated. The project's prospective design reflected these concerns as it was conceived with participants' educational and personal benefits in mind. Along similar lines, the research framework, Exploratory Practice, was provisionally chosen for its emphasis on holistic pedagogy, and research practice which prioritizes 'quality of life' in the classroom. As an instructional endeavour, the project aimed to contribute to participants' academic skills by providing a structured course designed to engage the learners in a novel approach to learning.

The ethical considerations entailed by my hoped-for fieldwork took on a more pragmatic focus when I applied for approval to the Research Ethics Committee of UCL Institute of Education to conduct a classroom intervention. With my application approved I sought official permission for the project from my manager, whom I apprised of all the details. These included the study's purpose, schedule, methods, intended pedagogical outcomes, benefits, and risks. Management was enthusiastic about incorporating my project into the International Foundation Programme (IFP), particularly as it addressed critical thinking pedagogy in a novel structured way. While critical thinking had long been a stated objective of the IFP, it was not explicitly taught but followed an immersion approach (Ennis, 1989), where critical thinking was assumed to improve without direct instruction.

At the start of my intervention course, I obtained consent from my participants, following BERA procedures (see Appendix A for a copy of the Consent Form). To mitigate any concerns which could have emerged from my status as gatekeeper (in that I graded their work, for instance), I informed the students of the features of the project first as a class, then individually, to address any reservations they may have had about participating (see Appendix B for a copy of the Participant Information Sheet). They were then—and regularly throughout the intervention—explicitly assured they could come to me or my manager with any concerns about participating in the intervention.

Another consideration was that of power relations. Challenges could have arisen from some students potentially viewing my three roles (teacher, researcher and participant) as contradictory. It would, for example, have been quite understandable for students to harbour reservations about sharing the same role as their teacher, that is of my being a fellow participant in the reading circle. Fortunately, these concerns were minimally applicable to that particular class due to its naturally collegial atmosphere, which I sought continuously to cultivate. This is not to say there were no instances of tension between the students and me. Lesson 15 saw a notable episode during the first part of the discussion of the short story, 'The Faber Book of Adultery'. As noted in my analysis (see section 5.10 for details), the students generally did not like the story, the reasons for which had not emerged up to that point despite my repeated questions. Incidentally,

it was the one story I had personally selected. Reflecting on the incident, I recall becoming progressively anxious as a researcher that my carefully planned session was disintegrating with every successive question going unanswered. Faced with an increasingly tense atmosphere, I must then have adopted an instinctively teacherly posture, which immediately rendered my role as participant peripheral. Thankfully, the situation was quickly resolved, although it was sufficiently jarring to highlight the ethical tenuousness of the entire research project. Not only did it underscore the capricious nature of human relations, but it also exposed the contingency of my self-assigned labels. Overall, the situation served as a timely signal to actively avoid taking any aspect of the project for granted and confirmed my commitment to preserving the pleasant atmosphere of the reading circle as a result.

With respect to privacy, all information observed and gathered was kept confidential, in line with GDPR-based university guidelines. As such, participants' identities were protected in that all personal details and collected data were anonymized as far as possible. Pseudonymization in this study applied when referring to individual responses in my data analysis, and involved replacing names or other identifiers which were easily attributed to individual participants with alternative names. This meant that the pseudonyms could not be traced back to the individual unless one had organizational access to the relevant personal data. Although all data from the project sessions were collected through audio and video recordings, these recordings were only used to create transcripts reflecting participants' contributions. The video footage in particular was used only if transcription from the audio recordings was difficult or indiscernible.

To reduce the risk of participant anonymity being compromised, all video recordings were destroyed as soon as good quality transcripts had been produced, while audio recordings would be retained until the viva. The transcripts would be retained for a maximum of 10 years, as recommended by the UCL Records Retention Schedule. Along with all other data, the transcripts were stored securely on the UCL network and on encrypted electronic devices, and backed up on password-protected personal USB drives, and not in any publicly accessible format or cache.

In regard to the research findings, participants were informed of the possibility of the findings being disseminated in publications and/or conferences after the termination of the research period, though they were assured that their identities would always remain strictly anonymous. A final consideration was that any issues of research independence, potential conflicts of interests or partiality were regularly assessed by my supervisors and me.



## **CHAPTER 5 - Kolya**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two main parts: analysis and evaluation. The first presents in-depth analyses of the discursive transactions of the first focal participant, Kolya, as he engages with a range of short stories in the context of our classroom reading circle. The analysis is framed by the efferent stance he generally adopted in reading and discussing the texts.<sup>11</sup> The second part presents a discussion of the findings, as it summarizes and evaluates Kolya's analyzed contributions with the aim of explicating the various ways in which his dialogic contributions contributed to his critical thinking development.

### **5.2 Kolya's Profile**

Kolya was a male student from Uzbekistan intending to major in Legal Studies. He had attended state school from Year One through to Year Twelve, with his formal English language education consisting of one or two grammar-focused classes a week in secondary school. Aside from the occasional and (in his view) poorly translated television programme or film, he had no other exposure to English. According to Kolya, however, his level of English was comparatively better than most of his classmates at school. He had always wanted to improve his English but found it difficult back home where almost nobody used the language in conversation. His stated intention as a result was to improve his proficiency level of what he repeatedly referred to as the queen's English. Nonetheless, Kolya knew he had to work hard to raise his proficiency level, and he was especially sensitive about how 'heavy' he considered his English accent. Having already taught him for one term before the research intervention, I assessed his general level of proficiency at the beginning of the course at pre-intermediate to intermediate, no higher.

Two factors stood in Kolya's favour as a prospective participant in the reading circle. One was that he had always enjoyed reading literature so our project would hopefully prove to be more pleasure than work. More generally, Kolya was determined to improve as a

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<sup>11</sup> See section 4.5.4 for a more detailed explanation of the focal participants' stances.

student, which he indicated meant availing himself of as many opportunities, both educational and social, as studying abroad would offer.

An interesting counterpoint to these qualities and intentions was Kolya's stance on various issues which arose from class discussions. He was not shy to admit he was rigidly conservative on certain personal, social, political, historical and economic issues—but just as resolutely open-minded on matters around religion. In a word, Kolya was dogmatic at the outset of the course. In the analysis which follows, we will see that consensual interpretation of text was one of Kolya's more naive expectations of his peers, at least in the early stages of the course. His initial propensity to impute ignorance and bias to other participants' views, while considering his own 'perceptions and evaluations ... uniquely objective and free of the biases that lead others to see things differently' is characteristic of the *false-consensus effect* (Ross, 2018, p. 755). In this way Kolya displayed a notable deficiency in distinguishing his own thoughts from what others in the reading circle may have been thinking, seeming generally to assume we thought as he did. Inevitably, since his textual interpretations were based largely on an efferent reading stance focusing on what was written on the page, he found himself frequently confounded by his fellows' opposing perspectives. This is because his notion of textual interpretation was normative—sometimes even prescriptive—so he did not always take into account important factors such as others' personal and cultural backgrounds. As will become clear, this tendency effectively limited his perspective and thus his capacity for critical and creative thinking development.

Despite this, Kolya enjoyed listening to other viewpoints and, perhaps paradoxically, was quite unafraid to think an issue through to its logical conclusion and indeed to prod polemically at questions which may not have made sense to him. This adversarial attitude, usually playfully manifested, indicated quite a strong desire to win arguments (Stevens & Cohen, 2021). Unsurprisingly, this mindset led inevitably to some fairly heated (though good-humoured) debates in class, notably among Kolya's fellow Uzbek classmates, who were perplexed by what they saw as his unorthodox beliefs. Even so, Kolya always deferred to a better argument and in this respect was well suited to his forthcoming studies in Law. As to the proposed literary texts to be read in the reading

circle, he often expressed the belief that he found short stories a good source of new vocabulary and language. He also hoped to graduate to reading more complex literature in English as the course progressed, a wish he reiterated several times. As discussed in Chapter 4, Kolya's expression of criticality in the reading circle was founded largely on reference to the text, which he initially seemed to regard as the sole evidentiary source needed to pursue inquiry and argumentation in the group. In terms of Quality Talk, this general approach to reading texts is designated as efferent.

The two excerpts A and B in the following section are drawn from the first reading circle session. This was the only time in the course that I used two weeks to cover a single short story (Mr Salary). The rationale behind this decision was that the text, while neither linguistically challenging nor very long, is semantically dense. Bearing in mind this was a new, unconventional and thus exploratory pedagogical experience for all concerned, at this point I was still actively observing and working out the participants' reading preferences and capacities for reading English literature. I opted for this reason to err on the side of caution and split the text over a fortnight. In doing so I hoped to mitigate any undue demands on participants' working memory in recalling textual details (Sweller, 1988), which would lead to alleviating related risks of cognitive overload (Alptekin & Erçetin, 2011).

### **5.3 Lesson 1 - Mr Salary (Part 1)**

This short story by Sally Rooney is a poignant depiction of arguably illicit love.<sup>12</sup> As early as the first few exchanges in this session, Kolya was already beginning to reveal a tendency to derive his knowledge empirically, that is, from the evidence immanent in the text. Two excerpts indicate this quite well. In the first (Excerpt A), which begins to explore the nature of the relationship between the two main characters in the short story, Kolya's initial responses to the issue are uncertain and vague. It is only when he begins to refer to the narrative that his observations become more assured.

#### **Excerpt A**

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<sup>12</sup> Appendix G provides synopses of all the short stories examined.

1	Cliff	What do you think about the relationship between Nathan and the girl, the main character, Sukie? Normal, interesting, nothing?	AQ HLQ
2	Fernao	It's a weird relationship.	UT
3	Kolya	No it's not really relationship. Maybe they are just friends? I don't understand, actually. They're not linked by love, but I don't know.	UT AQ
4	Aliyeh	I think there's a secret love between these two.	UT
5	Kolya	It's not love, or it's not open love. Just this idea you get when you read some things they say_____	UT TR
6	Samir	Look, they're just having fun_____	UT
7	Satya	Fun that lasted for three years? I don't think so!	UT
8	Kolya	I think maybe they are so proud, maybe too proud—too proud to confess their love. Maybe they don't know the difference between love and friendship.	RW
9	Cliff	What makes you say that, though?	AQ
10	Kolya	You know, Nathan said somewhere I see you as my sister or something like that _____	UT TR
11	Fernao	He calls her his niece.	UT
12	Kolya	Sorry, niece yeah! Maybe he doesn't want to recognize that he loves her as romantic ... like he sees her in a certain way, but maybe there is conflict with circumstance? Ah here's the page! Okay, not he but she says, ' <i>But I had once overheard Nathan referring to me as his niece, a degree of removal I resented</i> '. So not just he, but she feels things for him, but it's all secret. They fear to confess. <b>That's</b> the thing! So my question is why is this?	UT TR HLR AQ HLQ

The relationship between Sukie, the protagonist and Nathan, a family friend who is putting her up in his apartment, is unconventional for many reasons and is a central theme of the story. In view of the unorthodox dynamic between these characters, my opening Authentic/High-level Thinking Question (turn 1) seeks to begin exploration of this theme.

In the Dialogic Spell which develops from my question, the diversity in students' initial responses indicates there is nobody in the reading circle who is completely clear about

the essence of Sukie and Nathan's involvement. Fernao responds first, with a monosyllabic yet insightful characterization of the relationship as 'weird' (turn 2). Kolya follows this with a slightly more charitable view, allowing for the possibility that 'Maybe they are just friends?' (turn 3). Despite then ranging a bit further in his interpretation to assert that the two characters are 'not linked by love', he does not offer a reason to substantiate this claim and finishes the turn by conceding uncertainty about the nature of the couple's connection. Yet he immediately follows this admission by dismissing Aliyeh's supposition that there is 'a secret love between these two' (turn 4). Kolya's interjection here is interesting as his alternative proposition that Sukie and Nathan's relationship 'is not open love' (turn 5) is again not supported with a reason. Significantly for my overall analysis of Kolya's discourse in the reading circle, this early episode is one of the few times throughout the whole course that he makes unsupported claims. Despite the sum of his contribution up to this point in the excerpt appearing to be little more than guesswork, he does seem to have thoughts about the issue which he is still struggling to clarify and articulate. The following remark by Samir, 'They're just having fun' (turn 6), sees another speculative response to my original question. Any further comment Samir may have added is cut short by Satya, who at least provides an implied reason for the interruption: 'Fun that lasted for three years? I don't think so!' (turn 7). Her suggestion here is that there was more to the relationship than just fun.

These several relatively brief exploratory exchanges duly lead to a more considered response by Kolya from turn 8 onwards. Conveyed in a quieter, more measured tone, his remarks at this point are moderated by Reasoning Words (think; maybe) and more cautious phrasing: 'I think maybe they are so proud, maybe too proud—too proud to confess their love'. My subsequent prompt for evidence from Kolya is answered with a vaguely remembered reference to the text (turns 9-10). Although it is still hazy and inaccurate, his recollection that Nathan once referred to Sukie as his sister nonetheless signals to me the general direction of his train of thought. Fernao, however, recalls Nathan's reference more clearly and issues a swift correction: 'He calls her his niece' (turn 11). It is worth noting that Kolya's apparent difficulty in expressing his thoughts at this point is probably due less to any linguistic deficiency than to the complexity of the issue under consideration. His seeming equivocation in this instance actually reflects

these characters' own difficulty in determining and expressing their feelings for each other.

After acknowledging Fernao's correction, Kolya presses on with his analysis of the relationship. Speaking almost distractedly while scanning the text, his thoughts seem to be becoming slightly clearer although his delivery is still halting and his expression remains cautious: '*Maybe* he doesn't want to recognize that he loves her as romantic ... *like* he sees her in a certain way, but *maybe* he feels there is conflict with circumstance?' (turn 12; my emphasis). His hedged expression (italicized) suggests Kolya is struggling for clarity on the issue, in both thinking and speaking. Suddenly, there is a remarkable change in his demeanour; Kolya looks intently at the text and takes up the page excitedly with a loud exclamation. This is because he has located a specific passage. Sounding much more confident than in his first uncertain reply to my original question, he starts reading aloud a sentence from the text which referred to Sukie's resentful perception that Nathan's feelings towards her were less romantic and more fraternal than she preferred. Kolya's speech is noticeably louder and bolder, which appears to be boosted by the narrative evidence he has found. Even his interpretation of Sukie and Nathan's relationship seems to have advanced a step further: 'So not just he, but she feels things for him, but it's all secret. They fear to confess. **That's** the thing!' He concludes his Elaborated Explanation with an assured High-level Thinking Question: 'So my question is, why is this?'

What comes through clearly from this episode is how visibly and positively Kolya is affected by having found information in the narrative to support his thoughts on the issue in play. It seems to sharpen his focus and leads to a more confident expression of thoughts which previously came across as muddled and uncertain, or at the very least ambiguous. This habitual reliance on the text as the evidentiary basis for making any discursive contributions was to become a key feature of Kolya's participation in the reading circle as the course unfolded.

The following excerpt, taken from later in Lesson 1, illustrates this growing confidence in expression. Notably more self-possessed due to the security which the narrative has provided, Kolya begins to draw inferences about Nathan's reasons for looking after Sukie

financially. I attribute these inferences as based on both the text and his cultural background.

**Excerpt B**

1	Cliff	<i>'My college friends ... think you're paying me for something.'</i> What does that mean?	TR HLQ
2	Satya	That she's a hooker!	UT
3	Kolya	No, I think there's two reasons maybe.	RW
4	Samir	What? She's not! They <b>think</b> she is.	UT
5	Fernao	Yeah, maybe that's how <b>they</b> think she is.	UT
6	Cliff	So let's hear Kolya. What are those reasons?	AQ
7	Kolya	I think first maybe Nathan may be giving her money for prestige, to keep this kind of beautiful girl near for him, to demonstrate to friends what kind of beautiful girlfriend he has. Or maybe Nathan is trying to hide something to keep this girl. Maybe he's homosexual or something like that. Yeah, possibly for this reason he's giving money for her and looking after her.	HLR

In this excerpt, the reading circle is still exploring the complexities of Sukie and Nathan's relationship. To introduce a different angle to the discussion, I start by reading aloud part of the narrative in which Sukie is explaining to Nathan that his financial support is perhaps being misconstrued by her friends (turn 1). My subsequent High-level Thinking Question elicits several brief but interestingly varied Uptake responses, exemplified by Samir and Fernao's comments (turns 4 and 5). Their remarks are actually reactions to Satya's first reply to my question (which is discussed in Satya's case study). While their comments are similarly phrased, Samir and Fernao's emphasis on different words suggests both a difference in interpretation and, accordingly, in the meanings they intend to convey to the group (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Samir's remark is about perception whereas Fernao focuses on agency, namely who does the thinking. Also, both responses seem to be fairly spontaneous intuitive inferences (Mercier & Sperber, 2017), although Fernao's expression (in using 'maybe') is slightly more cautious and considered.

This point about differences in perspective and response may appear at first glance to be trivial. However, it illustrates the current significance of the phenomenon of viewpoint diversity and its ramifications beyond the relatively sheltered confines of the classroom (Duarte et al., 2015). I would suggest that the EAP classroom—particularly one that contains a reading circle or similar discussion group—is precisely the forum where an educational culture of encouraging viewpoint diversity should be fostered. One example of huge divisions in contemporary society where this phenomenon plays a central role is the sociopolitical arena. Increasingly sophisticated and influential channels of communication, most notably social and mainstream news media, magnify ideological differences between individuals and groups relentlessly to degrees of distortion not previously witnessed (Rauch, 2021). In an attempt to analyze and seek solutions for the extraordinary consequences of current sociopolitical divisions, a wealth of research literature has arisen in their wake (e.g. Brooks, 2019; Haidt, 2013a). Inevitably, the effects of this discord have also permeated university campuses and classrooms (Lukianoff, 2014; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). For students to be able to navigate the exigencies of such a fraught environment after graduating from university, they need to be suitably equipped to do so. In light of this, viewpoint diversity cannot be ignored in the EAP classroom. Since even the smallest differences of opinion matter, not only should they be accommodated but teaching and learning should promote the expression of divergent perspectives within a broader culture of academic freedom in higher education. It is within the context of dialogic discussion, where ‘wide-angle’ education (Widdowson, 1983) takes the form of several voices speaking collaboratively to the same issue and thereby invoking the *wisdom of crowds* (after Surowiecki, 2004), that such differences can begin to be constructively addressed.

Returning to the excerpt, Kolya answers me directly in turn 3 and suggests two reasons for Nathan’s financial support of Sukie. Thereafter employing a variety of Reasoning Words in turn 7 (think, may, could be, maybe, possibly), both of his suggestions are cautiously phrased, perhaps anticipating the advent of other reasons. Interestingly, the reasons Kolya advances suggest to me a perspective which seems culturally informed, at least to a certain extent. This view is reinforced by notes I made at the time (see Appendix E, No. 1), which had both Shav and Dmitri emphatically agreeing with Kolya’s



point. This agreement was in stark contrast to the views of the other participants, who were not as receptive. While both propositions advanced by Kolya—the idea of the ‘kept woman’ as a symbol of prestige, and that of using a person of the opposite sex as a smokescreen to conceal one’s homosexuality—are possible, they are not necessarily the most obvious or agreeable assumptions one would make in the current western zeitgeist. Quite aside from this, they are not the reasons for Nathan’s spending money on Sukie. What the possible reasons are for this misinterpretation and how they relate to critical thinking is explored in the concluding section of this chapter.

#### 5.4 Lesson 2 - Mr Salary (Part 2)

This next excerpt is taken from the second part of ‘Mr Salary’, which we examined one week later in our second session as a reading circle. I found this excerpt useful in expanding my analysis of Kolya’s interpretation of text as it occurred at this early stage of the course. By this point in the discussion of the text, our reading circle had agreed that the relationship between Sukie and Nathan was romantic—though obliquely, as so much about it remained indistinct and unexplored. We decided therefore to inquire further into this issue by exploring whether the narrative revealed more precisely the depth or nature of Sukie’s romantic feelings towards Nathan. With many participants having already exchanged views on the issue, Kolya finally responds by picking up on a quote first introduced by Satya.

1	Kolya	I listen to you guys and there is sympathy for her. But thinking about it, for me her love is not so soft, not so gentle, like there’s something behind it. It’s because we hear her say <i>My love for him feels so total</i> and after that <i>If he left my line of sight for more than a few seconds, I couldn’t even remember what his face looked like</i> . This is like a pragmatic love; can I say ‘pragmatic’? It turns off and on when she needs, or it’s useful. For this reason, yeah, I think she loves his money just. So I think her love is for her use, and without sympathy and not gentle.	EE HLR UT TR
2	Samir	[laughing] Uh-uh, did you read the paper, boy? He’s out this guy ...	UT
3	Kolya	I think so because when you look at this topic, this is Mr Salary, he is Mr Salary! Mr Money!	TR UT

4	Fernao	It's just a nickname. That's how her father sees him.	UT
5	Kolya	Maybe but I think if you love somebody, how can you forget his or her face for a second—how?	AQ HLQ
6	Fernao	It's not that you forget the face, it's like the feeling ... I think everything you read, she's in complete confusion with her life. She doesn't want to go back to university, she wants to stay there because this guy gives her a protection that she needs right now because her father is dying and she doesn't know what to do with her life.	HLR
7	Kolya	For this reason she don't want to lose this guy, because she needs the money.	UT
8	Fernao	It's not the money!	UT
9	Samir	He loves her, come on!	UT
10	Selena	Geez, it's obviously not the money!	UT
11	Juan	As Phil said, he doesn't want to take advantage of the situation because he's seeing that she's not in a good position now. He's got mixed feelings about her father, and love. So he doesn't want to take advantage.	HLR

Kolya's opening sentence confirms that he has been listening to the discussion for a while without contributing. He also attempts in this statement to summarize what the extant general view is among the participants, which is that Sukie's love for Nathan is genuine. Interestingly, Kolya characterizes this majority judgement of Sukie's feelings as 'sympathy for her' (turn 1). The introductory sentence is effective in setting up his main move, which is to advance an Elaborated Explanation in direct contradiction to that judgement. Kolya begins his argument with the conclusion: '... thinking about it, her love is not so soft, not so gentle, like there's something behind it'. The opening phrase of this statement suggests that Kolya had not only been listening, but also deliberating about the issue under discussion. The terminal phrase, however, is vague—though quite intriguing for that. Having stated his conclusion, Kolya immediately puts forward reasons to substantiate it: 'It's because we hear her say "My love for him feels so total" and after that "If he left my line of sight for more than a few seconds, I couldn't even remember what his face looked like"'. The Reasoning Word 'because' introduces a proposition whose structure and delivery Kolya appears to have worked out very carefully, and

which he may even have prepared in advance: there are no grammar mistakes, the quotes are sequentially arranged, and his reading of them is fluent. He follows this with what seems an equally well considered explication of the quotes: 'This is like a pragmatic love; can I say "pragmatic"? It turns off and on when she needs, or it's useful'. Kolya did not have a broad vocabulary in English and, as his teacher, I would not have thought the word 'pragmatic' was one he would know. So his query about this word suggests he may have looked it up for the particular purpose of using it in this argument.

Kolya concludes his line of reasoning by identifying money as the specific element of utility constituting Sukie's 'pragmatic love'. In doing so, he clarifies precisely what the 'something behind it' is, referred to at the start of his explanation. The references in his final sentence tie up his argument, pointing both to the more general reason supporting his interpretation of Sukie's feelings ('So I think her love is for her use'), and once again back to his conclusion about her love, namely that it is 'without sympathy and not gentle'. In response to Samir's sarcastic remark in turn 2, Kolya confidently defends his perspective by making an understandable link between Sukie's mercenary motives and characterizing Nathan as Mr Salary: '... when you look at this topic, this is Mr Salary, he is Mr Salary! Mr Money!' (turn 3). Overall then, Kolya presents a relatively brief but full Elaborated Explanation which he has constructed from what seems a scrupulous examination and interpretation of the text.

Kolya's interpretation of Sukie's feelings towards Nathan easily fulfils the defining characteristics of an Elaborated Explanation as outlined in this study's Quality Talk rubric. His account on this basis is sufficiently substantial, detailed and coherent to the extent that he adopts a considered stance, which he expands and supports through careful, cumulative and cohesive reasoning. In terms of formal argumentation, Kolya's interpretation is more difficult to justify. While this is due to several factors, the most obvious is the inconsistency between the elements of his argument, and what these elements represent. The two quotations (or premises) Kolya presents together as evidence in support of his conclusion do not lead plausibly to the conclusion. The essence of this problem is not simply a misunderstanding of the language caused by a lack of linguistic proficiency but an issue of pragmatics. Kolya apparently fails to

comprehend Sukie’s meaning, which can be inferred more accurately from the context than from direct interpretation of her words. In this case, what may appear a mistake in his understanding of the second quote can be considered a literal interpretation of the language, from which he infers something equivalent to ‘out of sight, out of mind’. As a result, and as a model of inductive reasoning, Kolya’s conclusion could be construed as false. In critical thinking terms, this is an instance where, with slightly more reflection of the context surrounding Sukie’s expression, he may well have arrived at a more plausible interpretation of the protagonist’s intended meaning. That said, as an example of literary interpretation, this Elaborated Explanation turns out to be no less persuasive an explication of Kolya’s comprehension than a strictly logical argument would have been.

### 5.5 Lesson 3 - My Hobby

This session explored Tom Fabian’s story of a man who murdered people as a hobby (see Appendix G for a synopsis). The excerpt below is significant as it shows Kolya retain the text as the primary basis for his discursive contributions even as he begins to move away slightly from his initial unwavering dependency on it. It also represents a model episode of Exploratory Talk. The analysis therefore explores how participants collaborated in constructing meaning as they all interrogated the text. The discussion was contentious, and questioned the narrator’s character: was he indeed a ruthless psychopath, or genuinely concerned about the welfare of people who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances they felt unable to manage? Satya had taken a stance at variance with the majority: that the narrator was not necessarily a psychopath but rather someone whose behaviour was perhaps justifiable. Given that his motives were arguably charitable, his murders could thus be framed as solutions to problematic situations. While Satya’s stance on the issue was clearly tenuous, it nonetheless represented a challenge to the position broadly held by everyone else in the circle, and we felt it worth exploring with a view to resolution.

1	Samir	Okay wait, so if a husband abuses his wife, this guy killing him would solve her problems, right? And then if there’s a hundred problems a day you’d kill a hundred people. And you’re not a psychopath, you’re completely normal, you’re completely fine? That’s what you’re saying?	HLQ
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2	Satya	Yeah, because you have a good reason! It's not like you're_____	UT
3	Samir	[laughing] Bloody hell, now <i>you're</i> a psychopath! Seriously though, not all reasons are good, man! I mean, Hitler thought he had good reasons.	UT HLR
4	Kolya	True! Also, you say he's not psychopath, yeah? So what do you think about the last sentence: 'Looking at her, I realize it's never too late to rekindle an old hobby'. What does this mean? It means he's enjoying and wants to start again! Can you ignore this?	AQ HLQ
5	Satya	Okay, it means he wants to kill her. But well, how do we know that when he said that he was being serious about it, like he wasn't joking? Because we know he said he doesn't have fun doing it.	HLR
6	Kolya	What? We know he wants because it's written here that he realized it's never too late. He's not ironic here—he means it! Something's not fun does not always means you don't want. It's his strong feeling!	TR HLR
7	Satya	I mean, he's an old man now, he can't move. Look, he has a short memory; he's going to say this and wake up the next day not remembering what he said.	HLR
8	Kolya	But it's his old hobby. And that shows his intention: people don't do hobbies they don't like, so he likes this. He wants to kill people, you know? He enjoys this. But I think even more: maybe it's like eating every day; you know how you need to eat every day to live? Well he needs to kill people to live!	EE HLR
9	Satya	Look, he doesn't mention the fact that he enjoys it, we don't see it. We even see that he's not happy about it_____	HLR
10	Kolya	But come on, it's clear, it's clear!	UT
11	Samir	Yes, it's definitely clear that this guy is a psychopath, you know?	UT
12	Satya	I understand, guys ... of course! [laughing] But is it wrong? [all laughing]	UT
13	Samir	You know what I like, right? The idea that if she know she's wrong, she's going to tell you. This is good, you know? Not like these guys [indicating Dmitri and Kolya]. They're never wrong. [all laughing]	UT

Samir commences the discussion with a stark expostulatory equation which explicates the grim logic of Satya's reasoning: 'if a husband abuses his wife, this guy killing him would solve her problems, right? And then if there's a hundred problems a day you'd kill a hundred people' (turn 1). Instead of retreating in the face of Samir's High-level Thinking Question, Satya counters with the proposition that murder is acceptable if 'you

have a good reason' (turn 2). The wording of this statement neatly circumvents Samir's tacit imputation that Satya approves of the narrator's psychopathy, as the context of the statement suggests it prioritizes philosophical over moral considerations. I say 'suggests' as it is unclear to me as an observer at this stage whether the 'good' in Satya's comment refers strictly to a philosophical or a moral good. Her general perspective as far as I can tell is philosophical whereas the subject under discussion is definitely moral.

Whatever her intention in making this particular statement in defence of the narrator's rationale for his actions, by invoking the narrator's purpose Satya engages a specific kind of argument. As is noted in the analysis of 'The Necklace' (Chapter 7), where Satya displays a similar approach to argument, reasoning which prioritizes purpose can be characterized as teleological. This is an important concept in Aristotle's theory of justice, set out in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Crisp, 2014). In sum, Aristotle's teleological account of justice posits that the purpose or *telos* of a social practice determines what rights or freedoms should be ascribed to the person enacting that practice. The implication is that rights and freedoms necessarily differ between individuals, depending on the social status or worth of the practice in which they are engaged. In turn 2 of the current excerpt, Satya once again presents an instance of teleological reasoning and, in those terms, her argument works. Because of the literal power which consists in the narrator's role as a murderer, his rights or freedoms prevail over those he kills. The difference on this occasion is that Satya's argumentative concerns refer not merely to the personal but to a wider sphere, that of public justice.

The rights and duties of an individual are conceptually provisional, as they are contingent on the evolving norms and values of the societies which create and shape them. This is one among several other factors which together inform the subtle complexities of justice. Invariably more complicated are issues of justice involving society at large. While Satya's argument in defence of the narrator has some merit in the teleological terms considered above, it is generally weak as it is not difficult to argue against her case from a range of alternative philosophical perspectives of justice. It seems appropriate then, given the ancient (Aristotelian) provenance of teleological reasoning, to evaluate Satya's proposition briefly in terms of a more recent and

contrasting account of political philosophy: Rawls's (1999) *justice as fairness*. This theory of justice advocates equal basic liberties for all members of society, with the most disadvantaged being afforded maximum benefit where necessary. According to Rawls (2005), there is a basic problem with teleological accounts of justice in a society where, ideally, everyone begins from an original position of equal rights or freedoms. In such a society, ascribing to an individual (in this case, the narrator) the freedom to pursue his telos (murder) will result inevitably in conflict. This is because the exercise of individual freedom to fulfil one's telos to one's preferred extent poses an inherent threat to the equivalent rights of other citizens to exercise their own individual freedoms. In the context of such a society, one person's individual rights are no more important than another's. And in the context of the story, the narrator's freedom to pursue his telos and kill another is no more important than the targeted person's freedom to pursue his telos, whatever that may be, without the fear of it being curtailed. Being murdered would curtail that freedom.

While reasoning of this kind is appropriate and compelling in the purely abstract considerations of philosophy, in the messier domain of moral pragmatics, where personal conviction, emotion and experience hold more sway, the power of such reasoning is rather easily compromised (Haidt, 2013a; Hume 1739/1969; Skitka, 2010). Returning to the discussion, Samir's first reaction to Satya's move is one of incredulity. Nonetheless, he gathers himself to respond with a compelling observation, adducing what he perceives as Hitler's indefensible reasoning. His point is simple: that in the context of evaluating human social behaviour, 'not all reasons are good' (turn 3). In exposing Satya's shaky rationalizing thus, Samir has inadvertently invoked an element of Paul's (1981) conceptualization of 'weak sense' critical thinking. This is where critical thinking is employed in a deliberately limited way to defend one's position at the expense of genuine truth-seeking, which would consist in exposing oneself to the best possible evidence.

Kolya then enters the discussion and starts off by confirming Samir's point (turn 4). Characteristically, he repeats the opposing position (in this case, Satya's) before referring to the narrative to introduce a countervailing perspective. Interestingly, in this

response he encircles the quoted text with several direct questions which seem in their stridency to come across as explicit challenges to Satya: 'So what do you think about the last sentence .... What does this mean? ... Can you ignore this?' Unfazed, Satya makes no attempt to evade the textual evidence presented to her: 'Okay, it means he wants to kill her' (turn 5). Perhaps to bolster her weakening position, she paraphrases a phrase from the narrative which broaches the possibility that the narrator may have been joking about his urge to resume killing: 'Because we know he said he doesn't have fun doing it'. Kolya responds exasperatedly by repeating his previous reference to the text and attempting to address any outstanding interpretive loopholes, including a persuasive rebuttal of Satya's suggestion that the narrator may have been joking: 'He's not ironic here—he means it! Something's not fun does not always means you don't want' (turn 6). Kolya seems with these observations to be simultaneously tying together a clearer understanding of his own quote as well as extrapolating Satya's textual reference to a general knowledge of the real world. This is hard cognitive work.

In an attempt perhaps to mitigate what the protagonist George Blake says about rekindling his old hobby, Satya's response in turn 7 is to change tack completely as she brings in the narrator's age and infirmity. Yet she still seems with this move to be rationalizing, by presenting creative scenarios as deflections. Her remarks in this turn are made smilingly, however, perhaps indicating that she is having fun just drawing it out and may be about to concede. My inference of Satya's behaviour in this instance is informed by the model of rationalization advanced by D'Cruz (2022), who characterizes such cognitive endeavour as a kind of creative accomplishment. '*Rationalizing*', he argues, 'is the process of generating and rehearsing narratives that have the credible appearance of genuine deliberation and inquiry but whose narrative arc aims at exculpation or self-justification' (D'Cruz, 2022, p. 107; original emphasis). While rationalizing is sometimes done in good faith and often without malicious intent, the reasons adduced for a given position may nonetheless be spurious, offering merely the appearance of relevance to the issue under consideration. At worst, rationalizing can be used perniciously and lead to grave consequences, particularly if one is in a position of power. A striking case is that of former UK prime minister Boris Johnson, who was found to have deliberately misled the House of Commons with 'his own after-the-event



rationalisations' (House of Commons Committee of Privileges, 2023, p. 6). Such diversionary artifice is precisely—though playfully—what Satya seems engaged in here.

Kolya, however, is not distracted and appears in fact to have crystallized his chain of reasoning: 'But it's his old hobby. And that shows his intention: people don't do hobbies they don't like, so he likes this. He wants to kill people, you know? He enjoys this' (turn 8). The next four turns are brief Uptake responses, though in a final show of resistance against both Kolya and Samir's insistence that the narrator must be a psychopath, Satya repeats Blake's dubious statement that he does not enjoy killing. As she is finishing this remark, she bursts into laughter, literally holds her hands up and relents: 'I understand, guys ... of course!' Even with the deficiencies in her reasoning now exposed, Satya still cannot help but close with a cheeky punchline: 'But is it wrong?'

However, her train of motivated reasoning, in which she seemed committed to not just sustaining but substantiating her evaluation of the protagonist, appears finally to have terminated. What is clear in Satya's overall argument is that, however accomplished or creative at spouting reasons one might be, the power of reasoning to justify one's views on issues of morality, while potentially extensive, is limited (Dunning & Ballantyne, 2022). Indeed, Mercier and Sperber (2017) point out that in some situations there are very few good reasons to be found for certain moral choices. And sometimes, however one's choices are rationalized, there are only weak reasons—or even no good reasons at all. At such points, Hauser (2006) argues, we encounter the realm of objective morality. This was one of those instances. Satya did not simply run out of argumentative options; she could well have continued her inventive line of reasoning. But on this issue or, in Walton's (2006) terms, under these conditions of dialogue, her reasoning was comparatively weak and this in the end rendered her argument unsustainable.

Assailed from the outset with considerable disconfirming evidence against her entrenched position, Satya nonetheless sought to fend off Kolya and Samir's evidentiary challenges. Her behaviour can be inferred as exemplifying a defensive posture which Kahan (2012), for example, argues is entirely natural: instinctive defiance is a predictable human response when one is initially confronted with information which contradicts one's fundamental beliefs. This phenomenon is borne out in Kahan's theory of identity-

protective cognition, as well as in accounts of motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance reduction (Pinker, 2020). While it is generally one's default reaction in such circumstances, resistance to mounting evidence against one's stance often carries substantial reputational risk. In the face of this risk and of a higher quality argument by her peers which even for her proves insuperable, Satya arrives with gracious reluctance at what Redlawsk et al. (2010) call an *affective tipping point*. At this realization she concedes and, on this occasion as is typically the case in our reading circle, collective reasoning prevails. Kolya and Samir's collaborative delivery of stronger reasons decisively undermine Satya's solitary efforts at reasoning her way spuriously through an increasingly insupportable case.

The excerpt concludes with an observation by Samir which marks Exploratory Talk as an effective discursive site for collaborative critical thinking or interthinking (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). Referring to Satya's capitulation, Samir comments that he likes 'The idea that if she know she's wrong, she's going to tell you' (turn 13). This points to a fundamental precept of critical thinking, which is a 'willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted' (Facione, 1990, p. 28). This is particularly evident in this dialogic episode, where a wide range of different viewpoints are freely expressed and challenged.

## **5.6 Lesson 7 - The Lifeguard**

I surmised that this short story by Mary Morris would appeal to the group on several levels. Because the protagonist-narrator Josh Michaels is a young man of their age, I hoped the students might be able to relate to him, either from personal experience or through what they knew of their peers. As it turned out, Satya was not impressed with the story, labelling it 'boring' and wondering why an author would write about this topic when 'he has the world. He can write about anything, any situation' (turn 46). The rest of the reading circle on the other hand were more receptive and engaged. Kolya in particular displayed a rather more expressive stance than usual in articulating his views about the story, drawing on a fair amount of his own experience to illustrate his observations.

The following excerpt comes midway through the session. Having focused on the narrator’s dissatisfied reflections about the state of his life, the discussion has become more personal and shifted to the participants contemplating aspects of their own lives. Dmitri has set a pessimistic tone by expressing his belief that there is nothing special about life.

1	Cliff	Okay, so Dmitri feels life is boring. Is there anything we <b>can</b> learn from this story about the purpose of living and, in particular, your roles in life?	AQ HLQ
2	Kolya	Well, this lifeguard’s attitude reminds me something about my life. When I was ten years old I mentioned to myself like Dmitri: what’s the point to study, to work? Just live this life like homeless people? Except these homeless people not heroes. How can I say? They can’t do these serious steps in life. It’s not a job sitting in the street_____	UT AR
3	Dmitri	They’re doing more serious things than you. Can you do what they do?	AQ
4	Kolya	Yeah, if you want I can twenty four hours stay sitting in the street. But then, what’s the point of my life in this? But maybe you don’t understand. So how can I say? Ok, do you remember one day all of us saw this funeral of our president, do you remember? Everybody cried in our country, even people that didn’t see or know him. And I remember ask myself: what’s the point in life? This lifeguard also has this moment, because to live for yourself is no meaning. I realized at ten there’s only one certain happiness in life: to make someone happy. If you can’t live for others, you are not people, not human. I don’t mean you should kill yourself, I didn’t mean this. Just live for others to develop the society. But do something. If you can’t do big things, do small things. But do something with your life for a bigger way or purpose than your life just. That’s it.	HLR AR TR
5	Selena	That’s right. That’s your purpose!	UT
6	Samir	Good one. Don’t do economics anymore, brother—wrong subject for you.	UT

Turn 1 sees me begin with an Authentic/High-level Thinking Question, intending to orient the discussion towards a consideration of any connections between the story and the students’ experiences. Kolya responds first with a vivid recollection of an episode in his childhood, in which he had doubts about the utility of study or work (turn 2). These questions were offset by reservations about living ‘like homeless people’, who the 10-

year-old saw as ‘not heroes’, and unable to ‘do these serious steps in life’. Before Kolya can reminisce further, Dmitri interrupts him and challenges his perception of the homeless: ‘Can you do what they do?’ (turn 3). Kolya responds affirmatively but in the same breath dismisses Dmitri’s challenge as pointless. He continues his story with a brief description of a former president’s funeral, which event prompted him to question ‘what’s the point in life?’ (turn 4). Kolya then returns to the present with a Textual Reference: ‘This lifeguard also has this moment’.

By narrativizing his own experience and then relating it to the text, Kolya illustrates the importance of intertextuality on comprehending ourselves in relation to the world we inhabit. This importance consists in the notion that our experience of lived reality is largely understood through interpersonal communication, which occurs primarily as oral (and secondarily as written) narrativized text. In other words, our perceptions are mediated by the stories we share with others, and their relevance to our personal experience (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Indeed, Turner (1998) argues that we humans have a ‘literary mind’, the basic function of which is to organize our experiences and thoughts into interlinking narratives, the better to facilitate navigation through the world. A similar argument has been advanced by Hardy (1977; 2014), who characterizes narrative as a ‘primary act of mind’ which we actively use to coherently organize perceptual experience. Kolya’s retrospective connecting of a childhood experience with the present text is an outstanding example of a High-level Thinking Response, where reflection leads to evaluation. This complex process usually happens intuitively and is known as associative activation (Kahneman, 2011). One or two ideas generate a constellation of associated ideas, which ultimately lead to a clearer, more coherent picture of a given situation and an appropriate response. The central feature of this dynamic cognitive activity is coherence. Seeking actively to improve understanding of his own background vi-a-vis the broader social environment, Kolya seems to make a conscious effort to synthesize both his personal experience and text-generated ideas. This effortful cognitive process seems to result in an improved and more coherent view of his world, which he is then able to draw on to clarify his explanation to us.

## 5.7 Lesson 9 - Elephant

This short story by Raymond Carver elicited very strong emotions in our reading circle. This was due mainly to participants' divergent conceptions of family loyalty and co-dependency, two interwoven narrative themes around which everyone adopted very personal stances. Having anticipated such a response, I was interested in observing the extent to which participants' investment in the emotive issues evoked by the story would influence their critical thinking. What unfolded overall as the session continued was a cognitive 'drawing in of the laager' (to borrow an Afrikaans idiom). Broadly speaking, this refers to a parochial aversion to foreign ideas. It was intriguing to witness the emergence of this laager mentality, given that we were already over halfway through the course and that students had shown a progressive openness to each other's perspectives. The following excerpt charts Kolya's initial response to the narrator's conflicted thoughts about constantly giving money to his needy family.

1	Dmitri	Question is, why is he repeating this, saying that he has to give them money? What if I've had enough and don't want to give them more? He's saying here that he has to_____.	AQ
2	Kolya	How are you confused? It's a feeling of responsibility he has!	AR
3	Dmitri	No, maybe there's a reason which we missed. It's in the story maybe_____	TR
4	Kolya	You know Dmitri, to analyze others is easy—why you're doing this, why are you not doing that—but being in this situation and facing these difficulties, it's different. You're just sitting and saying I'm good, I'm not giving them money. If your mother is old, your children are starving, you have to. You have to! So I can understand why he gives his family money for this reason.	HLR AR
5	Dmitri	No, don't say that, never! I'm telling what I know of you. You cannot endure being hungry outside at lunch and giving your monies. You! Exactly you cannot do that, so how are you pretending now?	UT AQ
6	Kolya	Man, that's not the same thing! I don't use money on me easily, it's true. But for my family I don't think even; I just have to.	UT

Dmitri's Authentic Question sets off this mini-debate by soliciting an explanation from the group for the sense of obligation the narrator feels and expresses (turn 1). Kolya's

interjection is brusque and introduced via an Uptake Question which carries an almost disdainful air: 'How are you confused?' (turn 2). This is followed by an Affective Response suggesting impatience towards a question which to Kolya seems to have an obvious answer: 'It's a feeling of responsibility he has!' This response is a clear indication that, for Kolya, familial obligations are inviolable and, as such, beyond question or consideration. Dmitri disregards Kolya's snappy response and, in a creditable analytical move, appeals instead to the text for a 'reason we missed in the story maybe' (turn 3) which may answer his initial question. Interrupting once again, Kolya seems to have misinterpreted the sincerity of Dmitri's bid for clarification: 'You know Dmitri, to analyze others is easy ... You're just sitting and saying I'm good ...' (turn 4).

Although he has predicated this observation on what I infer to be a misunderstanding influenced by his emotions having been stirred by the issue, Kolya follows it with an insightful High-Level Thinking Response, notable for a pair of reasons. The first is that the perceptive quality of Kolya's full response consists in a symbiosis of affective and deliberative elements, where emotion and reason are at once appealed to and delivered. This has a very persuasive effect on the other participants, including me, which I observed in my notes of the session (see Appendix E, No. 2). Another interesting point about this High-Level Response is Kolya's advocating a *false dilemma* (Morrow & Weston, 2019). This informal fallacy is misleading in that it reduces the scope of alternative considerations in an argument to just two usually diametrically opposed options, often unfairly weighted against the interlocutor. Ironically, Kolya commits this fallacy in the process of defending an ethical stance. Its significance for my analysis of critical thinking lies in demonstrating that a false premise can lead to a questionable conclusion and yet still generate a persuasive point.

We can begin to illustrate the point with Kolya's initial mistaken inference that Dmitri would not give his family money if they were in difficult financial straits. One way of explaining what Kolya does in this instance is with reference to deductive rules of inference, and specifically to a syllogistic argument form called *Modus Ponens* (Morrow & Weston, 2019). This is a type of valid inferential argument drawn from a hypothetical proposition and, typical of a syllogism, takes the form of three propositions separated

into two premises and a conclusion. *Modus Ponens* can be represented by the following standard form:

- If A then B (premise 1)
- A (premise 2)
- Therefore B (conclusion)

Structurally, the hypothetical proposition is represented in one premise by a conditional statement ('if ... then ...'), and a second premise asserts the antecedent (the 'if' clause) of the conditional statement. The conclusion asserts the consequent (the 'then' clause) of the conditional statement.

The reasoning represented by this form can be explicated thus: if both premises are true, then the conclusion follows necessarily and logically as true. Such a set of propositions renders the argument *valid* (Hurley & Watson, 2018). If either or both of the premises are false, then the conclusion is open to question. Whether it is true or false depends on the truth value of the premises, that is, how they are interpreted. In such a case, a conclusion is deemed *unsound* (Hurley & Watson, 2018). However, syllogistic reasoning stipulates that regardless of the truth or falsity of any of its propositions, the argument thus presented is still logically valid. This is because a deductive argument's logical validity is not determined by the truth value of its premises, but is rather a function of its formal consistency, that is, its structure.

Consider, for example, the following simple argument containing a false premise:

- If my muscles are sore, I exercise too much (premise 1)
- My muscles are sore (premise 2)
- Therefore I exercise too much (conclusion)

As we have seen, the logical validity of this argument is not in dispute for at least two reasons: one, it assumes standard syllogistic form and two, it follows the rules of deductive inference. Under these rules, a logical analysis must ignore the truth value of the argument's premises. It follows that if a premise is false, as it is in the above argument, this error in reasoning will not be disclosed by a logical analysis. What will disclose the error, however, is a semantic analysis.

This is precisely the case with Kolya's argument against Dmitri's moral position, viewed from the following perspective and reformulated thus:

- If Dmitri's children are starving, he won't give them money (premise 1)
- Dmitri's children are starving (premise 2)
- Therefore he won't give them money (conclusion)

As with the preceding illustrative example, Kolya's argument in this instance is logically valid. However, it is at once obvious that the first premise is false. The logical basis for its falsity is that it makes a disjunctive claim, asserting the truth of only one act (he won't give them money) to the exclusion of possible others. Oversimplifying the situation in this way immediately renders it subject to dispute. Now recall that a false premise does not necessarily result in a false conclusion; its truth value depends on how the first premise is interpreted. In this case, Dmitri has not made the claim purported in premise 1; it is in fact reasonable to infer that he would not make such a claim. On this basis, Kolya's interpretation is demonstrably inaccurate, so it follows that his conclusion is not true. The overall character of this argument therefore is that, while it is logically valid, because it has at least one false premise, it is unsound.

Even so, while Kolya's conclusion fails as a truthful interpretation of this particular case, the validity of his overall argument holds logically. This highlights the distinction between syllogistic or propositional reasoning and real-life arguments. In real-life discourse, and especially in everyday conversation, the basic difficulty with refuting, evaluating or even discussing an argument based on false premises is that the truth of its premises must achieve unanimous consensus (Walton, 1992a). This is a highly improbable expectation if the interlocutor does not share the advocate's viewpoint. It is no surprise that this problem of consensus around what constitutes truth underpins the broader epistemological problem of establishing causal connections. (This is a problem we discussed in section 4.2.1 in relation to thought and speech.)

To illustrate another difficulty in evaluating arguments, it is worth examining very briefly the same contribution in turn 2 from a different perspective. With a slight shift in focus from Kolya's statements used above, to include the ones which immediately follow (... you have to. You have to!), his argument can be reformulated thus:



- If Dmitri's children are starving, he has to give them money
- Dmitri's children are starving
- Therefore he has to give them money

In this case, Kolya's argument stands in both form (internal consistency) and content (truth value). Its conclusion follows logically and necessarily from its premises which, apart from any other consideration, renders the argument logically valid. It bears noting that a key extraneous consideration in this argument is a direct and persuasive appeal to emotion via the imperative, 'You have to!' Kolya's insistence in this exclamation has little to do with the protocols of formal argumentation and rather more to do with family loyalty. This is a moral value he clearly endorses and indeed takes pride in, even to the extent of engaging wilfully in motivated reasoning, which by now he is sure to recognize could undermine his overall argument (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2023).

To sum up, it is rare in real dialogue for speakers to express themselves in complete syllogistic or propositional forms such as those we have examined in this segment. Conversations work mostly due to communicative context (Grice, 1967). Premises are often implied or even missing, while conclusions are sometimes left to be inferred (Govier, 2019) so an analytical exercise as I have conducted above, employing the principles of syllogistic or propositional logic, may seem inappropriate. However, Pinker (2022) argues that formal reconstruction of conversational arguments can reveal fallacious inferences or implicit premises. The utility of identifying and critiquing arguments in deductive form, however, lies ultimately in evaluating arguments in real life as *reasonable or unreasonable* (Hatcher, 1999). For example, a 'poor' argument by deductive standards may profitably be evaluated according to inductive standards and found in those terms to be a 'better fit' (Walton, 2008). Alternatively, improvements could be made to arguments already shown to be invalid by adding more relevant premises, or perhaps by modifying the character or boundaries of the argument in different ways, as illustrated in the final example above. Most importantly, being attentive to the general quality of reasoning in real-life conversations can provide an effective defence against the natural human susceptibility to bias (Hurley & Watson, 2018; Kahneman, 2011; Walton, 1992a; 1998). Such a defence is seldom pre-emptive, but it can mitigate and perhaps even strengthen the perceived ratiocination of what may

in fact be a relatively weak line of reasoning. This is the case with Kolya’s contribution in this excerpt. His Elaborated Explanation reveals sufficient affective and logical merit for the reading circle to evaluate his argument, given the context, as *reasonable* at the very least.

### 5.8 Lesson 11 - The Lady with the Little Dog

This session examined the short story ‘The Lady with the little Dog’, by the Russian writer, Anton Chekhov. Kolya was at his most comfortable with the content of the text, as he claimed to have read it several times before in Russian, the original language. In fact, all three of our Uzbek participants knew the story intimately. They confirmed that it is not only a standard text in the literature curriculum of Uzbekistan (a now independent country which was previously part of the former Soviet Union) but is also an established tale in Uzbek cultural tradition. Predictably, this familiarity with the story resulted in these students contributing significantly more in this session than usual. Kolya was particularly excited as he had expressed the hope from the outset of the course that we would read a text by at least one of the Russian canonical authors. While this excitement comes through in the following excerpt, it is his compulsion for textual detail which again emerges.

#### Excerpt A

1	Alyeh	His personality was cold and uncommunicative with women, I don’t know why _____	TR
2	Kolya	Uncommunicative with women? You sure? With mens. With men. Come on!	AQ
3	Dmitri	Let her finish!	UR
4	Selena	[whispering to Kolya] Why don’t you try to find it rather than shouting at her?	OQ
5	Kolya	Oh sorry! But check that again. Is it men?	TR UT

The brief at this early stage of the session was for participants to explain what they thought of Gurov’s personality. Barely has Alyeh begun to offer her perspective than

Kolya interrupts her with loud, rapid comments (turn 2). With both Dmitri and Selena responding to his outburst in different ways, Kolya apologizes but is still intent on getting Alyeh to realize her mistake. He then follows Selena’s advice, disengages from the discussion for a few minutes, and focuses on locating the information he needs.

### Excerpt B

1	Kolya	Okay here, here! So Alyeh said Gurov was uncommunicative with men, no no with women. See now you’re confusing me [laughs]. But I think this is clearly written: ‘In the society of men he was bored and not himself, with them he was cold and uncommunicative; but when he was in the company of women he felt free, and knew what to say to them and how to behave’. See? It’s the opposite!	TR
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This excerpt shows Kolya a short while later in a still very excitable state, but much more secure in his position now that he has found the textual evidence to correct Alyeh and confirm his belief.

Later in the session, the group’s interest turned to the question of how powerful a transformative force love is. This excerpt is interesting for what it reveals about the limiting nature of Kolya’s approach to reading and discussing text.

### Excerpt C

1	Cliff	So most of you say you know what love is. Gurov had never known love like this until he’d got old and grey, and that changed him in some way, it seems. Does it, can it?	AQ HLQ
2	Selena	I don’t believe it!	UT
3	Cliff	You don’t believe it, Selena? Dmitri, what do you think?	AQ
4	Dmitri	I think we change our minds as every year we’re getting older, every year new things. You look back and you think it was different, so you change yourself manually. And in this universe I didn’t see anything stable forever; there’s nothing forever. So you cannot live with one person because you cannot predict. You cannot say ‘ <i>he had fallen properly, really in love—for the first time in his life</i> ’ and he will be 100% with this woman till the end. He might change his mind again_____	EE HLR TR
5	Kolya	Dmitri, you say ‘you cannot predict’ then you predict! Stop predicting please! It’s a roman: it’s stopped, it’s ended.	UT

6	Dmitri	No no, all I want to say is that he might change his mind again.	UT
7	Kolya	It's a roman—sorry, that's in Russian—it's a novel, a story. Yes, it's taken from real life but here you're making a stance of 'after'. Here in the text, it's the beginning and the end. That's it. You can't predict! They can have babies, they can get married, they can divorce, they can die at 70, but you can't predict. The story's finished. What happens is the power of love; love changes this guy. That's what we're told right here in these words. There's no more, man.	EE TR
8	Dmitri	You know what: you taste different foods but one of them you like more than others. But you just like it—it's not love.	UT
9	Kolya	What? Wait, how old are you: 22 yeah? You are still eating our national food. Why? Because you like it. Ha, it's a long time for something you just like. Well love is even more, stronger; it's an addiction. Gurov's not changing his mind. It's right there. That's it; no sense in predicting more.	HLR TR

I open discussion of the topic with an Authentic/High-level Thinking Question: can love change one's personality in significant ways, as the story seems to suggest? Selena's answer is straightforward though unsupported, so is merely a disagreement, not an argument (Cottrell, 2017). Dmitri on the other hand begins an insightful Elaborated Explanation with a well thought-through observation that 'there's nothing forever' (turn 4). To reinforce this point he outlines how people change as life develops, then he moves on to articulate a broader belief that everything in the universe evolves. Concluding his response by returning to my original question, he refers to Gurov's situation, quoting a relevant extract of the text. Interestingly, whereas most textual references in our reading circle are used to support a point a participant is making, Dmitri uses the text in this instance to highlight his *disagreement* with the perspective it suggests: 'You cannot say "he had fallen properly, really in love—for the first time in his life" and he will be 100% with this woman till the end' (turn 4). As Dmitri begins to explain this point by predicting what could possibly happen in the story after it finishes, Kolya interjects forcefully, identifying what he sees as a contradiction in Dmitri's reasoning process: '... you say "you cannot predict", then you predict!' (turn 5).

The reason for Kolya's consternation turns out to be pragmatic, judging by his overall response to Dmitri's viewpoint. Kolya's conception of a fictional text seems to be that it

represents a self-contained world which admits of no speculation about characters and events—or even ideas—beyond the last word on the last page. For him, it is meaningless for a reader to envisage a fictional future after a story has finished: ‘It’s a roman [novel]: it’s stopped, it’s ended’. To clarify his position on the issue Kolya offers an Elaborated Explanation in turn 7, which he begins by establishing the basic nature of a novel or a story, namely its fictitiousness. His subsequent comments reinforce his view that there is no point in imagining details beyond the narrative as it is bound by ‘the beginning and the end. That’s it’. On this basis, even if a story is based on real life events, Kolya insists that ‘You can’t predict!’

Given that the primary pedagogical aim of our course was to enhance participants’ criticality, which every participant was routinely reminded of, a view such as Kolya’s restricts the achievement of this end. In this study’s coding rubric, for example, three discourse elements indicating critical-analytic thinking in dialogic discussion of text stress the importance of thinking outside the semiotic boundaries of the text under discussion. These elements are Intertextual Reference, Shared Knowledge, and High-level Thinking. While discourse involving intertextual references relies on texts being explicitly cited, shared knowledge entails communication of extratextual experiences relevant to the discussion (though of course textual references could also be included). High-level Thinking questions and responses go even further, actively warranting speculation and reflection beyond the knowledge already derived from either text or personal experience. Indeed, it is clear that a discursive setting such as a reading circle could profitably introduce and explore new ideas which may not have occurred to a solitary reader. In this respect then, Kolya’s negative reaction to Dmitri’s inclination to consider fictional possibilities outside the scope of the current narrative suggests that the former is inadvertently imposing undue limitations on his own capacity to think critically.

A more obvious barrier to the development of Kolya’s criticality indicated by this excerpt is his characteristic persistence in elevating the text to the level of sacrosanct: ‘That’s what we’re told right here in these words. There’s no more, man’ (turn 7). The reluctance to critique a text or author because they are viewed as incontestable

authorities is a significant obstacle to critical thinking as it delimits opportunities to query received wisdom (Cottrell, 2017). Indeed, Walton (1997) sets out the epistemic risks of arguments from authority in detail, pointing to the suspicion of and even contempt for such appeals, from antiquity to the present day. In this instance—or perhaps it is just with this text—Kolya seems not to recognize that his analytical approach to the story is precisely that: *his* approach alone. That the other participants do not necessarily (need to) follow his line of reasoning is a possibility which seems to elude him. Neither does he realize that, in perceiving the text almost as an objective artefact independent of extratextual influence or meaning, he has inadvertently adopted a broadly formalistic (after the literary theory of Formalism)<sup>13</sup> and relatively narrow approach to textual analysis as a result. Almost inevitably then, Kolya sometimes displays a kind of naive realism, which is a general assumption that one’s perceptions of reality are veridical and unadulterated by prejudice (Cheek & Pronin, 2022; Ross & Ward, 1996). In this case, Kolya assumes that interpretations which differ markedly from what he perceives as his own impartial and text/evidence-based understandings are biased, ignorant, and even irrational (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2023).

In pursuit of critical thinking development, all participants in our reading circle are not only free but encouraged to employ their own modes of textual interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and description. Kolya’s prescriptive disposition in this situation is not conducive to a dialogic atmosphere in which such development can be cultivated and achieved. Reading and discussing literary works, particularly in a group, is fairly forgiving to the extent that the dialogic context permits the expression of multiple perspectives mostly based on subjective textual interpretations. In an EAP setting, however, academic text analysis would require a more rigorous approach to semantic interpretation, where an issue raised in a text is typically examined from as many perspectives as necessary in order to obtain the most detailed and accurate impression of its intended meaning. In practice, critiquing an expository text optimally would necessarily entail retrospective and prospective scrutiny, where both prior knowledge, relational reasoning and speculation would have complementary roles to play. While

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<sup>13</sup> See Schauer (1987) for a useful overview of this movement.

the content of an expository text is not inherently objective, there is more epistemic valence (Rauch, 2021) in identifying its purpose than there is in identifying the purpose of a literary text.

Returning to the excerpt, Kolya concludes by summarizing what he believes the story reveals in answer to my original question: ‘What happens is the power of love; love changes this guy’. While this assessment may be generally true, the fact that Kolya bases it solely on the text precludes any possible benefits a more comprehensive and wide-ranging consideration may have afforded him.

### 5.9 Lesson 13 - ‘Tickets, Please’

One of D.H. Lawrence’s most well-known stories was this week’s subject of discussion. This session represented a temporary departure for Kolya from the primarily efferent stance he usually adopted in examining texts, in that he made very few direct references to the narrative aside from general procedural moves to orient the discussion. What did reveal itself was an emotional awareness not evident prior to this, yet which seemed drawn from his personal experience. While he had expressed resistance in Lesson 11 to speculating any further than the narrative’s conclusion about potential future events or character development, Kolya was fortunately not averse to extrapolating ideas from the text for more generalized consideration of how they may play out in the real world. The following excerpt highlights one such extended response, expressed extemporaneously. The issue in question is whether anyone is to blame for the girls’ vengeful attack on John Thomas—and if so, who and to what extent.

1	Dmitri	I’m totally disagree with this violence these girls are doing because, for example, it’s not my fault if every girl’s trusting to me and they are being with me.	TR
2	Fernao	Oh my god! What are you talking about? Jesus Christ!	UT
3	Dmitri	Yeah, they bought it. If she’s smart, she will see that and she will stop. He’s tried his best as a man to make his move and they bought it. Yeah, it’s on the girls; they agreed on it. It’s your fault you trust me. He’s tried what he wanted; it’s a personal desire what he wanted.	HLR

4	Kolya	What's wrong with this guy? Please wake up and come back to real life. It's completely his fault because he's playing with feelings, he's cheating, he's lying. Come on, man!	HLR
5	Cliff	Can you explain what you think about that then?	OQ
6	Kolya	Okay, let's agree it's a man's fault if you're cheating and playing with women. And it's the other way also, if women play around men. It's not good. How can I say, women's feelings don't have choice if you come and play with them. But you can't play with this or use this trust badly. Trust and loyalty, these kind of feelings is higher than your desires. Yes okay, he wants something from these women but there is a line; it's just not excuse to playing with these women.	EE HLR
7	Fernao	[applauding] That's my guy. Exactly.	UT
8	Dmitri	What if I'm not playing, and I'm just trying my best? Look, I'm not saying anything bad. I've tried to hook up to be in love with the first girl, and she couldn't have me in her life; we didn't match. So I tried another one, and she accepts me. It's not my fault: I'm going and they're giving me way.	HLR AR
9	Kolya	Yeah fine, you have a go. But Dmitri, point is this. You want to achieve this? Achieve this honestly! Think how you are coming to them, how you are achieving these women: honestly or with lie? Yeah! Are you loyal and real, or selfish and just fake? That's the point. Yeah, you're right, if you're coming to love each other. But the point, <b>your</b> point is different. Achieving your goal is not important. Wait, getting goals is usually, but in this case not; important here is <b>how</b> you achieve this. These are people's feelings, man. You can get everything you want, but important in this one is <b>how</b> you get it.	HLR EE

Dmitri is the first to respond, with a view that surprises everyone. This is apparent in Fernao's horrified reaction (turn 2), which Dmitri himself seems surprised by. He then begins to explain his position, essentially attributing responsibility for the situation which instigated Annie's rage to her own naivety, a condition which he suggests all the young ladies involved were not only afflicted by but were complicit in: 'Yeah, it's on the girls; they agreed on it' (turn 3). Dmitri characterizes John Thomas, by contrast, as 'having tried his best as a man to make his move'. In terms of contemporary western standards around gender relations, Dmitri's explanation reveals a quite conservative perspective. This is reflected in Kolya's response: 'What's wrong with this guy? Please



wake up and come back to real life' (turn 4). Succinctly but very clearly, Kolya states why he thinks the blame lies squarely with John Thomas: ' ... he's playing with feelings, he's cheating, he's lying'. Sensing an opportunity for Kolya to substantiate his strongly worded response, I invite him in turn 5 to continue.

To contextualize further analysis of Kolya's motivations in this excerpt, it is necessary at this point to elucidate a few related constructs, the first of which is empathy. Conceptualized most simply, empathy refers to one's ability to imagine or represent in one's mind what another person may think or feel. A related concept coined and developed by Premack & Woodruff (1978) is *theory of mind*. This is the cognitive capacity to represent and attribute the full range of mental states (including desires, beliefs and intentions) to ourselves and others in order to understand and predict behaviour. Theory of mind describes a wider range of cognitive endeavour and so incorporates empathy. It can extend for instance to thinking about not just what others are thinking, but thinking about what those people are thinking about *other* people's mental states and behaviour. Yet theory of mind can itself be regarded as a component of the overarching construct of metacognition, a key aspect of critical thinking which Flavell (1978) construes broadly as thinking about thinking. Kuhn (1999) conceptualizes metacognitive operations more specifically: as the awareness, understanding and dynamic management of one's own cognition. As a part of the metacognitive apparatus, theory of mind has not evolved to function throughout life at an average automatic rate but is in fact responsive to stimulation and thus capable of development. This development is contingent on, among other things, the practice and guidance afforded by social interaction (Mercer, 2013). Indeed, Kuhn (1999) argues that the more deliberately and consistently one engages one's metacognitive operations in social situations over time, the more one learns to control and enhance these operations. What follows as a result is a commensurate development of one's theory of mind. Altogether, this makes theory of mind 'a very complicated kind of cognition' (Grist, 2009, p. 44). Importantly, this level of self- and social awareness is directly proportional to open-mindedness, which in turn is a key component of critical thinking (Facione, 1990).

Bearing in mind the concepts just outlined, I return to Kolya's response in turn 6. He launches into an Elaborated Explanation without further encouragement or pause, as both his expression and argument appear to flow easily from summarizing his personal stance on infidelity to addressing the issue as depicted in the text. Though brief, his exposition on the morality of cheating begins with a general but clear position on culpability, ascribing fault hypothetically to both genders, men and women, without prejudice, depending on which party is unfaithful. He opens his argument by using a zero conditional sentence to state his position as boldly as possible: '... it's a man's fault if you're cheating and playing with women' (turn 6). This grammatical structure admits of no ambiguity as it expresses something as being true whenever a certain condition prevails. Kolya follows this provisional conclusion with an alternative version which invokes gender equality, imbuing women who cheat or 'play around men' with the same qualities as their male counterparts. Bolstering both observations is Kolya's conclusion, which is morally unequivocal: 'It's not good'.

Although these first three statements express views strongly informed by Kolya's emotions, they do not preclude analysis in critical thinking terms. On the contrary, Kolya's observations are significant expressions of critical thinking as they evince two key elements of the construct. Firstly, they indicate not merely his capacity but his dispositional willingness (Hamby, 2015) to consider the issue of infidelity from perspectives other than just his own, even if one or more of these viewpoints may be beyond his personal experience as a young man. More surprising perhaps is the second element of criticality Kolya reveals, empathy, an aspect of cognition which implicates both compassion and imagination. Kolya has often displayed a strong tendency towards this kind of imaginative reasoning (see Byrne, 2007, for a persuasive thesis on imagination as a largely rational cognitive process). In this case, his response involves counterfactual thinking, which refers to the imagining of an alternative reality from his own (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Roese & Olson, 1995). Counterfactual thinking in turn depends on the propensity to reason causally (Sloman & Fernbach, 2018), which Kolya in this instance appears to have. This capacity enables Kolya to generate a counterfactual line of reasoning informed by his apparent empathy with women who experience infidelity. Following his strong statement of conclusion, Kolya's

consideration in sentence four shifts more specifically to women, whom he sees as victims of infidelity, since their ‘feelings don’t have choice’. This view is reinforced by the complementary premise that men who ‘come and play’ with women have a moral duty not to abuse women’s expectations of trust and loyalty: they ‘can’t play with this or use this trust badly’. Kolya’s chain of reasoning becomes clearer when he evaluates ‘these kind of feelings’: he views trust and loyalty as ‘higher’ than ‘desires’. The inference in this case is that desire is a ‘lower’, baser feeling. Kolya’s intuitions are understandable, conforming as they do to general human value systems, which exalt moral motives over impulses and instincts (Haidt, 2003; Kant, 1785/2002). For Kolya, therefore, being motivated by feelings such as desire is ‘just not excuse to playing with these women’.

The extent of this kind of empathy—and indeed its expression, which I strove to interpret authentically—is quite unexpected when one considers the severe bifurcation of the traditional roles ascribed to the sexes in Uzbek society. However, the presence of empathy in Kolya’s moral reasoning reveals that his thinking is guided as much by ‘the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible’ (Hoffman, 2000, p. 3) as it is by rationality. He sees no contradiction in using both emotion and reason to assess the morality of a given behaviour (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2023; Hauser, 2006).

Apparently realizing that his is the sole dissenting voice, Dmitri appears to go on the defensive in turn 8 with a High-level Thinking Response, whose opening question is rhetorically framed: ‘What if I’m not playing, and I’m just trying my best?’ In an attempt perhaps to mollify his fellow participants, Dmitri expresses the whole of this turn in an almost plaintive tone, and engages in an extended and—at least to me—a very obvious bout of motivated moral reasoning. According to Ditto et al. (2009, p. 312), motivated moral reasoning refers to ‘situations in which judgment is motivated by a desire to reach a particular moral conclusion’. The person drawing the conclusion has an affective interest in discerning the morality of a given person or behaviour, an interest which influences the individual’s reasoning processes towards making moral assessments which align with the preferred judgement. Dmitri’s response in this entire excerpt typifies motivated moral reasoning. He sees no contradiction in seeking reasons to

support John Thomas's position chiefly because he identifies morally with the former's behaviour. This is shown in his explanation, where he assumes the role of protagonist and insinuates himself directly into John Thomas's crisis. Perhaps more interestingly, and in line with Haidt's (2001) influential social intuitionist thesis, Dmitri's moral judgement precedes the reasons he sets out to substantiate it. This is an explicit barrier to critical thinking. As with much of the reasoning observed in the reading circle, Dmitri's judgement in this instance seems to be an intuitive rather than a reflective inference, and is thus susceptible to affective influence and motivated reasoning. Evaluated in light of the theories above, Dmitri's insistence that he is 'not saying anything bad' is a weak proposition, but understandable. Nor in the end is it a surprise that he views the 'evidence' presented in the narrative as exculpatory: 'It's not my fault: I'm going and they're giving me way'.

Kolya, on the other hand, seems disinclined to absolve Dmitri of his dubious defence of the protagonist's moral choices, and challenges Dmitri's explanation with a tight, lucid High-level Thinking Response. Introducing turn 9 with a sarcastic remark, Kolya follows it up immediately with his main point, which emerges as an explicit challenge: 'You want to achieve this? Achieve it honestly!' He then uses rhetorical questions to explicate what considerations are important when approaching a woman: 'Are you loyal and real, or selfish and just fake?' After dismissing Dmitri's earlier suggestion that his intentions might be honourable, Kolya confirms his own original point: that in this particular case, where 'people's feelings' are involved, the focus should be on the *manner* in which one person pursues another and not on the achievement itself. I found this overall to be a very coherent response, which suggests that it was equally clear in Kolya's mind. What struck me about this contribution is how effectively he drew different cognitive strands—language, moral conviction and criticality—together to produce a persuasive synthesis of the issue under examination.

### **5.10 Lesson 15 - The Faber Book of Adultery**

Written by Jonathan Gibbs, this metafictional story was the only one in which I had a prior stake: I had been curious to discover what the other participants would make of a text which was not a straightforward realist narrative. Another aspect of the story I

found interesting was the protagonist Mark’s personality, which was not one I (and I supposed other readers) felt naturally drawn towards. I wondered to what extent his personality would matter in the reading circle’s appraisal of him and the issues around his behaviour. All these considerations are piqued and probed in the narrative’s incremental revelation of Mark’s opportunistic if gauche seduction of Elizabeth, a friend from a small circle which included her husband, Zac, and the protagonist’s own wife, Laura (see Appendix G for a synopsis of this story). As a reader I was never sure if Mark’s dispassionate intentions towards Elizabeth were motivated and ultimately justified by an irrepressible artistic need to authenticate his writing or by baser, more cynical, concerns. Whatever the reasons, the protagonist did not impress me as a likeable character.

Nonetheless, it was the psychological issues evoked by Mark’s behaviour which intrigued me, and which I thought would appeal most to the other participants. I was therefore unprepared for their unanimous aversion to the story. The following excerpt illustrates this conspicuous lack of enthusiasm, with Kolya offering an interesting explanation for his personal indifference towards it.

1	Cliff	Okay shall we move on? I have been speaking a lot here and I honestly don’t understand why. I feel distinctly like I’m overcompensating _____	OQ
2	Satya	Sorry Cliff, I mean the story’s just not shocking or even interesting, and that’s why. It’s like meh. [Everyone laughs uproariously]	UT
3	Cliff	Wait, it’s what? [laughing] But really, you <b>don’t</b> find it shocking? You think it’s conventional?	UT AQ
4	Kolya	Yeah, even boring.	UT
5	Cliff	Do you really think so? Okay, so do explain why you think it’s boring. I’m seriously interested.	AQ UT
6	Kolya	I don’t know. I couldn’t find any meaning from this story. I think it’s hidden maybe, or actually it’s just empty words, you know? Like the author’s breathing but can’t express why that air is important for his life. Maybe he hasn’t skill for expressing this awareness? There’s not any style of literature. No art.	UT

7	Cliff	Hmm I see. So what would have made it more literary?	AQ/ HLQ
8	Kolya	I don't know. I'm not writer, just a reader [laughs]. For me, I just don't like this kind of stories, like modern or written in today's times. Why? Because there's more focus on sex in like love relations or even in people's lifestyle just. This is what I don't like in these modern stories. Yes, it is important in relationships with people. But these writers always try to make these scenes about that first. But do you have to write about this, and explain it in all this detail if you have writing talent? We all know how it works. Does Shakespeare detail sex or Dostoevsky? No, because one they've talent which spark our imagination. And two, of course they know this after all, that love or feelings is much higher than sex, is more I think spiritual, not so base? For this reason, because sex and desire is more important in modern stories than feelings in people's relations, I don't like it.	EE
9	Samir	Look, this is what attract people; this is why it's mentioned in every story.	UT
10	Kolya	Yes maybe. But guess what else I don't like? This writer talking about the words he should use in his own story about the woman--and this is while they're intimate together! I mean, it's confusing for me because it's like those movies when all things stops and suddenly the actor talks to the camera to like describe his feelings. No, man. What's the point here? Looks like this author should get another job! [laughs]	UT HLR

Without context, my transcribed words in turn 1 probably reveal little of my tone or the dread I was feeling as I spoke. As it turns out, these remarks came at the end of an extended period in this session during which I had been trying in vain to elicit from participants their usual meaningful observations about the text under discussion. Indeed, just after the session I made some notes to this effect in my observation notebook (see Appendix E, No. 3). The main points I recorded were my exasperation at the students' lack of responsiveness and my futile efforts to engage them. Reading turn 1 again with this in mind, a perceptive reader may now discern in my stilted expression an uncharacteristic disquiet—again attested by a review of my notes (see Appendix E, No. 4) at what was unfolding in a reading circle which had, up to this point, been a hive of keen and committed participation. On reflection, it must be conceded that the odds of all sixteen scheduled classes operating at an optimal level of dynamism throughout the course were long. Given the form of the previous fourteen discussions, however, the

lukewarm atmosphere in this class was not anticipated. Thankfully, this particular excerpt marks the point in the session at which the participants began to resume their usual degree of responsiveness.

Satya is the first to recognize my tone and lightheartedly offers a reason for her apathy: 'Sorry Cliff, I mean the story's just not shocking or even interesting, and that's why. It's like *meh*' (turn 2). Even with this brief response, she somehow manages to combine sincere contrition with the cheekiest natural expression of disinterest (*meh*), resulting in the whole group bursting into hysterical laughter. Another more fortunate effect of Satya's comment is that it breaks the strained stillness which had built up in the group. Still, I was curious to discover why she found the story mediocre: 'But really, you *don't* find it shocking? You think it's conventional?' (turn 3). Instead, it is Kolya who responds with, 'Yeah, even boring' (turn 4). Genuinely intrigued at this point of the exchange, I solicit an explanation from him. Characteristically, Kolya reaches for a Textual Reference, admitting that he 'couldn't find any meaning from this story' and that 'it's hidden maybe, or actually it's just empty words, you know?' (turn 6). He follows this with what strikes me as an odd but cleverly expressed appraisal of the author's talent; although plainly dismissive, his evaluation is couched deliberately in metaphorical euphemism: 'Like the author's breathing but can't express why that air is important for his life. Maybe he hasn't skill for expressing this awareness?' Although what he has already said in this turn is clear enough to understand, Kolya's final assertion—that the narrative does not display 'any style of literature'—is sufficiently provocative to pique my curiosity further. This leads to the rather obvious High-level Thinking Question: 'So what would have made it more literary?' (turn 7).

By this stage, Kolya seemed to have warmed to his subject. By framing his initial response with the quip, 'I'm not a writer, just a reader' (turn 8), he reveals some appreciation of the complexity of literariness and therefore the depth of my question. However, that joking disclaimer actually turned out to be his most diffident comment of the turn. From there, Kolya launches into an Elaborated Explanation rooted in a lucid judgement against 'this kind of stories, like modern or written in today's times'. His voice is low and his delivery unusually pedestrian (he often trips over his words in his haste to

get them out) but steady. Moreover, he has averted his gaze and, frowning deeply, appears literally to be thinking as he speaks. This latter observation is recorded in my notes (see Appendix E, No. 5).

Having declared his stance on the issue, Kolya proceeds to set out his reasons: 'Because there's more focus on sex in like love relations or even in people's lifestyle just'. This main reason is underscored by restating his position, 'This is what I don't like in these modern stories' and then moving on immediately to elaborating it. Conceding that sex 'is important in relationships with people', Kolya questions its priority in stories about relationships with a few telling remarks: 'But do you have to write about this, and explain it in all this detail if you have writing talent? We all know how it works. Does Shakespeare detail sex or Dostoevsky? No, because one they've talent which spark our imagination'. What emerges here is a distinct preference for less detail in fictionalized depictions of sex and a more allusive writing technique; citing Shakespeare and Dostoevsky as exemplars of this level of artistic ability underlines Kolya's position effectively. However, the second reason he advances to support his point is a baseless projection. It is a fairly obvious inference that Kolya's proposition that 'love or feelings is much higher than sex, is more I think spiritual, not so base' is a deep personal conviction (Skitka, 2010); so it is understandable that he attributes this belief uncritically to great writers since 'of course they know this after all'. While this unsubstantiated claim weakens Kolya's explanation in principle, its residual effect overall is in fact quite convincing. This is an instance of an Elaborated Explanation which derives its persuasive force as much from its strong rhetorical delivery as from its good, if flawed, argumentative quality. A comparable example in this respect is Satya's argument in Lesson 14, 'Mrs Mahmood'.

In response to Kolya's conclusion that he dislikes the overt expression of sex and desire being seen as 'more important in modern stories than feelings in people's relations', Samir offers the pragmatic explanation that 'this is what attract people; this is why it's mentioned in every story' (turn 9). Kolya's final point is also disparaging, but refers now to the character of the text itself. This is interesting for me as his observation touches on the metafictional nature of the text. At first, Kolya's objection appears to be grounded in mild moral indignation as he seems morally affronted by the narrator's



focus on ‘the words he should use in his own story about the woman—and this is while they’re intimate together!’ (turn 10). But this initial objection evolves into one based on confusion: ‘No man. What’s the point here?’ Kolya’s evident uneasiness with this ‘overstepping’ of narrative boundaries possibly stems from assumptions he has acquired as an experienced reader of traditional realist novels. To the best of my knowledge, he is unaware of metafiction as a genre and its aim of exploring broader human concerns through the deliberate disruption of traditional narrative conventions. So it is understandable that he identifies this kind of narrative technique in the story as a flaw in the writer’s talent: ‘Looks like this author should get another job!’

Interestingly, Kolya rationalizes his discomfiture in this turn by referring to films which contain metafictional elements similar to those he has encountered in the text: ‘it’s like those movies when all things stops and suddenly the actor talks to the camera to like describe his feelings.’ This is an Intertextual Reference, a discourse element which indicates Kolya’s eliciting of similarities between the different narrative media of short story and film. In doing so, he exhibits a specific kind of relational reasoning known as analogical reasoning (Alexander et al., 2012; 2016). Where relational reasoning is the human capacity to discern meaningful connections amidst a volume of information, analogical reasoning is more specific and entails the recognition of similarities between ostensibly dissimilar objects, ideas or situations (Dumas et al., 2013). According to Alexander et al. (2016), general relational reasoning is related to intuitive inference as it is informed by non-reflective perception. As such, it is an innate cognitive trait and thus a crucial precondition for better thinking. Analogical reasoning, by contrast, is effortful, conscious and purposeful, makes far greater demands on cognitive resources, and is therefore considered central to higher-order or critical thinking.

### **5.11 Evaluation of Kolya’s Critical Thinking Development**

By the end of the intervention, the quality of Kolya’s overall discursive contributions to the reading circle had improved noticeably. This was evident not only in personal qualities such as confidence in speaking and patience in turn-taking but also in his linguistic proficiency, notably his lexical breadth and accompanying oral fluency. Most importantly, I consider Kolya’s argumentative expression to have made a considerable

improvement; his Elaborated Explanations followed quite specific lines of reasoning and were generally more considered. As discussed at various points in this thesis, argumentative reasoning in the dialogic context of a discussion group circle can be deemed to indicate critical thinking (Crowell & Kuhn, 2014).

Before evaluating Kolya's overall performance in the reading circle, however, it is worth considering the extent to which his language proficiency influenced his critical thinking expression and development. I noted in my analysis of the first excerpt of the opening session of the course that 'Kolya's apparent difficulty in expressing his thoughts at this point is probably due less to any linguistic deficiency than to the complexity of the issue under consideration'. While I stand by that overall judgement at this stage of the study, there is certainly evidence of Kolya struggling to articulate his thoughts in the first few turns of this excerpt: his sentences were very short and often incomplete, and his vocabulary was extremely limited. Yet I also noted that a transformation occurred when he found support for his viewpoint in the text. This is important because it offers the most plausible reason, aside from personal preference, for Kolya's dependence on textual evidence for his verbal contributions: a lack of confidence in his spoken English. This makes sense in view of the 'shame' he often mentioned feeling in regard to his level of English. Considered in this light, the text does now seem a crutch which served to boost Kolya's confidence when expressing his thoughts in the reading circle.

However, I am loath to claim that Kolya's L2 limitations necessarily and significantly imposed constraints on his critical thinking. Any limitations he did display were more probably due to personal views influenced by his culture or misunderstanding the narrative. Kolya's determination to improve as a student overrode his aforementioned lack of confidence and contributed much to his ability to convey his message to his fellow participants. This resolve was based on his oft-stated appreciation of the intrinsic value of knowledge and his disposition towards reasoned inquiry. The combination of these cognitive 'tools' generated in him an insatiable enthusiasm for truth-seeking. These are among a group of intellectual virtues constituting what Hamby (2015, p. 77) calls a 'willingness to inquire', which he defines as 'the firm internal motivation to employ one's skills in the process of critical inquiry, seeking reasoned judgment through

careful examination of an issue'. Hamby argues that the *ability* to think critically is distinct from the *willingness* to do so, and one should only be deemed a critical thinker if one demonstrates both characteristics. Not only did Kolya have the cognitive capacity, but he consistently displayed a keen inclination to critical thought in the reading circle.

Yet even with these qualities in his toolbag of intellectual virtues, Kolya's motivation extended to active deployment of those virtues in the pursuit of better thinking. This purposeful choice to shift from a willingness to inquire to the active pursuit of inquiry is effected by a conscious cognitive impulse I wish to call *critical volition*. This is not to be confused with the *critical impulse*, discussed in my analysis of Satya's contribution to 'The Necklace'. (Recall that the critical impulse is conceived as a natural impulse experienced by all readers who encounter previously unknown or incongruous situations in texts which upset their cognitive equilibrium and impel them to satisfactory resolution of those situations.) Critical volition is a momentary cognitive impulse which may occur once or repeatedly. It may also be strong or weak, depending on the person and the circumstances. Essentially, critical volition marks the transition from the state of willingness to active engagement in deliberative thinking. Although this may seem a trivial point ostensibly, its importance can be illustrated by the distinction between taking a decision on the one hand and actually starting to carry out the decision on the other. As has been established in this thesis, even people strongly disposed to critical thinking often actively choose to resist the nudge given by their critical volition. This is because acting on this impulse would mean engaging in critical thinking, which is neither natural nor easy. Indeed, in its capacity to challenge pet beliefs and even uncover painful truths, critical thinking can be personally unpleasant.

So acting on one's critical volition takes courage, particularly if one comes from a background which devalues or suppresses critical thinking. By his own admission, Kolya is from such a cultural environment, even though he always struck me as quite fearless in actively pursuing the difficult truths, an exercise constituting a large part of the project of critical thought. He would routinely interrogate an issue to a point where he suspected his prior understandings and established beliefs might be undermined. Following Hamby's (2015) criteria, therefore, Kolya can legitimately be called a critical

thinker. This became increasingly evident as the course progressed and his confidence grew. The fact that his English was of relatively low proficiency seemed a negligible impediment to expression of his thoughts and our understanding of them. Indeed, my considered judgement overall is that Kolya's relatively low proficiency level in English played no conspicuously discernible role in constraining his critical thinking performance.

I turn now to the focus of this section: a comprehensive evaluation of Kolya's contribution to the reading circle in terms of critical thinking. In Lesson 1 (Mr Salary) Kolya made several speculative observations without substantiating them, which was the only time I noticed Kolya do so. Admittedly, he appeared nervous and uncertain in voicing his comments, which may well have been due partly to first-lesson apprehensiveness. However, another factor emerged almost immediately which offered a more likely explanation for Kolya's uncertainty, and which in the end proved the primary basis for his selection as a focal participant: his commitment to reading texts from an efferent stance. Also apparent from this first session was the influence of Kolya's cultural background in informing his interpretation of narrative characters and events. This was illustrated by what I inferred to be a misguided appraisal of the reasons behind Nathan's financial support of Sukie. Possible cultural bias comes through again in Lesson 2, where Kolya's interpretation of Sukie's motive for being in the relationship with Nathan as largely financial, while strongly argued, was not the majority consensus.

More generally interesting about these first two sessions was not just the participants' ideas in themselves, nor the fact that these were necessarily derived from a literary text. What these initial exchanges highlighted to me was the possibility that the very exercise of dialogic inquiry and argumentation around texts can foster skills which can be transferred. Inferential abilities such as speculation and generalization are natural cognitive processes, and employed intuitively every day in navigating our way through the world (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). In this particular discursive context, however, these capacities were relatively raw—but with more such practice looked to have the potential to be developed into viable transferable skills. Even if such skills did not enable 'far' learning transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 2012), that is to settings *qualitatively*

different from that of the classroom, at the very least they would be useful in comprehending other kinds of texts. In these first excerpts, the ideas presented and discussed were not merely located in the text, but rather *followed* from the text. This capacity in students to elaborate and expand ideas from an original source is as useful for exploring short stories in a reading circle as it is for examining expository texts in EAP—and as feasible to develop.

The excerpts from the first two sessions also show students needing to draw on their own relatively limited life experience for possible answers to the Authentic Questions posed. Admittedly, the narrative does provide subtle contextual clues which allude to the dynamic behind the financial aspect of the characters' relationship. That said, these contextual markers would arguably only have been fully apprehended by seasoned readers familiar with most aspects of the typical modern western context depicted in the text. Given that the students were generally not sophisticated readers of this kind, the onus was on them to generate ideas based on their personal experiences; these ideas were then critically audited by their fellows. The first two sessions were therefore important in revealing the benefits of robust dialogic discourse and collaborative thinking to the participants. The realization for me was that engagement so informed would result at worst in participants being exposed to new ideas and at best in their reaching more comprehensive judgements.

The third session (My Hobby) saw Kolya engage once more with the text in support of his observations. Importantly, however, his textual 'dependency' was already starting to decrease, which indicated a growing confidence in thinking beyond the fictive world constrained by the words on the page. In the selected excerpt, Kolya appeared confident, a feeling warranted perhaps by the perception that Samir was 'teaming up' with him in arguing against Satya's evaluation of the protagonist's character. As stated in my analysis, this excerpt was an excellent example of Exploratory Talk (Mercer, 1995), a protracted spell of collaborative classroom discourse which begins with a challenge based on a given issue. In our reading circle, challenges usually took the form of Authentic or High-level Thinking Questions.

Exploratory Talk ideally construed sees students engage in considered deliberation, a significant effect of which is generating reasons to support their thinking. In doing so, participants make visible the various elements of argumentation employed in their responses as well as the thinking motivating these elements. In Walton's (1989) conceptualization of dialogue for critical thinking, Exploratory Talk would fall roughly between dialogues of persuasion and inquiry, as both these forms of dialogue consist of features central to exploratory discussion. Exploratory Talk results in a sort of collective reasoning or interthinking, itself characterized by a 'dynamic relationship between *intermental* activity (social interaction) and *intramental activity* (individual thinking)' (Littleton & Mercer, 2013, p. 10; original emphasis). Dynamic discussion of this kind is mediated by diverse linguistic expression and characterized by viewpoint diversity. It is also geared towards a specific end, namely a deeper understanding of the text and the contextual issues it throws up. All these features taken together constitute what I call the *transactional dialectic*, a dynamic cognitive-discursive process inherent in text-based dialogic discussion. Participants' exchanges can range from congenially cooperative to constructively disagreeable to notably adversarial, yet still be collaborative in pursuing the resolution of an Authentic Question. In such a vibrant context of interthinking, what often emerges is a much higher level of comprehension among participants than is usually able to be achieved from individual thinking (Moshman & Geil, 1998).

Returning to Kolya, the excerpt chosen from Lesson 7 (The Lifeguard) indicated somewhat less of a reliance on the text and more of Kolya drawing on his personal experience and relating this to events in the text. His lengthy though coherent Elaborated Explanation in turn 4 included philosophical reflections on his own life and, more generally, one's place and function in society. This extended statement by Kolya was a remarkably lucid instance of critical thinking which demonstrated at least three key criteria of the construct: analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Kolya analyzed several different purposes of life from more than one perspective: this involved analysis of real past events as well as counterfactual considerations. He then evaluated these purposes by explaining and clarifying the process of his thinking, which signified metacognition at work. Finally, Kolya synthesized all these thoughts, which included good reasons, to

arrive at a firm conclusion about what he believed. The fact that this single articulate explanation drew admiring comments from his fellows is testament to its effectiveness. Also worth observing is the persuasive manner in which Kolya argued his case. The intense but controlled emotion which seemed to drive his delivery bears out conceptualizations of critical thinking which include emotion as a key constituent element (e.g. Kuhn, 2015; Lipman, 2003, Thayer-Bacon, 2000; Walters, 1994).

Heightened emotions were also strongly in evidence in Lesson 9 (Elephant), the next session selected for analysis of Kolya's reading circle contributions. This is understandable, given that family loyalty is the focus of the story. This theme led Kolya once more to reveal an overt passion for issues dear to him. On this occasion, however, it was clear to me that Kolya's genuine conviction for the cause in question and a passionate verbal delivery in support of it did not inevitably amount to critical thinking; nor did his assertions necessarily persuade his interlocutor, Dmitri. Indeed, Kolya's insistence on the notion of financial obligation to family left Dmitri rather perplexed. What Kolya's uncompromising attitude on this issue did again appear to disclose was his strong myside bias (e.g. Mercier, 2017; Stanovich, 2021; Stanovich et al., 2013). In this regard, his final remark in this excerpt was telling: 'But for my family *I don't think* even; I just have to' (my emphasis). Nonetheless, I made a note in my research notes (see Appendix E, No. 3) that Kolya's 'rant'—for this in truth is what it came across as—was somehow persuasive. Something in his speech, for all its obvious personal bias, resonated with us in the reading circle.

I attempted upon reflection to work out the possible reasons for this apparent anomaly and, after reviewing some of the literature on moral psychology (e.g. Haidt, 2001; Greene et al., 2001; Greene & Haidt, 2002), I began to understand what might have happened. Recent research in moral psychology, initiated by the 'affective revolution' of the 1980s (e.g. Zajonc, 1980) which supplanted the longstanding rationalist tradition, indicates that moral judgement is governed by affective intuition first and strategic reasoning afterwards. This phenomenon is generally known as the *intuitive primacy principle* (Haidt, 2007). An important implication of this principle for understanding morality and the judgements which flow from it is that inferences drawn from moral

intuitions are largely informed by emotions. In this respect, Hume (1739/1969, p. 462) was remarkably prescient in prioritizing affect over rationality: ‘reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’. Conceived thus, moral responses driven by emotions are effectively automatic; little if any thought precedes such responses. Indeed, most people would instinctively concede this point as generally characteristic of human nature.

However, it surprised me to learn that in matters of pressing moral judgement, not only does affective intuition resist and often override critical reflection, but we are all prone to *willingly surrender* our propensity to deliberate on personal issues in favour of purely emotional responses (Greene & Haidt, 2002). This behaviour is not simply what Caplan (2001, p. 8) terms *rational irrationality*, where ‘on some level, the agent has rational estimates of the attendant consequences of self-deception’. Epistemic rationality in such cases is present, to be sure, but what can be seen in Kolya’s behaviour here is a kind of rationality seemingly informed by a conscious bias (Stanovich, 2021). Stanovich calls this *expressive* rationality, as it serves a motivational function: that of overtly connecting a person to a valued group. So even if one ordinarily values truth-seeking, as Kolya does, one ‘might deprioritize rationality when it conflicts with being respectful, loyal or protective of others’ (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2023). In very personal situations this kind of bias can endorse reasoning where weighing the costs and benefits of truth against falsity seem wholly inconsequential (Galef, 2021). Indeed, given the right circumstances, one may *choose* to behave in this way with no qualms about either being or being seen as irrational. In such a cognitive state, personal equanimity and even public reputation are less important than adhering to the intuitive primacy principle. This is certainly true of Kolya in this episode, where he asserts an uncontested commitment to his family which admits of neither deliberation nor interrogation. According to Haidt (2013b), moral judgements made on this basis reflect a self-fulfilling paradox: they increase group cohesion yet undermine the pursuit of diverse inquiry. Whether or not Kolya is aware of this contradiction, assisting his family is for him not even one side of a putative dilemma; it is simply the only choice. This particular decision is consciously based on convictions for his family, with rational considerations deliberately placed in a very distant second place.



What I find fascinating about Kolya's stance here is that it can be evaluated differently, depending on the perspective. In relation to rationality, for example, Galef (2021) explains investment in such personal causes as almost always related to our strongest beliefs, which in turn are rooted in the most basic personal notion of all: identity. This investment is not unthinking, so is not irrational. It reveals an awareness of one's moral biases and a conscious volition in some cases to follow those biases instead of attempting more rational judgements; in such instances one's decisions are based on moral choices which defer to motivations even prior to rationality, such as affect. This view is corroborated by Cusimano and Lombrozo's (2023) recent findings which overturn established assumptions about errors in moral reasoning being systematic and often beyond our control. While Kolya's wilful abdication of pure reason is a stance which Kant (1787/1999), for instance, would likely disagree with, the decision Kolya makes in this situation nonetheless resonates as profoundly moral and one which many *would* endorse. From a social psychological perspective, Mercier and Sperber (2017) suggest that the morality of Kolya's decision consists in his deference to family loyalty, the psychology behind which most people would intuitively understand. However, it also makes sense in philosophical terms: advancing a communitarian case for morality, Sandel (1998; 2009a) challenges the Kantian notion of a person who, while part of society, is still able to exercise complete autonomy of moral choice. Sandel contends that no person is completely unencumbered in this way; our moral choices are governed less by individual freedom than by a fundamental if less obvious sense of being naturally bound by ties to one's community. Rather than being restrictive, these social ties provide individuals with a sense of belonging to the wider society and, as such, offer the impression that our lives have a narrative coherence. This view is reinforced by MacIntyre (2007), who argues from a moral philosophical position that the feeling of being an essential part of a larger social story stabilizes individual identity and assists us in making clearer life decisions while retaining the norms and values of the society in which we participate. As can be seen, all the aforementioned explanations are intuitively, empirically and theoretically coherent. It is no wonder that, taken together, they account for the persuasiveness of Kolya's stance.

A final thought on this session relates to my method of analysis. As previously explained, I chose to analyze Kolya's Elaborated Explanation in turn 4 in terms of deductive syllogistic reasoning. My aim was to illustrate that arguments which do not make much sense logically may nonetheless bear persuasive potential. In fact, to a lay audience an argument's logical validity is seldom its most convincing feature. Its persuasive power consists instead in its rhetorical effectiveness—that is, its immanent emotive capacity and the manner in which it is delivered—as well as the extent to which an audience evaluates it as coherent (Kahneman, 2011). In this episode, Kolya succeeds on both counts.

Lesson 11 (The Lady with the Little Dog) turned out to be interesting for me as a researcher into critical thinking, as it revealed another aspect of the influence of bias on rationality. Given that Kolya had been waiting expectantly from the beginning of the course for a Russian-authored text—and that this short story by Chekhov was one Kolya claimed he had read—I was looking forward to an insightful contribution from him. What emerged instead was a kind of reverential reification of the story. As my earlier analysis indicates, Kolya seemed almost protective of the text from the outset and this led him to suppress or, more accurately, shut down Dmitri's speculations about what the characters' future might hold. Because this future was not reified in the text, Kolya's view was that it was unreasonable and thus futile to imagine it. As happened in Lesson 9, this session exposed Kolya's proclivity to elevate certain things in his life to a level where they are immune from criticism. This tendency is neither wrong in principle nor of course exclusive to Kolya. It can, however, be difficult to sustain. Where he deferred to family loyalty in Lesson 9, his deference in Lesson 11 was to experts (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). This deference constituted the basis of his argument against speculations beyond the text, a rationale which even under cursory consideration proves relatively weak. Kolya's strident objections are predicated on a form of argument known as *argumentum ad verecundiam* or an 'appeal to reverence or veneration of "great names"' (Walton, 1997, p. 64)—the great name in this episode being Anton Chekhov. However, this kind of argument is generally shown by the theoretical literature to be driven by emotion and even sentiment, as opposed to reason or logic. The consensus therefore is that attempts to defend a contentious question in this way are

readily defeasible and likely fallacious. While not intentionally fallacious, Kolya's insistence that elements of the text created by the authority in question (Chekhov) could not be extrapolated further than what there was on the page did suggest a lack of critical thinking.

If critical thinking is to be improved, however, our most revered beliefs, values and artefacts (in this case, the text) should be open to question. The reality for would-be critical thinkers is that self-inquiry is challenging on several levels. For one, introspection to this degree is seldom a single event but rather a process which is sometimes drawn out. If followed through completely, the resulting constellation of personal revelations can lead to unsettling and even painful realizations. Questioning one's religious faith, for example, carries an obvious personal risk in pursuing the evidence wherever it may lead—and this risk applies to any number of areas individuals may find sensitive. Examining Kolya's responses in relation to the issues of family and now this literary text, I am reminded that the main reason critical thinking is so hard is that it is counterintuitive. This explains why the process is so exacting, if done properly. It demands not just the willingness to inquire (Hamby, 2015) but the critical volition to embark on the inquiry. It requires, moreover, the self-awareness to anticipate that one may encounter answers upsetting to one's basic sense of identity. The process of seeking, identifying, and then interrogating deeply held assumptions about such personal aspects of self, and the biases which mask or indeed enable them, underscores this difficulty. As Rauch (2021, p. 41) observes, 'where identity-defining beliefs are concerned, opinions are never just opinions and facts are never just facts'.

Lesson 13 (Tickets, Please!) revealed a further easing of Kolya's intense attachment to the text. By this stage he seemed to take a discerning approach, employing the text more judiciously, as a tool rather than a crutch. In this respect I observed in my analysis that the aversion Kolya displayed to extrapolations involving characters and events *of* the narrative did not extend to the generalization of ideas prompted *by* the narrative. Trivial though this distinction may seem, it showed in him some openness to generative thought, an important element of criticality (Facione, 1990). Another noteworthy, and related, aspect of Kolya's contribution to this session was his empathy for others, in this

case women. He argued convincingly that infidelity cannot be excused or even mitigated on the grounds of gender. To achieve this level of conceptual conviction, Kolya needed to employ counterfactual reasoning (Roese & Olson, 1995), that is he had to imagine a scenario he cannot possibly have experienced: that of being a woman having been cheated on by a man who, in Dmitri's words, was perhaps 'not playing' but 'just trying my best'. This willingness of mind in Kolya to weigh up the implications of an experience an appreciable distance from his own is important, considering the role his background as a young Uzbek man would have played in authentically envisaging such a scenario. My reading of Kolya's overall response in this excerpt is that he applied his conceptualization of justice equally to both sexes. His strong sense of morality in this situation seemed ultimately to hold greater sway over any possible culture-induced prejudices he may have had against women. More interesting perhaps is that he was able to offer a persuasive argument in support of his moral position without being tempted to engage in motivated reasoning (Ditto et al., 2009; Uhlmann et al., 2009), as Dmitri did. Overall, this session presented several moments of criticality in Kolya, where he displayed not just the capacity but the critical volition to reach beyond comfortable cognitive choices in order to pursue harder but arguably more satisfying moral goals.

Lesson 15 (The Faber Book of Adultery) was the penultimate session of the course and the last of Kolya's discursive contributions to be selected for analysis. As referred to in that analysis, this session's most significant and surprising outcome for me was the other participants' uniform dislike of the designated text. Recursive reviews of the transcript revealed several reasons for the rest of the circle's resistance to the story. In general, the students found the protagonist unlikeable, the plot obvious to the point of 'boring' (in Kolya's words), and the genre unfamiliar—and discomfiting as a result. This last reason seems to relate to the metafictional nature of the narrative, specifically the protagonist's ruminations about language and the unexpected narrative shifts from his thoughts to his actions and back again. For Kolya, the biggest problem with the story was the explicit description of sexual activity, which he claimed is a common feature of stories 'written in today's times' (turn 8). Whether or not his view is correct, he provided an Elaborated Explanation which clearly set out a firm stance supported by a brace of reasons which, while detailed and articulate, were not without argumentative

deficiencies. Yet what emerged from this turn was a thoughtfully constructed line of reasoning leading to a committed standpoint on an issue with much room for alternative arguments.

However, Kolya appeared less secure in defending his final point in turn 10 and, as a consequence, was less convincing to his audience. Aside from his strong feelings about the protagonist's description of such intimate details, he was clearly disconcerted by the overt self-reflexiveness of the metafictional text. Kolya managed nonetheless to describe his misgivings about this peculiar narrative device by using an illustrative Intertextual Reference to good effect. However, he was unable to go further and offer plausible reasons for his discomfiture, conceding that he found it 'confusing'. I interpret this scenario as a classic case of epistemic unfamiliarity, that is a situation in which a person is not really able to think critically about a subject due simply to a lack of knowledge about it (McPeck, 1981; 1990). At their most innocuous, metafictional works seek to create a sense of unease in the reader with the aim of instigating questions generated by the narrative's structure as well as its content and context. So whether or not a reader usually notices metafictional elements in narratives (which to varying degrees is an endemic characteristic of novels) is not left to chance in literary works such as this, which explicitly foreground metafiction. Being 'confronted' by the device may not merely cause unease but, as with Kolya, may lead to confusion. Indeed, the reading experience may induce even stronger aversive emotions such as exasperation, disdain, disgust and contempt. Exasperation was certainly apparent in Kolya's conclusion: 'this author should get another job!' (turn 10).

An important implication of this emotion-fuelled turn—and others like it in our discussions—is that intense feelings, whether positive or negative, influence rationality. According to Stanovich (2009; 2011), intense emotions effectively diminish our capacity for unbiased reasoning. Not only do they present a barrier to the constructive use of emotions in reasoning, such as rational compassion (Bloom, 2016), but they also prevent even-handed considerations of alternative or conflicting viewpoints. In short, intense emotions compromise critical thinking. Haidt (2013b) and Brooks (2019), for example, offer fascinating respective accounts on the effects of such strong emotions as disgust

and contempt on rationality. In fact, in extreme cases texts, oral or written, can lead to critical judgement impairment to the extent where irrational actions result in severe real-life consequences. Sacred religious texts are conspicuous examples of texts which have inspired emotion and behaviour to extreme levels of intensity. The following pair of well-known cases, which indicate extraordinary public reactions to fictional works, exemplify this point. One work is called *Troubled Blood* (2022), written by J. K. Rowling (under the pen name Robert Galbraith), and the other is *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie. The fallout for Rowling is that she has attracted the antagonism of the trans community and alienated a significant section of her previously loyal readership, who point to this newest novel as confirmation of the author's perceived transphobia. Consequently, they have called for her to be culturally ostracized or, in the parlance of social media, cancelled. Rushdie has incurred the much graver consequence of being physically harmed. Having survived book bans and burnings, insults and threats, and a death sentence which forced him into years in hiding under constant police protection, the author was stabbed multiple times while giving a lecture in August 2022. In light of such serious incidents, the importance of critical reflection and deliberation about and around fictional texts cannot be overstated.

## **CHAPTER 6 - Juan**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two main parts: analysis and evaluation. The first presents in-depth analyses of the discursive transactions of the second focal participant, Juan, as he engages with a range of short stories in the context of our classroom reading circle. The analysis is framed by the expressive stance he generally adopted in reading and discussing the texts. The second part presents a discussion of the findings, as it summarizes and evaluates Juan's previously analyzed contributions with the aim of explicating the various ways in which his dialogic contributions contributed to his critical thinking development.

### **6.2 Juan's Profile**

Juan was a male student from Ecuador who planned to pursue undergraduate studies in Primary Education. Unlike the rest of the class, Juan had lived and worked in the UK for approximately two years prior to enrolling at university. He had come from a working class background and had studied in the state school system in Ecuador, where English was taught at a relatively superficial level. Although Juan's level of English proficiency was generally upper-intermediate, he displayed a fairly wide range of colloquial American English lexis. He could express himself fluently in that register as he had lived sporadically in the US for a few years in his teens. However, there remained considerable first language (L1) interference in both his speaking and writing, particularly with respect to grammar. This interference included typical Spanish-to-English errors, such as inaccurate verb forms, subject-verb discordance, and missing subjects. An additional issue was clarity of speech or enunciation. Again likely due to L1 influence, Juan's spoken delivery was both extremely rapid and heavily accented, so often difficult for the listener to discern. I noticed that he was quite conscious of this, which sometimes caused him to withdraw slightly from participating whenever it occurred.

On the other hand, apart from his relatively wide range of English vocabulary Juan appeared to have had more life experience than someone typical of his age, something

I observed from utterances made during classroom discussions. He had worked in part-time jobs from a very young age so probably understood more than most of the others in the group something of the demands of studying and working. Perhaps as a result of his background, Juan was very pragmatic in his approach to any issues which arose during lessons. He usually avoided frivolous banter between classmates and preferred instead to 'get things done' without too much deliberation or fuss. He would sometimes become agitated and visibly impatient if other students asked questions which digressed too much or for too long from the topic under discussion. Perhaps due to this pragmatism, Juan's enthusiasm for the course seemed to wane over time; he may have begun to view the lessons as less valuable than he had at first anticipated—but this inference is speculative. As the course neared its end, he was absent more frequently, which was a pity as he did bring a lot to the class when he did attend.

One of the factors which influenced my selection of Juan as a case study was his relative reticence to engage in class discussion generally. While this choice may seem counterintuitive, what I found intriguing was that when he was moved to remark on anything, Juan's responses were seldom unconsidered or fatuous. On the contrary, his observations were typically infused with very personal allusions and always earnestly delivered, a discursive trait which became more apparent in the context of the reading circle. As a researcher using literary texts as a means of potentiating critical thinking development, one of my key aims was to observe whether any such development would be induced by Juan's expressive transactions with the texts and how these would be articulated in the reading circle (Soter et al. 2008). Several hypothetical queries arose from these considerations. For example, would Juan's criticality be revealed primarily by his affective responses or by more critical-analytic observations—or would these overlap in any significant ways? Given Juan's propensity to frame most of his responses quite subjectively, I also wondered whether this tendency emerged from just his life experience, his textual interpretations, or both. In relation to my analytical approach, would I be able to recognize and then meaningfully analyze the discourse features expressed?



The first session of the reading circle did not turn out as anticipated due to constant interruptions of a practical nature, including student enrolment, induction, and other administrative procedures. Despite these disruptions, we got the session off the ground as I had hoped, moderately but adequately, with several students managing to contribute quite effectively, including the two other focal cases (Kolya and Satya). The discussion did not yield any noteworthy participation by Juan aside from the occasional monosyllabic utterance, however, which I attributed to initial shyness. His first substantive contribution occurred in Lesson 2, as the group discussed the second part of Sally Rooney’s popular short story, ‘Mr Salary’.

### 6.3 Lesson 2 - Mr Salary (Part 2)

The first session had followed a fairly introductory path in discussing the narrative, tracing the young protagonist’s sudden realization that the platonic relationship she has always shared with her much older host has transformed into something completely unexpected but irrevocable, at least at first for her. The longer she lodges with Nathan, the more difficult Sukie finds it to explain away or indeed suppress her intense emotional and sexual attraction towards him. With the first part of the story having been covered fairly comprehensively though without any undue excitement, I was somewhat taken aback by the collective mood at the start of our second lesson: I wrote in my notebook that the atmosphere seemed charged (See Appendix E, No. 6), perhaps reflecting the burgeoning tension between the two main characters in the story. The following excerpt reveals the students’ reactions to a narrative episode which highlights the unlikely—perhaps even illicit—love developing between the two.

#### Excerpt A

1	Satya	Hello guys. What did you think or were you surprised or shocked when she said ‘I slipped my hand between my legs’?	AQ HLQ
2	Shav	I didn’t understand, seriously. What’s that sentence?	AQ
3	Samir	What don’t you understand about this sentence?	UT
4	Satya	Were you shocked or surprised by this character act, or did you expect that?	UT

5	Juan	No honestly damn, there are people they got needs, you know? They got feelings so ...	AR
6	Dmitri	For me, it's just an obvious character: when you're sleeping you're just putting in between your legs to make yourself comfortable.	UT
7	Juan	Get serious, guys. It's not in that way!	AR

Satya launches the session enthusiastically with a characteristically provocative Authentic Question she had clearly rehearsed for maximum reaction. Unexpectedly for her, the first respondent is Shav, who seems genuinely perplexed (turn 2). Samir responds to Shav's confusion thus: 'What don't you understand about this sentence?' (turn 3). By taking up Shav's question in this way, Samir appears almost to be guiding Shav towards the revelation Satya is eagerly soliciting from the group. In addition to being authentic, Satya's opening gambit is also a High-level Thinking Question, as it elicits a new train of discussion which leads to a flurry of speculative exchanges. Satya then attempts to retrieve the shock value of her question by clarifying it: 'Were you shocked or surprised by this character act, or did you expect that?' (turn 4). At this point, Juan interjects with an outburst both awkward and irritated: 'No honestly damn, there are people they got needs, you know? They got feelings so ...' (turn 5). His awkwardness is quite conspicuous to me, if not immediately to all in the circle, with a possible explanation for this being his perception of Satya's expression as unnecessarily explicit. Even clearer from his body language is his irritation: from my reading of it, it may be that the sexual reference is obvious to him and, in his view perhaps, should be equally obvious to everyone else. Juan's irritation quickly escalates to exasperation by his next statement: 'Get serious guys. It's not in that way!' (turn 7). Very early on then, we get an impression of Juan as someone who has little truck with transactions he views as superficial or unrelated to the current activity. To what extent this characteristic influences his critical thinking will become apparent as this analysis progresses.

At once evident too is the importance Juan places on people's emotional needs and feelings, substantiating almost every point he makes with direct reference to his own life and the central role emotions play in his personal experience. While his reliance on emotional experiences to support his reasoning does not generally compromise other

participants' comprehension of his references, Juan's first real attempt at argument in the reading circle, shown in the following excerpt from later in the session, indicates that this is not a fail-safe strategy.

**Excerpt B**

1	Cliff	When he speaks to her in the hospital, do you get the sense that he's being deliberately manipulative, and prodding her, or is he just saying stuff?	AQ HLQ
2	Juan	Yeah, he's just saying stuff.	UT
3	Fernao	No, he's trying to manipulate her. Again!	UT
4	Dmitri	To manipulate her, why?	AQ
5	Fernao	That's why she cried, because he knows how she feels about Mr Salary. And he knows how to hurt her, by saying ' <i>he's going to abandon you</i> '.	EE TR
6	Cliff	So what happens on Page 3, right at the top of Page 3, when her father says, ' <i>He'll go off and get married</i> '? And then she says, ' <i>It was clear that Frank didn't know who I was</i> '. How do we explain that?	TR HLQ
7	Samir	Yeah, this is what I'm saying! There's a passage here—I don't know if I'm going to see it again—but she says in general when she's talking to him, sometimes he takes a bit of time, sometimes he didn't answer. It's like he's out [delirious] you know, he's not focused on what she's saying.	HLR TR
8	Fernao	But this is <b>her</b> impression.	UT
9	Juan	Look, this even happens in real life because it happened to me, well with one member of my family that happened the same. And in the process when he was dying, he didn't recognize us. He's looking at us and saying, who are you?	AR
10	Cliff	Is that what's happening here?	HLQ
11	Samir	Yeah this is what's happening actually; this is what I'm saying.	UT
12	Juan	It's quite similar, yeah.	UT

In this excerpt the participants are considering whether the protagonist's father, Frank, who is in hospital with a terminal disease, is deliberately manipulating his daughter, Sukie. Juan answers my Authentic Question immediately, which is unusual as he tends

to keep his own counsel until he has listened to a range of other views first. Juan's view is shared by Samir, who presents reasons to support it (turn 7). However, by his own admission Samir's inferences in this instance are drawn from vague recollections of the narrative, and are inaccurate as a result. Fernao (turns 3, 5, 8) sets forth a much stronger case for the father being manipulative, making incisive observations based on evidence from the text, which lead to a succinct but convincing Elaborated Explanation.

By contrast, Juan's response in this excerpt is not effective in terms of argumentation more strictly conceptualized (Walton, 2010). This is despite his explanation being sufficiently detailed, and replete with reason and example (turn 9). Eliciting events he has personally experienced, Juan seeks to support the stance he initially articulates in turn 2. In doing so, he inadvertently commits the fallacy of *anecdotal evidence* (Walton, 2010), which is a common human tendency to assume that our individual experiences are typical of human experience generally and thus sufficient grounds for generalizing (Battersby & Bailin, 2015). Although the emotional gravity of the scene he describes lends rhetorical ballast to his delivery, Juan's lived experience is only peripherally related to the point at issue. His account is of course emotionally compelling; a real-life story with which others can identify is a powerful persuader. It is also topically relevant in that Juan's family's unfortunate circumstances resemble those experienced by Sukie and her father, Frank. However, my inference of Juan's initial interpretation of the narrative is that it is inaccurate: Frank *was* being manipulative. So even though the story offered in turn 9 substantiates Juan's original claim, his suggestion that Frank may have been delirious appears wrong-headed; Juan seems effectively to be 'barking up the wrong tree' in this pursuit. Also, his response is personal, emotional and vague, and thus does little to address the specific question of Frank's motivation and intent: 'this even happens in real life because it happened to me, well with one member of my family that happened the same' (turn 9). Not only is Juan overly reliant on the emotional appeal of the situation he describes, but the vagueness of his expression is insufficient to support his own point convincingly. In its persuasive insufficiency, this emotional response can be judged to exceed its evidentiary merit—or in legal parlance, its 'probative value'. On these grounds it can therefore be considered negligible as a rational argument (Bailin & Battersby, 2016).

Pointing out these limitations, however, is not to dismiss Juan's efforts or dispel the manner in which he approaches argumentation. In interpreting literary texts, emotional awareness bolsters a reader's relational reasoning (Alexander et al., 2016); in Juan's case this can be seen in his remarkable inferential capacity consistently to discern meaningful connections between textual information and his 'extratextual' lived experience. So indicating Juan's or other participants' divergent interpretations—particularly where these are motivated by emotion—is not to impugn their merit as Elaborated Explanations of a literary text. On the contrary, being personally, even emotionally, invested in an argument is a common basis for seeking sound premises to bolster that argument's persuasiveness. There are, after all, few elements of the human condition which carry such emotional heft as individual beliefs and values, particularly those forged by personal experience. Gilbert (2004) argues that emotion is integrally implicated in human communication and, as a form of communication, argumentation is no exception in this regard. From Gilbert's perspective, emotion and affect are inevitable interconnected components of argument or dissensual interaction, a phenomenon clearly evident in the occasional instances of disputational talk among the participants. It follows that both these components, emotion and affect, would be expected to feature at least as strongly in the broadly consensual transactions typically played out in the dialogic environment of a reading circle. In this sense then, Juan's response in the excerpt above may bear some argumentative worth due to its emotional appeal. And as we shall see in his affective responses delivered later in the course (for example, the final excerpt from Lesson 12 below) emotion can be a powerful matrix for the germination of an effective line of reasoning leading to a logical argument (Gilbert, 2004).

As noted above, however, Juan's reply on this occasion does not stand as an example of proficient argumentation in that it lacks probative value. What it illustrates instead is that affective reactions relayed with conviction do not in themselves constitute sufficient conditions for an effective rational argument. This is particularly true if the claims advanced are materially irrelevant to the point being made. According to Walton (2003, p. 6), an argument carries material relevance 'if and only if it will bear strongly enough on one or more ... arguments so that it may shift the balance of considerations

in the vote one way or the other'. Juan's affective response in this episode is distinctly lacking in material relevance. In fact, when emotional narratives such as this are advanced as evidence, they constitute 'weak and irrelevant moves in argument' (Walton, 1987, p. 330). On this basis then, not only are they merely anecdotal, but they can even be deemed fallacious.

### 6.4 Lesson 3 - My Hobby

This short story by Tom Fabian produced something of a pleasant surprise for me as a researcher. This was due to Juan introducing an aspect of his thinking which up to this point he had not really revealed, namely an appreciation for a more rational way of examining things. This was a major step away from what the first two sessions had already disclosed about Juan: a strong preference to argue from an expressive perspective, which manifested in discussion largely as affective observations and responses. In the present discussion Juan listened without comment for the first few minutes. The Big Question in play was whether Blake the narrator's hobby of murdering people was morally wrong, in view of his insistence that his actions were not for personal pleasure but for the general good. Blake's professed intentions were really to put an end to the misery of those he judged had suffered enough.

1	Juan	Can I ask a question about what is ... so his hobby is protecting ordinary people from bad people or is it the doing the murders he actually enjoy? Not his hobby and action just, but I'm asking his motive for do it.	AQ
2	Satya	No, he said it wasn't the killing that made him do it. He doesn't get satisfaction from the murder, from the killing itself, but from the good consequences of them for other people.	UT HLR
3	Juan	Hmm, is interesting but I just don't buy it. I couldn't find anything anywhere in the text about maybe he wanted to just warn the bad people instead of killing them before anything like warning first. I mean, wouldn't that be better morally and like so much easier than going through the whole planning thing with murders? Nah, he did it for his own selfish reason, I think. And that's his emotions: he got a kick out of actual killing.	EE TR HLQ
4	Satya	He doesn't even have emotions; he's a sociopath!	UT

5	Juan	No no, this sociopath thing is always a excuse. This dude's morality is false; he's immoral 'cause his intention, his motivation is wrong. Remember that philosophy guy we talked about, with the funny vulgar name_____	EE SK
6	Satya	Yeah, Kant! It's Kant!	UT
7	Juan	Yeah that guy [laughing]. What a name, man! But listen, he had a point, I think. Didn't he say our morals are in motivations, not in the action? Same with this guy's hobby. So we should look really at his inclination, his motive if we want to see his morality, not in his protest that his actions aren't enjoyable but like still necessary for other people's good, you know?	EE SK

Having already listened to the views of several members of the reading circle, Juan begins his observations in turn 1 with a fragmented but intelligible Authentic Question, seeking clarification for what motivates Blake to murder people. Satya responds immediately with the comment that 'the killing itself' (turn 2) is secondary to its beneficial consequences 'for other people'. As seen in my analysis of Kolya's contribution to this story in the previous chapter (Chapter 5, Lesson 3), Satya has a notably more lenient perspective of the narrator's hobby than the rest of the participants, a view present in this turn too. This attitude also emerges later in the current analysis, where Satya's judgement in defending the narrator's character and actions is wholly antithetical to Juan's considered argument. For now, Juan's stance is emphatic and unambiguous: 'I just don't buy it' (turn 3). He is firmly sceptical of the narrator's disingenuous declarations of altruism, a perception backed up by Juan summary statement that Blake 'did it for his own selfish reasons'. He underscores this judgement by not only identifying the reason ('his emotions'), but also emphasizing what it suggested about the narrator: 'he got a kick out of actual killing'.

To support this conclusion, Juan sets out in turn 3 a strong initial premise predicated on a reasonable assumption (references to which he appears frustrated not to have found in the text). This assumption was that a person who professed not to enjoy killing would do as much as he could to achieve his altruistic aims before resorting to murder. For Juan, it would be 'better morally ... [to ] ... just warn the bad people instead of killing them before anything like warning first'. His second premise takes the form of a High-

level Thinking Question, and appeals directly to common sense and practicality. Implicit in this question, however, is an appeal to the legal standard of the ‘reasonable person’ (Miller & Perry, 2012; Morse, 2008). By this standard, any perception of or argument for Blake as a reasonable person falls hopelessly short. Moreover, the idea of the narrator ‘going through the whole planning thing with murders’ invokes a central principle of the definition of murder: premeditation. While it would be presumptuous to ascribe any of the aforementioned legal detail to Juan’s thinking in this turn, his Elaborated Explanation nonetheless lends itself to such theorization. More importantly, it provides good grounds for inferring that his reasons are sufficiently cogent in supporting his conclusion.

Satya’s rejoinder in turn 4 is clever (‘He doesn’t even have emotions; he’s a sociopath!’) but for once her smartness evokes little noticeable reaction from anybody. Where I would have expected the reference to emotions to have attracted Juan’s attention—and in retrospect, ‘baiting’ him seems to be Satya’s intention here—he completely ignores it. Juan’s response to Satya is to trivialize the narrator’s possible sociopathy as ‘a excuse’ (turn 5), which seems to have the effect of strengthening his verbal delivery. He appears to be quite sure in his thinking now; his next observations are succinct and his voice is clear: ‘This dude’s morality is false; he’s immoral ‘cause his intention, his motivation is wrong’. But it is Juan’s next statement which, in my view, clarifies his train of thought. He makes a Shared Knowledge reference which suddenly illuminates the source and influence of his line of reasoning: he cites Immanuel Kant. Reflecting on this episode, it remains one of the stand-out moments of my entire PhD experience. In previous classes of the regular EAP course, we had discussed Kant’s distinctive notions of freedom and morality expounded in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/2002). Kant’s approach to these important though otherwise commonplace ideas had fascinated the students. As discussed below, what struck me about this episode was not Juan’s recollection of Kant’s key concepts, or even the level of detail at which he recalled them. Rather, it was his ability to connect—to *transfer*—these concepts to the current issue with such assurance and clarity of understanding which I found remarkable.



With Juan apparently unable to recall the philosopher's surname, Satya capitalizes on this unexpected opportunity—and shouts out the name clearly, twice. Predictably, a round of raucous laughter around the semantic hazards of homophones ensues. Having composed himself somewhat, Juan relays the final part of his Elaborated Explanation in turn 7. Essentially, he evaluates the narrator's behaviour in terms of the conceptual framework of Kant's exacting notion of morality. According to Kant, the moral worth of an action is determined by its *motive*, not the consequences which flow from that action. The motive confers moral worth on an action because the motive is of a certain kind, a motive of duty. For Kant, duty means following a moral course of action for its own sake, because it is intrinsically right. Moral rectitude does not consist in following one's desires and preferences: these are deemed motives of inclination. Rather, this moral rightness is categorical, the full knowledge of which can only be achieved through the exercise of human rationality.

This is precisely the moral standard against which Juan examines Blake's behaviour: 'Didn't he say our morals are in motivations, not in the action? ... So we should look really at his inclination, his motive if we want to see his morality'. Considered in this light, Juan's evaluation of Blake the narrator is inch-perfect. The moral principle which he recognizes as lacking in the narrator's rationalizing and consequent behaviour is the moral imperative which should compel Blake to seek alternatives to murder. For Kant, the moral imperative is a categorical directive to follow pure reason which, once attained, must be enacted practically. That Blake chose to ignore this imperative is, in Kant's terms, self-defeating and therefore contrary to reason. The only conclusion on this basis is that the narrator is morally wrong. His motive after all is not a duty in service of categorical moral rectitude; it is instead an inclination to self-indulgence, a self-interested attempt to satisfy his appetite for murder. Overall, whether or not Kant's categorical principle of morality is deemed correct is a philosophical choice. In this instance, Juan decides to base his characterization of Blake on this categorical principle of morality, and its appeal to reason and rationality. For me, this is the first significant indication of Juan prioritizing reason over emotion as the basis for textual critique, and a valuable step in his development towards thinking more critically.

## 6.5 Lesson 5 - Sandpiper

This short story is a topical one, dealing as it does with the challenges of multicultural relationships. Its author, Ahdaf Soueif, has long sustained a strong political presence in support of social equality in general and women’s rights in particular. As the story unfolds and the narrator’s character is subtly yet steadily developed, it becomes increasingly clear that the author has made no pretence at an even-handed treatment of her protagonist's predicament: her sympathies lie resolutely with the narrator. Aside from the theme foregrounding the nuanced problems of cross-cultural relationships, an emotive thread permeating the entire story is the narrator’s regret at having lost the intense love she and her husband once shared. The following excerpt reveals several participants’ responses to a narrative episode around this theme. Their interactions, and Juan’s contribution in particular, illustrate a discursive situation in which contrasting yet cumulative perspectives strengthen rather than undermine an initially expressed viewpoint.

### Excerpt A

1	Cliff	So now with this enhanced awareness you have of the writer, what is she trying to do here in the story in her depiction of the characters, and particularly of that woman? What is she trying to make us see about her character?	HLQ TR
2	Juan	First, that deep love even is not enough, because she describes how much love she has for him—sorry, how she <i>was</i> in love with the husband. But how much feeling you have first can change, is one thing. And also like I say, the love won’t protect you from everything that happen in change.	HLR TR
3	Selena	But her love faded away_____	UT
4	Juan	Not faded away. Things happened that in love is obviously important. But I see that love is like a basket that you need to fill in with stuff. But it’s also the other way—sometimes the good stuff that was in there first start to fall out. But that’s not like accident; is because people change and they change to each other, maybe treat them badly. So then, why do you carry an empty basket, you know what I mean? Is this enough for continue the marriage? No way! For example, she loved him, they were in love but as soon they moved to his country and she started to	EE

		live his culture, he tried to make her do things that she didn't want. Nah man.	
5	Selena	So I feel like the change of culture was the thing that made her ...	UT
6	Samir	I think the message that she want to share is that you might love someone but there are always barriers. For example, here the barrier is maybe the country ... you can love someone but once you change country, everything's different.	UT TR HLR
7	Juan	But that's the thing. I mean even with these barrier that love is not ever all the time sufficient, because if he was thinking about her as well that she's in my country and it's different from her, they could maybe talk and try to fix it?	EE

I begin this part of the discussion with a High-level Thinking Question, posed to invite exploration of the narrator's emotions, which are multi-layered and complicated. Whether her emotional convolutions are due to the ever-shifting dynamics between the personal and the social, over which she has little control, is not explicitly evident from the text. Neither is it clear whether her personality and choices are inadvertently complicit in the entanglement of her own feelings. My question is framed to encourage respondents to tease out these tacit complexities and appraise them in light of both the author's characterization of the narrator, that is with reference to the text, as well as our prefatory discussion of the author's own biography, that is drawing on prior shared knowledge.

Juan answers first, offering a firmly expressed, concise yet fully formed argument, which reinforces his initial assertion that 'deep love even is not enough' (turn 2) to save the narrator's relationship. This statement is his conclusion, and is stated right at the outset of a High-level Thinking Response. Although brief, this response constructs a complete idea and so amounts to an Elaborated Explanation. The opening clause is followed by Juan's acknowledgement of the strength of the narrator's love for her husband, citing her own description to support this point. A pleasing indication of linguistic awareness (from my perspective as an English language teacher) appears in the next sentence: Juan makes a mistake in verb tense and corrects the form from the present to the past: 'how much love she has for him—sorry, how she *was* in love with the husband'. This turns out

to be an important remedial remark as it establishes the narrator's baseline state of love, which serves thereafter to confirm Juan's resultant point: 'how much feeling you have first can change'. This statement also conveys the first of two reasons in support of the conclusion expressed in Juan's opening remark. His next reasoned observation in this turn offers an insight into why even deep love's susceptibility to change could mean it 'won't protect you from everything that happen in change'. Taken as a whole, this relatively minor contribution demonstrates Juan's grasp not only of the idea that love can and does change, but how this general characteristic of love can be applied to the protagonist's specific experience. Significantly, Juan refrains from referring to his own experiences, which up to this point was his most frequent and reliable mode of argumentative support. This first-time relinquishing of 'the personal' as the basis for almost every critical response to text may indicate a growing analytical sophistication.

Returning to the extract, Selena attempts in turn 3 to take up the thread from where Juan left off by suggesting that the love in question 'faded away', which Juan immediately contradicts with 'Not faded away, no' (turn 4). Employing the metaphor of a basket being filled up and gradually emptied—which represents the growth and decline of love—he then begins to elaborate an explanation which advances the idea of the protagonist's falling out of love as more than just a passive decline: 'But that's not like accident; is because people change and they change to each other, maybe treat them badly'. This leads to Juan questioning why people continue to 'carry an empty basket' if things change for the worse in the relationship. Using the text to exemplify his point ('he tried to make her do things that she didn't want'), Juan answers his own question and then arrives at an emphatic conclusion: that one should leave in such circumstances. By contrast, Selena responds in turn 5 by ascribing blame to 'the change of culture' rather than to either of the people involved. Her suggestion is taken up by Samir in the following turn, who points through textual reference to a change of country as a possible barrier to love. Juan reacts animatedly to Samir's suggestion, but not to agree; instead, he uses Samir's idea of a barrier to insist that if love is unable to motivate the two parties to 'maybe talk and try to fix it', then 'it is not ever all the time sufficient' (turn 7). This final statement is argumentatively effective in that it bolsters the stance Juan adopts in turn 2, right at the start of his argument. Not only does Juan begin his

contribution with a fairly complete argument in response to my original question, but through dialogic interaction he is able to sustain and temper it by providing good reasons in support of his position as the discussion progresses.

Still on the theme of cross-cultural romantic relationships, the next excerpt is taken from further along in the session, with the discursive focus having shifted from the influence of the social environment on the narrator and her husband to their individual influence on each other. To personalize and thereby amplify the potential issues at stake, I have set up a roleplay scenario involving two of the students, Samir (Egyptian) and Selena (Peruvian), asking them to imagine they met and fell in love in London. This location is pitched as neutral, a city with which neither of them has much cultural affiliation.

**Excerpt B**

1	Cliff	So imagine you're both in Egypt now—not London where you first met, not Peru. Samir's in Egypt now, his homeland. Would you, Selena, expect Samir to always act the same way towards you in Egypt now, as he did in London?	HLQ
2	Selena	No, not at all. I really don't think so.	UT
3	Cliff	Really? Why not? Isn't he the same man?	HLQ
4	Samir	I am. I can be the same man but not act towards her the same way.	UT HLR
5	Cliff	Would that affect your love for him, Selena?	UT
6	Juan	Ah that's exactly what I'm telling, guys: if it all fall out, why you going to walk around carrying an empty basket? That make no sense _____	UT
7	Alyeh	Oh please, the basket again? Sounds like he's never been in love.	UT
8	Juan	Oh I did love, trust me! And anyway, is a common idea about love, this basket thing, okay? Everyone knows it because it happen all the time to loads of people: they fall quick and deep in love then the love fall out over time. I didn't just make it up myself, so is real. The thing is, you fall in love with someone okay? This is love [holds up an empty pencil case]. You have your basket, he has his basket and you're both walking in love and life together. Okay, now he's so nice to my family [puts a pencil into the case], he's so a gentleman [adds another pencil], he's a hot bod guy [another pencil]. You're filling your love basket. Then assume time's going and someone's changing: you're	EE

		now taking stuff <i>out</i> of the basket. For example, he's not calling me anymore and other things. But then, you look and your love's gotten to be an empty basket and guess what: it's not going to save your relationship.	
9	Alyeh	Look, if you want to be in love with someone you should accept everything about them.	UT
10	Juan	Oh my gosh, what? The thing is, the point here is no-one changes anyone and also, you shouldn't change for anyone. Do you think Satya is just like the way she's here like in her country? Do you really think she is? She's not! What Satya is here, she's not in her country. It's a construction, you know what I mean? She's doing it 'cause she needs to save things. But guess what? It's a waste of time. Love is not enough still. I'm saying that love is not going to save your relationship like it's everything. No, love is one thing, it's one part of the whole thing.	EE
11	Cliff	Okay, let's say love's not enough. But then what else could be the problem with saving their marriage, aside from their love not being strong enough or 'everything', as you say?	HLQ
12	Juan	You know what's the problem, I think? Look, I don't know how it is to have children but until it happens to you, you're fine, you think you can deal with it 'cause is like in theory, right? But looking at her, I can figure out how it feels, especially with the stuff involving her daughter. Who wouldn't, no? I mean, as soon as she saw thing happen to her daughter, that she would be treated like that, like her now, in the country that she didn't approve how a woman should be treated, I think she started to realize that this was not good. Because now it was real, and love suddenly is a different part of the picture, maybe not so important as her daughter's future.	EE

As in all previous lessons, and following the guidelines of the Quality Talk approach, one of my key intentions in this session has been to model high-level questioning whenever the opportunity has arisen. The idea is to encourage students to gain confidence in asking high-level questions through repeated practice, with the objective ultimately of enabling transfer to similar dialogic settings they may encounter in future. With this in mind I open this next stage of the session by finalizing the roleplay scenario so that it is clear to everybody, and then address the first question directly to Selena. Her response is immediate and quite strong: 'No, not at all. I really don't think so'. It is a predictable reaction, given the group's discussion of cultural differences up to this point. This is also

the last opportunity Selena has to speak at this particular stage of the session, owing to an uncharacteristically voluble contribution from Juan which follows her response. I follow up on Selena's reply with a battery of short Uptake questions culminating in a High-level Question which I hope will elicit a critical observation from her. Samir is first to answer, however, drawing an intriguing distinction between character and behaviour: 'I am. I can be the same man but not act towards her the same way' (turn 4). Still hoping Selena will finally be prompted to respond, I take up Samir's comment quickly in the next turn and direct my next question to Selena: 'Would that affect your love for him, Selena?'

Instead, Juan jumps in with his basket metaphor once again, sounding quite convinced that it fits the situation under discussion: 'Ah that's exactly what I'm telling, guys: if it all fall out, why you going to walk around carrying an empty basket?' (turn 6). Alyeh's exasperated interjection in the next turn suggesting that 'he's never been in love' is met with a defensive riposte: 'Oh, I did love, trust me!' (turn 8). This signals a reversion to a discursive mode which appears increasingly characteristic of Juan's approach to argument: the affective response. What is different here from previous affective references is that Juan applies it more broadly than he has before. He does not refer to just his own experience as he usually would, but extends the affective association to others who, in his view, have shared the same experience: 'And anyway, is a common idea about love, this basket thing, okay? Everyone knows it because it happen all the time to loads of people: they fall quick and deep in love then the love fall out over time. I didn't just make it up myself, so is real'.

This observation is predicated on at least two problematic assumptions. The first is the dominance of affect in Juan's explanation and his apparent belief that emotiveness is correlative to persuasiveness. On the contrary, Fisher and Keil (2014) cast this assumption as *the illusion of argument justification*, with their findings suggesting that there is no necessary association between high affect and strong argument. A second problem with Juan's assertion here is that it sees him invoke what Tversky and Kahneman (1973, p. 208) call the *availability heuristic*: 'A person is said to employ the availability heuristic whenever he estimates frequency or probability by the ease with

which instances or associations come to mind'.<sup>14</sup> This is the most reasonable inference to be drawn about Juan's behaviour at this moment. To fend off Alyeh's accusation and bolster his credentials involving romantic experience, Juan attributes his basket idea to 'loads of people' who fall in love. From my perspective, Juan's response is a spontaneous defensive reaction and the 'consensus' he cites in support of his assertion appears to be information which he finds easiest to retrieve.

Seeking to justify his basket metaphor, Juan again appeals to emotions which in this instance takes the form of a particular kind of argument from popular opinion, known in informal logic as *argumentum ad populum* (Walton, 1999; 2008). This approach to supporting a claim appeals to popular sentiment rather than good evidence. While an appeal to emotion is not inherently fallacious simply on the basis of its popularity. Walton (1999) nonetheless maintains that, as an argumentative technique, it is susceptible to several points of contention. One is that a widely-held, even an established, belief does not necessarily represent the truth of an issue, however emotionally compelling that belief may be. Another critique is that an argument driven by sentiment is unduly fragile: it is contingent on the capriciousness of emotional motivations rather than on the relative stability of reasoned dialogue. A third issue highlighted by Walton (1999) is potential irrelevance. Emotional appeals can sometimes distract from questions of more authentic benefit to the case at hand than those evoked by popular opinion. While an emotional focus may be marginally useful, particularly in its inherent capacity to persuade, it may in fact occlude information of genuine relevance to the situation.

Despite these several problematic possibilities, Walton (1999) concedes that appeals to emotion or sentiment are not intrinsically 'wrong' in typical dialogues of persuasion. Our reading circle would be a conducive context for such dialogues. In such a setting, if discursive moves following *argumentum ad populum* were not *deliberately* motivated they could charitably be considered lapses, which would probably not compromise the proponent's case. Alternatively, if such an argument *was* deliberately motivated—by an

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<sup>14</sup> See Taylor (1982) for a brief but insightful discussion on evidentiary considerations and concerns surrounding the availability heuristic.



intention to deceive, for example—it could then be considered logically fallacious. Juan’s appeal to popular opinion to substantiate his point is, I suggest, an instance of the former; it is a lapse and not motivated by deceitful intent. Viewed through this lens, his appeal to emotion can be countenanced and could withstand possible objections. From the perspective of good argumentation, however, Juan’s employing of *argumentum ad populum* at the start of his Elaborated Explanation, albeit inadvertently, does undermine the overall cogency of his argument.

From this point, Juan sets out an extended conceptualization of his basket metaphor, using a pencil case and pencils as a literal illustration of his explanation. His detailed and coherent expression reveals that he has a very clear idea of what he means and, in my view, has transmitted it just as clearly to the group. However, Aleyah responds in turn 9 by shaking her head vigorously, apparently unconvinced: ‘Look, if you want to be in love with someone you should accept everything about them’. Jolting back in his chair as if he is about to fall off, Juan pretends to be incredulous: ‘Oh my gosh, what?’ (turn 10). Still play-acting, he takes a deep breath and begins what seems an attempt to summarize a few of the points discussed so far in this part of the session. These include the idea of how and why people change in relationships, a point he initiates by asking emphatic rhetorical questions then answering them with a reason: ‘Do you think Satya is just like the way she’s here like in her country? Do you really think she is? She’s not! What Satya is here, she’s not in her country. It’s a construction, you know what I mean? She’s doing it ‘cause she needs to save things’. Juan concludes the turn by reiterating a point he made in the previous excerpt, namely that love is only a part of a relationship and thus is not sufficient to save a relationship in the face of profound personal and circumstantial change.

What is interesting about this contribution is that while Juan has said a lot, in itself rather surprising, not much entailed argumentation. As noted above, this turn seemed to function primarily as an animated summary of the discussion up to that point. As such, Juan’s key concerns were highlighted, repeated, and quite forcefully expressed so that the rest of us were left very clear about his stance on the issues under discussion.

Responding to Juan's final assertion about the limitations of love, I put a High-level Question to him: 'Okay, so let's say love's not enough. But then what else could be the problem with saving their marriage, aside from their love not being strong enough or 'everything', as you say?' (turn 11). Juan's response in turn 12 is to offer an Elaborated Explanation which he begins by reformulating my question as a statement, presumably to give himself time to think—and that is just what he does, pausing for almost ten seconds. This unexpected lull presents a moment of bemusement for us all, except perhaps for Juan who, amidst a growing stir of suspense, genuinely appears to have taken the moment to calmly gather his thoughts. His answer when it comes is well considered and measured, with his first remarks again taking the form of an Affective Response, yet indicating a strong sense of what in psychology is termed *cognitive empathy*: 'Look, I don't know how it is to have children but until it happens to you, you're fine, you think you can deal with it 'cause is like in theory, right? But looking at her, *I can figure out how it feels*, especially with the stuff involving her daughter. Who wouldn't, no?' [my emphasis].

Cognitive empathy is one of two key dimensions constituting the overarching construct of empathy—*affective empathy* is the other.<sup>15</sup> The cognitive component of empathy denotes the capacity to understand another person's experience, without necessarily identifying emotionally with that experience. Affective empathy, on the other hand, is the notion with which people are probably most familiar, and is commonly known by just the single word, empathy. It refers to our propensity to experience vicariously the emotional experience of others, usually in response to their emotional displays or to other emotional stimuli (Reniers, 2011).<sup>16</sup> Some theorists such as Lamm et al. (2007) have argued that affective empathy results from intuitive inference in that it occurs spontaneously, and is the simpler dimension of the two. By contrast, cognitive empathy

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<sup>15</sup> Together, Cuff et al., (2016), Shamay-Tsoory et al. (2009) and Smith, A. (2006) provide a very useful overview of contemporary research into empathy.

<sup>16</sup> An interesting aside is that while affective empathy is a human trait almost universally equated with goodness, recent arguments have emerged highlighting its limitations and challenging its hallowed status in moral deliberation. Bloom (2016, p. 37), for example, makes a forceful case against empathy which represents it, among other things, as 'morally corrosive'. He advocates rather for an emotion he characterizes as *rational compassion*.

appears inherently reflective and, governed as it is by volition and intent, can be considered the more complex ability.

Reflecting on Juan's Affective Response, I find his observation really intriguing as it represents something of a paradox as a unit of analysis, the rationale for which view I will attempt to elucidate in this paragraph. Juan has shown from the outset of the course an inordinate tendency to rely almost exclusively on references to feelings and emotions when contributing to classroom discussions, even those outside the reading circle. It comes as no surprise that he has maintained the pattern where, with this observation, he once again adduces emotion to bolster a point of argument. It would seem appropriate on this basis to analyze Juan's Affective Response in terms of affect, especially since his response appears more representative of affective rather than cognitive empathy, at least nominally. As noted above, however, I consider Juan's response in this specific situation to be most appropriately perceived as an expression of cognitive empathy. Construed as such, it would invite a more accurate analysis. This analytical judgement is based on my perception that Juan seems able to relate to the situation and even articulate his understanding of it at a certain emotional remove. This perception and resulting inference is drawn from three sources: my knowledge of Juan as his teacher, my experience as an equivalent participant in the reading circle, and my perspective as a researcher. The words I highlighted, 'I can figure out how it feels', suggest to me that Juan recognizes psychologically—he apprehends cognitively—the emotional stakes involved in the situation, while still appreciating that they are distinct from his own. In this way, he stops short of affective empathy, that is of forming an internal representation of the narrator's mental state, an immersive experience which would lead almost inevitably to his experiencing her emotions as if he were feeling them. Considering all the factors which have informed my analytical judgement in this case, this is an authentic example of inference to the best explanation when analyzing qualitative data abductively (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014).

Given the myriad ways in which the more general construct of empathy is conceptualized, Cuff et al. (2014) deliver a useful caveat in relation to several constructs

very similar to cognitive empathy currently in use in psychology, all of which expound ways of understanding others’ feelings. These include social cognition, perspective-taking, theory of mind, mentalizing, and mindreading. This cautionary note applies also to the risk of what I would call ‘conceptual conflation’, a situation in which similar constructs are often perceived and rendered as conceptually interchangeable. Such conflation may lead not only to diffusing any important differences claimed by the theories they are a part of, as happens with the aforementioned concepts, but also to inundating the field with differently-named concepts which arguably denote the same phenomenon.

### 6.6 Lesson 8 - On Her Knees

This session examined a short story by Tim Winton, which proved a high-water mark in the engagement of all the participants as it generated uncommonly high levels of personal involvement not evident in prior discourse (see Appendix F for a full transcript of Lesson 8). Drawing on very personal experiences, several students used affective responses to substantiate many of the points they raised. In this respect, the nature of the talk differed markedly from previous and indeed subsequent discussions.

As already noted, Juan was one of the quieter students, generally preferring to listen rather than speak. However, there was always a sense that he was much more worldly-wise than most of the other participants. His response in turn 2 below to Selena’s opening Authentic Question about people who sell drugs is a case in point. Satya and Selena then go on to exchange views on the issue of right or wrong life choices.

#### Excerpt A

1	Selena	Okay, I want to come back to what Satya said. I feel like she should stick to her morals. For example, would you rather be rich and have a lot of money and be like the ones that sell drugs, what are they called_____	UT HLQ AQ
2	Juan	Pusher, drug dealer.	UT
3	Selena	Yeah, drug dealer. Or would you rather have a good life, be happy, know you’re doing the right thing—but don’t have a lot of money like a drug dealer? Which would you choose ... because there’s always a choice.	HLQ

4	Satya	Actually for me, I always put myself into someone else’s position; this is how I know what to do or not. For example, if you steal my phone I’m going to be bad, you know; I ’m not going to feel good. That’s normal. So why should I steal someone else’s phone? That’s the way I think.	AR EE
5	Selena	But I think what Satya’s saying is not like you know that it’s wrong. It’s more like you feel that you’re doing it ... even though you know it’s wrong you won’t feel it’s bad_____	HLR
6	Satya	So yeah I know it’s wrong, but I wouldn’t feel <i>as bad</i> . It wouldn’t affect me that much.	AR
7	Juan	What about for people that, depending on the circumstances, they have to do bad things? For example, as you say, imagine you’ve got a family, you live in poverty, you don’t have any theft of anything—and then you decide to steal even though you know that it’s bad for the society. But you have to do it because if you don’t do it, your family basically die.	HLQ EE

Juan’s response once he has listened to Selena and Satya’s exchanges takes the form of an introductory High-level Thinking Question (turn 7) which introduces an Elaborated Explanation. Immediately striking is Juan’s use of the expression ‘depending on the circumstances’: this marks a sophisticated awareness of behavioural contingency, indicating what Peterson (OxfordUnion, 2018) has called ‘thinking at high resolution’. This is a level of thinking which is comfortable with variation in complexity, and is associated with the adoption of considered positions on complex issues (Kuhn et al., 2020). Even before expounding his view on the issue, my inference is that Juan’s deliberate use of this qualifying phrase conveys to his audience a nuanced awareness that choice is conditional, even in difficult situations which may seem to ‘force’ immoral or illegal action. While his Elaborated Explanation depicts a vivid scene of such extreme poverty that the circumstances would eventually compel a deliberate act of theft, it is surprisingly succinct. To personalize the issue Juan exemplifies it by describing a relatable scenario, referring to the second person repeatedly, and using conditional expressions such as ‘What about’ and ‘imagine’. He continues to build the scenario sequentially with supporting statements and concludes his argument with an imperative: ‘you have to do it because if you don’t do it, your family basically die’. While

Juan’s argument in this extract elaborates his thinking on a single point in a well-substantiated line of reasoning, he has not directly introduced an affective element at this stage. This comes in his next contribution later in the discussion.

**Excerpt B**

1	Juan	I’m the kind of one that says that not all thieves are like that because some of them are really lazy and they just want to steal because they want to get easy things. But some of them are really poor, and they <i>need</i> to steal. But you <i>would</i> see the difference because .... Look, if someone came to a fruit shop and stole some fruit, well what can you say? But the other one, if they see you’ve got a good iPhone, thinks: I’m going to steal it. I think you might see the difference between them, and you would notice who actually needs to do it to survive.	EE
2	Cliff	Right.	UT
3	Samir	For example, in Arabic countries you can’t steal. But the difference is in what you’re stealing. For example, if you steal food, they’re going to be a hundred times more understanding than if you steal money_____	EE
4	Juan	Yeah, that’s what I mean.	UT
5	Samir	Because if you steal food that means that you <i>need</i> to eat, otherwise you’re going to die, and you have no option, no choice.	EE
6	Cliff	What if you steal food for selling?	HLQ
7	Juan	I think it’s difficult. I think it’s <i>really</i> difficult!	AR

Juan begins this response by disclosing his personal perspective on ethical choices, and uses motivations for theft to illustrate his point (turn 1). What comes through clearly in this statement is further confirmation of how subtle his thinking is—at least in this expression of his view of stealing. He attempts to explain that not only are there different motives for stealing, but that these differences should not necessarily be difficult to discern. Some thieves, he argues, ‘are really lazy and they just want to steal because they want to get easy things. But some of them are really poor, and they *need* to steal’. While Juan’s conclusion is not explicitly stated, his implication here seems to be that we should be able to ‘notice who actually needs to do it to survive’ and ethical judgements should therefore be made accordingly. In turn 3, Samir adds to Juan’s explanation with an example specific to Arabic culture, which Juan accepts as

confirmation of his point: ‘Yes that’s what I mean’ (turn 4). On this particular topic at least, Juan seemed to me a participant who exhibited a very sophisticated level of thinking, a perception reinforced by his reply to my Authentic Question in turn 6. Without being simplistic, Juan’s concise response acknowledges yet another complex aspect of the issue under discussion as ‘difficult. I think it’s *really* difficult’ (turn 7).

## 6.7 Lesson 12 - White Nights

In this session Juan delivered another noteworthy Affective Response. The short story under discussion was ‘White Nights’, Dostoevsky’s depiction of unrequited love. The choice of this text was an attempt at addressing repeated requests from students for stories by canonical writers they had initially encountered in school. Other such authors in our syllabus included Guy de Maupassant (‘The Necklace’), Henry James (‘Paste’), and Anton Chekhov (‘The Lady with the Little Dog’). Perhaps not unexpectedly, an interesting pattern became apparent from the final selection of literary texts: many of the narratives explored variations on the theme of romantic love. Some stories positioned love in a secondary role, as undergirding more prominent themes such as cross-cultural alienation and loneliness in Ahdaf Soueif’s ‘Sandpiper’. In ‘White Nights’, however, love and its myriad ramifications permeate every thread of the narrative. Conscious that some readers may find a story with such a pervasive emphasis on love cloying, I was hesitant at first about including this text in a reading circle of young adults, but it was in fact well received. Indeed, not only did the participants seem familiar with the notion of unrequited love, but they were eager to talk about it. Juan’s reaction to the story was rather more animated than usual, with the following excerpt quite telling in this respect.

### Excerpt A

1	Cliff	And right at the end he meets Nastenka again. But the other man, the one she’s been yearning for, arrives accidentally. She sees him and realizes that she’s still in love with him. So then our guy is left bereft as she literally runs to that other guy _____	TR
2	Juan	You know what? I’ll do this [gets up and starts walking towards the door. Everyone else is laughing]. Basically no! Poor guy! I’m going to cry for him [puts his head down and feigns sobbing]. Look, that happened to me once.	AR TR

This exchange sees me summarizing events around the narrative's conclusion, intending to follow this with an Authentic Question. Before I finish, however, Juan interjects with an exclamation, pushes his chair out, waves sardonically to the group and walks towards the door. Although he is play-acting at first and we all fall about laughing, it quickly emerges that he is actually upset, and for good reason: 'Look, that happened to me once' (turn 2). But it is not Juan's passionate reaction which intrigues me; in terms of critical thinking development, this is peripheral. Rather, it is his apparent depth of awareness of the wider emotional implications of this specific narrative situation. It is this capacity, this cognitive deftness when encountering emotional issues—possibly born of personal experience and an innate curiosity about people—which informs much of Juan's contributions to the reading circle. His reaction to this episode recalls a similar response to a narrative scene in a previous session (see Lesson 5 earlier in this chapter for our discussion around the short story 'Sandpiper'). To explain Juan's response then, I made the argument that his remarks were probably motivated by cognitive empathy. That inference was drawn from my observation that he seemed able to understand the significance of an emotional episode without necessarily being drawn fully into a congruent sharing of it (Eisenberg et al., 2014). He was able to relate empathically to the situation while remaining at an emotional remove from it. Juan's response to the current narrative situation involves something more than cognitive empathy, which in its usual form would entail adopting the characters' perspective to imagine what they might feel. What Juan does here is retrieve relevant memories of prior emotional events which he has personally experienced. While such retrieval of past experiences to understand another's feelings *is* a strategy which indicates cognitive empathy (Eisenberg, 1986), the intensity of Juan's reaction would suggest he has been moved, on this occasion at least, by affective empathy too.

In the sense that he relates very strongly to narrative content which he 'recognizes' on an emotional level, Juan's behaviour in this episode is typical of what Pike (2003) terms an Associative Reader. Pike's (2003, p. 65) model of reading aims to 'integrate thinking and feeling and to illustrate how cognition and emotion can be synthesized' in readers' aesthetic transactions with literary texts. On this view, associative readers find appeal in characters, events and situations which signify equivalent moments in their personal



histories. Their emotional responses when reading depend on the degree to which their individual life experiences are invoked. The text serves thus as a 'stimulus' to readers' schemata. Similarly, Juan's textual interpretations seem almost wholly rooted in his personal experiences, which in turn inform his manner of expression in the reading circle. In turn 2 for example, he identifies completely with the narrator's experience, with the intensity of his emotional investment coming through clearly in a vehement declaration of empathy: 'Poor guy! I'm going to cry for him'.

More interesting in terms of my thesis is the apparent development from Juan's emotionally driven contributions earlier in the course to his more critical responses in this much later session. As suggested in the analysis of Lesson 2, Juan's reliance on personal experience to substantiate a point did not always hold up argumentatively. In using the real example of a delirious family member not recognizing the people around him, his response in turn 9 of Excerpt B to the group's observations on 'Mr Salary' was appropriate to the discussion in the sense that it was squarely on topic. The elements of the lived situation under discussion were familiar to all, so it was topically relevant (Walton, 2003). However, Juan's inference of the father-daughter dynamic (that is, Frank's disparaging perception of Sukie) in that narrative scene was inaccurate, and this misinterpretation weakened his reply. The premises Juan advanced, however personally significant to him, therefore offered only illusory support to the point he was making (Bailin & Battersby, 2016). While topically relevant, Juan's explanation influenced neither the truth nor the falsity of his conclusion. The type of relevance in such an instance is referred to as material relevance. As noted in the analysis of Lesson 2 (Excerpt B, turn 9), the fact that Juan's argumentative contribution in this particular case was in no way *useful* to the issue under consideration rendered it materially irrelevant (recall that usefulness is important since it points to the assessment of material relevance). Also, how such relevance is assessed in everyday conversation or legal discourse depends on the type of dialogue in which participants are engaged (Walton, 1998; 2003). Whether the tenor and tone of the argument is collaborative or adversarial, material relevance is crucial to persuasiveness. So even in the relatively informal conversational context of a literary discussion group, the higher the material relevance of a participant's line of reasoning, the greater the probative value of their response—

and ultimately, the more cogent their argument. In view of this, Juan’s dialogic contributions to the reading circle at that early stage of the course were mostly affective and, in argumentation terms, largely one dimensional.

By contrast, the following excerpt from later in this current session reveals an enhanced synthesis of emotion and cognition in his responses, which comes across as a rather more evolved persuasive style.

**Excerpt B**

1	Juan	The thing is, I’m asking myself the question: what makes a man stupid when we are with girls? I mean we fall in love and basically a girl can have you in their hands so they can do whatever they want when we are in love.	HLQ
2	Cliff	They have you eating out of their hands?	UT
3	Juan	Yeah.	UT
4	Dmitri	So would you say that’s also possible the other way round, that if a girl’s in love with a boy, he can ____	UT HLQ
5	Juan	Okay, can be both ways but now it’s normally this way because I think before there was more, there was much like, you know, sexism ... it was like that: girls were eating in the boys’ hand. The girls had less power before, now they have it. So for example, now I’m in a relationship, a new relationship. Basically I’m falling in love with this girl because I really like her. I didn’t want that one, I didn’t want this because I didn’t expect anything from someone, I wasn’t even looking for a girl but that happened. But now I’m thinking now okay I really like this girl, I’m falling in love, but what happen if that girl tomorrow left me? I’m going to be like this guy, like ... crying.	EE

This excerpt follows a Dialogic Spell in which students explored Nastenka’s putative culpability for the narrator’s misery at having lost her. Questions which arose earlier in the discussion included the following: ‘Was she totally to blame?’, ‘Had she deliberately led him on?’ and ‘Why had he allowed himself to fall for Nastenka when she had repeatedly warned him not to?’ Having listened to the other participants for much of the lesson with minimal input, Juan begins this excerpt with a High-level Thinking Question. His first few words, ‘I’m asking myself the question: what makes a man stupid when we are with girls?’ (turn 1), reveal that, far from being ‘switched off’, he has been

actively reflecting on the issues under discussion. In its reference to men who are helpless in the face of the whims of the women they love, this is a novel and complex question for the group. As such, it presents fresh opportunities for analysis and evaluation, and invites deeper collaborative inquiry into an already established topic. This happens almost at once as Dmitri adroitly takes up the intriguing gender implications of Juan's opening statement: 'So would you say that's also possible the other way round, that if a girl's in love with a boy, he can \_\_\_\_' (turn 4). In its contrastive focus, broaching as it does a woman's perspective on the same issue, Dmitri's High-level Thinking/Uptake Question holds as much potential for in-depth examination as Juan's. Indeed, this potential begins immediately to be realized as Juan responds with an Elaborated Explanation in turn 5.

Juan's account begins by conceding the plausibility of Dmitri's speculative observation, acknowledging that women historically had less power in romantic relationships: 'Okay, can be both ways but now it's normally this way because I think before there was more, there was much like, you know, sexism' (turn 5). Although Juan uses the word 'sexism' for the sociocultural condition he is trying to explain, this narrower term probably connotes the broader phenomenon of patriarchy. Incidentally, this is an example of a language student's expression being compromised somewhat by L2 limitations. Despite this apparent constraint, Juan's intended meaning can in fact be gleaned from the context of the discursive exchange. This is due primarily to the reading circle format fostering a collegial atmosphere conducive to productive intermental activity in the form of interthinking (Littleton & Mercer, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962; 1978). So having replied to Dmitri's question and agreeing that 'girls had less power before', Juan concludes that '... now they have it'. Visibly emotional and using his own romantic relationship as an example, he begins a lengthy and detailed Elaborated Explanation of how being emotionally invested leaves him vulnerable to the possibility of his girlfriend leaving him and the relationship ending as a result: '[W]hat happen if that girl tomorrow left me? I'm going to be like this guy, like ... crying' (turn 5).

What comes through from this excerpt, therefore, is how Juan synthesizes the affective with the cognitive or, in a more literary sense, the heart with the mind. Characteristic of

his discursive exchanges in the reading circle following his individual reading of texts, Juan’s strategy when elaborating an explanation to make a point is to use an example drawn from his personal experience—by this stage of the course, an entirely predictable move; affective reaction has been his standard mode of engagement with text from the outset. Notably, however, this particular narrative episode eventuates in a distinctly considered response: a conscious deliberation of his current relationship. This awareness generates a summary analysis of his relationship, followed by the imagined prospect of being hurt by a breakup. According to Blanchette and Richards (2010), there is a strong correlation between emotional arousal from affective content and the capacity for attention and mental processing: such arousal and capacity are directly involved in higher level cognition. On this evidence, Juan’s emotional stimulation, which stems from the personal significance he assigns to this narrative event, is likely to have led to the mobilizing of the cognitive resources necessary to *think* through the situation carefully. In contrast to his perhaps disproportionate reliance on emotions to inform his responses in earlier stages of the course, Juan’s critical-analytic recognition of potential real-life consequence indicated in the excerpt above (turns 1 and 5) is an observable outcome of his affective transaction with this text. This enhanced reflective awareness suggests he strategically employs the emotions which the narrative elicits to mediate further deliberative processes such as speculation, evaluation and generalization (Blanchette & Richards, 2010). Taken together, these cognitive processes are key proximal indicators of a High-Level Thinking Response.

Juan’s critical-analytic mindset is carried through to further verbalized expression in the next few exchanges of Lesson 12, which continue to explore the implications of being rendered vulnerable by being in love.

**Excerpt C**

6	Satya	That’s the danger though, the risk.	HLR
7	Cliff	Yeah interesting, so let’s just remind ourselves about this. He’s hurt, there’s no doubt about that. She has absolutely stabbed him in the back, right? But what’s his outlook going forward? Either he can be really upset and morose and look at the world in a bad light and hate	AFQ

		her, or he can do what he did and see the situation how he sees it. With all that in mind, what are you afraid of? [to Juan]	
8	Juan	Look, I wouldn't say the same like him—but my history [story] is different. Because my girl didn't tell me 'don't love me, don't fall in love'. She was like 'I am the same girl now and before'. She gave me love so she wouldn't say 'I didn't expect this' but rather 'I feel comfortable with you and not with someone else, so I'm fine with you'. So if she finds another one, another guy, I wouldn't be okay ... I wouldn't hate her because I know that's life, but at the same time it would hurt because she was like okay, you say something before, now you change your mind? What's going on?	AR EE

Replying gently to Juan's emotional outburst in turn 5, Satya nonetheless introduces the first element of a countervailing argument in the form of a High-Level Thinking Response: 'That's the danger though, the risk' (turn 6). She highlights a fundamental feature of romantic relationships, namely risk, the ramifications of which are explored by the group in a subsequent passage of Exploratory Talk. Before that, however, I was interested in digging just a bit deeper into the motivations behind Juan's perspective. Beginning a procedural move by clarifying the state of narrative events pertinent to Juan's concerns—and the narrator's reactions to these events—I then ask Juan an Affective Question: 'With all that in mind, what are you afraid of?' (turn 7). Juan begins his Elaborated Explanation with a typically affective response, invoking his personal background first. However, he then contrasts his situation to that of the narrator's by making repeated double-pronged references to his life vis-à-vis the text. These comparative references serve the function of reasons or premises which support the conclusion that he would not share the narrator's magnanimity in accepting that his girlfriend chose to leave him for another man. In his words, 'I wouldn't say the same like him—but my history is different' (turn 8). Juan's final statement on the issue illustrates once again his relative maturity in the ways of the world: 'I wouldn't hate her because I know that's life'. These remarks also suggest that, while he remains acutely in touch with emotions as the basis for his general outlook, Juan's affective responses now seem tempered with a developing rationality.

## 6.8 Lesson 15 - The Faber Book of Adultery

The text under consideration in this lesson is a contemporary short story by Jonathan Gibbs and is interesting in several respects, which are worth foregrounding as they contextualize my analysis of Juan's responses in the excerpt to follow. Fairly unusually for a work of literary fiction, the story incorporates within itself a reflexive commentary on its own linguistic workings and narrative identity (Hutcheon, 2013). In this sense, it can be broadly categorized as a metafictional work. Waugh (1984) conceptualizes metafiction as writing which draws attention deliberately and self-consciously to its status as an artefact, with the aim of querying the continuously shifting and thus provisional boundaries between fiction and reality. Central to any discourse on metafiction is the concept of narrative self-consciousness, whether it be textually, authorially, or even narratorially inscribed.

In the case of 'The Faber Book of Adultery', this self-consciousness is narratorial, embodied as it is in the reflexive ruminations of Mark, the first-person narrator-protagonist. Mark is a writer whose thoughts and feelings about the process of writing intertwine almost seamlessly with his actions as together they drive the narrative towards its conclusion. He gauges every experience, even one as deliberately pragmatic as his own adultery, in terms of its potential for creating fiction. This constant display of provisionality—of the author or narrator (the distinction is never made clear) treating thought, imagination, fiction, volition, emotion, language, action, and reality as operating on a one-dimensional ontological plane—makes demands on the reader's capacity for uncertainty. Consequently, reading experiences can range from refreshing and enlightening to unsettling and even jarring. While reading the text, I noticed many instances of the narrator making a show of critiquing his personal battles with the principles and conventions of fiction writing, sometimes cleverly but usually to the point of (in my view) amateurish hyperbole.

This session was the last selected for Juan's analysis, and provided yet another example of his propensity to transact affectively with literary texts. As in Lesson 14 however, his final response in this excerpt is noteworthy for placing less reliance on purely emotional reasoning to make the point (Gilbert, 2004; Blanchette & Richards, 2010). Seeming

increasingly to recognize reasons other than those generated by just his personal experience, Juan’s responses reveal a growing inclination to incorporate rationality in support of his stance. In the following extract the reading circle is discussing the protagonist’s possible motives for considering making a pass at his friend’s wife.

1	Kolya	But what’s the point with his friend’s wife or girlfriend? This is interesting. There’s a lot of girls outside he can try with them but he chooses his friend’s girlfriend or wife, I don’t remember_____	AQ HLQ DS
2	Satya	It’s the flame!	HLR
3	Cliff	Explain that. The flame?	OQ
4	Satya	So he can pick any other girl if it was only just for sex but he chose his friend’s wife. And that’s because it’s more intense: the way that they need to meet up, or if something happens and they’re found out ... the things at risk are more_____	EE
5	Kolya	Anyway, the feelings are the same, the same.	UT
6	Satya	The sex is the same, but it’s not the intensity, it’s not the adventure. They’re risking a lot of things, both of them: it’s their friendship, and their kids know each other_____	EE
7	Selena	Oh so it’s dangerous ... so they like the danger?	AQ
8	Satya	Yeah exactly. It’s more like an adventure, not just sex.	EE
9	Juan	You’re playing with fire and you can get burnt.	UT
10	Kolya	Yeah you’re playing but there’s no any feelings, so what’s the point? What’s the point with his friend’s wife? He’s without any feeling.	AQ
11	Satya	But it’s the adventure in itself. It’s like when people, like kids when they try cigarettes.	EE
12	Kolya	You mean like adrenalin? Ah okay.	AQ
13	Satya	Yeah yeah yeah like adrenalin, that one, that one! It’s the same thing like with cigarettes or driving fast on the highway—it’s the, what’s that thing, the rush. You read about it in books then you want to try it.	EE HLR
14	Cliff	Very interesting, Satya. But is this an actual thing—I mean the kind of thing where someone looks for a thrill. Is that a real thing humans	AFQ HLQ

		experience, an intense feeling that is maybe a risky one as well? I mean, is that what we humans do?	
15	Juan	Yeah, it's like things that are banned or are illegal, those things are the most wanted. Why? I don't know, but I think 'cause humans always want the things they're not allowed to have or is difficult for them. For me if I say okay I'm poor I can get a £10 phone but I would like to get a iPhone which is like £1000, so I would be on debt for two years to get that phone. And people prefer that instead of buy a phone for £10 and that's true, rather be in debt. That's actually happened to me right now 'cause I got an iPhone [laughs]. But that's a good example of why people always want the most difficult things and always want illegals or .... So I think <i>this</i> motivates them, this prohibit stuff. This is what motivates this writer and the friend's wife—but mostly him because men they like ego, they have more ego.	EE AR HLR TR

As can be seen from turn 1 in the transcript above, Kolya's opening High-Level Thinking Question represents several of the discourse elements I have coded as markers of higher-order thinking. As such, it generates an extended Dialogic Spell of discussion rich in critical-analytic discourse. His question is also an Authentic one as it reflects genuine confusion and seeks clarification about the motivations of the narrator: 'But what's the point with his friend's wife ...?' Satya's reply, 'It's the flame!' (turn 2), is characteristically confident but unusually succinct, which leads me in turn 3 to solicit further explanation from her. Satya begins her response—which eventually results in a full Elaborated Explanation—by repeating and acknowledging Kolya's initial query. This is a sophisticated argumentative technique as it requires a respondent to pay careful attention to the position originally advanced with the aim of either rebutting or reinforcing that viewpoint (Crowell & Kuhn, 2014). In this case, Satya avoids undermining Kolya's point but still manages skilfully to submit further ideas as possible explanations for the narrator's motivations. These explanatory ideas include risk, intensity, adventure, adrenalin, and rush (turns 4, 6, 11, 13). The trajectory of Satya's argument from plausible to convincing can be traced from turns 2 to 13, and its resultant effectiveness is clear: Kolya shifts completely from adamant insistence on his perspective (turns 5, 10) to comprehension and eventual acceptance of Satya's viewpoint (turn 12). Looking to broaden consideration of the issue into a more



generalized analysis, I follow Satya's logical conclusion with a High-level Thinking/Affective Question (turn 14) which brings the element of personal human experience into sharper relief.

Juan immediately takes up my affective allusion and responds by pointing out a truism of the human condition: 'things that are banned or are illegal, those things are the most wanted' (turn 15). Admitting ignorance of the rationale for such behaviour, he nonetheless speculates on the motivation behind it, a move introduced by the Reasoning Phrase 'I think'. Juan substantiates this speculation with a detailed example, referring first to himself as the subject of the exemplified scenario then generalizing the reference to 'people'. Once again the scenario turns out to be drawn directly from his personal experience: 'That's happened to me right now 'cause I got an iPhone'. In this instance, however, Juan extrapolates what he knows from first-hand experience to elucidate a more general principle he believes is also applicable to others. He deliberately chooses this real-life episode as 'a good example of why people always want the most difficult things and always want illegals'. In the final couple of sentences, Juan turns his attention back to the text to deliver the conclusion that '*... this motivates them, this prohibit stuff*'. Yet even this proposition is qualified by Juan's last words of the turn: 'This is what motivates this writer and the friend's wife—but mostly him because men they like ego, they have more ego'. This final clause suggests that men and women possess different levels of motivation in relation to sexual illicitness. For Juan, men (represented here by the writer) are more motivated by 'this prohibit stuff' because of their 'ego'. In critical thinking terms, the fact that this broader point is not immediately elaborated is not as important as Juan's choosing to qualify it by appending that final clause about ego. It is that qualification which clarifies the point, and which is the essence of critical thinking.

## **6.9 Evaluation of Juan's Critical Thinking Development**

As with Kolya, Juan's general level of criticality appeared to have improved by the end of the course. This was evident not only in the actual length of his Elaborated Explanations—a complete argument coherently expressed in a single spell—but in their relative complexity. He still operated largely from an expressive stance and so depended

on affective observations to convey his thoughts, but these were increasingly tempered with more rational observations and propositions. Juan's overall contribution to the reading circle and its relation to critical thinking is summarized and evaluated in the following discussion.

My analysis of Juan's discursive contributions to the reading circle began in Lesson 2 - Mr Salary (Part 2). Immediately striking about his exchanges in this session was his tendency to couch almost every response in affective terms. Throughout the course, it became increasingly evident that affective response was Juan's habitual mode of expression, which I observed to be the case even in other classes we shared across the EAP foundation programme. While consistent reference to emotions to support an argument is not necessarily misguided—indeed, it can be persuasive—it is not a reliable approach to good argumentation (Walton, 1992b). Strictly in terms of rational argumentation, Juan's observations in this session were fallacious on at least two counts, both of which related to the principle of relevance. In my analysis, I argued that Juan's reply right at the outset of the excerpt (turn 2) showed that he had interpreted the text inaccurately. Because his interpretation and thus his conclusion was mistaken to begin with, inaccuracy informed his entire line of reasoning as it unfolded, which resulted in his argument being fallacious. Aristotle called this fallacy *ignoratio elenchi* (cited in Walton, 1982), which can be translated as *misconception in refutation*. This term refers to an argument which, even if its premises succeed in providing plausible support for the conclusion, ultimately fails on the basis that its conclusion is erroneous. In other words, even though the conclusion follows plausibly from its premises, the argument is not cogent because it was erroneously conceived. For Juan, this meant he began with an inaccurate inference but continued building an argument in support of that impression. The broader fallacy, that of anecdotal evidence, consisted in Juan uncritically generalizing his individual experience as typical of everyone else's.

Although his presumptive reasoning led to a weak formal argument overall, Juan's intent was clearly not to deceive or mislead so, in mitigation, any fallacious statements can be considered inadvertent. Also interesting is that, whether or not any of the other participants realized that much of Juan's Elaborated Explanation in this excerpt was

fallacious, this did not effectively detract from its persuasive impact. On the contrary, the emotional way in which he related his personal story to the episode depicted in the text had a visibly powerful effect on the rest of the participants. On this basis, Juan's argument succeeded as a persuasion dialogue (after Walton, 1989; 2006), which has as its central aim to persuade one's interlocutor of the truth of one's thesis. Given the heightened levels of enthusiasm in this particular discussion, the criteria for persuasion were not very difficult to meet.

The next session (Lesson 3 - My Hobby) provided the first real indication that Juan was open to reading with a more critical-analytic stance than what was his customary expressive one. Even so, his approach to evaluating the protagonist George Blake's moral standing was rooted in emotional considerations; in this excerpt he was looking to comprehend Blake's personal feelings about his murderous hobby. Juan's very first query suggests he was sceptical about the latter's motivations, which meant he was not inclined to take an unreliable narrator's word for it. In what seemed an attempt to get as close as possible to the truth behind Blake's behaviour, Juan embarked on an Elaborated Explanation which took the form of a verbalized cognitive exercise in speculating and understanding what would constitute reasonable motivations for murder. This mind-reading exercise led Juan to the conclusion that the narrator is 'immoral 'cause his intention, his motivation is wrong' (turn 5).

The most important aspect of this session by my reckoning is that it contained an extraordinary contribution by Juan. This was an Elaborated Explanation which, in the context of this particular educational setting—a reading circle—illustrated critical thinking in its ideal form. Having clearly read the text closely (a practice which cannot be assumed of students), Juan had adopted a very firm position on the protagonist's moral rationalizations. What I found striking was how Juan recalled prior shared knowledge to substantiate his line of reasoning. Nothing about Kant's philosophy is easy to apprehend, so when I introduced a few of his most famous concepts in a previous class I did not expect students to grasp them with any degree of utility, let alone invoke them in a totally separate academic activity many weeks later. Yet Juan not only remembered our discussion of Kant, but he employed the philosopher's conception of

morality (and its central principle, *motive*) to support his argument and inform the judgement to which that argument had led him. This singular application of prior knowledge to a novel situation makes a very strong case for learning transfer in such contexts. Even more remarkable is that the transfer which occurred in this episode involved a high level of critical thinking and argumentation.

In Lesson 5 (Sandpiper) Juan took a step back from referring to his personal experience, at least in Excerpt A. Nonetheless, this first excerpt saw him take a firm stand on the issue under discussion and provide clear reasons in support of this stance, expressing himself not just with conviction but coherence. Indeed, what impressed me in his first response (turn 2 of the initial excerpt) was his concern with detail. In a single sentence he made a Textual Reference to support his observation and corrected himself on a point of grammar. Juan's drawing these elements together pointed to a growing expressive confidence and what seemed a more analytical approach to both the text and the discussion than I had previously witnessed. Also noteworthy was Juan's enthusiasm and focus throughout the exchanges in this excerpt, both of which come from intrinsic interest in the given topic and as such are fundamental to effective analysis. This keen involvement allowed him to make meaningful additions to other participants' perspectives. While these discursive transactions were collaborative and truth-seeking, they were not necessarily aligned—but this is typical of the process of dialectic inquiry. Generally speaking, the participants' exchanges observed in this episode appeared to have a dual effect: they seemed to sharpen Juan's individual reasoning as well as advance the group's collective understanding of the issue.

Excerpt B saw Juan revert to affective response as the standard means of substantiating his views, though with an interesting difference. He applied his analysis in this instance more widely than to just his own experience, invoking what he took to be a majority view to support his argument. I observed in my analysis that Juan seemed intuitively to employ the availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) to substantiate his claim for the popularity and prevalence of his basket metaphor. As happened in Lesson 2, this led to the commission of another argumentative fallacy, namely an appeal to popular opinion or *argumentum ad populum* (Walton, 1999; 2008). Although I again defended

Juan's failure to guard against fallacious reasoning, this was another demonstration of the pitfalls of appealing uncritically to emotions in support of an argument. However, the rest of Juan's response in this excerpt (turn 12) revealed his grasp of cognitive empathy, an important aspect of critical thinking, which I discuss at length in my analysis. Overall, Juan's contribution in Lesson 5 was his most voluble: he spoke more than in any other session and was very clear in setting out his perspective. In my view, however, much of what he said was explanatory, if not descriptive, and not necessarily indicative of critical thinking.

Lesson 8 (On Her Knees) shed some light on the apparent complexities of Juan's background, further specifics of which emerged in other classes later in the year. This was important because his previous personal and social experiences seemed in this discussion to inform expression of his thoughts about the text even more than they ordinarily did. While the first excerpt illustrated Juan's credentials in urban slang, it also saw him present a hypothesized yet authentically detailed account of a socioeconomic scenario to which everybody could relate. Juan followed this in the next excerpt by sharing his personal evaluation of the moral implications of stealing. His process of reasoning on this topic can best be described by the word I used in my analysis: nuanced. I found that Juan was able to communicate quite subtle insights about the issue under discussion by using illustrative details he seemed to know the other participants would readily appreciate and understand. Juan's ability in this session to accurately communicate the subtlety of his thoughts represented, in my view, another step towards developing his critical thinking. Bearing in mind Ennis's (2018, p. 166) most recent definition of critical thinking as 'reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do', Juan's thinking here appeared not just to bolster convictions or beliefs derived from reasonable reflection of experiences he may have observed or personally have had. They also seemed to provide him with a reasoned basis for action should such a moral quandary ever arise.

Lesson 12 (White Nights) saw Juan display his most balanced approach towards argument up to that point in the course. This balance—by which I mean a proportional synthesis of emotion and rationality—revealed itself later in the session. In the first

excerpt, however, Juan's reaction was not just typically emotion-led, but *emotional*; it turned out he had been moved by the narrative and was genuinely upset. As a result, his observations immediately following this turn were expressed with intense feeling and, understandably, heavily biased in support of the wronged narrator. In relating so fervently to the events in the narrative, Juan exhibited the qualities Pike (2003) ascribes to an Associative Reader, a point I discuss in my analysis. By the time Excerpt B came round, however, there was a distinct difference in both his demeanour and verbal expression. Although he was still visibly emotional, he was much calmer and his speaking was quieter and more even. In turn 5 of Excerpt B, Juan used the deeply affective 'grist' of the story to inform an impressive Elaborated Explanation. What emerged was an incisive critique which seamlessly integrated the general and the particular, the public and the personal. Excerpt C saw Juan continue in this vein, drawing easily on both Textual Reference and personal experience to elucidate a rational, even philosophical, analysis of the issue in question. This seemingly near effortless analytical exposition delivered, in my estimation, another significant marker in Juan's critical thinking development.

The excerpt from Lesson 15 (The Faber Book of Adultery) was the last of Juan's discursive contributions to the reading circle to be analyzed, and his responses once again displayed several key discourse features from the Quality Talk analytical rubric suggesting higher-order thinking. Juan's concluding turn in particular produced a High-Level Thinking Response resulting in a multi-faceted argument, the overall effectiveness of which lay in his simple, clear and considered analysis and evaluation of the issue at hand. His argument took the form of a sustained inductive line of reasoning which moved several times—without losing coherence—from affective examples to real-world generalizations and back again. Utilizing examples of sound probative value, Juan's affective references were not simply informed by the text, but in fact referred back to it. This reflexive processing of information deliberately intended to lead to a more finely tuned stance on a given issue is indicative of higher-order thinking.

What must again be acknowledged is the *source* and *quality* of criticality of Juan's responses. As with all the texts in the reading circle, the original source of any discussion

was a literary text, a short story. For this session we read a story which, in addition to functioning as a fictional narrative, self-consciously foregrounds the process of fiction writing. This metafictional motif simultaneously frames and meanders its way into the heart of the narrative, a process which, being an account of seduction, made for a disconcerting reading experience for me personally. Yet I would argue that it was precisely this text's literariness—and the deliberate awkwardness of its metafictional character—which generated the quality and range of critical thinking evident in Juan's Elaborated Explanation, a contribution which would be welcomed in any EAP classroom. Among the several key elements of critical thinking I discerned were speculation, generalization, analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Another subtle aspect of this turn worth noting is Juan's final qualifying clause. As stated in my analysis, Juan's point benefited more from those last few words than the main point itself. For it is that qualification which clarifies the point, and which is the essence of critical thinking. Altogether then, this final Elaborated Explanation saw Juan at his most confident in the entire course, both in the analytical fluency of his thinking *and* in the fluent articulation of those thoughts. This synthesis of cognition and performance marked another auspicious step in the development of Juan's proficiency in critical thinking and argumentation.

## **CHAPTER 7 - Satya**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two main parts: analysis and evaluation. The first presents in-depth analyses of the discursive transactions of the third focal participant, Satya, as she engages with a range of short stories in the context of our reading circle. My analysis of Satya's performance is framed by the critical-analytic stance she generally adopted in reading and discussing the texts. The second part presents a discussion of the findings, summarizing and evaluating Satya's analyzed contributions with a view to explicating the various ways in which her dialogic contributions contributed to her critical thinking development.

### **7.2 Satya's Profile**

Satya was a female student from Saudi Arabia and a non-native speaker of English. She attended private schools in Saudi and completed high school with English as one of her majors. This was her first time in the UK living and studying alone. For a foundation student, Satya was remarkably fluent in her oral expression, which facility contributed to her confidence in classroom discussion. Her written language skills were not of the same standard, however, and she struggled with accuracy, particularly in syntax and spelling. Overall, I considered Satya fairly proficient in English, and she showed a strong and constant motivation to participate in the course. She was unfailingly pleasant, enthusiastic, helpful to her classmates, had a mischievous and unexpectedly risqué sense of humour, and displayed a distinctly inquisitive habit of mind. This naturally interrogative disposition often extended to scepticism—and occasionally to the point of cynicism—all of which made for keen and lively classroom transactions. Unsurprisingly, Satya's plan at university was to major in philosophy for her bachelor's degree. She also expressed a desire to pursue postgraduate studies if, after her undergraduate studies, she had not been recalled to her duties back home.

As will be seen in her case study, Satya's extremely affluent upbringing informed her fundamental worldview. Yet more than anybody else and to her credit as a person, she



was conscious—though not bashful—of her privileged background. This acute sense of self-awareness coupled with her natural sense of inquiry and an indefatigable ‘critical spirit’ (Siegel, 1988) afforded Satya generous ‘analytical space’ to accommodate new ideas. At the beginning of the course she expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of reading literature in class as an alternative to the standard EAP content, increasing her vocabulary, and exploring issues more deeply. She also believed the texts would be generally at her level of English proficiency and thus linguistically accessible to her.

In the context of our reading circle, it was Satya’s manner of speaking which first arrested the listener. Her idiosyncratic mid-Atlantic diction accentuated her fluency and made her easy to listen to. Yet she appreciated listening to her classmates’ views as much as she enjoyed speaking and sharing her ideas with them. She was genuinely curious, moreover, which was evidenced by the constant battery of questions she threw into every session she attended. On this basis, Satya’s interrogative approach towards the texts encountered in the reading circle can aptly be characterized as critical-analytic (after Murphy et al., 2009).

Critical thinking begins with reception and is followed by production, both of which elements are active endeavours. In the classroom, critical thinking at its most effective begins with active noticing of a topic followed by a recursive cycle of direct and contextual questioning. This dialectic activity leads to enhanced understanding of the topic and ultimately better reasoning, judgements and decision-making. Central to this entire reasoning process is a reflective disposition: the more natural the disposition to reflective thought, the fewer challenges there are to critical thinking development (Dewey, 1933; Facione 2000). This in essence describes Satya’s learning disposition in the classroom. One of the key processing components of cognition, questioning is structurally ingrained in the operations of critical and creative thinking (Cuccio-Schirripa & Steiner, 2000). A tendency to ask probing reason-based questions persistently in pursuit of knowledge is one of several habits of mind which constitute what Siegel (2017) calls a ‘critical spirit’, otherwise designated in the literature as a critical disposition. According to Stanovich (2011) the disposition to deeper thinking is a cognitive propensity of the reflective dimension of the mind, as opposed to the

algorithmic dimension, which accommodates cognitive ability or intelligence. Another character trait of a person naturally disposed to thinking critically is self-regulation. This refers to the capacity and volition to reflect on and mediate one's thoughts and behaviour to attain personal goals and respond appropriately to life's vicissitudes (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008; Whitebread & Pino-Pasternak, 2010). Self-regulation also entails a personal awareness sufficiently robust to subject the convictions, biases and heuristics arising from individual experience and social influence to continual reassessment—and, if warranted, to amend or even discard them (Hilbert, 2012). In displaying such behaviours, thoughts and language, Satya epitomizes Siegel's (2017) conception of the idealized critical thinker.

The discussion which follows analyzes Satya's critical thinking development in the reading circle. What emerges repeatedly clearly is her marked individual disposition to deeper inquiry through questioning, one of the essential constitutive components of critical thinking (Kuhn, 2018; 2019). As a basic tool of inquiry, questioning cultivates epistemic curiosity, a strong and persistent desire to acquire knowledge. The accretion of learning as a consequence of asking questions contributes to resolving the inevitable instances of cognitive disequilibrium thrown up by the questioning process itself (Chin & Osborne, 2010; Dewey, 1933; Piaget, 1977). The other component of critical thinking is argumentation (Kuhn, 2018; 2019), fundamental to which are questions such as *how do you know?* or *why do you believe that?* (Osborne & Reigh, 2020). Inquiry and argumentation, therefore, function as complements, with the dynamics of their interaction determined by specific learning conditions and task goals (Kuhn, Modrek & Sandoval, 2020). My central aim in this case study is to explore the extent to which the kinds of questions Satya asked in her dialogic discourse around literary texts indicate inquiry and argumentation proficiency at a level consistent with critical thinking. In doing so I will trace and foreground any significant ways in which Satya's strong interrogative leanings may have enhanced her criticality.

### **7.3 Lesson 1 - Mr Salary (Part 1)**

In this opening extract of Lesson 1, Satya displays several traits which fellow participants would learn are characteristic of her inquiring nature.

### Excerpt A

1	Satya	Okay, why does the girl call her father 'Frank' and not 'Father', not 'Dad'? Because she had trouble with him? I thought at first he was her stepfather but actually it's her real father. I mean I get her father didn't_____	AQ HLQ
2	Kolya	I think it's normal for western people to call by name.	UT
3	Fernao	Yeah, 'cause her mom died when she was born and then they didn't live together_____	UT
4	Satya	And she was assaulted when she was young. She said his friends, either they give her no affection or more than that, meaning that ...	UT
5	Cliff	Where does it say that?	AQ
6	Fernao	No it doesn't say that.	UT
7	Satya	No I mean affection and then something else.	AR
8	Fernao	Here: 'no affection or else so much'.	TR
9	Cliff	Oh right, so on the second page, paragraph five: 'Frank had problems with prescription drugs. During childhood I had frequently been left in the care of his friends, who gave me either no affection or else so much that I recoiled'. So what does 'recoil' mean?	TR TQ
10	Kolya	It's afraid of something?	TQ
11	Cliff	Yeah kind of. So Satya, what was your impression of that again?	UT AQ
12	Satya	Maybe they treated her ... maybe they touched her or said something to her. I mean, she's a child so it was easier and they know that her father had some problems so it's easier to kind of do that to her.	HLR
13	Cliff	Hmm, do you have the same feeling, Fernao?	AQ
14	Fernao	I mean, looking from that perspective, yeah, it might have happened. Like it's between the lines, you know. She didn't say it but it's quite 'there'. Maybe she didn't understand it at that time, but now that she's older she understood what it actually means?	HLR
15	Satya	I mean she's a child, so if somebody kind of hugged her or talked to her in a normal way, she's going to love it. But if they did something too much, I mean a kid feels when it's a bit too much. They feel when it's not normal.	HLR

Satya opens proceedings by raising the issue of how to address one's parents (turn 1). Of relatively mild interest to me personally, what a daughter calls her father would not usually be expected to evoke more than cursory impressions, even in a group discussing literary texts. According to Paul & Elder (2007, p. 36), however, framing questions in an unusual, self-directed or systematic way is crucial to establishing 'an additional level of thinking, a powerful inner voice of reason'. Kahneman's (2011) decades-long research in experimental psychology on system 1 (fast and intuitive) and system 2 (slow and deliberative) modes of thinking confirms the efficacy of framing in either impairing or enhancing reasoning. He has found that consciously repositioning one's perspective in relation to commonplace situations can foster a more critical understanding of such situations. The individual framing the question may not be the only beneficiary of the framing effect, however. Kuhn and Modrek (2021) have found that merely witnessing a question framed in a dialogic context such as our reading circle is cognitively beneficial. Argumentative thinking is enriched simply through exposure to dialogic framing, as it immediately presents alternative perspectives which individual reasoning may have overlooked. Therefore, by making this metacognitive move, by asking Authentic and High-level Thinking Questions around an otherwise mundane aspect of Sukie and Frank's relationship, Satya's deliberately inquisitive framing of the issue arouses sufficient interest among the other participants to generate a multi-faceted Dialogic Spell (turns 1-14). With her very next comment, in fact, Satya raises the stakes considerably, broaching an issue of unsettling gravity: '... she was assaulted when she was young' (turn 4). Two salient observations can be drawn from this unexpected comment.

The first is Satya's penchant for polemics. As we were all to discover in subsequent sessions, she relished discussion around edgy—even taboo—subjects, which occasionally emerged in remarks such as the one above. Unfailingly, what confounded most of Satya's fellow participants, given her very conservative Saudi background, was her proclivity for pushing discursive boundaries in this way. Satya's relentless curiosity, coupled with a simple enjoyment from shocking people, may go some way to explaining her motivation for such provocative expression. Another observation prompted by the remark in turn 4 above, and more relevant to my current analysis, is Satya's tendency at

this early stage of the course to leap to conclusions without persuasive evidence. As an instance of narrative interpretation, particularly that of a literary text, her impression in this turn is certainly not far-fetched. Were it not for the conspicuous absence of any previous or subsequent narrative references, it could even be regarded as insightful. Indeed, considering the context of the episode under discussion, Satya's inference may even rise to an arguable level of plausibility. At least one other student appears to agree with it, albeit tentatively (Fernao in turn 14). In this instance, however, the issue itself is not of primary interest. More concerning is Satya's ill-considered articulation of a matter of this delicacy; in a classroom setting, the potential repercussions of such unguarded expressions are undesirable.

Following this line of analysis further, two particular implications of Satya's assertion are worth noting: emotional and academic. The first implication is self-evident: however primed the participants may have been to encounter issues of any kind in their reading, with trigger warnings given as a matter of course at the start of each session (see Lockhart, 2016, for the value of trigger warnings), child abuse is a matter to be approached with the greatest circumspection in any forum. As intimated earlier, the issue when it was raised was wholly unanticipated and on reflection, in my trilateral role as teacher-researcher-participant, I recall being slightly alarmed and feeling inadequately prepared to contend with such a fraught issue. Had I been offered the option at that point, I would probably have avoided introducing the topic. To their credit, therefore, the students managed the entire situation with laudable sensitivity and maturity. A second implication of Satya's comment relates to academic expression. Although less obvious perhaps than the possible emotional ramifications of making such a careless remark, it is a more important consideration for this study. The reason is that academic discourse, and academic argument in particular, is an essential element of EAP. A basic feature of poor practice in argumentation is deriving conclusions from weak premises, of which Satya's rash inference in turn 4 above is a striking example.

To illustrate this more clearly, let us cast Satya's full Elaborated Explanation (turns 4-15) in the excerpt as an inductive argument. Examining this explanation in terms of inductive reasoning requires several factors to be borne in mind. First, the analysis will be

recounted in the language of both philosophy (in particular, that of informal logic) and psychology. An example is the term ‘argument’: this concept and all its accompanying principles are employed in both fields, fairly similarly at some times though quite differently at others (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). For the present discussion I will adopt a general approach, assuming similar conceptualizations across the two disciplines. A second factor to consider is that of ‘support’, a concept central to inductive argument analysis and evaluation. My analysis specifically invokes the *quality* of support which premises purport to provide for the conclusion (Bailin & Battersby, 2016). A third key principle in this context is ‘credibility’, which refers to premises or conclusions being ‘worthy of reasonable belief’ (Bailin & Battersby, 2016, p. 69).

Turning then to the analysis, Satya begins her contribution auspiciously, as the ostensible truth value of her major premise—that the narrator Sukie had experienced unwanted affection from her father’s friends (see turn 4 above)—is not in dispute. Sukie’s actual words are that her father’s friends had given her ‘either no affection or else so much that I recoiled’ (turn 9). Although this account is a recollection of past events, that is, a memory, there is no reason to believe Sukie does not intend and represent it as factual. In view of this, the situation as narrated cannot be interpreted by a reader as anything other than negative. Disturbing as it is, however, nothing more is made of this statement in any other part of the narrative. It follows plausibly then that if the narrator had considered the level of affection to have been sexual impropriety, assault or even abuse, this may well have emerged as a central theme. And if so, it would then have been a different story. Satya’s major premise of ‘too much affection’—even though it is derived directly from Sukie’s narrated fact—is an inference which seems, therefore, to have been arrived at intuitively rather than reflectively (Mercier & Sperber, 2009). The apparent ease with which Satya draws the conclusion that Sukie ‘was assaulted when she was young’ (turn 4) from the unwelcome affection the latter experienced recalls the moral dual-process model developed by Joshua Greene and his colleagues (Greene et al., 2008; 2001). These studies suggest that people deliberate less on ‘impersonal’ moral problems than they do on ones in which they are more personally invested. The intrinsically higher stakes of personal involvement invite more careful consideration. In this light, because there is no other evidence to substantiate Satya’s

inferred conclusion of abuse, this assertion on its own does not give the rest of the reading circle sufficiently credible reason to persuade us to her view. So while Satya's interpretation is legitimate in the sense that it is a plausible *individual* reading, her judgement fails to attract unequivocal consensus. In a word, her inference lacks collective credibility.

Satya's major premise is a prime example of what Mercier and Sperber (2017) call a psychological reason, that is, a mental representation of an objective reason (in this case, Sukie's statement). Satya's premise does support her conclusion to the extent that it is possible—arguably, even plausible. This support is nonetheless relatively weak as it is merely one plausible possibility among others, none of which can claim more credence than any other. Satya's premise overreaches its remit of credibility, as it purports to 'represent a genuine fact as supporting a conclusion it actually does not support' (Mercier & Sperber, 2017, pp. 111-112). In the absence of anything more telling to be gleaned from Sukie's statement in turn 9 or indeed from any others in the narrative, there is too much room for inferential ambiguity to accept Satya's conclusion as credible. Therefore, her conclusion and its single premise fall short of a standard of credibility which is sufficiently supportive to constitute a cogent inductive argument.

It is no surprise then that Satya is immediately challenged by both Fernao and me to substantiate her initial claim (turns 5 and 6 respectively). Her response is swift and creditable. She rephrases the charged remark, thus tempering it, and then goes on to proffer various speculative scenarios to further confirm her point (turns 12 and 15). While these supporting speculations—which for the present purpose I designate as minor premises—reveal Satya's argumentative creativity under pressure, they still lack persuasive force as a cogent inductive argument. Indeed, the strongest reason she advances in support of her original assertion of abuse arrives eventually in turn 15: 'a kid feels when it's a bit too much. They feel when it's not normal'. At best, this kind of assumption is anecdotal; at worst, it is specious.

Satya again rushes to judgement further along in the session. Aiming to open a line of inquiry which explores the reciprocal emotional dynamics between Sukie and Nathan, I

begin by reading aloud an excerpt which sees Sukie simultaneously reflecting and voicing her feelings on their relationship.

### Excerpt B

1	Cliff	<i>'My college friends worshipped Nathan and couldn't understand why he spent so much money on me. I think I did understand, but I couldn't explain it. His own friends seemed to assume there was some kind of sordid arrangement involved, because when he left the room they made certain remarks toward me. They think you're paying me for something, I told him.'</i> What does that mean?	AQ HLQ
2	Satya	That she's a hooker!	UT
3	Kolya	No, I think there's two reasons maybe.	RW
4	Samir	What? She's not! They <b>think</b> she is.	UT
5	Fernao	Yeah, maybe that's how <b>they</b> think she is.	UT

Satya's outburst in turn 2 is as impetuous and unsubstantiated as it is wide of the mark. In quick succession, no less than three respondents challenge her assertion with more nuanced qualifications. Again, what seems to take precedence over her capacity to think things through is her proclivity to jump to conclusions as well as making apparently facetious utterances for their shock value. As with many subsequent outbursts, however, Satya's intention here seems more about opportunistically and knowingly 'stirring the pot' than making a serious point. Indeed, much of the fun we had in the reading circle arose from spontaneous moments like this.

### 7.4 Lesson 2 - Mr Salary (Part 2)

The second session on 'Mr Salary' exposed Satya's tendency to let her attention drift in the midst of a discussion, coupled with her reliance on intuitive inference to get her back on track. This extract reveals the risks involved in depending too much on intuitive inference.

1	Cliff	How does she deal in that way, possibly, with her father's illness? Is it that she cries about it or _____ [general approbation]	AQ HLQ
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2	Satya	No, she says I'm going to have sex with Nathan now. I mean it's obvious: she used him as an excuse to escape.	TR
3	Juan	What?!	UT
4	Cliff	We're talking now about <i>her father</i> , Satya. How does she deal with her father's situation, especially when he accuses her or says some bad stuff about her on Page 3 right at the top?	HLQ

Even with the barest context, it is clear from the above exchanges that Satya's response does not align with the prevailing topic. It is difficult to pinpoint the reason but it appears she was thinking about something else, and answered my question impulsively, without giving it due consideration or even attempting first to orient herself within the discussion. Embarrassing herself as a result, Satya's subsequent responses were inevitably more prudent and considered as the session unfolded. This particular excerpt demonstrates the importance of participants attending closely to a discussion thread or line of reasoning if they expect to contribute meaningfully—or even just sensibly—in a dialogic forum such as a reading circle. In critical thinking terms, if the intention is to engage higher order skills such as analysis and evaluation of a given topic, concentration is a basic requirement and prior to the cognitive effort that will invariably follow.

## 7.5 Lesson 4 - The Necklace

This is a short story by Guy de Maupassant set in France over a century ago. Satya's overall contribution to this session was, by her usual standards, fairly muted. Her responses in the main were confirmatory of other participants' ideas, and comparatively brief. However, two exchanges stood out, the first of which relates to the most prominent theme in the narrative, pride, and its attendant delusions. The excerpt below reveals Satya's response to the question of what fuels the protagonist Mathilde's aspirations to a higher station in life. Among the few possibilities mooted by participants was the influence of family.

### Excerpt A

1	Kolya	No, no. First paragraph, you read here, eh? There's small explanation, but she has a family.	TR
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2	Selena	No, it says about the parents in one part, wait ... [scans text]	TR
3	Satya	I think her parents gave her hope, maybe her mother.	HLR
4	Samir	Where's that from in the text?	TQ
5	Satya	No no no, that's my thing, from me.	HLR
6	Cliff	Oh right, so you've just worked that out?	AQ
7	Satya	I have. Look at hope. It's like with self-esteem; I mean you have self-esteem, the first, I mean the one who has to teach you self-esteem is your parents. That's how you're going to get it. Are you born with hope? No. You learn it; you have to work hard for it. So maybe you even earn it?	HLQ HLR AQ

Seeking reasons for the protagonist's motivations, both Kolya and Selena's first recourse is to the narrative (turns 1 and 2). By contrast, in answer to Samir and my questions, Satya declares that her judgement on this issue is not gleaned from explicit textual evidence but that she has actually worked it out (turns 4-7). Of course, in our reading circle the text is the source of any subsequent cognitive or verbal deliberation about its content. Following Mercier and Sperber's (2017) conceptualization of reasoning, Satya's inference about hope being the cause of the protagonist's motivation would have been intuited almost immediately, perhaps even spontaneously, from her first encounter with this issue in the narrative. With Satya's concept of hope having been shaped by her previous experience, this initial inference could thus be considered intuitive.

However, her use of the phrase 'I think' (turn 3) points to a conclusion apparently derived from a process of reasoning beyond just her original reading of the semiotic information on the page. Satya begins in turn 7 to explicate her reasoning process in a High-Level Thinking Response, using the concept of self-esteem as an analogue of hope: 'Look at hope. It's like with self-esteem; I mean you have self-esteem, the first, I mean the one who has to teach you self-esteem is your parents. That's how you're going to get it'. She follows this metacognitive explanation with a High-level Thinking Question, employed rhetorically to reinforce her preceding point: 'Are you born with hope? No. You learn it; you have to work hard for it'. Interestingly, her concluding remark, 'So maybe you even earn it?', takes the form of a tentatively expressed question. This

suggests that her process of reasoning on this issue is still unfinished. It turns out, therefore, that Satya's inference on hope as Mathilde's motivation is neither just intuitive or reflective, but a developing interaction of both. It appears that she is processing her thoughts as she speaks. Although Satya seems not to have arrived at a definitive position on the issue yet, what is emerging at this stage is nonetheless a clear and creative articulation of quite a complex idea.

I turn now to another fascinating moment later in the session, which related to the perennial question of authorial versus narratorial identity. The following exchanges reveal a rather unexpected reaction from Satya.

### Excerpt B

1	Cliff	So whoever's saying this—' <i>With women there's neither caste nor rank, for beauty, grace and charm take the place ...</i> '—that's a view, not a fact. Whose view is that? Is it the author's view or is it the narrator's view?	AQ
2	Satya	How should we know?	AQ
3	Cliff	Well I don't know. This is what is one of the questions of literature. We don't always know whose view it is, you know: if it's the storyteller within the story or is it the author who wrote the story, because they're not always the same.	HLR
4	Dmitri	Storyteller's view.	UT
5	Satya	But why would he not be the same? He wrote a book for what? Why would he write a book if he's not going to represent himself? It's pointless, kind of impossible.	HLQ
6	Cliff	If I'm a politician and the leader of a party and I write something, if I make a speech, right, is that always how I feel? if I say <b>this</b> is what we should do ... is that necessarily how I actually feel?	HLQ AQ
7	All	No!	UT
8	Satya	No, you could be a liar.	UT
9	Cliff	That's why sometimes we need to as readers perhaps look at the story itself and see: is the narrator, is the teller of the story, necessarily the author who wrote this?	HLQ

10	Satya	I understand, I get that, but hearing the lies or the things that you say, I can actually find out who you are, so in the end it's still you. You're not changing personalities and writing this; you're the same person.	HLR
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Going by her first Authentic Question in turn 2, it is clear that Satya has not previously considered the author/narrator conundrum. Looking perhaps to remedy the situation, she literally begins thinking aloud—addressing nobody in particular—by asking a series of penetrating High-level Thinking Questions about the issue (turn 5). Interestingly, her questions bear a sceptical slant, bordering on incredulity: ‘But why would he not be the same? He wrote a book for what? Why would he write a book if he’s not going to represent himself?’ My response is to offer an illustrative analogy, the logic of which everyone appears to follow, including Satya (turns 7-8). So I am somewhat surprised by her reaction when I conclude my explanation. At this point she seems almost offended by ‘hearing the lies’ (turn 10) of an author who would choose audaciously not to ‘represent himself’ (turn 5). It is not difficult to imagine that a reader confronted with a sudden jarring realization such as this could be upset, at least momentarily. With her epistemic expectations undermined and perhaps even revealed as illusory, what appears suddenly to arise in Satya as a reader is what Piaget (1977) calls a state of *cognitive disequilibrium*.

Dewey (1933) had prefigured Piaget (1977) in this respect when he addressed cognitive contradictions and their implications for the reader in the context of learning. Dewey argued that a moment of doubt or ‘crisis’ such as that experienced by Satya above causes relative discomfort in the reader, ranging from mild to acute, which generates the need to reduce the tension and seek resolution by reassessing the situation (Gawronski, 2012). What typically follows is a process of contemplation—or reflective thought, in Dewey’s terms—to demystify the unanticipated difficulty stimulated by the unexpected new information. In reading, this process can prompt what I would call a *critical impulse* in the reader. A critical impulse is one which arouses a variety of related subconscious aspects of the reader’s previous experience and imagination. While the initial impulse may have been triggered subconsciously, the processes seeking to resolve the conflict are deliberately regulated by the reader. That is, they are metacognitive. Having worked transactionally to co-construct meanings with the text—using prior

knowledge to infer, analyze, and evaluate textual information—the reader arrives eventually at a subjective but satisfying meaning, where the impasse is resolved and cognitive equilibrium is restored. Initiated by the critical impulse and repeated sufficiently, such conditions gradually develop and establish a disposition conducive to the critical thinking process. It is these metacognitive and cognitive processes and their implications for developing learners’ apprehension of related aspects of critical thinking in EAP (such as textual reflexivity, authorial intent, perspective, stance and other rhetorical devices) which is of significance for this thesis.

As we have seen in the excerpts from this and other sessions, while Satya’s reasoning may sometimes be overly intuitive and lacking in credibility, her capacity for creative reasoning is sufficiently developed to have helped resolve the cognitive disequilibrium she experienced in Excerpt B. This at least was my expectation as her teacher. Even by the end of the session, however, Satya seems agitated and genuinely wrongfooted. Just the idea that the author of a story may not be the same person as the narrator was a revelation which has left her thoroughly perplexed and frustrated.

## 7.6 Lesson 6 - Paste

‘Paste’ is a short story Henry James crafted deliberately as a kind of diegetic cognate of Guy de Maupassant’s story ‘The Necklace’, which our reading circle had discussed two weeks earlier. A theme which connects both stories is the dynamic at the heart of social conflict. Of the few discursive responses Satya delivered in this session, none were particularly notable in terms of critical thinking development. However, it is worth remarking on the following contribution, which relates to the antagonist, Arthur Prime. Satya’s observation of his personality displays a typical combination of acuity and impishness. Beyond that, however, she reveals a remarkable, almost careless, aptitude for literary character analysis. This acuity was coupled with a level of linguistic proficiency which, for a foundation level student, was almost as impressive.

1	Satya	It says here, ‘... <i>he seemed somehow to brood without sorrow, to suffer without what she in her own case would have called pain.</i> ’	TR
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		So he doesn't show his feelings; he's dry. Precise and dry—and he's too honest. No, not too honest, somehow rude?	
2	Cliff	What's the word? If you don't care about someone's feelings and you just think what you feel matters, you're what?	TQ
3	Satya	Asshole.	UT
4	Kolya	It's honest.	UT
5	Cliff	Yes, 'honest' is one way of saying it—in Russian! [all laugh] In English?	TQ
6	Satya	Dickhead! Right?	UT
7	Cliff	[laughing] Nah, he's insensitive. <i>That's</i> the word.	UT

It is no exaggeration to say that Satya does not couch her utterances in subtlety. In turn 1, she makes a Textual Reference to support her impressions of Arthur as precise, dry and 'not too honest, somehow rude?'. Her casting about for the right word suggests the likelihood that, if she had a broader vocabulary to draw from, Satya would have chosen to describe Arthur in more palatable but no less accurate terms. The words she does choose leave us fellow participants in no doubt as to her disdain for this character. In the end, and to everybody's amusement, my awkward attempt to steer the conversation back to a more lexically respectable course by donning my teacher's hat threatens instead to open a floodgate of increasingly coarse expression on Satya's part. What comes through on balance, however, is her extraordinarily insightful ability to discern the essential qualities of literary character and context.

### 7.7 Lesson 8 - On her Knees

A few prefatory considerations are needed to elucidate my analysis of the following sequence. In terms of productive discussion, it is an axiom that argument trumps assertion. In more conversational contexts, however, making an emphatic assertion or claim is surprisingly often sufficient to persuade an audience to the desired point of view. This is particularly true if such a claim exploits the audience's bias towards its own interests. And while the extent to which an assertion is accepted is subject to many variables, the most potent of these is the audience's susceptibility to persuasion through an appeal to their emotions (Walton, 1992b). A powerful example of this is social media,

which has contributed to enabling and legitimizing a burgeoning culture of distorted perceptions of reality. One of the most common of these cognitive distortions is emotional reasoning, a kind of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Emotional reasoning occurs where one’s interpretation of reality is guided by one’s emotions, particularly if these are negative emotions (Burns, 2000; Leahy, Holland, & McGinn, 2011). What makes these kinds of claims effective in acts of conversational communication is the operating principle of perceived intensity or ‘loudness’: an emotive statement should at the very least be robustly asserted. Of course, the conspicuous caveat is that any claim which ‘can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence’ (Hitchens, 2007, p. 150). Despite such an obvious pitfall, making an enthusiastic but groundless claim in the pursuit of persuasion occurs more often than not—mainly because it requires less cognitive effort. All this is the province of rhetoric. Constructing a cogent line of reasoning with full warrant is the domain of argumentation.

At this stage in our reading circle, all participants generally understood that merely making a claim was an ineffectual argumentative move. While a spirited assertion may mark an initial foray into the arena of argumentation, appreciably more was needed to sustain an argument of any merit. Enthusiasm and conviction would not meet the necessary conditions of argumentation, particularly if held up against such advanced qualities as empathy and critical detachment, themselves necessary conditions (Walton, 1989; 2006). They understood that merely making a claim—however passionately delivered—fell well short of fulfilling the conditions sufficient for argumentation, where critical thinking could be seen to occur. By contrast, even an adequately considered argument would achieve these goals to a given extent. To illustrate this point, the excerpt below tracks an argumentative contribution by Satya, which takes the form of an Elaborated Explanation in response to the Authentic/High-level Thinking Question I pose to start the discussion.

1	Cliff	Right, let's begin. Here’s the Big Question: how does the main character, the cleaner, handle being accused by her employer of stealing her earring?	AQ HLQ
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2	Satya	<p>Okay ... the way the mother handled the situation when the woman [her employer] told her that she stole the earring? She [the mom] was still so nice to her. She still went there even after they accused her. And I think that kind of attitude, you see it a lot in—not poor people maybe but—working hard people. So I've seen people like this who have, not shops, but they would bring their truck. And they would put their products, their watermelon, and they would be so honest with their customers, and they would have the best products yet they don't even have a proper shop! And then you would see other people who are in bigger shops are actually dishonest and they would double the price. When I see these kinds of people I also see their position in life, or where they are, like these people are poor and these people are rich And it kind of comes with idea that being too honest, being loyal—all these moral things—they don't really bring that much good of an outcome for the poor, just like with the mother.</p>	EE
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Using Mrs Lang's personal nature as a yardstick for character appraisal, Satya begins by summarizing with three remarks the narrative episode of the cleaner returning to work even after she had been accused of stealing. Importantly, her first utterance is a question, and in fact a reformulation of my opening question (turn 1). My best inference about this move is that Satya is clarifying her understanding of the issue under discussion and marshaling her thoughts on it. By employing adversative language in these initial comments to evoke binary images of her primary characters, Satya appears to pit the 'accusing' employer against the 'nice' cleaner. Her delivery of this summary is terse, and my immediate impression is that this tone visibly draws the other participants' attention to her explanation; nobody interrupts at all until she has concluded her point. Being attentive to fellow participants' viewpoints with the intention of apprehending all sides of an issue is a key prerequisite to skilled argumentation (Kuhn & Udell, 2007; Van Eemeren et al., 2013). This is also a ground rule of our reading circle. Because the participants are generally lively and comfortable with each other, they interject quite freely—though always respectfully—which means it is unusual for one speaker to deliver such a long turn uninterrupted. Deliberately or inadvertently, however, Satya succeeds perceptibly in securing a committed hearing from her audience.

Another point of interest is Satya's stance on the issue in question. It is the nature of argument to begin with a stance predicated on a fundamental belief (Cottrell, 2017).



Satya's compelling opening tacitly suggests her position on the issue she goes on to elaborate. She introduces her major premise with a Reasoning Word, 'I think', and presents the view that Mrs Lang displays an 'attitude' of honesty and loyalty, which Satya professes to have seen represented often in a certain kind of hardworking person. Drawing further on her personal experience ('I've seen'; 'then you would see'; 'When I see'), Satya then constructs vivid scenes of this attitude in action, apparently playing off the 'honest' habits of hardworking fruit sellers against the 'dishonest' and unscrupulous behaviour of their better-off counterparts. These 'other people who are in bigger shops' and 'are actually dishonest' constitute Satya's second premise. Interestingly, her narrativizing throughout the excerpt reveals a relatively high level of proficiency in both language and reasoning. Satya seems able simultaneously to use her language to express quite complex ideas in the form of vignettes apparently drawn from her own experience. Importantly, more able learners such as Satya are not only more likely to proffer high-level elaboration in such collaborative settings, but in so doing enable enhancement of their own understanding of the issues under discussion (Webb, 1989; 1992; Webb & Palincsar, 1996).

In explaining the contrasting attitudes between the groups she has designated, Satya appears to reinforce their dissimilarity by repeatedly using the modal 'would' to highlight both groups' behaviour as characteristic and habitual. She also seems concerned to generalize her perspective and experiences by pluralizing her references to the people and activities she describes. For example, she never refers to 'a person' but to 'people' and all nouns and pronouns in this particular excerpt are plural. Satya proceeds thus from premises based on repeated experiences to a logical conclusion regarding the general attitude and behaviour of both groups. This kind of inductive generalization is significant in indicating the proximal connection between expressed language and critical thinking processes (Murphy et al., 2018). Satya's conclusion in this passage is that 'being too honest', while admirable, is a quality which usually results in worse life conditions for such people than for those who are 'actually dishonest'. A remaining note of interest is her apparent keenness to avoid what Jost et al. (2004) call the *compensatory stereotype*. In the context of Satya's response, this stereotype refers to the widely-held trope which represents the poor as good and the rich as bad. Satya

makes only a cautious allusion to this distinction at the start of her statement and maintains this circumspection throughout. Only at the end does it become clear that this *is* in fact what she thinks.

### 7.8 Lesson 10 - Track

In this lesson our circle examined a story by Nicole Flattery about a young couple in a dysfunctional romantic relationship, a session I found at once engaging and disconcerting. It was engaging as a participant because the students were really involved, but disappointing as a researcher because there were remarkably few Elaborated Explanations or even brief but pithy accounts of any aspects of the story. At points I wondered whether the students were already in holiday mode as this was the last week before the Easter break. Despite being reminded of the ground rules at the beginning of the discussion, the participants' performance can be summed up in two words: distracted and fragmentary. Verbal exchanges were characterized by constant interruptions and frequent overlapping. Individual trains of thought which would usually have led to productive lines of inquiry were routinely punctuated by interjections, leaving ideas half-formed and sentences half-expressed. I reviewed the class recordings several times to try and ascertain a reason for the unusual atmosphere and behaviour, in case I had overlooked any revealing audiovisual clues or cues. I found none, however, and accept that it seems to have been simply the mood current among the students that morning.

Nonetheless, Satya made one timely intervention midway through the session, a move which countered the disjointed discourse prevalent up to that point. The issue under discussion was whether the narrator actually loved her boyfriend. Citing the text as support, three participants (Alyeh, Syed and Juan) had already opined that she did. Kolya and Satya, however, held the opposite view.

1	Kolya	This is not love. Even he expects her to change, but he's still the same!	UT HLR
2	Satya	Exactly. If we ask 'does she love him' at the beginning then yes we say 'she loves him'. I mean she actually says it ... God knows why! But	EE AQ

	<p>because we're readers, we read the whole story, we see how things go. Do things change? I think they do; that happens a lot in stories, right? So when we ask again near the end here 'did she love him', we have to say 'no' not 'yes'. Yes in the beginning, sure. I mean I know she says it, but I'm not sure anyway—she's a flake [laughs]. Look the thing is, can we assume she loves him through the whole story? No. Isn't that one of the things of the story, to show how things change? I really think finally that she doesn't love him. It must be, right? I mean, in the end she leaves him. She literally left the studio and she went to the train station. Gone.</p>	HLQ
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Kolya opens the exchange with a firm judgement, which he follows with a convincing reason. It is persuasive because of an implicit expectation of equality which marks the ideal of true love between two people. Agreeing with Kolya, Satya establishes the state of play by conceding at the outset of her Elaborated Explanation that the protagonist's declaration of love for her boyfriend cannot be ignored because 'I mean, she actually says it' (turn 2). Significantly, she then introduces a metacognitive element to her observation by expressing what she thinks happens in her and other readers' minds as they read a fictional text: '... because we're readers, we read the whole story, we see how things go'. She reinforces this point later in the explanation: '... can we assume she loves him through the whole story? No. Isn't that one of the things of the story, to show how things change?' Satya's contention here seems to be that readers' perceptions should change as events in the narrative unfold and change too. Indeed, she designates 'change' as a characteristic property of short stories: 'Do things change? I think they do; that happens a lot in stories, right?' This observation, initiated by a High-level Thinking Question, is singularly convincing because it is true; fictional texts by their very nature narrativize trajectories of change. Satya then confirms her provisional conclusion with an emphatic expression of obligation: '... we have to say "no"'. An even stronger declaration consolidates her summative conclusion a few lines later: 'I really think finally that she doesn't love him. It must be, right? I mean, in the end she leaves him'. By any reckoning, this is an impressive Elaborated Explanation by Satya: it is structured, coherent and persuasive.

## 7.9 Lesson 12 - White Nights

This session presented a further and qualitatively more sophisticated instance of Satya's propensity to transact interrogatively with both the text and fellow participants. The story under discussion was one of Dostoevsky's most celebrated. The group had been discussing the question of whether love is real. This was in relation to how easily and deeply the nameless protagonist of this short story seemed to fall in love with his antagonist. In analyzing this story, the term 'antagonist' is construed somewhat differently to its standard definition: it does not refer to a direct rival or opponent, but rather suggests the main source of anguish or conflict for the narrator, the inaccessible object of his love, Nastenka. The following excerpt reveals Satya's perspective on the issue.

1	Satya	Guys, there is something that I don't understand in love. Is it only real for a moment? Or because it's just for that moment, it's not actually that real, period. Like, you see people spending time like six years and seven years together and then they come to the understanding that yeah, we need to break up, we don't feel something anymore. And then they meet another person. And even if they loved someone and that person loved them back, and they get broken-hearted and they think that they're never going to fall in love again, guess what: they do! So like, what the F's going on, people? I mean if you're with someone for twenty years, right, and you're growing old together and then the both of you die and then when people remember you, they're going to say, oh the two of them were in love and they could never leave each other. But maybe if you guys had broke up you would find love with other people. So, it's not that real, in a way, is it?	AQ HLQ EE
2	Alyeh	Ah okay, so because we can fall in love more than once, it's not real love?	UT AQ
3	Satya	Well that's what I'm asking, is it real for a moment? Like not forever; for a moment. Or not really love at all? I mean, are we all just fooling ourselves? Is it all just BS? I mean, I personally don't know. How would I, right? I'm just curious, you know?	AQ HLQ EE

A frank admission of confusion launches Satya's Elaborated Explanation: 'There is something that I don't understand in love' (turn 1). Functioning as a cue for forthcoming information, this general statement is effective in preparing the rest of us to listen for

additional detail, as well as allowing Satya a moment to gather her thoughts. It also sets the stage for a clearer exposition of the two possibilities puzzling her: 'Is it only real for a moment? Or because it's just for that moment, it's not actually that real, period'. While this last remark is awkwardly expressed, both utterances are in fact Authentic and High-level Thinking questions. They are authentic because they reflect Satya's genuine confusion and need for clarification; and they require high-level thinking because they are eternal questions about the human condition, the answers to which will always be sought.

Satya goes on to present realistic scenarios illustrating her conundrum in more detail. Finishing her opening exposition, her exasperation is evident: 'So like, what the F's going on, people?' Before this question's impassioned phrasing compels equally strong responses, things turn rhetorical as Satya immediately begins to extemporize. She eventually arrives at a provisional conclusion in the form of a tag question: 'So, it's not that real, in a way, is it?' Despite its interrogative tag, the declarative clause in this question suggests that Satya has made up her mind on the issue: love is not real. Yet she still has the equanimity to hedge even the initial clause with 'that', followed by 'in a way'. This is strikingly nuanced verbal expression for a foundation level student. Alyeh follows Satya's explanation with an Uptake Question which conveys a tentatively expressed but accurate understanding of the latter's extended query: 'Ah okay, so because we can fall in love more than once, it's not real love?' (turn 2). Satya responds with a cluster of further rhetorical questions, with the first two reiterating the source of her confusion. Seemingly deflated by this point, she winds down her Elaborated Explanation with several really softly spoken words. Spoken to nobody in particular, they are almost introspective: 'I mean, are we all just fooling ourselves? Is it all just BS? I mean, I personally don't know. How would I, right? I'm just curious, you know?' While the distinctly personal tone of these last remarks is telling, the suggestiveness of their content characterizes them as fair exemplars of Authentic/High-level Thinking Questions. They have a distinctly generative quality, which could lead easily to novel threads of discussion.

## 7.10 Lesson 14 - Mrs Mahmood

This short story by Segun Afolabi centres on the pensive narratorial musings of the protagonist Mr Mahmood and, perhaps surprisingly, *not* his eponymous wife. This session differed noticeably from others in that it came to resemble something of a therapy session, in which the protagonist was subjected to a collective, if amateur, psychological analysis by our reading circle. That the group’s discussion took on this complexion was not unpredictable as the narrative seems to contrive self-consciously to draw the reader into the workings of the narrator’s mind. As such, the narrative tone is strikingly introspective, even confessional. In the following excerpt, the Big Question under discussion is what kind of person Mr Mahmood is. Satya’s contribution offers another demonstration of her propensity to ask questions as she speaks. In this case, significantly, the questions appear to be part of her actual *process* of reasoning.

1	Cliff	Okay, what do we think of this guy?	AQ
2	Fernao	Neurotic! Seems to have issues?	UT
3	Satya	Hmm, more than that. Okay I’m going to jump and say that I asked myself: if he did not have his wife, would he have ended up killing himself? I really do believe that!	HLQ
4	Shav	Why? Why would he kill himself?	AQ
5	Selena	Yeah, I mean the only thing that made him still want to be alive was his wife.	TR
6	Cliff	Why do you say that? Is it in here?	AQ
7	Selena	Because in the end he says ‘If it came right down to it, if I thought about it clean out, pared back the skin, the tired flesh and arrived at the bones, I realise the one certainty in my life is Isobel’.	TR
8	Satya	And because as we know when we read the story, we know that he missed the chance. Look, he did not pick up the sneakers, he did not go for the competition. And after he saw that Olympic guy, he regretted everything, he regretted the chance that he missed.	EE
9	Selena	Yeah, he felt that he didn’t take the opportunities in life—and that’s what means the difference between an ignorant and a naive.	HLR

10	Satya	But it's not that he just missed an opportunity. I mean, don't all of us miss opportunities? We do, right? No, he actually believed in himself but for some reason he was afraid. So he knows that if he went back he could have become something. But he didn't. So in a way he takes responsibility for his own failure.	EE HLQ
11	Fernao	I agree. I still don't think he would kill himself though.	RW
12	Satya	But taking responsibility for his failure is just the first step, right? What do you do when you know you failed, and accept you failed? Is that it, is that the hardest part? Maybe. Then the harder part is decide what to do next, right? But how do you go on, how do you face people? For this guy, how do you face yourself? So if he finds he can't, maybe then he'll off himself [whistles].	EE HLQ
13	Fernao	[laughing] <b>Off</b> himself? Mr Mahmood isn't The Godfather and you're not a mafia guy, you know!	IQ SKQ

Fernao answers my opening Authentic Question with a spontaneous exclamation, which is in fact a fairly accurate perception of Mr Mahmood's character (turn 2). His subsequent remark is broader and more cautious, and implicitly invites further detailed response. Satya takes up this invitation enthusiastically, appraising Mr Mahmood in a typically self-assured, immoderate way: 'Okay I'm going to jump ... if he did not have his wife, would he have ended up killing himself?' (turn 3). Framing this High-level Question rhetorically can be inferred to serve at least three subtle but effective functions: it introduces Satya's general stance on the issue; it equips her with a safety net—or an avenue of retreat—should her interpretation be implausible; and it provides firm leverage to drive home her point: 'I really do believe that!' Shav's response to Satya's overdrawn theorizing is, understandably, one of incredulity.

A curious development then occurs; Selena seems to support Satya on this point, agreeing that 'the only thing that made him still want to be alive was his wife' (turn 5). This is interesting mainly because Selena, quite unlike Satya, is usually careful not to overstate her views on any topic. Their agreement on this occasion prompts an accumulation of dialogic exchanges spanning turns 7-12, which result in a single comprehensive argument delivered by two participants, a stellar spell of interthinking (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). In response to my Authentic Question seeking an explanation

in case I had missed a textual reference bolstering Satya's initial exaggerated claim, Selena quickly locates and reads out the supporting quote (turn 7). It turns out not to be very strong evidence for their joint inference. Perhaps sensing this, Satya follows Selena's citation by recalling relevant narrative details: 'Look, he did not pick up the sneakers, he did not go for the competition. And after he saw that Olympic guy, he regretted everything, he regretted the chance that he missed' (turn 8). This encourages a further contribution from Selena, which includes a tantalizing observation: '... the difference between an ignorant and a naive'. Unfortunately for the group, this difference never gets explained.

Satya then extends the argument past Mr Mahmood's regrets, beyond the idea 'that he just missed an opportunity' (turn 10). Again framing her thoughts rhetorically, she asks the group: '... don't all of us miss opportunities? We do, right?' These simple but High-level Thinking Questions allow her to fulfil two objectives. One is to personalize the issue, which tends to increase an argument's persuasiveness by appealing to the listener's emotions, particularly those motivated by personal interests (Walton, 1992b). The other is to signal a departure from the current point under analysis, which leaves room to introduce a new one. Having done this, Satya neatly explains her new point: '... if he went back he could have become something. But he didn't' (turn 10). The rhetorical effectiveness of this statement owes much to its form: it is a reduced hypothetical syllogism. However simple its construction, this argument form remains the most important deductive inference pattern in both everyday reasoning and formal logic (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). Of course, syllogisms are schematic renderings of the reasoning process, providing decontextualized and idealized representations of the world. As such, they seldom represent the full range of contextual subtleties of real life, depending rather on the audience's experience for accurate comprehension and evaluation. So while Mr Mahmood's vocational failure is not explicitly expressed in these remarks, the form of the syllogism complemented by the context afforded by both the narrative and personal experience leaves us readers in little doubt of Satya's intention. Even unstated, just the implication of Mahmood's personal inadequacy here delivers a powerfully present conclusion to Satya's point.



My expectation after this last turn was to move on to another topic. But even as he expresses agreement with the account Satya has just given, Fernao is unable to resist questioning Satya's conviction that Mr Mahmood 'would kill himself, though' (turn 11). For some reason, Satya construes Fernao's opinion adversarially, effectively baiting herself into a final argument. Animated and visibly agitated, she picks up directly from her previous comment and begins turn 12 with a series of six consecutive questions, somehow managing in this exposition to vary their forms. The first is rhetorical, followed by two Authentic/High-level Thinking questions. The next three display the same format: one rhetorical question, with the next two Authentic/High-level Thinking. What is remarkable about this interrogative flow is that the answers to Satya's questions seem incorporated into their formulation as well. In addition, all but the last question are general in orientation; the final one hones in on Mr Mahmood's own experience. It is specific, personal, and delivers a dramatic conclusion: 'So if he finds he can't, maybe then he'll off himself' (turn 12).

Another interesting feature of Satya's 'productive outburst' is its genesis and implications for critical thinking. Of the three focal participants, Satya has the most unflappable character, but in this instance Fernao's admittedly snide comment seems to have touched a nerve. This provokes in Satya an impassioned defence of her position, which results in a rapid-fire yet incisive response. What is important in critical thinking terms here is the unexpectedly tense atmosphere which contextualized Satya's impressive sequence of questions. This atmosphere and its results reflect a broader theoretical debate about the potential value of adversariality in the teaching of critical thinking. On one side of the trench are Halx and Reybold (2005), who characterize critical thinking instruction as a 'pedagogy of force'. This is a notion which Hayes (2015, p. 319) adopts and adds to, asserting that such teaching 'tends towards aggression' and fosters classroom conflict as a result. The opposing theoretical camp argues that adversariality, even if not actively sought, is inescapable as it is a constituent component of argumentation and inquiry. As such, it is best addressed and appropriately marshaled. Casey (2020), for example, contends that if argument involves questioning fundamentally personal phenomena such as beliefs, adversariality is not just inevitable but in fact essential to resolving any emergent issues. For critical thinking instruction in

particular, Bailin and Battersby (2021) propose an approach they term *dialectical inquiry*, which advocates a robust confrontation yet open-minded consideration of opposing viewpoints within a collaborative framework. Significantly, the epistemic benefits of collaborative deliberation have been shown to disseminate from groups to individuals (Kuhn & Crowell, 2011; Mercier & Sperber, 2017). The reading circle aligns with the dialectical inquiry approach to critical thinking pedagogy, aiming to cultivate the intellectual virtues of truth-seeking and inquiry through a dynamic but respectful and supportive learning environment. Satya’s notable performance in turn 12 can be considered credible evidence of the benefits of this approach.

### 7.11 Lesson 16 - The Man Who Walked on the Moon

This text was the last in our course. For a narrative pervaded by a haunting bleakness, this story by J.G. Ballard generated an unexpected level of animation in our reading circle. For some reason, the narrative brought out several fairly ‘literary’ interpretations, with the language in many exchanges suffused with more imaginative allusions than usual. The following excerpt came late in the session, with the participants analyzing the narrator’s closing thoughts about his newly-acquired identity. Satya had been relatively quiet for much of the discussion. Perhaps realizing our reading circle sessions were drawing to a close and this was probably her last opportunity to contribute, she suddenly enters the discussion with a decidedly literary appraisal of the issue in question.

1	Cliff	So finally, guys: does he, the narrator, <b>actually believe</b> that he’s an astronaut?	AQ
2	Samir	Haha, he believes in everything!	UT
3	Shav	Yeah, I think at the end he believe_____	UT
4	Selena	Because it’s metonymic—in his mind he became the thing he wanted to be.	HLR
5	Satya	Okay, I think not with the first astronaut, the liar, but with the second one, the narrator. And Cliff, when you say ‘actually believe’, is that really what we should focus on when we think of how he sees himself? Because I really don’t think he lost his mind; I think he’s actually very clear about what’s happening to him. Look, when he said yes I’m an	EE HLQ TR

		astronaut and I walked on the moon, I don't think we should focus on the actual moon. Isn't that like a detour to get readers off track ... yeah, like a distraction? He said here ' <i>those eyes that had seen the void</i> '. You know what I mean? So he saw the emptiness, because obviously when you go to the moon your perspective of space and time, it shifts, it's changing. So maybe when the space and time in his life, his perspective, changes—I mean he says that here—maybe <b>that's</b> why he said he's an astronaut. Not because I walked on the moon but because I have a different perspective than everyone else. He can isolate, he can understand isolation. [general sounds of agreement]	
6	Selena	Yeah yeah yeah, that's right!	UT
7	Shav	This is what I was going to say before!	UT
8	Samir	I think it's completely different! I do agree with this, how you explain yourself, but I think it's not about that. You see when someone comes to question you, when this person have doubt, you're entirely confident. For this guy, that means the tourist is going to believe in your answer 100 percent. If you say yes, you win your life back. It's a circle. No question. Look, here in the last sentence when he says I told him casually, yes I'm the astronaut, that means he's confident.	EE HLR
9	Satya	No no, but they asked him before and he said no. Didn't people actually came to him before all of this and ask him if he was an astronaut? And what did he say? He said no, I'm not. So it's not about the doubt and the confidence, you're just wrong. And yeah yeah, he is confident, yeah. But that's not the question.	TR UT HLR

My Authentic Question in turn 1 queries the narrator's ontologically ambiguous expression of his and Scranton's final circumstances as it is unclear what the narrator now sees as reality. By this point in the story, both the narrator's perception of his own improvised status and Scranton's fabricated identity have merged in his mind: 'Scranton had travelled in space. He had known the loneliness of separation from all other human beings, he had gazed at the empty perspectives that I myself had seen' (Ballard, 2018, p. 337). As can be seen in turns 2-4, all three initial respondents (Samir, Shav and Selena) share a view of the narrator as perhaps slightly delusional, though Selena expresses her opinion in a more sophisticated way lexically.

Satya follows these responses in turn 5 by weighing in with an entirely different interpretation. She begins an Elaborated Explanation by clarifying which character she

will be referring to throughout, namely the narrator. Satya then questions my original question, which held the implied assumption that the narrator had lost touch with reality. Though the tone of her query could be construed in various ways, perhaps even chastizing, I consider it a legitimate challenge to my analytical perspective. This is in keeping with viewpoint diversity as one of the reading circle's key principles. At the outset of the course, members agreed to strive in our discussions not only to endorse the principle but actively pursue its practice. In this spirit, while an atmosphere of respect among participants was prioritized, no subject was exempt from discussion (Duarte et al., 2015). So having contested my opening question, Satya then puts forward her own contrasting claim, which posits the narrator as being 'actually very clear about what's happening to him'. In the process of explaining her view she asks several interesting questions, which appear to serve as self-clarifying prompts confirming what she is trying to convey: 'I don't think we should focus on the actual moon. Isn't that like a detour to get readers off track ... yeah, like a distraction?' As noted in my analysis of 'The Necklace', when explaining her views on texts she has read, Satya tends to literally voice her thoughts as they come to mind. This is not to say she responds without consideration. On the contrary, her responses are usually fairly well thought through; yet they seem to develop more nuance in the process of being articulated. A related peculiarity is that Satya's fluency is seldom constrained, which could be accounted for by her inclination to let her train of thought unravel as she speaks. While this propensity can be beneficial, one of its drawbacks is that it can result in overwrought explanations.

Continuing with Satya's commentary in turn 5: she introduces a timely Textual Reference, which provides some empirical leverage to bolster the persuasiveness of her still unfolding argument: 'He said here "those eyes that had seen the void". You know what I mean?' The rhetorical force of this concluding question consolidates the textual reference and sets up the next part of her argument effectively. What follows in the final few sentences of the turn is a quite remarkable synthesis of textual references, shared knowledge and creative inferences: 'So he saw the emptiness, because obviously when you go to the moon your perspective of space and time, it shifts, it's changing. So maybe when the space and time in his life, his perspective, changes—I mean he says that right here—maybe *that's* why he said he's an astronaut'. Satya's vivid evocation of the

narrator's understanding of 'emptiness' and 'isolation' is explained in terms of the shifting 'space and time' she imagines an astronaut experiences. Her explanation moves almost seamlessly back and forth between her interpretations of narrative events and the various related real-world concepts they evoke. In this way she is able to construct a convincing argument supporting her contention that questioning whether the narrator actually went to the moon is 'a distraction'. For Satya, the narrator's self-perception derives less from having actually 'walked on the moon' than from a grudging, reluctant familiarity with emptiness and loneliness. The uniqueness of his experience gives him 'a different perspective than everyone else'. This, Satya concludes, is why 'He can isolate, he can understand isolation'. This final sentence is met by an eruption of approving though largely unintelligible noises, with Selena and Shav's being the only discernible comments (turns 6 and 7). Suddenly, Samir startles everyone by cutting into the general approbation with a loud shout: 'I think it's completely different!' (turn 8).

Before proceeding with a necessary analysis of Samir's turn, it is worth highlighting a procedural moment which occurred at this point. Although he strongly opposes her interpretation of the narrator's state of mind, Samir makes a point of recognizing the strength of Satya's explanation: 'I do agree with this, how you explain yourself, but I think it's not about that'. From my perspective as a researcher, observing such a gesture even at this late stage of the course is rewarding. It confirms the effectiveness of the ground rules agreed on at the very outset of the project, one of which was that participants should strive to maintain a congenial atmosphere.

I return now to Samir's turn, presented as a counterpoint to Satya's performance. As the other students begin to regroup and settle, Samir begins a High-level Thinking Response, sharply countering Satya's creative critique with a rather more pragmatic analysis of his own. It is necessary immediately to qualify the 'High-level' component of Samir's full response as inconsistent; his thinking in this turn was of a high level only sporadically. That said, his interpretation centres on *how* the narrator responds to the tourist's query; the more confidently the narrator replies, in Samir's view, the more easily he will be believed. Ostensibly, the logic is insuperable: 'If you say yes, you win your life back. It's a circle. No question'. His point is strongly asserted and, on the face of it, appears a fair

one to make. The argumentative fragility of the first statement in this response, however, lies in the fact that it is a robust assertion and nothing more. In its grammatical form, it is a simple zero conditional sentence; in syllogistic form, it lacks a minor premise and is therefore incomplete. In conversation, arguments with missing premises (called enthymemes in formal logic) are more common than not, and are not in themselves fallacious. Viewed as such, a constructive assessment of this response would grant that at the very least it offers an alternative perspective of the issue under consideration. However, the most that can be said about this claim is that it is an intuitive inference confidently expressed (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). As noted in the prefatory remarks to the analysis of 'On Her Knees' (see Lesson 8), an enthusiastic assertion does not constitute even the necessary, let alone sufficient, conditions for a cogent argument. To properly satisfy standard critical thinking criteria, Samir would have needed to produce a comprehensive *reasoned* inference: that is, an appropriate interpretation drawn from the textual evidence, supported by reasons plausible in that context (Walton, 2001). In this case the context is the transactional dialectic which prevails between text, reader and reading circle. To his credit, Samir manages this in his final remark, drawing a reasoned inference (indicated by the reasoning term 'that means') from a well-chosen Textual Reference: 'Look, here in the last sentence when he says I told him casually, yes I'm the astronaut, that means he's confident'.

Too often in this turn, though, Samir's inferences do not rise to the level of even inductive reasoning, where probability is the standard. They can therefore quite fairly be evaluated as consisting of the less persuasive elements of abductive reasoning. Admittedly, Harman's (1965, pp. 88-89) seminal conceptualization of abduction as 'inference to the best explanation' seems a favourable perception of the construct. Less generously, however, Walton (2001) characterizes abductive inference as informed conjecture. Without being too severe, I think Walton's description fits Samir's assertions in this instance: the latter's claims are implausible because the narrative evidence from which they derive does not reasonably support them. In colloquial expression, they are 'far-fetched'. This is not to say they are worthless; on the contrary, all discursive contributions are beneficial in the context of a reading circle. But Samir's statements, as with all exchanges, are being evaluated in this study as putative instantiations of critical

thinking. In these terms, Samir's inferences justifiably appear 'fallible and conjectural' (Walton, 2001, p. 143). This may explain why his fellow participants find his claims hard to believe. Overall, then, Samir's is a relatively weak contribution, consisting as it does of repetitive, stunted assertions which fall well short of elevating his Elaborated Explanation to a standard sufficiently plausible to persuade his audience.

Satya is quick to recognize this. Buoyed by the favourable reception of her argument in the previous turn, her confidence has increased visibly, and with it her hubris. Unfortunately, this emerges in an abrupt rejoinder to Samir's final words: 'No no, but they asked him before and he said no!' (turn 9). Satya's unusually brusque response escapes nobody's attention. Not oblivious to the reaction her riposte has caused, she immediately softens her tone, with her next utterances taking the form of quiet questions which I infer are meant to defuse the tension: 'Didn't people actually come to him before all of this and ask him if he was an astronaut? What did he say? He said no, I'm not'. Despite their conciliatory tone, however, it is immediately obvious from the content of these questions—and the summary answer—that Satya has still not backed down from her initial sentiment. Indeed, the questions include a Textual Reference clearly intended to remind Samir of a narrative detail which pointedly undermines his assertions, while continuing to reinforce Satya's argument. While her usual means of persuasion are creative inference and discursive charisma (her *ethos*, in Aristotelian terms) the effectiveness of this response is of the most straightforward and unambiguous kind: the appeal to logic (or *logos*) (Diestler, 2012). Satya does this by simply citing irrefutable textual evidence. Continuing to her conclusion, however, she is again unnecessarily severe: 'So it's not about the doubt and the confidence; you're just wrong'. She then seems unable in her closing remarks to resist delivering a backhanded concession: 'And yeah yeah, he is confident, yeah. But that's not the question'.

It is uncomfortably obvious that Satya puts on a slightly waspish performance in this final turn; thankfully, though, it is a rare display. That she is able to articulate her own position so convincingly while equally incisively critiquing a contradictory perspective cannot be overlooked. This is due in part to her linguistic facility in English. More relevant

to the aims of this thesis, it is evidence of a fast-developing critical-analytic capacity, as well as a growing confidence in exercising it.

### **7.12 Evaluation of Satya's Critical Thinking Development**

As has been indicated in the preceding analysis, Satya's capacity for critical thinking appeared to develop notably in several ways over the duration of the course. This improvement was attributable to several factors, of which the most conducive were her personal traits. Satya's relentless willingness to inquire (Hamby, 2015) stood out in this respect, and this quality was complemented by her fearlessness in making mistakes or indeed discovering that certain of her established beliefs may have been mistaken. Another key attribute was simply her deep intrinsic interest in learning for its own sake. As to the contextual influence of the reading circle, what seemed unfailingly to augment Satya's natural sense of inquiry and argumentation was the robustness of the transactional dialectic shared by this particular group of participants. The atmosphere was at once respectful and collaborative, yet charged: one could not get away with a throwaway comment without it being detected and challenged. Satya thrived amidst the ebullience of these exchanges. The following commentary summarizes and evaluates her critical thinking performance in each session analyzed.

Almost from the beginning of Lesson 1 (Mr Salary - Part 1), it was evident that Satya generally asked more questions than the other participants in the reading circle. This was not really surprising to me since I had seen her exhibit this propensity in other standard EAP classes we had shared previously. What was interesting from an analytical perspective were the kinds of questions she asked: at the very least they were often interestingly framed. This was true of her first question in this excerpt and many like it which followed. Framing as conceptualized by Kahneman and Tversky (2000) refers originally to decision-making in the domain of behavioural economics, and describes the particular way an issue is linguistically configured and presented and the resulting change in perception and response. More broadly conceived, it is readily applicable to other situations, including dialogic transactions in a discussion group such as ours (Kuhn & Modrek, 2021). In this first excerpt, the inference I drew from Satya's question was that it seemed framed to elicit interest from her fellows. Perhaps her phrasing and



diction struck me as unusual simply because her question sought answers to a situation I considered prosaic. It was then and remains unclear to me how conscious Satya was of her practice of reframing familiar ideas to make them appear novel again in some respect. However, it was something I noticed she did frequently.

This habit, coupled with a propensity to resist predictable patterns and stock responses, indicated her approach to reading was strategic and guided by epistemic vigilance (Reichl, 2009). It also evoked the concept of *defamiliarization*, originally introduced by the Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky to describe a literary device which compels the reader to critically examine overly familiar characters and events with the explicit aim of perceiving them in a new light, and thus of interpreting them afresh (Bell et al., 2005). Defamiliarization is an element of the broader literary notion of *foregrounding*, which refers to the range of stylistic variations in literature (phonetic, grammatical and semantic) whose objective is to distinguish literary from everyday expression. The uncommon linguistic variation induced by foregrounding leads to the text being defamiliarized. According to Miall and Kuiken (1994, p. 392), this is a complex process which amounts to difficult cognitive work for the reader, as defamiliarization also generates feeling; and it is this affective response to the text which guides ‘refamiliarizing’ efforts at interpretation. Defamiliarization has been employed more widely than literary theory, including by sociologists Timmermans and Tavory (2012; 2022) as a novel approach to data coding in qualitative research. Indeed, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, the current study has also drawn on this aspect of Timmermans and Tavory’s approach to abductive analysis.

Satya’s habit of reframing ideas also recalls Sandel’s (2009b) observation about the effects of studying philosophy: ‘Once the familiar turns strange, once we begin to reflect on our circumstance, it’s never quite the same again. This is the tension that animates critical reflection and political improvement and maybe even the moral life as well’. Both Sandel’s statement and defamiliarization then are fair, if partial, explanations of what motivated Satya as a student in and out of the reading circle: she never tired of asking interesting questions, often philosophical in nature, about familiar issues—to the extent that she (and we) inevitably encountered aspects of those issues not routinely explored.

The tendency to follow a line of inquiry towards areas of unfamiliarity which often test epistemological boundaries is characteristic of someone imbued with a critical spirit (Siegel, 1988; 2017) and that quality was certainly discernible in Satya, in this excerpt and others.

However, neither a proclivity to deeper inquiry nor a high level of intelligence can obviate errors in judgement. All of the three analyzed excerpts from Lessons 1 and 2 revealed a distinctive weakness in Satya's reasoning capacity and thus in her critical thinking: her typical response to encountering problems was intuitively to rush to judgement. Her impulsive urge to resolve uncertainty as quickly as possible often tempted her to accept what seemed ostensibly the most coherent or familiar—cognitively, the most easily accessible—explanation of events. According to Kahneman (2011), explanatory coherence bears a strong correlation to cognitive ease or strain: the more coherent an explanation (or 'familiar' a situation), the fewer demands made on cognitive processing. So the less cognitive strain there is to contend with, the easier the explanation is to accept. Analogously, the more familiar a situation seems, the greater the cognitive ease. Another corollary of this phenomenon, and one directly applicable to Satya's impetuosity in making rash judgements, is the following: the more familiar something appears, the harder it is to discern its veracity, so the easier it is to believe. In Kahneman's (2011, p. 62) words, 'familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth'. This tendency to draw hasty conclusions from intuitive inferences gives rise to illusions of remembering and illusions of truth, for example, and such errors are predictable if judgements derive from one's impression of cognitive ease or strain. It turns out then that Satya's particular compulsion to the swiftest and most expedient resolution of problems is entirely natural.

However, Taleb (2007) argues that just such behaviour represents a flaw in cognition which often results in the commission of the *narrative fallacy*. This refers to an innate trait in humans to narrativize past knowledge and experience in an attempt to make sense of the present and shape predictions of the future. Invariably, these stories are recalled inaccurately and applied subjectively and thus are only imperfect versions of understanding. They result inevitably in illusions of remembering and truth. That Satya's

initial impressions of situations encountered in the reading circle were often informed by such narrativized perceptions of coherence and familiarity was not a problem in itself. It was that she depended uncritically on these tenuous interpretations to assert many of her claims. Stanovich (2011) calls this unwillingness to check one's intuitions a cognitive 'laziness', a flaw in the reflective mind. Kahneman (2011, p. 244) sounds a similar cautionary note on yielding—with conviction but without reflection—to intuitive inference: 'subjective confidence is a poor index of the accuracy of a judgment'. This observation highlights another common fallacy, *overconfidence*, which is an unwarranted self-assurance in one's understanding of an issue or circumstance in the face of limited evidence. This was certainly evident in Satya's responses in the selected excerpts. While she was unfailingly assertive when delivering opinions and adroit at bolstering them with persuasive rhetoric, Satya's confidence in her own understanding of the issue under consideration was illusory. It did not necessarily reflect the truth of the issue, nor did it lead her to accurate conclusions. In the first two sessions at least then, the related elements of impetuous judgement and overconfidence presented a barrier to Satya's critical thinking development.

The next analyzed session (Lesson 4 - The Necklace) revealed two interesting aspects of Satya's process of thinking. The first was in Excerpt A, where she appeared to be working out her perspective on the issue in question as she was speaking. This was not the only instance of Satya organizing her thoughts 'on the hoof' as it were; another significant example of this occurred in Lesson 14 - Mrs Mahmood. Such a response as occurred in this excerpt is a salient demonstration of the effect of collaborative reasoning on individual reasoning. The possible answers to the question in play were not obvious, so while other participants were attempting to glean some insights from the sparse information in the text, I did observe Satya listening to them; yet amidst the bustle of conversation, she chose for a while to reflect on the question alone. There is much empirical evidence to suggest that individual perspectives are moderated, refined, enhanced and often revised when they are exposed to a range of different viewpoints (e.g. Sloman & Fernbach, 2018; Surowiecki, 2004). Such changes are more likely to take place with dynamic expression of viewpoint diversity, where exposure to diverse opinions involves active participation in a discursive context conducive to exploratory

talk and interthinking (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). Changes in perspective occur even more readily in discursive forums oriented towards a particular objective, including political think tanks, academic seminars or indeed, literature discussion groups (Kuhn, 2015; 2018; Reznitskaya et al., 2009). In light of such arguments, it is no surprise that Satya's main responses in this session took the form of rhetorical questions expressed very cautiously. Articulating her thoughts in this way seemed to serve a dual purpose: personally, to navigate her way through new unfamiliar ideas and more publicly, to present them for other participants to consider and evaluate.

Excerpt B presented a second notable aspect of Satya's process of reasoning, namely her unexpected aversion to the idea that, in literary text interpretation, the author and the narrator could be viewed as discrete figures. This was a kind of *imaginative resistance*, a cognitive phenomenon which sees someone with an otherwise capacious imagination experience difficulty participating in an activity which requires imagination (Gendler & Liao, 2016). As noted in the analysis, Satya appeared to understand my analogy illustrating the potential for author and narrator to occupy different ontological spaces and roles but then, surprisingly, she actively eschewed that idea. Drawing inferences from recursive reviews of the audiovisual recording as well as the transcribed text of Satya's own explanation in defence of her stance, I analyzed her response in terms of Piaget's (1977) notion of cognitive disequilibrium. To reinforce this analysis of Satya's repudiation of possibilities beyond those already seemingly entrenched in her mind—in other words, her choosing not to think critically—I turn to a further theoretical reference: McPeck's (1981; 1990) argument for the importance of broad and deep domain knowledge in developing critical thinking. Predicated on the observation that the criteria for reason evaluation vary from one discipline to another, McPeck's thesis can be summarized thus: the more one knows about one's discipline, the more effective one's critical thinking about it will be. While a specifist or generalist approach to critical thinking has become a matter for theorists to decide on individually, McPeck's specifist case for comprehensive disciplinary knowledge has been persuasive, and is a principle now accepted as essential by the critical thinking research community.

Against this theoretical background, it is clear that Satya's knowledge of literary analysis was limited, as she had not previously encountered the notion of author-versus-narrator. Despite this, what caught me slightly off-guard was her vehement reluctance in this instance to accept the distinction between the two, given that she had been easily the most receptive of the participants to novel ideas up to this point. This contradiction suggests once again that good thinking is not intuitive but rather deliberate and effortful; even those naturally disposed to engaging with new ideas, like Satya, encounter epistemic barriers which they may find difficult at first to confront and overcome.

There is an additional feature of interest in Excerpt B. It provides a simple but illustrative example of how intuitive and even more reflective inferences about moral judgement—such as Satya's—are increasingly understood to operate in social psychology. The lens through which such moral behaviour is analyzed and evaluated is known as the *social intuitionism* model, conceived and developed by Jonathan Haidt (2001; 2013a; 2013b). In a word, judgements usually come first, followed by justifications. That is to say, we construct reasons to substantiate *ex post facto* justifications of already decided conclusions. This approach to reasoning is teleological in the sense that it starts with an established belief or judgement and works retrogressively from that point to discern reasons suitable to justify the judgement. Teleological reasoning is derived from Aristotle's concept of *telos*, which can be translated as *purpose, end, or essential nature* (Crisp, 2014). Mercier and Sperber (2017, p. 112) put it succinctly: 'The main role of reasons is not to motivate or guide us in reaching conclusions but to explain and justify *after the fact* the conclusions we have reached' (my emphasis). This account runs contrary to the commonly held misapprehension that we usually reach conclusions from a bank of reasons we somehow possess beforehand. Needless to say, the provisionality or permanence of such conclusions depends on the circumstances in which they are expressed. Beliefs or judgements expressed in everyday conversational arguments, for instance, are particularly susceptible to being undermined. In this context, Walton (1998; 2006) contends that the truth or falsity of even established judgements are presumptive. What this means for an advocate of such judgements is that his beliefs are always subject to re-evaluation as new information, whether conducive or

contradictory, appears. For an interlocutor, the contingency of such judgements or even lines of reasoning, founded as they are on evolving and thus provisional knowledge, contributes to their defeasibility.

For all their conspicuous funniness (if one finds it amusing to witness invective directed at people who may deserve such treatment), Satya's responses in the excerpt from Lesson 6 (Paste) display an incisiveness about her judgement of literary text which, in my view, can only be activated and optimized if certain elements are present. Three such interconnected elements relate to this session: Satya's *interest* in the story, her high-level *comprehension* of it, and her *linguistic proficiency* in comprehending the narrative and responding to it. With regard to the first element, a reader's level of interest in a given text would seem a fairly reliable predictor of how astutely the narrative is likely to be apprehended, things being relatively equal. In such a scenario, where uncertainties about characters, issues or events arose, a keen reader would make an effort to do what was necessary to clarify those questions to their satisfaction. This is what I observed in Satya's responses in this session: her genuine interest in the story and particularly in the antagonist, Arthur Prime, went a fair way to informing her penetrating perception of his character. Indeed, this interest functioned to supplement the second aspect of Satya's critical literary judgement, her overall comprehension of the text. This is noteworthy because of all the texts examined during the course, 'Paste' was probably the most linguistically challenging read for the participants (based on their own oral feedback). Understandably, Henry James's meandering sentences, fragmented into numerous subordinate clauses, would be difficult going for most L2 students. However, based on just the few contributions she made to the session, Satya appeared to understand the story very well.

What contributed significantly to her high-level textual comprehension was the third element of analytical acuity, her linguistic proficiency. More than any of the other participants, Satya possessed the linguistic aptitude, vividly evident in this brief excerpt, to comprehend relatively advanced English *and* articulate her thoughts in response. Dialogic transactions with both the text and the group appeared not only to enhance her linguistic expression, but the very process of expressing her thoughts seemed to

hone her individual reasoning. This relates to important findings noted earlier that learners with higher linguistic proficiency appear to derive greater overall gains than lower-level learners in collaborative settings (Webb, 1989; 1992; Webb & Palincsar, 1996). In short, ‘having more language’ confers multiple benefits, not only cognitively (in comprehension and thinking) but verbally (in argument quality). Satya’s tendency to use speaking almost as a vehicle to thinking is a point I have made about her performance several times in this thesis (see my analysis of Lesson 8, for example). This does not necessarily imply that the other two focal participants’ critical thinking development was unduly compromised by their relatively low English proficiency levels—indeed, I make this argument in discussing literary reasoning later in this section. There were of course times when certain words or expressions arose which did impede individuals’ immediate comprehension. However, such instances were minor and exceptional, and thus negligible; and any semantic challenges of this kind were quickly resolved by the collaborative input of reading circle members. My general point is that Satya had a rare combination of qualities conducive to critical thinking development.

The excerpt analyzed in Lesson 8 (On Her Knees) fulfilled the essential criteria of an Elaborated Explanation: it was an extended discursive turn which explicated a single idea through a detailed construction of coherent supporting statements (Webb & Palincsar, 1996). What was significant about this excerpt is how astutely Satya combined thorough textual knowledge with her personal experience to generate a persuasive discourse in response to the initial Big Question. A useful lens through which to evaluate this explanation—and indeed this whole lesson—in terms of critical thinking is the notion of *transaction*, seminally conceptualized by Dewey (1997) and modified by Rosenblatt (1969; 1978/1994; 1938/2016). Dewey posited the learning process in terms of a relationship between the individual (the knower) and the environment (the known). The comprehensive experience of engaging actively with one’s environment constitutes a dynamic transaction which results in meaningful experiential learning. For Dewey, all processes of inquiry involve transactions, the elements of which are engaged in continuously evolving associative activity which incorporates mind and body, subject and object, and self and environment, to varying degrees. Rosenblatt (1969) extended this theory to the dynamics of the reading process, arguing primarily for transactional

variability between reader and text. Every reading event, according to Rosenblatt, generates an almost limitless range of interpretive flexibility as, in their new transactions, both reader and text assume new characteristics generated by the environment. Essential to both conceptualizations is the pervasive influence of *experience*: Rosenblatt followed Dewey in highlighting the epistemic significance of subjective experience in learning development. With respect to the process of reading, since experience is wholly personal, textual interpretation is uniquely informed by the constant, nuanced shifting of the reader's 'habits, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs' (Connell, 1996, p. 404).

To what extent then did Satya's personal experience influence her perspective when challenged by my Authentic/High-level Thinking Question to respond to the story 'On Her Knees'? And how did her English language level and reasoning ability mediate her response: did they enhance or compromise her observations? Even though we were halfway through the course by that time, it was exceptional for a student to launch into an extended turn this close to the start of a session. The Big Question for this session was prosaically framed and quite neutrally delivered; I did this deliberately with the aim of merely activating learners' schemata and incipient thoughts on the issue. Gauging the already intense level of feeling in the group, I had hoped this low-key introduction would generate a few calm and reflective contributions before emotions inevitably intensified and, consequently, impaired participants' reasoning. Yet there seemed enough in the question to tap into something in Satya's experience which elicited not just a simple claim or proposition but a compelling Elaborated Explanation. Satya managed in the course of her explanation to exhibit Cottrell's (2017) key criteria for argument in critical thinking: a strong stance teasingly suggested at the outset but fully articulated in the conclusion; true premises predicated on first-hand experience which provided plausible support for her conclusion; and overall, a clear intention to persuade. In short, what my analysis sought to foreground was that Satya had presented a cogent inductive argument which demonstrated another notable instance of critical thinking.

Lesson 10 (Track) was one of those sessions which struggle to get off the ground. Perhaps the bleakness of the narrative and the reserve of the characters contributed to



the lethargic atmosphere in the reading circle as there were few exchanges in the early stages of this discussion which evinced critical thinking of any note, an observation I made in the analysis. But this in itself was not unexpected: while impulses towards criticality may be sparked by intuitive inferences in most discursive situations, reflective thought is seldom sustained on the back of critical impulses alone. On the contrary, reflection which leads to critical thinking is a consciously effortful, deliberative enterprise. The Elaborated Explanation in this excerpt, when it came, therefore reintroduced a semblance of depth and sophistication into the discussion which served in turn to reinvigorate subsequent dialogic exchanges and lighten the mood. Satya's delivery was measured from the outset and, even at that point, she seemed to have her entire explanation geared towards gradual, considered elucidation. As ever, several rhetorical questions framed her response at moments judiciously positioned to not just maintain but in fact strengthen the flow of her argument. The motif undergirding Satya's account was that of change, and she referred to that concept in at least two ways. One was in literal terms, as she spoke to the process of reading the text from beginning to end and the change that endeavour induces in the reader: '... we're readers, we read the whole story, we see how things go'. This observation can be interpreted as follows: what I as a reader perceive at the start of a narrative cannot be what I perceive at its end, owing to what I will have experienced through my reading of the text. The other impression of change indicated by Satya bore a literary complexion, and appeared to describe the evolutionary nature of not only this story, but of *story* itself: the state which characters and events inhabit and exhibit at the beginning of a fictional narrative is not the state they inhabit and exhibit at the end: 'Isn't that one of the things of the story', Satya asks, 'to show how things change?' These ostensibly simple observations were made in support of a more important point: that the protagonist did not love her boyfriend. Yet these were anything but simple statements; what we actually witnessed was a multi-layered, ratiocinative exposition, persuasively delivered.

My analysis of the excerpt from Lesson 12 (White Nights) highlighted the increasing astuteness and critical-analytic quality of Satya's questions and high-level comprehension around the texts we examined. An even closer examination reveals that her entire Elaborated Explanation, consisting of both turns 1 and 3, was actually a single

extended Authentic Question. Satya's initial query revealed her epistemic limits (Ballantyne, 2019) on the nuances of love. Conceding that the philosophical paradox confounded her, she managed to elucidate its essential elements by describing hypothetical scenarios suffused with authentic real-world detail. Interesting again was her apparent utilization of speaking as a means of clarifying her thoughts on the extant issue. These ideas were mostly expressed as counterfactuals through the use of several conditional if-clauses. In this way, Satya managed to convey the specifics of her confusion via creatively fabricated vignettes. This worked effectively: because her language was simply yet coherently expressed, the message she conveyed was understandable. Impressively, Satya's interrogative propensity appeared to generate no less critical-analytic questioning about this literary text with its strongly affective focus than might have been prompted by an expository text featuring academic content. This observation reinforces the governing pedagogical assumption of my thesis: that essential elements of critical thinking (including inference, analysis, evaluation and synthesis) can be cultivated in the productive reading and discussion of texts, regardless of genre. More importantly, these elements are potentially transferable to varying degrees across disciplinary contexts. Crucial to achieving such outcomes is creating an environment conducive to open dialogue, in which participants feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints candidly and respectfully (Miller, 2003). In this way, they are exposed at minimal personal risk to the widest range of perspectives. What is generally fostered in such educational settings is students' critical thinking dispositions, where any intrinsic interest in truth-seeking is gradually encouraged to further exploration of issues beyond their usual boundaries.

Lesson 14 (Mrs Mahmood) saw the most powerful demonstration yet of Satya's ability to use questions as vectors of persuasion. Particularly effective in this respect was the range of rhetorical tools Satya employed, which began with her by now characteristic use of polemical expression. Whether or not Satya's contribution in this turn resulted in a cogent argument in the strictest terms of inductive reasoning is no doubt worth further analysis. Given the research aims of this thesis, however, Satya's rhetorical proficiency here took precedence over her straight argument skills for the simple reason that her expression in this turn was not empty rhetoric, but was in fact imbued with a high level

of criticality. Satya's questions in the final turn were the very definition of High-level Thinking Questions in that they were all capable of eliciting reflective inferences from her audience (Mercier & Sperber, 2017), and of leading to generalization, analysis and speculation (Nystrand et al., 2003). More than that, they were exemplars of inferential reasoning. The questions were therefore at least as important for their critical content as they were for their rhetorical dexterity. Overall, this session was distinctive for revealing in Satya an already burgeoning capacity for something more than argumentation, in itself a formidable set of skills to learn let alone master. It showed off a formidable flair for extemporaneous reasoning, which seemed sometimes to evolve from cognitive genesis to verbal expression in an effortless *flow* (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, for a full exposition of this optimal state of being). By integrating critical content and creative rhetorical delivery, Satya displayed a diaphanous clarity of thought which then poured forth in a 'rhetoric of argumentative invention' (Billig, 1996, p. 3).

The final session selected for analysis of Satya's critical thinking development was Lesson 16 (The Man Who Walked on the Moon). Satya's Elaborated Explanation in this excerpt was notable for at least two reasons. The first was her confidence in challenging the focus of my opening question. Shyer students would have balked at what may have seemed an audacious move (a glance at a few participants' faces appeared to confirm this inference), but my main impression of Satya's response at the time was a kind of 'teacherly pride'. I realized that her query sought not to undermine my question per se, but rather the assumption on which it was predicated—in football parlance, she was playing the ball, not the man. Her reconfiguration of the essence of the question itself seemed almost casual, yet it was clear from the detail of her response that much thought had preceded the utterance. In critical thinking terms, this was an impressive instance of reasoning in action and indeed as close as I would come to discerning—and on that basis claiming—a causal link between thinking and behaviour (see Section 4.2.1 for a discussion on issues of causation around cognition and behaviour). Satya's particular response here reflected a key criterion of Cottrell's (2017) skills approach to critical thinking, which stipulates that no discipline is sacrosanct or above inquiry. Considered more generally, Satya's questioning disposition is a distinctive feature of McPeck's (1981; 1990) conceptualization of critical thinking as reflective scepticism.

While Satya's overall propensity to inquire was certainly characteristic of Satya as an individual, I would argue that this intellectual virtue was also the inevitable outcome of months of active participation in a situated learning environment, namely the reading circle. The sustained dialogic engagement fostered by the circle made for a familiar environment in which participants felt increasingly comfortable responding at length and in-depth to any issues which arose in discussion (Pally, 1997; 2000). As this instance shows, that level of comfort extended to questioning even the epistemological foundations of each other's questions. So while her expression was not very clear, Satya succeeded in querying the underlying assumption of my question and then shifting it slightly but unmistakably to an alternative focus in order to accommodate the implications of her perspective. Evaluated in terms of argumentation, this was in fact a bold and strategically valid move.

The other noteworthy aspect of Satya's performance in this excerpt was her literary reasoning (Lee & Goldman, 2015). From the middle of turn 5, Satya's critical-analytic evaluation of the issue under discussion reflected Langer's (2011) observation that literature broadens the capacity of readers to think about the world and their experience of it. Such a capacity, which I allude to in my analysis of this excerpt, is demonstrated in Satya's 'remarkable synthesis of textual references, shared knowledge and creative inferences'. This synthesis played out thus: Satya appeared to draw on her knowledge of the processes of reading literature and combine this knowledge with her broader experience of the world in order to attain the most reasonable and satisfying interpretation of the narrative. She then used this disparately sourced interpretation to solve the ill-structured problem of the narrator's self-perception which arose from my Authentic Question.

Lee et al. (2016) refer to such a process of literary text comprehension as *epistemic cognition in literary reasoning*. This is a complex process of understanding which encompasses 'the reasoning processes, beliefs, and values that enter into interpretation of the knowledge' (Lee et al., 2016, p. 165) transmitted in and understandable from literary works. Essentially, literary reasoning employs additional cognitive resources (such as imagination) to those typically involved in logical reasoning. Where literary

reasoning and logical reasoning may understandably be thought to be significantly different cognitive processes (e.g. Langer, 2011), my contention is that they differ only in scope and application. In terms of scope, literary reasoning is wider as it can draw on cognitive elements such as imagination and emotion to substantiate its claims. Application refers to the divergent practical purposes for which both kinds of reasoning may be utilized. In the case of reading and the cognitive processes involved in interpreting text, for example, how textual interpretation is put to work is where differences can emerge. Scope and application notwithstanding therefore, it follows that if both an expository and a literary text are exploited for the same educational aims, say improving textual analysis and evaluation through dialogic discussion, such an endeavour presses into service very similar cognitive processes. This is my thesis, and it aligns with Byrne's (2005), which postulates that thoughts generated by the imagination are governed by the same principles and even mechanisms as those arising from rationality. It also provides the best explanation for the seamless way in which Satya's response in this final Elaborated Explanation combined textual knowledge, personal experience, and counterfactual imagination to construct a sophisticated literary analysis. Based on her fellows' spontaneous applause and praise, she could not have delivered her argument more convincingly.

Satya's critical thinking development in the reading circle was largely a tale of two dominant but competing features: exceptional comprehension versus erratic judgement. Both of these cognitive elements were evinced quite clearly in discussion and as such were interpreted, through abductive and pragmatics inference, to a credible level of accuracy. Satya's aptitude for comprehension was aided by her enthusiasm for inquiry and her capacity to think 'outside the box'. This ability was supported by her vivid imagination; she would regularly surprise the group with novel ideas, apparently tangential but somehow related to the issue in question. Yet it was precisely this imaginative capacity which led Satya frequently to leap to wildly inappropriate conclusions—and audaciously claim epistemic validity for those. In terms of Kuhn's (1999) developmental conceptualization of critical thinking, Satya's inclination to allow for all possible premises and conclusions locates her in the second of three stages of critical thinking development. Kuhn characterizes people at this stage as taking a

*multiplist* (or relativist) epistemological stance. At its simplest, this can be viewed as the idea that 'because all people have a right to their opinions, all opinions are equally right' (Kuhn, 1999, p. 22). Of course, such judgements by Satya in the reading circle were usually driven by her provocative sense of humour and corresponding tendency if confronted with a conundrum to choose the polemical over the sensible option.

However, Satya's naturally interrogative habit of mind and propensity for truth-seeking overcame her roguish tendencies more often than not. In these situations, she exhibited characteristics typical of an *evaluativist* thinker, someone who at the most basic level engages in efforts to improve their thinking simply because they recognize the intrinsic value of good thinking. This is Kuhn's (1999) most evolved category of critical thinking development. An evaluativist is a person who acknowledges epistemological uncertainty yet has the intellectual curiosity, confidence and resolve to evaluate every situation on its own merit yet within its appropriate context, with a view to achieving the most desirable decision or action. In other words, an evaluativist is a genuine critical thinker, not least because they appreciate that their own course of development is never complete. Of all the participants in the reading circle, Satya displayed this potential most conspicuously.

## CHAPTER 8 - Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters have provided an analysis of the data as well as a comprehensive discussion of the study's findings. As such, this thesis ends with a relatively brief synoptic chapter, starting with a recapitulation of the key outcomes of my study. Drawing on insights from these findings, I briefly discuss the implications for EAP pedagogy and outline some of the study's limitations. The thesis concludes with suggestions for profitable future research.

EAP is typically conceptualized and practised as a utilitarian endeavour. The discipline's pedagogical remit thus construed imposes undue limitations on its creative potential in the classroom. Given these pragmatic constraints, the main purpose of this research project has been to explore the efficacy of an unconventional pedagogical approach to EAP, an aim introduced in Chapter 1. This approach comprised the following key components:

- educational setting: an EAP foundation university class
- principal aim: to explore the potential for critical thinking development
- primary materials: literary texts
- methodological approach: practitioner research
- mode of instruction: dialogic discussion in a reading circle

The unconventionality of my approach refers mainly to the principal aim and the primary materials. While critical thinking is an expected outcome in EAP courses, it is seldom explicitly or systematically taught. Neither does literature feature as a common classroom resource. Another component rarely found in a typical EAP class is a reading circle, although this mode of instruction does seem slowly to be gaining traction in various guises (e.g. Bloome et al., 2020; Hall, 2015). An increasingly popular discussion format in EAP classrooms is the *academic reading circle* (ARC), introduced by Seburn (2016). While Seburn's ARCs are closer in configuration to that of literature circles (as developed by Daniels, 2002; 2006), they inevitably rely on the reading and discussion of

academic expository texts. The current study focuses on literary texts as a vehicle towards critical thinking development.

It is important to re-emphasize that my pedagogical approach does not assume that general group talk is synonymous with critical thinking. Nor is a causal claim advanced that such discussion leads inevitably and necessarily to critical thinking. Rather, this study's approach has been exploratory: it is predicated on the assumption that productive talk is a fertile site for the cultivation of critical thinking. I have therefore taken the focal participants' verbal contributions to reading circle discussions over the duration of the course as potential evidence of their critical thinking development. Primary interpretation of possible instances of critical thinking evinced by the focal participants has been guided by the discourse features delineated in the Quality Talk rubric, while ancillary interpretation has been informed by abductive analysis and pragmatics analysis.

## **8.2 Conclusions of the Study**

Findings from this study contribute to the extant repository of knowledge in two important ways. First, the outcomes provide insights into ways in which students—exemplified by the focal cases—engaged in productive talk about and around literary texts can develop critical thinking dispositions. Each of the following paragraphs in this section summarizes the key findings with respect to the students' critical thinking development.

The focal participants' argumentative reasoning in expressing their views seemed to have made a considerable improvement by the end of the course. This can generally be seen in an increasing sophistication in reasoning in their Elaborated Explanations. According to Crowell and Kuhn (2014), argumentative reasoning expressed within the dialogic context of a discussion group can be considered a compelling indication of critical thinking. Their findings reflect a significant consensus in the research literature that argumentation is an analogue of critical thinking. On this basis, therefore, the current study can be considered to have achieved its primary aim, which was to explore



ways in which critical thinking developed through dialogic discourse around literary texts.

Exploratory talk (Mercer, 1995) in the collegial setting of the reading circle enhanced individual students' confidence, including that of the focal participants, to express their viewpoints without fear of ridicule or sanction. In this context, participants' confidence was boosted, say, by discovering textual evidence confirming a point of argument or perhaps by other participants sharing their opinion and thereby validating it. Increasing individual confidence led to a willingness to risk expressing even unorthodox perspectives, which prior caution—rooted perhaps in reputational concerns increasingly seen in Generation Z (Haidt, 2022; Twenge, 2017)—might well have curbed. This free and relatively unconstrained expression of ideas generated a prevailing dialogic atmosphere in the reading circle in which both interthinking (Littleton & Mercer, 2013) and individual thinking thrived.

Emotion emerged as a central feature of discursive transactions in the reading circle and a key element in *motivating* the focal cases, especially Kolya and Juan, to respond with insightful Elaborated Explanations on certain topics of discussion. Such responses would likely not have emerged had the emotiveness of those topics not provoked or inspired more careful deliberation than usual. This outcome calls into question the conceptualizations of such seminal theorists as Ennis (2018) and Siegel (2017), who have referred only incidentally to emotion as an integral element of criticality. For the same reason, however, the prevalence of emotion-fuelled exchanges in the reading circle bolsters the contention of other important accounts (e.g. Kuhn, 2015; Lipman, 2003, Paul, 1992) that the role of emotion, intuition and imagination are central to critical thinking, not just as an incipient motivational factor but as a basis for sustained and nuanced argumentation.

Related to this was the impressionable effect of emotion on the audience; emotion seemed effectively to 'open them up' to the message. I observed on several occasions with all three focal cases that a verbal argument's persuasive force often consisted in effective rhetoric, a big component of which was emotion. Listening participants were most easily convinced by a message when it connected emotionally with them, and

when the speaker was able to harness and deliver that emotion. When the participants did not grasp the emotional import of the message, they often rejected it. Such transactions were frequent and surprisingly so, as they seemed to have little to do with rationality and reasoning, purportedly the foundations of critical thinking. Nonetheless, how well the listeners received the message—how persuaded they were—depended largely on how much sense it made to them, that is the degree to which they evaluated it as coherent (Kahneman, 2011). Persuasion therefore seemed to work best when the participants were being intellectually charitable and willing to understand each other.

A second way in which this study's outcomes contribute to the existing research literature relates to EAP pedagogy. The intervention allowed me in my trilateral role as teacher-participant-researcher to observe participants' transactions first-hand. My considered judgement from this immersive involvement and from comprehensive feedback is that the students found the process interesting, novel, fun, challenging and rewarding, both personally and educationally. At the very least these outcomes demonstrate the efficacy of a literature-based discussion forum in EAP pedagogy. More importantly, they make a strong case for making such an instructional approach an intrinsic part of an EAP syllabus. As argued in the Methodology chapter, a reading circle would be most practicable in an in-session programme, though with appropriate organization it could be just as productively deployed as an elective module on a shorter pre-session course. Our reading circle discussions worked on several analytical levels, including the conventional instrumental dissection of text structure and language.

A related positive finding was the development of participants' pragmatics skills: to this end we discussed textual features such as attitude, stance, voice, intent, bias, and perspective wherever they arose. Together with those features we focused on the rhetorical devices favoured by a given author, such as the language of suggestion, comparison, persuasion, description and explanation. Not all of these were explicit—which is where critical thinking came in. This would then entail students interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing both the content and form of the texts. Recursive practice in critiquing texts over the six-month period in this way generated constant questions and responses. Becoming increasingly sophisticated, this dialogic activity

ended sometimes with consensus and sometimes in controversy. Overall, the strategies learned in the discursive process of critiquing literary texts would, I contend, stand the participants in good stead in addressing the mostly expository texts they would expect to encounter in their core degree programmes.

### **8.3 Implications of the Study**

Several interdependent implications emerge from this study. One relates to my original intuitive ideas about what constitutes effective teaching and learning (outlined in the Introduction). The findings have strongly suggested—at least to the teacher in me—that personalizing content is a crucial first step to engaging students not only in learning, but in learning to think better. While personalization is an almost axiomatic notion in contemporary pedagogics, achieving it in the classroom is often a more difficult proposition; raising students' interest to the engagement level necessary to do the cognitive work required by critical thinking does not happen as a matter of course (Reznitskaya, 2012, makes a similar observation about misplaced assumptions around dialogic teaching). At its simplest and most optimal, I have always viewed the process thus: personalization → emotion → motivation → engagement. Underpinning the entire approach is the conviction that whatever activity students are engaged in *should genuinely matter to them*. This brings in the next related implication, the situated learning context represented by the reading circle.

This study has revealed the reading circle discussion format to be an optimal forum for personalized learning as described above to take place, which suggests that it would be a useful instructional addition to an EAP classroom. A well-arranged reading circle encourages students to express their ideas dialogically, sure (and, importantly, safe) in the knowledge that those ideas will at minimum be recognized by their fellows. In our circle, individuals were routinely acknowledged as valued members of a collegial enterprise. This kind of peer validation seemed genuinely to boost participants' self-belief to the extent that they were at ease expressing their views in a foreign language, even on contested issues. An unexpected personal benefit was the extent to which participating in the live sessions elucidated interdisciplinary knowledge I had up to then encountered only in my reading. Among many others, several theories and concepts

stand out for me: consilience; the primacy of disposition in critical thinking; intuitive versus deliberative inference; literature's role in personalizing learning; dialogic discourse between people and texts; the questioning mindset; argumentation and viewpoint diversity; moral reasoning; and abductive inference.

A final implication of this study is the *potential* for near transfer of training. A wealth of research (e.g. Halpern, 2014) suggests that the prospect of near transfer is enhanced by, among other factors, a general dispositional propensity towards questioning. This was one of the more noticeable tendencies I observed among all participants over the course of the intervention. However, while knowledge transfer is an objective immanent to pedagogy as a concept, I make no such claim for critical thinking transfer as either an aim or outcome of the present study. Rather, as stated in the Introduction to this thesis and following theorists such as Halpern (2014), I endorse the notion of near transfer as a general pedagogical assumption, and then cautiously, under specific conditions. To be clear, this study's findings substantiate a different claim: that a classroom environment conducive to viewpoint diversity and dialogic inquiry contributes to engagement in robust collaborative discourse. In the reading circle, this transactional dialectic involved exploratory talk and interthinking, which usually resulted in participants arriving at more balanced perspectives on emergent issues. Another result—which relates to the question of transfer potential—was a noticeable development in participants' general disposition towards questioning by the end of the course. In view of this, there seems to me plausible grounds for a follow-up research project with similar learning conditions to mine to explore the potential for near learning transfer. Such a classroom/research environment could focus, for instance, on cultivating participants' openness to inquiry, a dispositional element of critical thinking which has been shown to be potentially generalizable (see Hamby, 2015; Ku, 2010; Ku et al., 2010; Kuhn, 2022).

As noted above, having discussed the almost binary arguments for and against knowledge transfer in the literature review, I adopted a cautious pedagogical position favouring the former. My stance in this respect can be encapsulated in the following normative statement: *critical thinking teaching should aim primarily to generate an authentic interest in reflective inquiry. This could begin with a student's curiosity being*

*sparked by the perception of having a personal stake in a given issue. With guidance and dialogic practice, the student's inquisitive habit of mind should develop into a genuine ongoing disposition to pursue personal and intellectual integrity. Insights gained from this evolving knowledge ought ultimately to lead to improved reasoning, judgement, and decision-making.* From this statement of my approach in its ideal form it is evident that I conceive of critical thinking ability less as a set of skills to be transferred than as a dispositional willingness to think interrogatively, with a view to thinking better. My contention is that this volition to think better, to actively consider the applicability and potential utility of prior knowledge to new contexts, is what may lead to transfer. And it is this pedagogical assumption which should largely inform critical thinking instruction.

What can also be seen in such an approach is the key role of metacognition (Kuhn, 2022). This concept, which prioritizes thinking about thinking (be it of students' own views or those of their classmates) should be made explicit in classroom activities, particularly in group work. Only by making explicit the mechanics of good thinking, by 'revealing the engine' as it were, will students be able to evaluate for themselves the merits of such a pursuit. Those students who do learn to appreciate the pragmatic value of critical thinking afford themselves the opportunity to derive the full suite of benefits eventually. The responsibility therefore lies squarely with teachers of critical thinking, not so much to instruct but to nurture students' thinking dispositions by creating educational conditions appropriate to their development.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the study**

Any research design bears limitations, and several points can be addressed to the current study in this regard. One limitation was its design as a case study, the standard concern being the extent to which findings from specific cases can be generalized. According to Duff (2006), generalizability to a broader population can potentially be facilitated by considering sociocultural and other relevant factors. Creating a reading circle as part of the overall instructional approach in an EAP class could, for example, involve such relevant factors as a familiar educational context and similar L2 proficiency level among participants. Even so, variables such as these may not be generalizable simply due to the variety of forms they can take: the nature and context of one

foundation university classroom may differ in myriad ways from another. So while generalization can be supported by relevant factors, Duff (2006) posits an even more basic prerequisite for possible replication: that the study should provide a high level of detail. A thick description of observed behaviour and events may, for instance, indicate parallel possibilities for application in other contexts. These possibilities may be taken up by other researchers and realized, with appropriate modifications, in their own research. An example was this study's triple-pronged approach to data interpretation, the scope of which may simply not be necessary for similar projects. My decision to employ such a detailed analytical approach was due primarily to the incorporeal nature of the psychological construct under examination. In addition, this study was exploratory on several levels. Other studies may have different units of analysis (say, language) and may not be exploratory; in such cases, just one mode of analysis would typically suffice.

Another limitation was the amount of time devoted to the intervention. The research process would have been more effective if the teaching schedule had optimized time in either of two ways. One is if the intervention had been designed to last for a full academic year, that is three terms rather than two. Alternatively, the timetable could have consisted of two classes a week instead of one; this would have doubled the number of sessions to thirty-two. Both scenarios would have allowed the study to assume a more longitudinal character, which would have exposed the participants to more texts and discussion, yielding in turn more data. It is worth noting, however, that a greater volume of data is not intrinsically better, particularly in qualitative research. In the current study, for example, extra data would have been similar data—and it is not an inevitable conclusion that 'more of the same' would have further elucidated the findings.

Nonetheless, a longer intervention would have translated to participants becoming increasingly familiar with the format of the intervention sessions. The potential for confounding variables influencing participants' behaviour would then probably have decreased, and clearer developmental patterns in their critical thinking may have emerged. This kind of outcome reflects Chambers' (2009) hypothesis that an observer's

paradox such as the Hawthorne Effect would eventually diminish to negligible, as happened in our reading circle. This tendency of confounding variables to regress to the mean over time (Kahneman, 2011) would have reduced the risk of my drawing erroneous inferences from participants' discursive contributions, thereby increasing the accuracy of my interpretations and judgements. As it happened, however, logistical issues concerning the foundation programme prevented amendment of the intervention's provisional schedule, so the syllabus remained in place for the duration of the course. Indeed, in a fortuitous turn the first term proved crucial in getting to know the students which, as I point out in the methodology chapter, was key to establishing the comfortable dialogic environment conducive to the optimal operation of a reading circle.

Another limitation of the current study is that critical thinking development was assessed via a single avenue, namely dialogic discussion. A wider range of assessments would have yielded results which, aggregated, would have offered a more definitive answer to the research question. A comparative study is the simplest way this could have been achieved, with my class serving as the experimental group and the other reading class in the programme representing the control group. This research scenario would have furnished at least one extra data set without any further logistical effort. However, ethical reservations were expressed about the proposed control group 'missing out' on any potential gains generated by the intervention. On those grounds, the research project would have been unlikely to be approved by the ethics committee. Another way in which multiple assessments could have strengthened the research findings is to have conducted a mixed-methods study, including perhaps a complementary mode of instruction to the reading circle as well as a pre- and post-test of critical thinking. These options are elaborated in the following section. Overall, a research design which seeks to draw on more than a single assessment source would be more rigorous and carry more empirical force. Given the current study's attempt to explore and explain a cognitive construct (critical thinking) through observed behaviour (elaborated explanations), a more comprehensive research design featuring multiple forms of assessment would have given warrant to more robust causal inferences and, consequently, more plausible claims for critical thinking development.

## 8.5 Recommendations for future research

In light of the implications of this study's findings discussed earlier in the chapter, it is clear that there is substantial scope for research into the teaching of critical thinking in the EAP classroom. The outcomes and limitations of this study suggest that further research would benefit not only students and practitioners, but the discipline more broadly. Within the context of EAP, it would be possible to expand upon the findings of the current study in a number of ways.

First, it would be useful to replicate the exploratory nature of this study, following the same instructional framework of a dialogic reading circle. The difference, however, would be in the type of texts examined. While I favour literature for its potential to cover the full range of human experience and, in doing so, to capture the interest of readers at the most personal level, other classroom contexts may find alternative text types a more appropriate fit. I have already referred to the growing popularity of academic reading circles in EAP, which utilize academic expository texts for discussion (Seburn, 2016). But if the aim of the activity or course is critical thinking development, there is no reason why other kinds of text cannot be used to generate dialogic discourse to this end. The outcomes of studies in diverse EAP settings using different text types would provide important insights into the effectiveness of one approach over another.

It would also be useful to conduct similar practitioner research studies, though with research designs geared to signifying certain aspects of critical thinking, the two broadest being skills and dispositions. With regard to skills assessment, for example, an effective study would be to employ a mixed-methods approach with a view to obtaining a quite specific measure of critical thinking development. For quantitative data and analysis, all students would undergo a pre-test and a post-test of their critical thinking—before and after the intervention, respectively—an effective example of which would be the Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment (HCTA) (Halpern, 2010). This is a standardized instrument which is administered and scored online, consisting of twenty-five everyday scenarios that respondents analyze and critique. These real-world scenarios require open-ended constructed responses, and are followed by forced-choice questions which seek both to elicit and suggest the reasoning process which informs an



answer (Larsson, 2017). A study which utilized such a test such as the HCTA would yield an empirical result which the participants may view as more 'tangible' than the current exploratory project.

Also useful would be a study examining the impact of dispositions or habits of mind on critical thinking development. Retaining the basic methodological framework of a dialogic reading circle, such a project would conduct assessments parallel to the group discussion sessions. These assessments would employ instruments covering different dimensions of critical thinking disposition. Ku et al. (2010) identify four dimensions of thinking disposition which highlight different aspects of participants' responses to situations that entail thinking. The dimensions, broadly speaking, are inquisitiveness or willingness to inquire, open-mindedness or attitude flexibility, conscientiousness or systematicity, and truth-seeking or fair-mindedness. Such an approach could contribute much-needed evidence towards the debates around the influence of critical thinking dispositions on learning transfer.

Following the current broad consensus in the research literature that critical thinking development in the classroom is optimized by both direct instruction and inquiry-based learning (e.g. Abrami et al., 2008; 2015; Alfieri et al., 2011; Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Klahr, 2009; Ku et al., 2014; Mayer, 2004), it would be beneficial to conduct a practitioner research study which sought to implement such a dual approach. The direct instruction component would take the form of a hybridized teaching format, combining both explicit critical thinking instruction and content, which Ennis (1989) has characterized as *infusion*. In a typical lesson, the first hour would consist of explicit teaching of critical thinking language, principles and skills (Cottrell, 2017; Halpern, 1998), including open-ended tasks and ill-structured problems. This explicit instruction would be followed in the next hour by dialogic discussion conducted in the format of a reading circle. Such an approach to practitioner research, consisting of both direct instruction and inquiry-based activities in the same session, would potentially benefit both students and teachers. The former would likely experience improvement in critical thinking which, given conducive conditions, could even lead to learning transfer (e.g. Ku et al.,

2014), while practitioner-researchers would probably recognize opportunities for further innovative pedagogical routes to critical thinking development.



∞ Tomorrow morning, let us meet here again. ∞

(Socrates, *Theaetetus*, 369 BCE)

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Consent Form



### Consent Form

**Title of research:** Exploring the development of critical thinking in English for Academic Purposes through the use of literature: an Exploratory Practice approach

*If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Cliff Kast in person or at the address below.*

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to being audio recorded and/or filmed as part of this project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations, they will not be attributed to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw permission for any data I have contributed to be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can contact Cliff Kast at any time and request for my data to be removed from the project database.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the results will be shared in research publications and/or presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the UK Data Service. I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Cliff Kast  
UCL Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL  
Email \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet



### Participant Information Sheet - International Foundation Programme

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Title of Study:** Exploring the development of critical thinking in English for Academic Purposes through the use of literature: an Exploratory Practice approach

**Department:** Culture, Communication & Media

**Name and Contact Details of the Researcher:** Cliff Kast

#### Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research project. This will involve your attending a weekly class in which you will be a member of a reading circle. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

#### What is the project's purpose?

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which critical thinking is developed through the use of literature in an EAP classroom.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a member of the current Foundation class, which is the level my research is focused on.

#### Do I have to take part in the sessions?

Yes. The classes are part of your syllabus.

#### What will happen to me as a participant?

You will attend a weekly class for 2 hours from January until June. You will be asked to read three literary texts over this period, two in Term 1 and one more in Term 2. You will be asked to do this reading at home, then we will discuss what you have read in class. The data from these lessons will be recorded for my research.

#### Do I have to take part in the research?

No. Taking part in the research means that you give permission for any data you have contributed to be used in the study. 'Data' in this context means any of your words as recorded in the transcripts. You can withdraw permission for such use of your data at any stage of the project, and request for your data to be removed from the project database. If you have any queries or concerns about this, please speak to me. If you prefer not to speak to me, you can speak to Dr Amos Paran or Simon Blow, both of whose details are included below.

#### Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

Any audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be made only with your permission (as indicated above), and will only be used to create a transcript for my own data analysis. Any illustrations of or references to your contributions in publications, conference presentations and lectures will be derived from the transcripts. No other use will be made of this data without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages and no risks in taking part in this research.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Your participation in this project will contribute to developing your critical thinking, literature comprehension, and collaborative discussion skills. It may also help shape future research in the field of EAP.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you have a complaint you should inform Dr Amos Paran, the PhD supervisor, and/or \_\_\_\_\_, the manager of the IFP. Their details are:

Dr Amos Paran UCL Institute of Education 20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL Email: _____ Tel: _____	Name: _____ Pathway Campus Manager Lawrence Building 104 University of Roehampton SW15 5SL Email: _____ Tel: _____
---	--

However, should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by either the supervisor or the manager, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – [ethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@ucl.ac.uk)

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information collected about you during the course of the research will be strictly confidential and be kept by me in secure password-protected locations. Nobody will be able to identify you in any ensuing reports or publications.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the university may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research should be published in my PhD thesis, which can be accessed at UCL IOE. Findings may also be disseminated in publications and/or conferences after the termination of the research period. They may also be used to contribute to further research.

For further information, please contact me, Dr Amos Paran, or \_\_\_\_\_ (details above).

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.**

Cliff Kast  
UCL Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C – Intervention Class Schedule

Session		Kolya	Juan	Satya
1	Mr Salary (Part 1) - Sally Rooney	/	/	/
2	Mr Salary (Part 2)	/	/	/
3	My Hobby - Tom Fabian	/		
4	The Necklace - Guy de Maupassant			/
5	Sandpiper - Ahdaf Soueif		/	
6	Paste - Henry James			/
7	The Lifeguard - Mary Morris	/		
8	On Her Knees - Tim Winton		/	/
9	Elephant - Raymond Carver	/		
10	Track - Nicole Flattery			/
<b>EASTER</b>				
11	The Lady With the Little Dog - Anton Chekhov	/		
12	White Nights - Fyodor Dostoevsky		/	/

13	Tickets, Please! - D.H. Lawrence	/		
14	Mrs Mahmood - Segun Afolabi			/
15	The Faber Book of Adultery - Jonathan Gibbs	/	/	
16	The Man Who Walked on the Moon - J. G. Ballard			/

**/ indicates sessions analyzed**

## Appendix D – Mini-profiles of Reading Circle Participants

**Selena** is a young woman from Peru. She speaks Spanish as a first language, is fluent in Italian and had an English proficiency level of C1 on the global CEFR scale. She was a diligent student and, although confident in expressing her perspective on various issues, was always keen to hear others' views too. Selena enjoys extensive reading and plans to own her own business in the future.

**Alyeh** is a young woman from Iran. Farsi is her home language, and she had an English proficiency level of B1. She has wide-ranging interests, is extremely curious and seems to consider nothing prosaic. Due primarily to her language level, Alyeh was quite shy overall in the first few classes but grew steadily in confidence as the course progressed. She would like to be a fashion designer one day.

**Satya** is a young woman from Saudi Arabia. Her first language is Arabic, and while her spoken English was relatively fluent at level C1 (she had attended international schools all her life), her writing was a fair bit weaker. Satya is interested in the 'big' questions of life, and it is no coincidence that she was planning to pursue studies in philosophy. Her ambition—which was a running joke meant only partly tongue-in-cheek—was to use her father's money to live the best life she can.

**Juan** is a young man from Ecuador. Spanish is his home language though he reports a high proficiency in both Italian and Portuguese. His overall English proficiency lay between B1 and B2. He has previously lived in the United States and had spent a couple of years in the UK before starting at the university. Juan was not a great talker in the reading circle, though had very strong ideas on certain issues and was not shy to express these views. He enjoyed reading non-fiction when he could and wanted to be a primary school teacher.

**Dmitri** is a young man from Uzbekistan, whose first language is Uzbek. He has (near) native proficiency in Russian and a general English level of B1-B2. Dmitri admits to being conservative in his outlook on life and even sceptical about anything he does not have first-hand knowledge of. In his words, 'I prefer to live that way'. He professes not to have

plans for the future as—to paraphrase him—there is no point in planning for what may not happen.

**Shav** is a young man also from Uzbekistan. While he speaks Uzbek at home, he considered his proficiency in both Uzbek and Russian as of a very similar, if not the same, level. His English proficiency was B1-B2. Shav displayed an easygoing, pleasant personality in the class though he often preferred to listen more than talk. He seemed interested in discovering new ideas and was always accommodating of his peers' views, even if they surprised him. Shav's hope for the future was to head his own accounting firm.

**Kolya** is a young man from Uzbekistan. His first language is Uzbek, though much like the other two Uzbeks, he has a near-native command of Russian, and his level of proficiency in English was B1-B2. Kolya mentioned spending a lot of time reading novels and would sometimes broach ideas he had encountered in these texts in class. He revelled in a good debate, often taking the role of devil's advocate to, in his words, 'see how uncomfortable this make me', and never tired of exploring ideas as far as possible. Kolya was determined to become a lawyer.

**Samir** is a young man from Senegal, though he also holds Egyptian nationality. He considers both Arabic and French as first languages, and has an English language proficiency level of B2. Samir had already attended university in Senegal but his studies were interrupted, which was the reason for starting afresh at this university. At once friendly, industrious and open-minded, Samir was popular among his classmates and with his teachers. His plan for the future was to open his own business.

**Fernao** is a young trans man from Brazil, whose home language is Portuguese. He is fluent in Italian and Spanish, conversant in French, and his English proficiency level is C1. Fernao is older than the rest of the participants and this is most evident in how maturely he interacts with his classmates, exuding an almost pastoral presence. Fernao's life experience and calm nature is an interesting foil to the rest of the students' more youthful ebullience, though he gets on well with everyone. His plan after graduation was to build on the success of his current businesses.

## **Appendix E – Field Notes Cited In-text**

1. The Uzbek guys all seem to agree on K's ideas about Sukie's motives. Cultural norms maybe?
2. K's wrong here, but others are listening. Why? His feelings drawing them in, but is he giving good reasons too?
3. !!What's the problem with these guys?? Young adults but no interest in sex? Cultural? Too much tv, so desensitized? Session died on its feet! Wth did I do wrong? Uurgh.
4. Nobody's responding here. What's happened and how do I salvage this?
5. K's off the rails here, biased AF but no apologies. Is K. thinking on his feet here?? Still, oddly convincing - how come?
6. Wow, guys seem up for it today - electric buzz!



## Appendix F – Transcript Sample

### Lesson 8 - On Her Knees

Cliff: Right guys, let's begin. The big question we'll start off with today is this: what is the story about? Okay? Carry on.

Dmitri: It's about a 16-year-old child and her mother ... or his mother?

Alyeh: He's a boy.

Selena: He's a boy? Where does it say that?

Alyeh: On the second page it says, 'a 20-year-old ... boy who needed his neck scrubbed.'

Cliff: Is he a boy or is he a young man?

All: A young man.

Cliff: What does 'shot through' mean?

Selena: Like 'left'?

Cliff: Yeah. The man left the family. He walked out. He abandoned the mom and the son.

Satya: Okay ... the way the mother handled the situation when the woman [her employer] told her that she stole the earring? She [the mom] was still so nice to her. She still went there even after they accused her. And I think that kind of attitude, you see it a lot in—not poor people but—working hard people. So I've seen people like this who have, not shops, but they would bring their truck. And they would put their products, their watermelon, and they would be so honest with their customers, and they would have the best products yet they don't even have a proper shop! And then you would see other people who are in bigger shops are actually dishonest and they would double the price. When I see these kinds of people I also see their position in life, or where they are, like these people are poor and these people are rich. And it kind of comes with idea that being too honest, being loyal—all these 'moral' things—they don't really bring that much good of an outcome, just like with the mother.

Cliff: Does that diminish the feeling? What I'm asking is: even if the result is not a good one, should you change and become more ruthless, or should you retain your\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: I'm young, I'm going to live, I have a future ahead of me. And when I see these two kinds of people, that really does affect me—like, how should I be, how should I think about my worth, my ethics, my values? They're changing.

Dmitri: You're morally weak?

Cliff: Because *you* have a choice, right?

Satya: Yeah. I can do this or I can do that.

Selena: You should stick to your morals.

Juan: What about the people that don't have it, that don't have a choice?

Dmitri: What do you mean? Give us an example.

Satya: No, I mean have a choice in doing right or wrong. Everyone has a choice of doing right or wrong.

Cliff: So what do you think is reflected in the story in that sense?

Satya: That she chose to do the right thing even when life hit her hard.

Samir: Do you think it's the right thing?

Selena: I think the key is to stick to her morals. We should always stick to our morals.

Satya: Yeah, but is that going to bring a good outcome? Just like in the movies when you see the good one, the honest one, has a great outcome. That's what *I've* been taught since I was a kid.

Selena: But are you going to feel good about yourself, are you going to be happy?

Samir: You're going to lose your honour, right?

Satya: I don't know because I haven't tried. But I'm not going to say I'm going to feel bad if I was disloyal, or if I bribed someone. Honestly\_\_\_\_\_

Selena: You don't know.

Satya: I don't know. I mean I should do it, and then I'd see how I'd feel.

Selena: Oh okay yeah, I think you should do it\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: The thing is, it's also about honour, you know. You see, some people are so sweet and kind, and you can bring them down; it's okay for them. But some other people they're like, I'm not going to do that because it's going to play on my honour. And in this story the young guy doesn't like, for example, the fact that his mother's working, you know, because he saw it as a weakness\_\_\_\_\_

Dmitri: Is he ashamed?

Samir: He's not ashamed, but it's like you're seeing your mother suffering\_\_\_\_\_

Dmitri: He's ashamed in front of his classmates.

Samir: Yeah exactly ... it's something like this.

Selena: Okay, I want to come back to what Satya said. I feel like she should stick to her morals. For example, would you rather be rich and have a lot of money and be like the ones that sell drugs, what are they called\_\_\_\_\_

Juan: Pusher, drug dealer.

Selena: Yeah, drug dealer. Or would you rather have a good life, be happy, know you're doing the right thing—but don't have a lot of money like a drug dealer? Which would you choose ... because there's always a choice.

Satya: Yeah I know. When you ask me this question, I can't answer you and it would be the real answer. I might cheat and I'd get rich and I would be happy. But it wouldn't affect me. Like, I'd *see* it as a big deal but once I *do* it, it's not that big of a deal, you know what I mean? Sometimes you would *think* that you'd feel bad but you don't *actually* feel anything. And you'd be surprised by yourself .. like, that was okay, that was easy.

Selena: [laughing] Well *then* we'd have to get to know each other more, I mean ourselves, how we are. Because people have different [standards of] happiness\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: [laughing] I mean you *should* know yourself in the end, if what you're doing is good or not\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: Yeah but *how* are you going to know, if you're not going to do it? How can you be so sure of it?

Samir: But you said you can do it and not feel anything about it?

Juan: Only God knows [everyone smiles and the conversation abates].

Cliff: Okay. You [Satya] say you won't know until you do it or unless you do it, right? And then you [Selena] say that, if you have been raised with certain values, you'll know before you try it that that's not something you should do. Is that\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: Actually for me, I always put myself into someone else's position; this is how I know what to do or not. For example, if you steal my phone I'm going to be bad, you know; I 'm not going to feel good. That's normal. So why should I steal someone else's phone? That's the way I think.

Selena: But I think what Satya's saying is not like you know that it's wrong. It's more like you feel that you're doing it ... even though you know it's wrong you won't feel it's bad\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: So yeah I know it's wrong, but I wouldn't feel *as bad*. It wouldn't affect me that much.

Juan: What about for people that, depending on the circumstances, they have to do bad things. For example, as you say, imagine you've got a family, you live in poverty, you don't have any theft of anything—and *then* you decide to steal *even though you know* that it's bad for the society. But you have to do it because if you don't do it, your family basically die.

Dmitri: Not everyone thinks in this way!

Juan: Yeah but it actually sometimes happens.

Satya: It happens a lot, yeah.

Juan: I'm the kind of one that says that not all thieves are like that because some of them are really lazy and they just want to steal because they want to get easy things. But some of them are really poor, and they *need* to steal. But you *would* see the difference because ... Look, if someone came to a fruit shop and stole some fruit, well what can you say? But the other one, if they see you've got a good iPhone, thinks: I'm going to steal it. I think you might see the difference between them, and you would notice who actually needs to do it to survive.

Cliff: Right.

Samir: For example, in Arabic countries you can't steal. But the difference is in what you're stealing. For example, if you steal food, they're going to be a hundred times more understanding than if you steal money \_\_\_\_\_

Juan: Yeah, that's what I mean.

Samir: Because if you steal food that means that you *need* to eat, otherwise you're going to die, and you have no option, no choice.

Cliff: What if you steal food for selling?

Juan: I think it's difficult, I think it's *really* difficult!

Dmitri: Doesn't matter, I think. Doesn't matter for selling or \_\_\_\_\_

Samir: It doesn't. I think as long as it's food, they're going to think in a way that he's hungry, he wants to eat.

Cliff: Interesting. Okay good. Anything you [Kolya] would like to say about the story? [general laughter] What are the main themes or ideas here?

Kolya: Yeah I wanted to say but *before* this conversation, which is now in my head. What can I say? I think this short story is about family relationships between the mother and the son—it is amazing—and clearly you can see how mothers sacrifice themselves for their children, for example, she never lets her son help her. And she always does it on her own: she always cleans the house, she tries to earn money. On the other hand, this story I think is about honesty and self-respect of people \_\_\_\_\_

Dmitri: To us ...

Kolya: What?

Dmitri: Talk to us, not to Cliff; he knows about this.

Kolya: But I think you can hear me \_\_\_\_\_

Dmitri: But you're talking like this [turns his back to the group]. Discuss with *us*.

Kolya: [laughing] Because I'm thinking of two things at one time ... it's difficult!

Cliff: That's fine. Carry on. Who has self respect?

Kolya: Mother and son: they are earning for their life honestly, by their labour. [slightly embarrassed and flustered] I don't know ... I'm in a mess, really.

Satya: I think also something about the boy. I understand he feels bad for his mother, but I don't think he's being the good supportive son; like he feels bad that she's actually cleaning toilets, but he's not doing anything about it.

Samir: He is.

Satya: I mean, no no, he could\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: He's trying to convince her but he can't. I think he's still young, you know?

Satya: So he can't convince her, but why is he not a good persuader? He's not giving her solutions. He's telling her stuff but\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: Honestly, do you want to motivate your mom to buy\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: No, but I would give her other solutions, like I found a job for you. I'm not going to tell her to stop working and not give her another solution, because your mother's not going to listen to you. So if you bring her a better option, it would be fine.

Samir: Yeah yeah sure, maybe she's going to change.

Cliff: Who is stronger?

Kolya: The mother!

Selena: Yeah, I don't think the mom's stupid.

Juan: Yeah that's what I mean. If you've got a child, he's like ten or sixteen, and he came to you with this idea to change your life, how would you feel? He's just starting to live *his* life.

Selena: And the mom's not stupid. She could find a job too; she doesn't need the help of him finding a job for her. She has more experience and she knows more.

Alyeh: The thing is, she wants to take care of her son's success for his future.

Kolya: But on the other hand I think Victor is without honour.

Samir: It's the opposite, man. You're crazy, honestly.

Cliff: Okay, explain that.

Kolya: Because look, his mom is cleaning others' toilets and homes, but he's twenty: he can do it, he can work. [general loud objections] Listen, even if his mother bans him from working, he should do it. He's a man, first of all. He's twenty. He should do it, you know? For example, it's worse than this for me if my mother

cleans another's home and I go to university. No. It's not for me, for example. It's better I will die.

Samir: We've told you his mother is not going to listen to him anyway so\_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: For example, for me my mother also bans me from work, but I work always. I'm working from sixteen years. She always bans me, but I want to work.

Dmitri: But if you would study earlier, you could get some opportunity to do some duty, you know? You would help your mother earlier.

Kolya: But until then my mother will clean others' toilets? No, man!

Dmitri: Brother, this is life. You have to *endure*.

Samir: Brother, this is what I'm telling you.

Kolya: This is the choice of weak people, no.

Juan: You can never change his mind.

Dmitri: I think 'On Her Knees', this name, is all about\_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: On her knees, yes, your mother is working *on her knees*. Is it good for you that your mother is working on her knees?

Dmitri: She struggles, right. She said that the importance is all about your studies. You have to study, she knows. She is so smart because she knows if she invests in her son—this son of a son [general boisterous laughter]—he will give back everything to his mother.

Kolya: [sarcastically] You are right.

Dmitri: Just endure, just wait for four years, three years\_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: Okay, four years, five years you wait, it's good. His mother banned him from working, but if he really wanted to help his mother, he would, he could. Because if people *want* to do something, they will try to find opportunities to do this. Those who don't want, they'll find a reason not to do this.

Dmitri: I partly agree with you. However, there is another side\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: [to Kolya] That's the difference. *He's* listening to you but you're not listening to him.

Kolya: I'm listening now because he's saying things from the text\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Okay yes, let's listen to him. [to Dmitri] What are you saying?

Dmitri: I'm saying that his mother's point was only to pay full attention, give full focus on her son's studies. And logically or factually—I don't know how you're going to look at this case—but *this* is the right way to do it. Otherwise, the son and the mother will work together, and it might continue for 5 or 10 years so you will lose time, you know?

- Kolya: I'll ask one question of you. For example, you are in this situation: your mother has earned money for you in this way, by cleaning the house or something like that. And after 4 years, you become a very successful person. You are sitting in the office, and one person comes to you: 'Hi Dmitri, how are you?' and you answer, 'I'm good.' Then he asks, 'How's your mother, who was cleaning our house?' How do you feel? You're successful, but your mother is not!
- Samir: This is what we told you! It's honour. It's been like 2 hours I've been telling you it's honour. I told you it's over honour because you're not going to look at your mother cleaning floors, for example.
- Kolya: This is honour? You should *keep* your honour.
- Samir: This *is* honour. I told you, you should not let your mother clean the floor. This is what he's trying to do, but his mother is not listening to him. This is what Dmitri said before.
- Dmitri: This is a different thing. This is how *he* [Kolya] feels.
- Samir: Yeah he's right also ...
- Dmitri: From his point of view, he's right. I cannot just ... if I'm right it doesn't mean that he's wrong. Maybe he's right also--but he's not right in this case. [general laughter] But if my mother cleaned the floors of my rich classmate's house, instead of working I would focus more on studying. But not 4 years; make it 2 years to make it faster, you know? And another thing: after these years, I'm successful, I'm sitting in the office and they come and ask how's my mother, she used to clean my house. But! She worked as a cleaner, why? To feed me, to invest in my studies. She wasn't a whore in strip clubs. She worked with honour.
- Cliff: Okay, I think that's quite an important thing. Is there a theme in the story about the nature of work: what work means, how important work is, whatever work you do. Can you say anything about that?
- Satya: Yeah, work ethics as well.
- Samir: Do you mean if you work honestly, or if you work by stealing\_\_\_\_\_
- Cliff: Yeah, what kind of work you do: is it important in how society sees you, in how your family sees you?
- Samir: You can work honestly, but it depends on what work. For example, people who clean the street, they know first the way people look at them. For me, for example, if I see someone cleaning the street. I respect him as I respect a director. You know why? Because we're throwing things, he's cleaning after us: this means that every job matters, you know? But for me, I couldn't do it. I'm honest: I couldn't do it. I'll never do it, my entire life. I prefer to ... I'd rather die without working than cleaning the floor.

Cliff: So is *that* how the woman feels?

Samir: The woman just wants to earn money to help her son. But the son is different: he's got honour.

Cliff: Yes? [to Alyeh]

Alyeh: It depends on the way you want to earn money. There's other jobs to do. Kolya said where's the honour, there's no honour in that. But there's another way for her. I mean, she could be a porn star instead of going and cleaning houses.

Kolya: Okay, how can I say ... for people it's not only being a porn star or a poor worker. There are a lot of alternatives, there's more opportunities. How can I say, for example, Sid said he would respect the people who clean the street ... man, you should be a little bit honest. Nobody in our society respects the people who clean the streets! [general uproar]

Samir: Ah you're crazy, man! I'm the first person on this earth who respects these people!

Kolya: No! Nobody respects these types of people! You can say hello or hi. But *nobody* respects these kinds of people, I know!

Samir: Ah, he's crazy this guy!

Cliff: Okay let's calm down. [to Juan] Yes?

Juan: [to Kolya] What did you say, you feel sorry for who?

Samir: He said that he's never going to respect someone that cleans the floor\_\_\_\_\_

Juan: So you don't respect *me*. You don't respect me—because I used to clean toilets.

Kolya: [flustered] How can I say ... honestly, nobody respects these kinds of people.

Selena: What? I would never think that\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: I understand you don't put them in a high rank, but it's about respect. For example, you're eating, yeah? You're throwing everything away, the guy is coming and cleaning for you—and you have the courage to tell me you're not going to respect this person? [incredulous] If someone is not doing this work, who's going to do it? You think that a machine just comes and starts cleaning everything for us? Come on!

Cliff: Okay. What were you saying?

Selena: I have maids in Peru and they all are family, and my driver is too\_\_\_\_\_

Dmitri: Rich!

Selena: No, in Peru it's cheap. They even have their own room in my house, all of them, and they are considered family. I talk to them now, and they say I miss you and I tell them that back too.



Samir: Yeah, even us. In my country too it's the same.

Cliff: Right. What were you saying?

Satya: I think honour—pride—can be a problem. So I think it's in Christianity that there's the seven, deadly sins? Pride and honour was one of them. And I did not understand it but then I started thinking about it, and it *is* a problem sometimes. You wouldn't do things because of your pride or your honour. And then you would ask yourself why, and it wouldn't make sense! I mean so what if I'm cleaning toilets? Is it a big deal? I mean, I'm not going to clean toilets. Why? Because I don't need to, I don't *have* to. But if I have to \_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: If you lost your money?

Satya: If I lost my money and I knew a rich person, my friend, I would go to her and say I want to be your maid, you know? Just give me a job, you know what I mean?

Kolya: Where's your honour, where's your honour!

Satya: See, when you ask me where's \_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Okay okay, I think we need to make a decision about what the words mean. There's pride of self and pride like arrogance, right. Honour is a very slippery concept.

Kolya: I think honour defines the levels of your society.

Cliff: I think what we mean is dignity. Honour is not quite the same. Dignity is respect for yourself.

Dmitri: But if those cleaners will not clean those floors, those toilets \_\_\_\_\_ [Kolya slams his pen on the desk]

Alyeh: Are you okay?

Dmitri: [to Kolya] Man, this is so disgusting \_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Okay, just hold it for a sec. [to Kolya] Stop. [to Dmitri] Carry on.

Dmitri: The first salaries given will go to the cleaners because they are the most appreciated people in the company. If they're not cleaning \_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: [sarcastically] Oh really?

Dmitri: Are you kidding me?

Samir: He's right! If they don't clean, who's going to do it? [general consternation]

Juan: I'm leaving. [gets up]

Selena: Oh my god! [pretends to bang her head on the desk]

Kolya: I want to say something. It's my little experience. When I was in Uzbekistan, I went to a supplies factory and I worked as a ... *worker*, the lowest position.

Nobody respected me, the managers or others. But actually this factory belonged to my uncle. After I said and they knew about this, they started to respect me, just because I was a relative of this man who owned the company. So how can I say, nobody respects these people in low positions.

Cliff: So can I ask you: with them learning that you were the relation of the boss, doesn't that say something about *them*, about *their* values? What does it say about what kinds of people *they* are? Is it real respect?

Kolya: They are ordinary people in our society who will greet you, who will speak to you, according to your position in the society.

Cliff: Oh ok. But is that real?

Kolya: Yes it's real.

Cliff: No I mean is it *real*? Is it because you are a relation of the boss, or is it genuine? I respect you just because I respect, or I respect you because of your uncle, I wonder? [general laughter]

Samir: It's not real!

Dmitri: It's fake respect!

Alyeh: So this should be a good experience for you to have respect for people. You've been in this position so you should learn to be respectful to other people who clean, who are under your level. Because in the end we are all human so respect is really important, the thing that you don't have.

Kolya: Listen, I want to respect everybody but people in our society don't respect these people.

Cliff: Ah what he seems to be saying is \_\_\_\_\_

Samir: You know what, he's completely right, I cannot say the opposite. The thing is that today, even if you don't respect someone you shouldn't show it, in a way that at the end if you realize things ... as in the example of someone that's cleaning the street: if this person doesn't do it, who's going to do it? So for me, for example, honestly I used to sit and talk with some people in the street and it was normal for me. It was like I was having a conversation with a normal person. You know, when I was younger I used to tell my father I'll never work for anyone, I swear. And he was agreeing with me before because I was like, I'll never accept in my entire life someone telling me what to do in work. I was like, I want to be the boss, that's it. And he was like, how are you going to learn, how are you going to get experience? I was like, I don't need experience. If I want experience, as you are a boss you're going to teach me experience, as you are my father—and he was accepting everything I was telling him. And now, the more I grow up I realize that sometimes you need people to throw things at you

to get to a higher level, to learn things, you know? This is how I'm thinking now. Before I didn't used to think like this.

Selena: Actually, I think that\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Just one second if you don't mind. Can I just clarify ... I've been thinking more about Kolya's point, and I think he's just saying what the reality is. People actually don't look at those who clean as equals, not everyone. I think he's just *describing* what's happening out there; he's not necessarily saying, 'I believe that he's low and I'm high'. He's saying this is what it is.

Samir: No, but he said it also.

Cliff: I know he did, but not only\_\_\_\_\_

Samir: He said it.

Juan: Yeah but then he needs to say his words properly because he said 'You can't respect those people!' What did he mean by that? You mean you can't respect those people.

Cliff: You're right. Kolya, you need to choose how you express yourself\_\_\_\_\_

Juan: Yeah because in my experience, I used to work as a cleaner for more than one year in this country. I never did that in my country because you have to have a good job there. But when I came here it was the worst thing, but I just realized how life is, how people are. I used to have good friends who weren't cleaners; they were in high positions, managers and bosses and stuff like that. They came to me and talked to me: Hi, how was your day, do you want this, I invite you that. But also there were people who looked at you like [sniffs]. They don't even say thank you when you clean all the mess they made. So I hated that. I didn't care about losing my job.

Selena: It depends on the people!

Dmitri: It depends on the people, and it depends on the country where you work.

Selena: Also what I wanted to say was he [Samir] wanted to be the boss of everything, and my dad always tells me please you have to work hard, don't have a boss—because he doesn't have a boss. I'm always saying I want to work here. Then he's saying, oh but later you're going to have your own company? And I'm like, I don't want that. I don't want my own company at all. I really always want to work for someone. I also want to work in a big company, not to have my own company, because I feel you could have a big risk of losing everything. That's my fear, so I prefer working\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Or you could just get fired by the boss\_\_\_\_\_

Selena: But you could always get a job. It's not like your business goes down.

Juan: I'm going to say a fact. I think you could have all the money in the world so you could buy your respect. But I think you should start from the bottom, go up until you become a boss and then you'll have respect. If you get your first job as a boss, people will think this guy is new, he doesn't know anything. But if they know this guy has been working in this company even though he's the boss's son, he grew up in this company and knows everything, I've got respect for him.

Selena: I don't know ... I wouldn't be the boss. If you lose everything it all depends on you. People kill themselves because of that. I would never.

Dmitri: So is the reality about earning respect or earning money? If you're earning money what you can do is clean somewhere or to fix somewhere. And your task is to fix and get your money and live your life. Or is it important to get respect also?

Kolya: Yeah, it's important!

Dmitri: If you live by their opinions, what is your own life? Are you going to live by their opinions, are you going to do everything according to them? I think my task, my mission is to get money to feed my ... Her [the protagonist's] mission was to get money in whatever way, and invest in her son's studies. And that was okay for her. I didn't find anything that showed she needed to get respect from someone. It's all about you, you know, but it changes every time. You cannot just 100% exactly the reason—it always changes.

Cliff: Okay right, Satya?

Satya: I have a question about respect and everyone being equal. Is it the same as sympathy, because I don't think it is. Like if I have sympathy (is it sympathy or empathy?) for someone who's cleaning\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: It's not the same thing, is it?

Satya: No, they're not equal. So I think what's happening more is not about respect or equality but sympathy.

Cliff: Well it depends on what you think of as equal. As Alyeh said, as humans? As we've agreed before, the one who's as low as possible in society is the same, as a human, as I am. And similarly, the one who's as high as possible in society is the same, in humanity, as I am. So on that basis, I respect the human being first. And whatever else he or she will do around that, I'll evaluate you accordingly. But yes as a human being, if I meet you, *that's* how I look at you first, and how you present yourself. Is that the answer, I think, for that? Empathy and sympathy are not the same as respect.

Satya: Yeah but if I was sympathetic towards someone I would be considered as respectful.

- Cliff: Yeah, usually yeah.
- Satya: Is it the same thing, when we're saying we should respect everyone, everyone is equal?
- Selena: No, I wouldn't respect people who do the wrong thing: people who are drug dealers, people who steal. I would never respect those people.
- Cliff: But what if it was your father? Would you lose respect for your father if you knew he was involved in that?
- Selena: I wouldn't respect him. Yes. I'm saying yes. I wouldn't be able to look at him.
- Samir: Look, for me it's different. I have friends that used to sell drugs and everything, I can't lie. This is why even sometimes when people speak with me, they ask have you ever smoked and drink and stuff, and smoked weed and stuff and everything. I'm like, no never. But when they ask me questions I know how to reply. Because if you're a drug dealer, if you speak with me or have a conversation with me it's normal, honestly, I don't care. I'm talking with you like I'm talking with my friend, like everything is normal. But respect is different. For example, if you want something from me I'm not going to be very open to you. For example, if you ask me to give you this and I'll give you that, I'm going to be more distant, because I think you're doing things that's not really good.
- Cliff: Okay, yeah. It's a hard balancing act.
- Dmitri: But when it comes, we are talking about this and we can talk more. But when it comes to action, real action, to test it, we might change our opinions. *This* is the reality.
- Cliff: Yes, yes. And I think that's where the sympathy and respect happens. Because I can go ah, I feel so bad for them but do I respect them as human beings enough, equally, to—if something happened that needed my active response—*react* as a human on the same level? It's a different thing from being sympathetic and saying, 'those Africans are in such a bad state' but can you *show* me how you would help them. It's another story.
- Satya: I also wanted to share something ... there was this philosopher or writer and he had this idea that the president should go to the toilet and carry a camera, and take a video or a picture of himself while he was cleaning the toilet, so he could show the people that it's okay to do this. What I think is, if it happened in real life, would it actually change a thing, change this idea of honour that we have? Or change our pride: that I don't want to clean toilets because it's embarrassing, or I don't want to fix cars and be a mechanic?
- Samir: I'm not okay with that, honestly. It's different, you know, to see the president go and ... I think it's not a good example.

Juan: I understand what you mean.

Samir: Yeah, I mean there's different work in society. As Kolya said, for sure you're going to respect people whatever job they do. For example, someone who is in first class inside a plane? This is normal if you're really rich. You own that money, you suffered to get that money, you're going to have a better rank than other people. This is normal, for me. But as Satya says, for the president to show people through his example, I don't think that's a good idea. I think it's people that should show different behaviour to each other. *That* might help. You don't need the president to give examples.

Satya: I think it's kind of similar when presidents or people in charge encourage people to go to war, to fight for their country. They would take the vulnerable ones to do their job for them. And I think we're doing the same thing in life. It's like saying, why are there hookers? Well it's because people want hookers, that's why. And we actually opened that door for them, so obviously somebody's going to walk inside of that door. I think it's the same thing.

Cliff: Ah okay, fine. Yes Dmitri?

Dmitri: How do you call this bad thing in the toilet and it smells, the verb, and you're irritated ... you cannot touch this, right? How do you call this feeling?

Juan: You want to throw up, yeah we get it!

Samir: Anyway?

Dmitri: The question is: if this thing comes from our organism, and you as a person comes from the same organism\_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: Never never compare yourself to a sperm man, what's wrong with you? You're a man, not a sperm. I can't take it!

Dmitri: Man, this is a very serious point\_\_\_\_\_

Kolya: But you cannot compare these things!

Satya: [asking incredulously] Is he saying he's sh\_\_? Is that what he's saying?

Dmitri: Wait, how can you feel disgusted about this thing. This is one thing? The other is how can you look at cleaners or poor people or the homeless like you're disgusted? We are the actuality, the reality ... we all!

Satya: I think it's a good point, but it's a bad example.

Cliff: Excuse me, but can I say something: is this related to our story or the things we should be talking about? No!

Kolya: I don't know, ask him.

Cliff: That's a good point, actually. I think your point was, whatever's natural is natural and we should not ignore it. It's what it is, right?

Dmitri: Yes!

Alyeh: You guys can talk about this out of this room, please!

Cliff: Can we just round this up. What can you say about class in society? Is there evidence of class and, if so, how is it shown in the story?

Satya: Ah when her son tells her not to do this job: don't clean toilets, it's not good for you; or I can work and you should stop. Here it tells you that he finds it embarrassing because you're cleaning toilets. His mother sees it as work but he sees it as embarrassing—different visions.

Cliff: But how is that related to social class?

Satya: Because if you're high class, you're not going to clean a toilet.

Cliff: Okay.

Kolya: I want to say something about the lowest classes and how they earn their money. For example, in order to earn a small amount of money they should work hard, whereas the rich can earn money easily as much as they want, I think.

Cliff: Yeah. So is the mom unhappy in the work she does?

Satya: She doesn't express her feelings. She doesn't complain; she's not the complaining type.

Cliff: She doesn't say anything about how she feels?

Kolya: There were some words but I don't remember ... she's happy because all the people in the district respect her because she's honest, respectable\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: So not happy, but there is value in it?

Selena: Yeah, I don't think anybody would be happy in this situation.

Alyeh: On the first page it says, 'She came home with a week's notice and wept under the lemon tree where she thought I wouldn't hear. I tried to convince her never to return.' So this means she was unhappy\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Unhappy because she was accused of stealing something?

Alyeh: Yeah.

Cliff: Okay, I just want to end it by reading something and then I want to ask you what you think, right? It's on the first page. So this is how the son sees his mother: 'She was proud of her good name and the way people bragged about her and passed her around like a hot tip, but I resented how quickly they took her for granted. I'd seen their patronising notes on floral paper, their attempts to chip her rate down. The householders who thought most highly of themselves were invariably the worst payers and the biggest slob. It was as

though having someone pick up after them had either encouraged them to be careless or made them increasingly determined to extort more work for their money. Through it all, my mother maintained her dignity and her hourly rate. She left jobs, she did not lose them.’ What does that say about how *he* feels about his mom overall?

Samir: He respects her, like 1000 percent.

Satya: I think also he respects the way she sees her work. In a way he kind of wishes that he had that.

Samir: When you think that this person has never got kicked out of work, that means this person was very respected and even competent.

Selena: I feel like she feels happy right now, despite there being some ups and downs. In the stealing situation, that was a ‘down’ obviously. But I feel throughout, generally, she’s happy.

Dmitri: In every situation you can find positives and negatives.

Samir: I think she’s more confident, you know? But in this story she’s doing that on purpose to prove them wrong, you know \_\_\_\_\_

Selena: What?

Cliff: So what do you feel about that last scene where she leaves the money, she leaves the earrings, and she leaves the place clean? Is that a good way to leave the job.

Alyeh: Respect!

Samir: Yeah, at the end it’s like she’s losing everything and she’s winning everything also.

Satya: Yes but it was more like okay, you cleaned the flat, you left the money and the earrings and then you left. What did you get from that? If the rich woman came back and she saw the money, the earrings and everything, she’d say wow. She was going to think a lot of that woman and her values. But that’s it? That’s it! If you got the money, you’d actually help yourself, you know what I mean?

Alyeh: No no no, she’s going to feel that having so little, she’s much ‘bigger’ than her.

Samir: Exactly!

Kolya: I think in this situation she demonstrated how although she’s from the lowest level of society, she’s ‘more’ than these rich people. By cleaning that room for free she shows that, for her, money is not important. Her honour is more important, I think.

Dmitri: But as Satya said, that’s going to be forgotten. She left her money, the earrings, her job?



Alyeh: It's about respect.

Satya: In a way, she's an idealist in the end, you know? But at the same time, she cares about what the woman thinks. Why did she leave both the money and the earrings? She wanted to leave a mark: 'I have values, I don't need money, I don't need anything.' But again honour comes back, pride comes back (whichever one we were talking about). It comes back again and that's why I said that sometimes it's wrong. Because you wasted your time\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: Does she feel that she wasted her time?

Satya: But her son was with her\_\_\_\_\_

Cliff: And in the end does *he* feel that she wasted it?

Satya: No, but I mean she cared about the woman.

Cliff: So what's the value of all that, if anything?

Satya: She had enough: she didn't need that money—again, an idealist. But at the same time, I think that's a problem because she cared about the woman, she cared about what the woman thinks.

Selena: No, I think she did it for herself\_\_\_\_\_

Satya: She did it for herself, but the woman was involved in her vision, to complete her mission. She needed the woman to complete her vision.

Kolya: Satya, she cared about her honour, not about that woman.

Satya: Okay, but when you think about your honour you think about other people\_\_\_\_\_

Selena: Yeah everything revolves around other people, it's obvious. If you were alone by yourself, 'honour' wouldn't exist, it wouldn't really matter.

Satya: I mean, you don't exist without other people. It's the same thing here: your honour doesn't exist without other people.

Cliff: Hmm that's true, I think you're right. Why it's so hard I guess, why we're so conflicted is because the stuff that we do as individuals is related to the stuff that we do as a society. So even if she leaves with her respect intact, she only has that respect because she knows it will be seen, it's valued, by someone else. And it's that conflict and that flux, that dynamic, which makes life very interesting. Thank you all very much!

## **Appendix G – Short Story Summaries**

### **Lessons 1 and 2 – Mr Salary (Sally Rooney)**

This short story revolves around a young woman, Sukie, who is returning from college in the United States to Dublin, Ireland to visit her dying father, Frank, with whom she has always had a difficult and complex relationship. Having not lived with her father for many years, she arranges on her return to lodge with Nathan, an indirect relative connected through his sister's marriage to Sukie's uncle, and whom she previously lived with following her mother's death. Nathan is 15 years older than Sukie, attended her christening, and has always spoiled her and taken care of her in a platonic way. However, perhaps due to the fraught relationship with her uncaring father and the way Nathan has always selflessly looked after her and made her feel safe, Sukie realizes that her feelings towards him have developed over the years from a warm gratitude to a deep love laced with a tense lust—a feeling Nathan is neither unconscious of nor immune to. From the moment Sukie slips into the seat of Nathan's car at the airport, their relationship is ignited by a heady, hypnotic sexual tension which simmers through the entire narrative until the end.

### **Lesson 3 – My Hobby (Tom Fabian)**

This story traces the delusional ruminations of the first-person narrator and protagonist, George Blake, an old man seeing out his days in a residential home. Though he fancies himself a sincere do-gooder, a self-confessed model citizen who had a wife and son he loved, Blake is in fact a narcissistic serial killer: 'I used to kill in order to help people; it was sort of like charity with me' (para. 4). Reflecting on his past murderous 'hobby', the narrator recounts its advent with an unsettling impassivity. Over the next twenty years he murders many people, whom he lists by profession, in what he considers a creative variety of ways: 'I tried to mix it up' (para. 11). When both his wife and son die in quick succession (and to which the narrator makes no further reference), several other important changes occur in his life. He retires, moves home and settles on a fresh target whom he calls the Black Widow, a woman he suspects of killing her former husbands. He also meets an inquisitive Australian, Stanley Leyton, who invites him home for dinner. There he accuses Blake of murdering his brother and blackmails him with the evidence.

In response, Blake contacts the Black Widow and blackmails her instead into murdering Leyton—an assignment she agrees to, but botches when her old gun backfires and kills her instead. With Leyton now an even more serious threat, the narrator gives up his hobby and agrees to pay his blackmailer for as long as necessary. In later years the two end up in the same residential home together, though Stanley eventually dies. The final scene sees Blake feeling slightly bitter at the nurses, who seem tired of looking after him. When one of them comes to check up on him one morning, he feels the stirrings of an urge to resume his old hobby.

#### **Lesson 4 – The Necklace (Guy de Maupassant)**

This short story is set in France over a century ago. The protagonist is a young woman, Mathilde Loisel, who lives in an apartment with her husband, a clerk in the Ministry of Education. While they are not poor, Mathilde yearns to live in the luxurious manner of her wealthy friend Jeanne. One day the couple are invited to an extravagant ball and to alleviate her distress at not having an expensive gown, Mathilde’s husband gives her his savings to buy it. Mathilde then borrows a sparkling diamond necklace from Jeanne to complement her dress and, suitably attired, Mathilde has a wonderful evening at the gala. On their arrival home, however, the couple find that the necklace is missing. In a great panic, they search for it in vain and stall for time until they are able to cobble together the vast amount of money needed to purchase a replacement. Ironically, Jeanne did not notice the necklace’s absence and hardly looks at it when it is returned. Mathilde and her husband spend the next ten years working themselves to exhaustion to pay back the loans and in the process, their social and financial circumstances change dramatically. At some point after this Mathilde unexpectedly meets Jeanne, who is shocked at first by her friend’s rough, aged appearance and then by the sad story about the necklace. More shocking still, for both Mathilde and the reader, is Jeanne’s revelation that the borrowed necklace, for which the couple had sacrificed so much, was a cheap fake made of paste, worth a mere fraction of the cost of the genuine diamond necklace they had given to Jeanne.

#### **Lesson 5 – Sandpiper (Ahdaf Soueif)**

The overarching theme in this short story is the prosaic hardship of being in a cross-cultural relationship and, related to this, the personal struggle involved in adjusting to a very different, less flexible culture. Broadly speaking, the cultures in question are Arabic (Egyptian) and European, the latter alluded to obliquely in the text as located in the 'northern land'. The narrative spans just one afternoon and is set in Alexandria, where the protagonist (the unnamed first-person narrator), her husband and their daughter are spending the summer holidays with the husband's family. Over the course of the afternoon the narrator contemplates the strained state of her marriage, ruefully contrasting her current situation with the giddy happiness of earlier times when she and her husband were deeply in love. She reflects on how her roles as wife, mother, and woman have changed for the worse, and admits to herself that her daughter, Lucy, is the only reason she has remained in the marriage. Feeling increasingly alienated, confined, lonely, helpless and unloved, she clings to the hope of eventually moving away when Lucy grows up and becomes more independent.

#### **Lesson 6 – Paste (Henry James)**

This is a short story with social conflict as its main theme, which is expressed in the broader terms of class and the narrower terms of family. At the centre of the narrative is a young woman who, alone among those in her circle, chooses to take the right path. The protagonist, Charlotte, receives a box of theatrical costume jewellery as a token of remembrance of her aunt, a former actress, who has just died. Charlotte and her cousin Arthur (the deceased's stepson) speculate that some of the items may be genuine rather than fake, which would imply that they were presents from an admirer. This is significant as it is related to the centuries-old social stigma which regarded actresses as women of easy virtue. However, Arthur priggishly dismisses this suggestion, asserting that his stepmother's honour was beyond reproach. Charlotte soon discovers that the pearls are real and, while she feels obliged to return them, recognizes that they would be revealed as a 'gift' to an actress and so confirm Arthur's worst fears. Instead, she starts wearing them in private, though eventually feels compelled to confront Arthur with the truth. Refusing to believe Charlotte, Arthur insists he will have the pearls professionally appraised, and later informs Charlotte that they are indeed fake. However, Charlotte meets an acquaintance, Mrs Guy, wearing the pearls, who says she has bought them

from a jeweller. This reveals to Charlotte that not only has Arthur lied, but he may well have sold the pearls directly to Mrs Guy.

### **Lesson 7 – The Lifeguard (Mary Morris)**

This short story explores the anxious coming-of-age of Josh Michaels, an eighteen-year-old boy who serves as the local beach lifeguard and the story's unreliable narrator. The narrative traces the development of his self-image, and in this vein is somewhat reflective in tone. Josh is quite self-absorbed, posturing, accustomed to getting what he wants without much effort, and apparently confident as a result. The people around him, who seem to yearn for the glories of their past, see their long-lost youthful qualities reflected in him. While Josh basks in both the community's esteem and the attention he receives from girls, he is inwardly frustrated because he intuitively feels all this admiration is unwarranted and that he is missing something deeper in his character. One person he does find intriguing, though 'old', is Mrs Lovenheim, whose daily routine is to read a book on the beach. Seemingly unremarkable, she nonetheless stands out for Josh because of what he perceives as her secret obsession for him, as well as a depth of character lacking in everyone else around him. One day, a young girl Becky Spencer gets into difficulties in the water but Josh freezes and fails, just when courage and maturity are most needed. Instead, Mrs Lovenheim rescues Becky, which prompts Josh finally to approach her. Mrs. Lovenheim's self-assured but humble response triggers in Josh a full awareness of his personal inadequacy, and his self-image crumbles as a result, changing irrevocably. Josh eventually turns out to be just the same as the people he used to resent, devaluing his later years and looking back sentimentally at his youth.

### **Lesson 8 – On Her Knees (Tim Winton)**

This short story is about Carol Lang, a middle-aged domestic cleaner and her son Victor, a 20-year-old university law student—who also functions as the narrator. Mrs Lang takes pride in the quality of her cleaning work and the good reputation it has earned her in the local community. The central narrative begins with Mrs Lang having been accused by one of her wealthy clients of stealing a pair of expensive earrings, and the cleaner being dismissed as a result. The client nonetheless leaves a note asking Mrs Lang to clean for one more week while a replacement is sought, along with a thin envelope of money

for the final job. On hearing this, Victor is incensed and tries in vain to persuade his mother not to return. She chooses to go anyway, intending to maintain her pride and reputation. Despite serious misgivings, Victor relents and steps forward at the last minute to accompany his mother and help with the job. While vacuuming, they find the earrings on the bedroom floor. Even though she is now vindicated, Mrs Lang decides to protect her hard-won reputation by not challenging her client. Instead, she places the earrings alongside the unopened envelope and the house key, and leaves with her integrity intact.

### **Lesson 9 – Elephant (Raymond Carver)**

This short story is told from the perspective of an unnamed first-person narrator. He is a reformed alcoholic whose whole family is financially dependent on him. His mother is old and greedy and expects a monthly stipend, while his brother is at risk of his house being foreclosed so needs immediate help. The narrator's children also regularly call on him for financial assistance: his daughter has two children with a husband who refuses to work, and his son has accrued a considerable amount of debt from college expenses. In addition, the narrator has to pay monthly alimony to his ex-wife. Feeling obligated to address this financial burden, he works constantly, even giving up little things he used to enjoy, all to save money. Understandably, the situation takes a heavy toll on him and he starts feeling self-pity and resenting his family. One night he has two dreams: one is a pleasant recollection of his childhood, of feeling safe and happy with his father; the other is a nightmare, in which he relives the time when he was drinking heavily, and an episode where he threatened to kill his son. Waking up in a cold sweat the next morning, the narrator understands that being an alcoholic is what frightened him most—and compared with that, his life is now so much better. With this fresh realization, he decides to walk to work, whistling and thinking happily about how much he actually appreciates his dysfunctional family.

### **Lesson 10 – Track (Nicole Flattery)**

This short story traces the emotionally abusive relationship of a couple who cohabit uncomfortably in a New York apartment. The protagonist in the story is the 1<sup>st</sup>-person narrator, a young insecure Irish woman with a history of mental health problems. Her

older boyfriend is a moderately successful comedic actor with a declining career, who projects his anxiety and self-loathing onto his girlfriend. After a failed evening out with his fellow actors in which she sat reticent and wordless, he quietly chastizes her for being 'an odd little ghost person'. So the abuse, though reciprocal, is not evenly distributed between the central characters. But neither is it blatant, with the narrative deliberately low-key in its depiction of the painfully repressed interactions between the two. Their situation epitomizes the imprecise pain of alienation, a feeling reflected in the narrative tone, which is surreal yet strangely detached. The boyfriend actor occupies much of his free time by secretly replaying a recorded track of a childhood comic performance, at the end of which his mother applauds. Equally secretly, the narrator slates her boyfriend's work on an online forum, posting her comments under his mother's name. The stage for these alienating 'solo performances' is the ultimate anonymizing experience of the overcrowded city.

#### **Lesson 11 – The Lady With the Little Dog (Anton Chekhov)**

This is essentially a love story involving the protagonist Dmitri Gurov, a cynical man on the cusp of middle age and Anna, a naive younger woman, who meet at a restaurant while on holiday in Yalta, a popular regional destination at the turn of the nineteenth century. Gurov strikes up a conversation with Anna and, though both are married, they leave the restaurant together and spend a few hours walking along the coast. Over the next week, the pair spend more time together and embark on a love affair which changes them both in profound ways. While Anna struggles with her conscience, Dmitri finds himself increasingly weary of her moral angst. The affair ends abruptly when Anna receives a letter from her husband urging her to return home, which she does with mixed feelings of regret and relief. Dmitri too goes back home, immersing himself again in Moscow's elite society. To his frustration, he cannot forget Anna so decides to find her and resolve the situation. At the very end of an unsuccessful search, they meet coincidentally at the theatre. Anna is mortified they will be seen together, but still promises to visit Dmitri in Moscow. The couple resume their relationship with Anna visiting Moscow regularly. One day in a hotel, they realize the true depth of their love for each other. Both are distraught at the complexity of the situation confronting them, but are equally determined to keep searching for a solution.

## **Lesson 12 – White Nights (Fyodor Dostoevsky)**

The protagonist, the nameless narrator, is a lonely young man living in Saint Petersburg who, wandering around the city at night, considers himself a dreamer. The narrative spans four nights. On the first, the narrator comes across a young woman, Nastenka, who is being harassed by another man, and he intervenes. He accompanies her home and immediately finds himself revealing his loneliness and timidity to her. Also lonely, Nastenka agrees to meet the young man again, on the proviso that he should not expect romance. On their next meeting, the narrator recounts his life in the form of a story with him as the lonely lead character who dreams of life as he wishes it to be. Nastenka's story involves being raised by her grandmother and falling in love with a young lodger, who promised to save enough money to return and marry her—something he has not done. By the following night, the narrator realizes he has fallen in love with Nastenka, though he does not reveal this. She tells him that she loves him, unaware of the depth of his feelings. Perhaps understandably, the strain of his unrequited love has led to feelings of alienation towards her. The fourth night sees the narrator divulge his devotion to the young lady but insist on never seeing her again. In desperation, she urges him to stay, holding out the prospect of a future relationship. As they continue walking, however, Nastenka's missing lover reappears and they reunite immediately, leaving the narrator bereft. The story concludes with the narrator receiving a letter from Nastenka, in which she apologizes sincerely for hurting him. Bursting into tears, he decides philosophically to look on the experience in a positive way.

## **Lesson 13 – 'Tickets, Please' (D.H. Lawrence)**

This short story is set in the English midlands in the midst of the First World War. Turning away from the contemporary combat raging in northwestern Europe, the narrative explores aspects of a subtler struggle though one arguably no less profound: the battle between the sexes. This is explored through the themes of romance, sex, betrayal and vengeance. The protagonist, John Thomas, is a young tram driver who is supremely confident of his way with women, particularly the young women conductors on the trams. Even his name, a pointed reference to 'penis' (and one of many such allusions), suggests his apparent manliness. However, a related question springs immediately to mind, which is never addressed: given the war, why is he not fighting? Despite this and



his dubious reputation, one of the conductors, Annie, finds herself drawn to John Thomas and agrees to go on a date with him. She subsequently discovers that he has also been 'walking out' with several of the other women conductors. Having deliberately begun the relationship as casually as John Thomas has, Annie nonetheless ends up feeling betrayed. She then gathers the other ladies and together they exact a brutal revenge on the young man.

#### **Lesson 14 – Mrs Mahmood (Segun Afolabi)**

Unexpectedly, this short story revolves around the insecurities of *Mr Mahmood*, and not his wife. Among the themes explored are personal fear, regret, insecurity, and love. Mr Mahmood lives a comfortable life, with his own business and a wife he dotes on. By most standards, he would be thought to have accomplished a lot. However, the narrator lives with regrets from his experiences as a young man which feed his present insecurity to the extent that he sometimes feels personally beaten by life. In his youth Mahmood was an above average athlete obsessed with winning. He had the talent and potential to achieve elite status which, to an almost oppressive level of regret, he never did. Many years later the narrator now seems to compensate for that personal shame by conducting his life in a very orderly and strict fashion. Occasionally his mask of self-discipline slips, when he indulges in alcohol and music, and when he is impatient with his wife (who, by contrast, is unwavering in her loyalty and understanding). One day a young boy attempts to steal a pair of trainers from the shop and escapes with Mahmood in pursuit. When he catches the boy, the narrator is about to strike him but stops himself, instantly regretting his loss of self-control. The boy, significantly, is the antithesis of Mahmood and seems calm and resigned to the consequences of his actions. Instead of contacting the police, the narrator informs the boy's mother of the incident. This unexpected act suggests Mahmood believes at least in giving others, if not himself, a second chance.

#### **Lesson 15 – The Faber Book of Adultery (Jonathan Gibbs)**

The story begins with the protagonist, himself a writer, perusing the bookshelves and generally observing the post-dinner scene in the home of Zac and Elizabeth, a married couple he and his wife were friends with. Among Mark's musings are writerly thoughts

about the ontological relationship between fiction writing and reality. These thoughts are interspersed with less intellectual reflections about Elizabeth, who Mark finds sexually attractive. Finding himself momentarily alone with Elizabeth, Mark's opening gambit of flirtation is cautious, even speculative—and to avoid any imputations of impropriety, he masks his interest in her with diversionary references to the various ways infidelity is rendered in literature. The night ends without incident but in the weeks that follow, Mark's ideas, both literary and actual, about having an affair with Elizabeth develop. One day, unexpectedly, he finds himself babysitting her ill 4-year-old son who was now asleep. Mark passes the time inappropriately by going through his friends' bedroom and Elizabeth's personal things. Somewhat aroused, he is inspired to start writing a passage which reflects his thoughts and desires. This is when Elizabeth arrives, having left Zac to continue the evening with his friends, and offers Mark a nightcap. The account of the seduction which follows, and which concludes the narrative, is as much about the process of erotic writing as it is about the realism of the experience the text seeks to represent.

### **Lesson 16 – The Man Who Walked on the Moon (J.G. Ballard)**

This is a short story set in Brazil which explores themes of loneliness, identity, truth, illusion, exploitation and redemption. It is narrated by a mediocre unnamed journalist, unappreciated at work and despised by both his wife and mother, who happens on a dubious opportunity to reinvent himself and regain his dignity. He does this by assisting another character fallen on hard times, Scranton, who ekes out the barest living by masquerading as a former astronaut for the amusement of impressionable tourists. The narrative charts the strange trajectory of these characters' originally separate lives to the eventual merging of their identities into a single false persona. The various social transactions made along this journey include the irony of tourists playing along good-naturedly with Scranton but also willing to suspend their disbelief enough to buy into the possibility of his celebrity, unlikely and paltry though it is. This grubby yet alluring transformation of value from person to persona, from human being to commodity, is after all what the narrator recognizes as Scranton's utility. Towards the end of the narrative, the ailing Scranton succumbs to a rather nondescript death. For the narrator, by contrast, Scranton's death is a pivotal, restorative moment. Having divested himself

of adult life's usual responsibilities and scruples, and infused with a fresh perspective on reality, the narrator assumes Scranton's fraudulent role with an incongruous lightness of being.

## Appendix H – Ethics Application Form

Institute of Education



### Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

#### Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form\* and submit it to your supervisor for approval.

If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

#### Section 1 Project details

a.	Project title	Exploring the Development of Critical Thinking in English for Academic Purposes through the Use of Literature: an Exploratory Practice Approach	
b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)	Clifford Kast CNGKA03	
c.	<b>*UCL Data Protection Registration Number:</b> Z6364106/2018/05/50	Date issued: 11 May 2018	
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Amos Paran	
d.	Department	Culture, Communication and Media	
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
		DEdPsy <input type="checkbox"/>	
f.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.		
g.	Intended research start date	14 January 2019	
h.	Intended research end date	28 June 2019	
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: <a href="http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx">http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx</a></i>	United Kingdom	

October 2018

j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:
	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:
<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.</li> <li>– Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the <a href="#">National Research Ethics Service (NRES)</a> or <a href="#">Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)</a>. In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.</p>		

### Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires               | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <i>if only method used go to Section 5.</i>              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action research              | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <i>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Observation       | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups                                   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature review | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, give details:   |

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

#### Purpose and aims

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which critical thinking is developed through the use of literature. The research will take place in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) university class. The main aims of the study can be divided into two strands: internal and external. The internal strand refers to those objectives which will affect my class and me: (1) to read literary texts for pleasure and engage in productive talk about these texts, and in so doing (2) to enhance participants' high-level comprehension and critical thinking skills. The external strand refers to objectives I hope could be more widely applied in the education community: (1) to explore the efficacy of literature as a viable pedagogical tool in the development of critical thinking and thereby (2) to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which literature can be an authentic resource in the EAP classroom.

#### Research Question

*In what ways, if any, does dialogic discussion in a literary reading circle contribute to the development of higher order comprehension and critical thinking in an EAP context?*

#### Research design, participants and sampling

The research design will employ the research methodology of Exploratory Practice, developed by Allwright (1993). This is a principled form of practitioner research which allows the teacher to assume the additional roles of researcher and full participant. It also emphasizes learners as key collaborative practitioners in the research project. Exploratory Practice differs from other practitioner research frameworks (e.g. Action Research) in that it focuses more on reflection and collaboration among participants to achieve an integral *understanding* of a 'puzzling' classroom phenomenon. In the proposed project, the central puzzle will revolve around the seemingly incongruous use of literary texts in the typically utilitarian context of an EAP classroom. While Action Research aims to identify problems which need to be solved in order

to improve a situation, Exploratory Practice is exploratory in that it may or may not result in 'solving a problem'. Nonetheless, it does ultimately aim to result in improved conditions for learning.

The study will be conducted as part of the year-long (pre-first year) International Foundation Programme EAP course. It will take the form of a classroom intervention, using the instructional frame of a literary reading circle (Duncan, 2012; Reznitskaya, 2012). At the start of the foundation course, in September 2018, a class was formed of 9 students of similar linguistic proficiency. For the first semester, I have been teaching this class the normal syllabus of the EAP course. The intervention will take place in the second semester, beginning in January 2019. The participants will comprise a group of approximately 15 participants and me, the teacher, as a fellow participant. This anticipated increase in number is due to several new students typically enrolling for the second semester. Initial procedures for the reading circle will involve a whole class induction explaining the project.

The intervention will follow a non-experimental mixed-methods design, with the primary unit of analysis being critical thinking development as demonstrated in dialogic discourse and a standardized critical thinking assessment. Qualitative data collection and analysis will involve the higher order discourse emerging from the reading circle's dialogic discussions, using the Quality Talk coding rubric (Soter et al., 2006/2016). For quantitative data and analysis, all students will undergo a pre- and post-test of their critical thinking—before and after the intervention, respectively—via the Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment (HTCA) (Halpern, 2010). This is a standardized instrument which is administered and scored online.

The foundation programme is a full-time course comprising 20 hours a week, 16 hours of which are devoted to EAP, with the remaining 4 hours given to maths and ICT. I currently teach a 2-hour reading-speaking class. This class will become the reading circle, meeting once a week for 6 months, totalling approximately 40 hours. Participants will be invited to suggest, select and decide on three texts from a list of literary works. The texts will be graded progressively from relatively shorter to longer (a short story, a novella, and a novel) as well as from easier to more difficult. To partially address expected disparities in language level, text selection in this intervention is key. Literary works will be chosen from a limited set to encourage learners' critical thinking dispositions which, I hope to demonstrate, will promote high-level comprehension and critical-analytic discussion. The dialectical process of text selection will be highlighted to members as the first instance of critical thinking in the research project.

For instruction I will employ a hybridized teaching format, combining both explicit critical thinking instruction and content, which Ennis (1989) has characterized as *infusion*. Challenging the long-held bifurcation between top-down, structured, 'direct' versus bottom-up, constructivist, 'discovery' instructional approaches, much recent research (e.g. Abrami et al., 2008; Alfieri et al., 2011; Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Klahr, 2009; Ku et al., 2014; Mayer, 2004) has demonstrated that an infusion of explicit critical thinking instruction as well as enquiry-based content optimizes the potential for beneficial critical thinking outcomes. Applying these findings to my study, the first hour of a typical lesson will consist of explicit teaching of critical thinking language, principles and skills (Cottrell, 2011; Halpern, 1998), including open-ended tasks and ill-structured problems—that is, problems located in authentic contexts whose answers depend on the respondent's ability to make judgements based on reasoning and prior experience (King & Kitchener, 1994, 2004; Kuhn, 1991). This will be followed in the next hour by literary discussion conducted in the discursive format of a reading circle observing the dialogic principles of Quality Talk (Wilkinson et al., 2010). The merits of such a 'balanced approach', where direct instruction precedes inquiry-based activities in the same lesson, are demonstrated by Ku et al.'s (2014) study, which documented notable improvement in both critical thinking and learning transfer tasks.

When the first text has been read, an open-class summary session will be held to gather overall impressions of the project's process up to that point. Opinions will be solicited to refresh and confirm the aims of the study, and begin reading and discussing the new text. A similar session will be repeated on completion of the second text. At the end of the final term, having completed the third text, I will again conduct an open-class plenary session to obtain final reflections on the entire process. To complete the intervention and determine the extent, if any, to which critical thinking has developed, all students will take the HCTA post-test (Halpern, 2010).

#### **Data collection**

I have chosen a mixed methods research design for two reasons. One is that a single method does not adequately convey the complexity of human behaviour; qualitative data, for example, foregrounds information which may provide significant contextual details about participants, including factors which could influence performance, such as motivation and



engagement. The other reason is that a wider range of evidence offers a kind of methodological triangulation so the possibility of bias in data collection methods decreases.

For the HCTA, I will collect quantitative data, all of which will be done online. The reading circle, on the other hand, will yield qualitative data. All discussions will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed, and two primary modes of data collection will be used:

- **Classroom recording:** To accurately capture the discursive interaction between participants, I will make audio and video recordings of each session.
- **Research journal:** I will keep a detailed journal, with notes written down immediately after each session to record any initial impressions and insights, and elaborated as soon as possible thereafter. These notes will serve as both data collection and a source of analysis.

To determine which qualitative data to focus on, I will use the coding rubric of Quality Talk (Soter et al., 2006/2016).

### **Reporting**

The research question will be addressed by analyzing the results of the critical thinking pre- and post-tests, as well as the audio-visual recordings of the reading circle discussions, and my research journal notes.

Reporting of my findings from the reading circle discussions of literary texts will primarily take the form of presenting discourse extracts which illustrate learners' higher-order comprehension and critical-analytic thinking. These extracts will be discussed with reference to important recurrent words or phrases, which will themselves inform significant themes, interpretations and conclusions. For coding of the data I have obtained authorization for the use of the Quality Talk discourse coding manual from Ian Wilkinson, one of three authors (with Anna Soter and Karen Murphy) who developed this approach to classroom discussion (Soter et al. (2006/2016; Wilkinson et al., 2010). Although Quality Talk was intended to privilege a critical-analytic stance towards literary text, its authors encourage teachers to instantiate it in ways that fit the needs of each classroom where it is implemented.

Reporting of my findings from the Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment (Halpern, 2010) will start with a baseline score of critical thinking ability from all participants. I will calculate Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the post-test scores on the HCTA, which consists of 25 everyday scenarios covering various topics, each leading to questions which first require a constructed (open-ended) response, followed by forced choice items. I will present pre- and post-test scores graphically and follow these with explanations.

### **Dissemination**

Through presentations and publications, my findings will contribute to the argument for literature to be used as an authentic source of materials in EAP pedagogy, and in particular to develop critical thinking. With the main focus of my PhD being critical thinking, I plan to extend my knowledge and network by fostering relations with leading scholars in this field.

Examples of forums where I hope to present my work are events held by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Teachers (BALEAP), and the newly-launched Research Network on Literature in Language Learning within AILA (Association Internationale de la Linguistique Appliquée - International Association of Applied Linguistics). The BALEAP Conference in April 2019, themed 'Innovation, Exploration and Transformation', would be an ideal introductory platform to present my study's 'exploratory' take on EAP praxis, and I expect the feedback from practitioners and researchers would be invaluable for my studies in this area. Another conference which I would be keen to attend and hopefully present at is the 'International Conference on Critical Thinking', scheduled for early June 2019 in Leuven, Belgium, and organized by the project CRITHINKEDU, in partnership with the Foundation for Critical Thinking (USA).

I would like to write at least one journal article or working paper for publication during my doctoral studies. What would suit me at this stage of my research is an innovation by the Journal of English for Academic Purposes, which is its new 'Researching EAP Practice' strand. This will offer more grounded and practice-based discussions (4000 words) than are usually found in conventional research articles, and this would be an appropriate forum to introduce my classroom-based research. I also plan to present at an in-house seminar or conference, probably next summer's IOE student conference.

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## Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)

Early years/pre-school



<input type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults <i>please specify below</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below
<input type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> No participants

**NB:** Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC).

#### Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>

\* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

#### Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>

\* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments**.*

#### Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		<i>If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?</i>	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	If no, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>

g.	If no, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><i>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p> <p><i>If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to Section 9 Attachments.</i></p>			
<b>Section 7 Data Storage and Security</b> <i>Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.</i>			
a.	<b>Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?</b> Data will be collected from my class of Foundation EAP learners, who will participate in a weekly literature discussion group.		
b.	<b>What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected</b> The personal data collected may include participants' names, nationalities, and gender.		
c.	<b>Is the data anonymised?</b> Do you plan to anonymise the data? Do you plan to use individual level data? Do you plan to pseudonymise the data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><i>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p>			
e.	<b>i. Disclosure – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?</b> The results will be disclosed in my PhD thesis, which will be accessible by any interested parties with access to the IOE repository. Prior to that, only my supervisors and I will have access to them. Further dissemination in the form of presentations and articles will also lead to the project's results being disclosed.		
	<b>ii. Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?</b> No, all personal data will be anonymized or pseudonymized.		
f.	<b>Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc.</b> All data will be encrypted and securely stored and backed up on password-protected USB drives, and not in any publicly accessible format or cache. <b>** Advanced Encryption Standard 256-bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS</b>		
g..	<b>Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution) – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

h.	<p>How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The data, in transcript form only, will be kept for 10 years, as recommended by the UCL Records Retention Schedule (p. 5)</p> <p>Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are) No</p> <p>Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.) No</p>
i.	<p>If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymisation and short retention period of data.</p> <p>Pseudonymization of my data will involve replacing names or other identifiers which are easily attributed to individual participants with a reference number or letter. This means that such numbers or letters cannot be traced back to the individual unless one has organizational access to the relevant personal data. Although all data from the project sessions will be collected through audio and video recordings, these recordings will only be used to create transcripts reflecting participants' contributions. The video footage in particular will be used only if transcription from the audio recordings is difficult or impossible. To reduce the risk of participant anonymity being compromised, all video recordings will be destroyed as soon as good quality transcripts have been produced, while audio recordings will be retained until the viva. The transcripts will be retained for 10 years, as recommended by the UCL Records Retention Schedule, and stored securely on the UCL network and encrypted electronic devices.</p>
<p><i>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p>	

### Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Methods</li> <li>- Sampling</li> <li>- Recruitment</li> <li>- Gatekeepers</li> <li>- Informed consent</li> <li>- Potentially vulnerable participants</li> <li>- Safeguarding/child protection</li> <li>- Sensitive topics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International research</li> <li>- Risks to participants and/or researchers</li> <li>- Confidentiality/Anonymity</li> <li>- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality</li> <li>- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)</li> <li>- Reporting</li> <li>- Dissemination and use of findings</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

This project will involve young adult university students collaborating with me in a reading circle to produce insights into whether reading literature has an appreciable influence on the development of critical thinking. Ethical issues to consider include the following:

- To ensure integrity and quality, the project has been designed with participants' educational and personal benefits in mind. The research framework, Exploratory Practice, with its emphasis on holistic pedagogy and research practice prioritizes 'quality of life' in the classroom and over the course of a research project seeks to sustain and improve conditions conducive to both personal and learning development. More specifically, the project will contribute to



participants' English language and academic skills development by providing a structured course designed to engage the learners in collaborative critical discussion of literary texts.

- Permission for the intervention has already been granted by my manager, who has been apprised of all the details, including purpose, schedule, methods, intended pedagogical outcomes, benefits, and risks. The reading circle session has now been officially incorporated into the second semester syllabus of the International Foundation Programme (IFP). My proposal was accepted largely because the IFP as a whole is divided into modules, one of which (UK Academic Culture and Study Skills) is quite flexible, and gives teachers room to input creative content. Management was enthusiastic about incorporating my project into the module, particularly as it addressed critical thinking pedagogy in a structured way, that is, using what Ennis (1989) calls the *infusion* approach. By contrast, although critical thinking is a stated objective of the IFP, it is not explicitly taught. Following Ennis' (1989) typology, the IPF's current pedagogic approach is one of *immersion*, where critical thinking is assumed to improve without direct instruction.
- I will obtain informed consent from my participants, following BERA procedures (a copy of the Consent Form is attached). To mitigate any concerns which could arise from my status as gatekeeper (in that I grade their work, for example), the learners will be similarly informed of the features of the project first as a class, then individually, to address any reservations they might have about participating (a copy of the Participant Information Sheet is attached). They will then—and regularly throughout the intervention—be explicitly assured they can come to me or my manager with any concerns about participating in the intervention.
- A related issue is that of power relations. Potential problems could arise from what some learners may view as my three roles seeming to contradict each other (teacher, researcher, and marginal participant) and how and when I would shift between them. It would, for example, be quite understandable for learners to have reservations about sharing the same role as their teacher, namely, being a fellow participant in the reading circle. Fortunately, these concerns are minimally applicable to my current class due to its congenial atmosphere—all the learners get on really well. From the beginning of the year, I have encouraged the learners to be forthright in expressing their opinions but, equally, to be readily accepting of others' views and respectful of turntaking. As a result, there is a robust curiosity among the learners which fuels a prevailing questioning culture in the classroom.
- All information observed and gathered will be confidential, and participants' anonymity will be protected in that all personal details and collected data will be anonymized as far as possible. Pseudonymization will apply when referring to individual responses in my data analysis. As noted in Section 7 (i) above, all raw data (i.e. audio and video recordings) will be destroyed as soon as I have created transcripts of participants' contributions.

Participants will be informed that they can refuse permission for data (i.e. transcriptions) produced from audio and/or video recordings to be used. They will also be able to withdraw permission for this data to be used, and request such data to be removed from the project database at any time. Further, they will be informed that the research may result in publication, though their identities would remain strictly anonymous. All data will be encrypted and securely stored and backed up on password-protected personal USB drives, and not in any publicly accessible format or cache.

- Participants will be informed of the possibility of the research findings being disseminated in publications and/or conferences after the termination of the research period.
- Any issues of research independence, potential conflicts of interests or partiality will be regularly assessed by both my supervisors and me.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual Yes

### Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research ( <i>List attachments below</i> )	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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1. Copy of Consent Form
2. Copy of Participant Information Sheet

<i>If applicable/appropriate:</i>		
b.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
c.	The proposal ('case for support') for the project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Full risk assessment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>

### Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.

**I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:**

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Clifford Kast
Date	13 November 2018

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

### Notes and references

### Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

[British Psychological Society](#) (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*

or

[British Educational Research Association](#) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

[British Sociological Association](#) (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/research-ethics>

### Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

### Further references

The [www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk](http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk) website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

### Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Research Development Administrator (via [ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk)) so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name	
Student department	
Course	

Project title		
<b>Reviewer 1</b>		
Supervisor/first reviewer name		
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?		
Supervisor/first reviewer signature		
Date		
<b>Reviewer 2</b>		
Second reviewer name		
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?		
Supervisor/second reviewer signature		
Date		
<b>Decision on behalf of reviews</b>		
Decision	Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Approved subject to the following additional measures	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not approved for the reasons given below	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review	<input type="checkbox"/>
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC		
Comments from reviewers for the applicant		
<p><i>Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: <a href="mailto:IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk">IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk</a>.</i></p>		