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The Importance of Elsewhere:
Método Paulo Freire and the Canada-Northern Ireland Connection[1]

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This essay focuses on the personal experience of its author, an English professor of Canadian origin, who has developed innovative ways of teaching post-colonial literature in a place where an awareness of "identity" is both omnipresent and unavoidable. In Northern Ireland, the problem of defining an identity for oneself, and then maintaining that set of distinguishing characteristics, is a key determinant of patterns of behaviour in daily life. The majority of students who attend Queen's University come from Northern Ireland, and are drawn from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. They have a highly developed sense of their own political, religious, and cultural allegiances, and often have difficulty, because of deeply ingrained suspicions and fears, about entering into exchanges which may help to breach the barriers which have plagued this troubled land. In this situation, it is the author's belief that the Canadian post-colonial model provides an ideal opportunity for engaging in useful discussion or debate, and attests to the numerous possibilities of exchange and connection between differing geographical and historical sites.

The pedagogical process works by association, using students' learning about Canada to help them understand and potentially find

solutions to issues affecting Northern Ireland. Not only are there strong cultural, economic and familial links between the two countries, but they also share a number of interesting post-colonial characteristics. If students can understand the intricacies of the Canadian post-colonial model in an atmosphere where their own political, religious and social sensibilities are not challenged, they can then engage with key issues affecting Northern Ireland, a region where a sense of belonging, often linked to religious affiliation, provides the *raison d'être* for its citizens. This methodology has positive effects: by beginning with the study of a "neutral," non-threatening country on the other side of the Atlantic, students can acquire a firm grounding in post-colonial discourse and theory, while learning how the imperial process has affected Canadian ideas about its colonial past, as well as its ideas about nationality and cultural politics. They can then project these ideas into a Northern Irish context, where similar processes are at work, but where the issues have a more direct bearing on the lives of individuals, affecting, for example, nationality, education, place of residence, and social contact; all of these are still despite the recent cease-fire and other political initiatives affected by sectarianism and bigotry.

The course around which this essay is based, "Canadian Post-Colonial Texts and Contexts," was developed in 1992 with innovative teaching and modes of assessment in mind, and has provided students, particularly through the production of a group video, with the opportunity to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue of catharsis or liberation (a concept stimulated by Paulo Freire's teaching methodology); this active, communal educational experience helps students to derive deep personal and academic meaning from their studies. As a direct result of taking this course, students may emerge slightly more enlightened about themselves and their situation, and may be better equipped to deal with the serious problems affecting their country.

The essay is divided into six sections: (1) "Identity and Cultural Diversity in Northern Ireland," which gives a brief overview of the conflict and of the aspirations of the citizens of the province, will help to describe the students involved, and to explain the particular circumstances under which this course was designed; (2) "The Influence of Método Paulo Freire and the Importance of Student-Centred Learning" provides an explanation of the philosophy behind the teaching methodology adopted for this course, and shows how a similar model may be applied to other national contexts; (3) "Course Design and Curriculum" outlines how the program of study was developed, the modes of assessment used, and indicates goals the

author/teacher hoped to achieve; (4) "Assessment" provides a description of the assessment procedure, and an appraisal of the course by teacher and students; (5) "Conclusions" provides a brief overview of how the results of the project accorded with the original objectives; (6) "Practical Applications" is a series of reflections on how what has been achieved here can be applied to teaching in other national contexts— particularly in Canada.

Identity and Cultural Diversity in Northern Ireland.

In his seminal study, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, John Whyte stated unequivocally that in proportion to its size, Northern Ireland is "the most heavily researched area on earth" (viii). For various reasons this region of the United Kingdom attracts a great deal of attention worldwide. It is a society rife with divisions, and its prolonged conflict is about power, security, and the very existence of the province itself. The key to unravelling the complexities of the situation lies in understanding the aspirations of the citizens of Northern Ireland, and their attitudes towards their own identities.

The island of Ireland has been deeply affected by imperial domination and the colonial process for over 800 years. The Anglo-Normans first came to Ireland in 1169, and consolidated English power over the succeeding centuries. In 1921 an independent, largely Roman Catholic Ireland emerged, consisting of 26 of the 32 counties of the island. The six northern counties, which were predominantly Protestant and loyal to the British crown, remained within the United Kingdom. This region, known as Northern Ireland, was given a regional parliament based in Belfast, with limited powers of government. The partition of Ireland did not recognize adequately the complexities of identity or the political, religious, and social aspirations of its citizens. The civil rights march of 5 October 1968 (which took as its model the American civil rights marches of the 1960s) marked the start of the "Troubles" which with the recent cease-fire declared by paramilitaries and the subsequent partial resumption of violence[2] still affect the population.[3] The situation is highly charged, and any "neutral" description of it will be contested by parties on all sides of the debate. Nevertheless it is helpful to offer as balanced a description as possible, so that nuances and delicacies of opinion may be drawn out.

There is always a temptation when writing about a conflict situation to stress either the extent of conflict or the lack of it. There is, too,

in the political commentaries, a tendency to lurch from total pessimism—
"The problem is there's no solution"— to an optimistic act of faith
suggesting that somewhere there is a simple answer, if only it could be
found. The roots of the problems in Northern Ireland are complex, and do
not lend themselves to concise summary. It may, however, be said with
confidence that the conflict is both institutional and constitutional, and
essentially involves two groups, though the categorization of these
participants is by no means universally accepted. Protestant/Catholic is
perhaps the most widely used, but because the constitutional aspirations of
the region's citizens do not neatly coincide with religious affiliation, other
distinctions have also come into common use, such as
unionists/nationalists, loyalists/republicans, and even Ulster British/Ulster
Irish, to distinguish between those who prefer to ally themselves with
Britain, and those who aspire to a constitutional union with the Republic of
Ireland.[4] While most Catholics are nationalist and describe themselves as
Irish, not all do; and while most Protestants are unionist and would prefer
to be called British rather than Irish, the labels are not universal. The choice
of terminology can affect perceptions of who is in conflict with whom, and
why.

There is a tendency to see the cultural map of Northern Ireland in
terms of a simple dichotomy, to talk about "the two cultures" or the
"Planter" and the "Gael" as if this was a sufficient typology.[5] This situation
mirrors that in other countries which suffer from the maintenance of a
binary opposition between "Us" and "Other." Yet to see the two main
cultural groupings as monoliths is to erect stereotypes, and much of the
difficulty in understanding Northern Ireland is not only in the creation of
stereotypes by and for outsiders, but in the fact that the communities create
their own stereotypes, and then begin to live up to them and believe in
them. So much of what passes for political, social and economic debate in
Northern Ireland consists of mere assertion, or the rehearsal and
dissemination of carefully tended myths. The positions of the participants
are deeply entrenched, and at present there seems to be little hope for a
solution which centres on the maintenance of a dichotomy or dualism. In
order, therefore, to shed new light on the situation, and to encourage the
uncovering of issues, the deconstruction of stereotypes, and the challenging
of received wisdom, it is desirable to be more enterprising, to address issues
of diversity, and to place Northern Ireland firmly in the post-colonial world.

In terms of finding a voice for itself within post-colonial discourse,
Northern Ireland presents interesting challenges. While it is clear that the

region has long been affected by the British imperial process, it has been impossible up until now to determine whether Northern Ireland possesses that key constituent of any post-colonial society: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. The process is complicated by the self-representation through stereotypes referred to above; it is also hampered by sensational attempts at cinematic representation such as *The Crying Game* and *In the Name of the Father*. Such misrepresentations confirm the operation of a politics of identity in Ireland, in which nationalist movements attempt to instill in the population a sense of unique or essential Irishness, thus denying the great diversity in the country's people and culture. The questions raised are succinctly posed by Richard Kearney:

> What are the central issues at stake in the cultural debate? Perhaps the most dominant is the question of identity and difference. What does it mean to be Irish? Is it some unique 'essence' inherited from our ancestors? Is it a characteristic of a specific language (e.g. Gaelic) or religion (Catholic/Protestant) or ideology (nationalist/unionist)? Is it a matter of ethnic minority, genetic heritage or geographical residence? (*page?*)

Such questions of authenticity go beyond Irishness (or Canadianness for that matter) to encompass the nature of historical analysis of the colonized subject. The wider questions raised by formulations of national culture have been explored by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* and by Amilcar Cabral in his essay "National Liberation and Culture." Their work is relevant to all situations in which the identity of the colonized subject is subject to cultural domination; this oppressive process tends to dictate over-simplified and passionate search for national points of identification. In the case of a quest for Irishness the absurdity of this reductive process is illustrated by John Wilson Foster:

> Time and again at arty or academic social gatherings in the evenings, the drink flowing, the concentric circles of Irishness narrow and shrink, the real Irish receding, as it were, into a dark centre, starting up with the ballads of the sorrowful legend of Ireland, as StephenDedalus called it, breaking into the Gaelic, claiming their heritage, the more consciously if there are foreigners present, the Prods [Protestants] and English meanwhile affecting sheepish grins and bottomless ethnic empathy, faking away like mad! (257)

Like Fanon and Cabral, Foster points to the part played by academics, whose combined political activism and intellectual production implicate them in the process of representing the subjectivity of the Gael— that is, the colonized Other.

Foster, an Irishman living in Canada, comments insightfully on the difficulties inherent in the debate over such appellation as "Canadianness" or "Irishness." In his continual vociferous writing about "over there" from the position of academic (and personal) safety afforded by North America he resembles Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (by her own admission a critic with a "third-world" consciousness), who moved to the United States (a "first-world" country), but continues to focus her scholarly attention on the repercussions of colonialism at "home" in India.[6] While the experiences of Forster and Spivak are clearly different, the work of another Irishman, David Lloyd, combines elements of both these critics' views in his book *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*. Lloyd attempts to see Ireland not as part of Europe, but as on a par with India and other third-world countries because of its underdeveloped economy and its continued suffering from the effects of the imperial process.

Casting suspicion on the politics of identity, Lloyd argues that the insistence on monolithic concepts such as Irishness denies the great diversity of the country's people and culture. Such a monolith, he explains, appears in the work of Seamus Heaney, who is often cast as the representative Irish poet, especially since his recent Nobel laureateship. Born in Northern Ireland (and thus a British subject) he fills his work with allusions to Irish mythology and the country's Celtic past. In doing so, argues Lloyd, Heaney espouses and fosters a false and ultimately condescending notion of Irish identity that appeals to the same bourgeois intellectual classes identified by Fanon, Cabral and Spivak in other national contexts. Those who support Heaney are privileging a sense of Irishness which is exclusive and stagnant; it casts a peculiarly antiquated light on the reality in modern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland such considerations have special significance: pluralism, openness to change, and tolerance of diversity are more likely to provide a basis for mutual trust and resolution of conflict than insularity and protectiveness. At the moment, however, very few people in Northern Ireland can be unaware of sectionalism, if not sectarianism, as a debilitating and stultifying fact of life, even when it does not manifest itself in conflict or overt violence. By concentrating on exclusiveness and on differences

between two parties (whatever labels one chooses to attach to them), the encounter becomes one of discord rather than diversity, or conflict rather than compatibility.

A way forward may be to look at issues of cultural pluralism, and how these reflect on identity, that is, the set of values which define a community, or a people, consisting of an amalgam of attitudes, shared historical experience, political and economic structures, religion, folklore and ethnicity. Yet in the case of Northern Ireland, it is important to ask whether cultural pluralism is possible, and to what extent it is separate from, or precedes, political systems. It is a formidable task to find a polity for this region which can contain deep conflicts of value within a single system. It is also difficult to refute such critics as Richard Rose, who asserts that the "great unbargainables" in Northern Ireland are allegiance and identity, that no consensus is available on these fundamental issues, and that government without consensus can only be achieved by integration, assimilation, or repression (Rose 205). Such immovability is in effect imperialist, and has clear implications for evolution and progress in any colonized society. As Cabral clearly understood, by denying the historical development of a dominated people, cultural development is equally denied (Cabral 42).

Before it becomes possible to relate to others it is essential to explore and test one's own identity. It is clear that groups, as well as individuals, have identity problems. The difficulty in finding labels for the divided factions in Northern Ireland is a case in point: Protestant/Catholic, unionist/nationalist, or even Ulster British/Ulster Irish. The solidarity of the group is an important support for the individual, who can often only achieve self-realization through identification with the group. Group identity can, however, operate negatively, and as Fanon makes clear/ an imperial power which defines the limits of group identity has the ability to eradicate individuality, thus accentuating feelings of displacement and depersonalization (173). In the same way as an individual needs security and self-assurance, so communities need to develop self-confidence; thus, secure in their own values, they can deal with other groups much more constructively than if they were insecure, lacking in self-confidence, or saw themselves as oppressed or undervalued by the wider society.

Many manifestations of inter-group conflict are determined by the self-perception of the groups concerned, their feelings about others, and their preconceptions of others' view of them. The British critic Homi Bhabha, in his foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (a critique of

identity politics in the negritude movement) explains that each opposing group is able to implicate the "Other" as embodying tendencies towards aggression and violence by a process of distancing these motivations from their own sphere. Such an alignment of Self/Other is characteristic of all juxtaposed colonial subjects, where narcissistic myths of supremacy are prominently evoked (Bhabha ix). Underlying most of these conflicts is a failure of communication, a lack of empathy and understanding which results in stereotyping and scapegoating, and a basic lack of trust, without which no social, political, or other contract is conceivable. The issues central to Northern Ireland tend to be stated in absolute terms, which are in themselves irreconcilable. This confrontational position relates to the wider debate about colonial dislocation and alienation of the person. In such an atmosphere of stalemate, not only in the case of Northern Ireland but indeed in all situations where oppositional colonial alignment is manifest, it is desirable to introduce new ideas and principles of identification which challenge long-held preconceptions, and move beyond the language of Otherness. In this way societies will be able to move away from projecting anxieties and fears onto "Them" ; they can then encourage feelings of humanism and reconciliation.

In Northern Ireland education can play a key role in fostering an atmosphere of mutual recognition and understanding. In the past a segregated system of education, which accompanied residential and occupational segregation, meant that Protestants (who form the majority of the population) tended to see expressions of Irish culture as belonging wholly to the Catholic community, and indeed as having been hijacked for political ends. In contrast, because Britishness was so often expressed in terms of Englishness, Catholics tended to see this identification as something imposed on society by the 'Brits', as an initiation test which they could not pass. In recent years, however, an effort has been made to provide opportunities for interaction from an early age. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland is encouraging elementary and secondary schools to adopt programs conducive to mutual understanding. For the first time cultural diversity is being cherished and facilitated in the curriculum; while schools are still largely segregated at all levels from kindergarten to grade 12, agreed syllabi are being developed for history and religion which encourage the early analysis of difference, the value of shared traditions and tolerance of others. Certain other initiatives, such as the establishment of integrated schools, have gained grass-root support, though their numbers and influence are still rather limited.

Once students finish secondary school the opportunities for exploring the "Other" tradition are drastically reduced. If they choose to go on to university, they quickly discover that time is at a premium, and there is little or no time to devote to the facilitation of mutual recognition. Many of those who attend Queen's University are residents of Northern Ireland, and large proportion of them hope to remain in the region after graduation. For these individuals in particular the reinforcement and development of mutual understanding, and a recognition of the value of cultural diversity are of great importance in the progress towards a resolution of the conflict.

The Influence of Método Paulo Freire and the Importance of Student-Centred Learning

In order to make progress in cross-community dialogue in any culture, it is important to provide individuals with opportunities for interaction on their own terms rather than having conditions stipulated by observers, facilitators, or others who represent authority. In my own situation in 1991, as a specialist in Canadian literature recently arrived in Belfast, it was not immediately obvious how I could provide a forum for my students to integrate into their literature studies some meaningful engagement with Northern Irish issues. In the numerous courses taught in Anglo-Irish literature, for example, the common pattern in seminars is for students to avoid expressions of personal opinion, but rather to depend upon the professor's views for the "right" answers to the exam questions, and to perpetuate the model of passive "Banking-Digestive" learning, with its one-way flow of information, quickly forgotten after assessment is completed/an experience still all too common at universities. Instead, I wished to encourage "active learning" which focuses directly on the goals of interdisciplinarity, and involves students in a search of personal and academic meaning in studies; gaining a sound grasp of key subjects, procedures, and principles; analysing and reflecting on them; and being able to relate and apply them in an appropriate range of contexts and circumstances. Understanding of this kind is more soundly retained, more readily deployed, and more flexibly applied. Active learning involves giving students greater responsibility for their own learning and encouraging them to reach beyond the canonical confines of their own specialist subject area, so that they have the fullest opportunities for active involvement: being challenged to think things through for themselves, to identify and tackle problems, and to share and discuss ideas with others. The implications of this strategy, in a variety of national contexts, are readily apparent.

I derived inspiration for my teaching methodology from the work of the Brazilian educator, philosopher, and political activist Paulo Freire. In reading his seminal text *Pedagogi do Oratorio* (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) I was struck by his use of education as a means of freeing people from a bondage engendered by silence. The direct outcome of his work in Brazil and Chile has been that various groups of oppressed people who have been imprisoned by mental and physical poverty have been given new hope as well as a belief that they can affect their own destinies. The literacy skills he encouraged gave previously oppressed people the tools with which to educate and liberate themselves.

The Freirean method is not, however, primarily concerned with education, but with a much greater human need: the development of a just society. In this sense the possibilities for application of this methodology go far beyond the dispossessed in Latin America. Their struggle to participate in the transformation of their society is similar to many other situations around the world where education can stimulate the development of a critical consciousness or *conscientização*; in which manifestations of oppression can be identified, quantified, and finally overcome.

Freire's sharing of the life of the poor in north-eastern Brazil led him to discover what he describes as the "culture of silence" of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were directly related to a systematic economic, social, and political domination. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were submerged in a quagmire in which the development of such critical awareness and response was practically impossible. It became clear to Freire that the educational system with its narrow canonical confines was one of the major instruments for maintaining the culture of silence.

His goal of mass literacy was achieved by teaching in community-based learning groups known as "culture circles"; these were used as a means of structuring both discussion and collective action. His method, now known universally as "Método Paulo Freire," is an interdisciplinary process of both literacy acquisition and conscientization. It is based on the simple but fundamental technique of "problem posing," and is therefore the antithesis of passive "Banking-Digestive" education which, rather than asking questions, gives authoritative answers. This undesirable method leads to what Freire calls "narration sickness":

Narration (with the reacher as narrator) leads to the students to

memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them in 'containers', into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. . . . Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. (58)

In place of this oppressive system Freire introduced a "Dialogic-Liberating" methodology, in which distinctions between teacher and student are discarded in favour of a problem-posing approach, based on creativity and emergence of consciousness, looking forward to a liberating praxis which can lead to transformation.

"Método Paulo Freire" is a three-stage investigation, which poses three fundamentally different questions. First there is a naming stage, where one asks the question "What is the problem, what is the question under discussion?" Second there is a reflection stage: "Why is this the case? How do we explain this situation?" Finally there is the stage of action or praxis: "What can be done to change this situation? What options do we have?" (chapters 3-4). This progression, according to Freire, has liberationist potential because it stimulates active reflection by participants about the issues which have a direct bearing upon their lives. The teacher is a facilitator or co-ordinator, who neither sets agendas nor thinks for others. The learning process is both student-centred and student-directed; in this way students acquire ownership of their learning, and naturally employ an interdisciplinary lateral thinking process. Freire summarizes:

> Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of action) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed. . . . The important thing, from the point of view of liberation education, is for men to come to feel like masters of their own thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate. (83, 118)

The process and practice of dialogue in these culture circles liberates society. The individuals concerned move from a position where

they recognize that deprivation of dialogue (silencing) means oppression, to one where they understand that interchange leads to liberation, not only of an individual but potentially of an entire society. An essential element in this metamorphosis is the development of a *conscientizição*, or consciousness of the potential for transforming reality. It involves an awareness of the oppressor and an understanding of the means by which oppression is sustained. Thus the important stages of dialogue and *conscientizição* in an education-liberation process can lead to psycho-social changes in attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. Individuals experience a redefining of boundary systems and a recreation of their images of self. Such an upheaval, affecting the touchstones of self-identification, can lead to a rejection of an individual's cultural base, and can affect codes of behaviour buried deep within the psyche. The oppressed emerge ready and able to name the forces which shape and control their lives, and equipped with the power to assist in shaping their own destinies.

It is clear that Freire's method can be applied in other contexts where the oppressed are affected by a culture of silence. From what has already been explained about Northern Ireland, it is clear that an atmosphere of stalemate and even fear persists, particularly as it affects an individual's or a group's potential to transform reality. It may be that the Catholic minority is more conscious of its oppression than the Protestant majority, but on both sides there is a tendency towards inaction and silence. While actual literacy is not an issue in Northern Ireland, there is evidence of economic, social and political manipulation and domination. In the current climate the development of a critical awareness or *conscientizição* is difficult if not impossible, and the segregated education system means that opportunities for exploring the "Other" tradition are either infrequent, or informed by an agenda set by those in positions of authority in schools or churches, with little or no opportunity for student leadership or ownership of the activities.

In my own teaching I wished to draw on some of the valuable lessons of Freirean methodology in order to penetrate the culture of silence which exists among Northern Irish students. I was convinced that the technique of learning in culture circles could be adapted to a university environment in order to advance from a "Banking-Digestive" to a "Dialogic-Liberating" model of education. I wished to move away from a narrative mode of teacher-student exchange towards a student-centred one which gave them an authoritative voice and responsibility for the learning process. I fell upon the idea of producing a group video as an activity which

could create an environment similar to Freire's culture circle. Allowing students to have complete control over a video production provides an excellent opportunity for them to acquire some ownership of the learning process. It encourages the development of skills which are directly relevant to the Dialogic-Liberating educational model: (1) written, oral, and visual communication and presentation skills (script writing, voice-overs; camera shots) which bear a resemblance to the "naming" stage of Freire's method (2) group work skills, including negotiation and co-operation, which parallel Freire's "reflection" stage; and (3) problem-solving skills, corresponding to the "action" stage. In addition to this sound pedagogical rationale, I felt that students would find working with video to be stimulating, even "cool," and they would be highly motivated, or "psyched."

It is interesting to note that there are some points of contact between the Freirean method and that employed by Moses Coady, J.J. Tompkins, and A. B. MacDonald in the development of the Antigonish Movement in Atlantic Canada. This venture, which originated at St. Francis Xavier University in the wake of depression in the area's traditional fishing, mining and agriculture industries, has since the 1930s placed great emphasis on adult education as a means of social improvement and economic consolidation. The typical pattern involved an organizer entering a community, developing contacts, and meeting residents in order to discern a community's strengths and weaknesses. A study club was created and a series of meetings scheduled. The expected outcome was the establishment of a cooperative and credit union, as well as the continued discourse facilitated by study clubs and community activism. Like Método Paulo Freire, the model developed by the Antigonish Movement (which had a liberal and Catholic emphasis) had applications beyond the sphere for which it was originally conceived: its activities were publicized in the United States, Europe, Latin America and Asia, and since 1959, with the establishment of the Coady International Institute, community leaders have come to Nova Scotia to study the Antigonish method. The Canadian government has appreciated the success of the movement, and has looked to it for advice on the implementation of its foreign aid programs.[7]

While the similarities between the Freirean and Antigonish methods— particularly in the initiation of culture circles and study groups— might seem striking, there are several important differences. In terms of their original motivations, Freire's program was more politically than economically motivated. His students in Brazil and Chile suffered far greater oppression, poverty, and potential for physical violence than did the

residents of eastern Nova Scotia; also the threat to Freire's own life in the communities where he worked has no parallel in the settings visited and activities initiated by Coady and his followers. Furthermore, as noted above, the Freirean method is concerned with the development of a just society and the stimulation of *conscientizição*, in which evidences of oppression can be ultimately overcome.[8] Some have taken this to mean armed struggle or popular revolution, and there can be no clearer evidence of this than within Northern Ireland's Maze prison (containing the notorious H-blocks, designed for the detention of the country's most dangerous terrorists). Among the republican prisoners, the desire for self-improvement through education is strong, and the text which they find most inspiring is Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[9]

Course Design and Curriculum

The production of a group video is an innovation which can be applied to a variety of disciplines and national contexts, as will be demonstrated below. For me the key to making the project particularly germane to Northern Ireland was to ensure that my course required a personal understanding and commitment from each student, that it related to previous knowledge and experience, and that it adopted a dialogic approach. Cultural identity has already been identified as an important landmark for the citizens of this region, and I felt that the concept could be a useful basis on which to build. Because I was located in a literature department, the curriculum necessitated some engagement with texts. Anglo-Irish writers were not suitable, partly on account of my unfamiliarity with many of them, and partly because of my own anxiety about students perpetuating the culture of silence if asked by me (a figure of intellectual authority) about their opinions on issues which penetrated to the core of their identities and existences. Northern Ireland continues to suffer from the effects of a contemporary colonialism that has retained and developed an ideology of dominance and subservience. In order, therefore, to avoid confrontation, a more roundabout approach seemed appropriate; given the connections with Northern Ireland that could be made on the theme of post-colonialism, Canada was chosen as the focus. I hoped that by "looking elsewhere" it would be possible to think constructively about problems at "home."

The study of Canada as a post-colonial society produces many interesting parallels with Northern Ireland. Using the terms formulated by

Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, both countries display elements of oppositional post-colonialism and complicit post-colonialism,[10] depending upon the community under consideration. In the cases of Catholics/nationalists in Northern Ireland and the First Nations Canadians, French Canadians, and some ethnic minorities in Canada, these groups are exposed to racism, the problem of learning/speaking a second language, and political struggle; their world is that of the oppositional post-colonial. Its opposite, the complicit post-colonial, is a term that may be applied to Protestants/unionists in Northern Ireland, as well as to all those who endorse and share in the legacy of the British Empire in Canada; their world is that of the White settler colony and its continuing legacy.

Like the Catholics in Northern Ireland, Canada's native peoples have been marginalised and ghettoised since the arrival of the White settlers. Only recently has their voice been heard in both national and international contexts. The confrontation between the Mohawk people and several levels of the Canadian government in the summer of 1990, and the role of the Native peoples in ending the possibility of the Meech Lake agreement on the Canadian constitution, are but of the two reasons for recent consciousness-raising. In both literature and politics they are breaking free from the culture of silence that has oppressed them for hundreds of years. The issues they highlight (land claims, self-government, economic self-sufficiency, education, and the preservation of culture and language) have their counterparts in the Northern Ireland situation.

The non-Native Canadian imagination has been affected by different issues. They were trapped by their colonial heritage until at least 1945, suffering from what acclaimed Canadian critic Northrop Frye has termed Canada's "garrison mentality." Communities, surrounded by physical or psychological "frontiers," established cultural forts, which catered to closely knit, beleaguered societies, providing bastions against a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting (Frye 225). Given this situation, which emphasized the "victim position" and engendered survival strategies, it is understandable that Canadian communities not only encouraged shared human values and a great respect for law and order in the quest for social cohesion and protection of a fragile way of life, but also refused to engage with concepts of cultural difference, place and displacement. Until this debate could be initiated, Canada would not become a bona fide participant in the search for a distinctive identity, a goal shared by most post-colonial societies.[11]

The quest for a Canadian identity became a national obsession throughout most of this century. Paradoxically, Canada's participation in the conflict strengthened imperial sentiment and loyalty to Britain, and resulted in a steady flow of writers, including Mordecai Richler and Margaret Laurence, to the imperial metropolis of London in order to undergo an extended literary apprenticeship (a similar exodus to Paris, the other imperial metropolis, occurred among French-Canadian writers). An opposing trend, which forced on all Canadians—English and French— a rapid consideration and formulation of their identity and autonomy was the encroaching influence of the United States. Canadian resentment of and resistance to the American "invasion," coupled with a desire to dissipate the cultural obeisance to Britain and France, resulted in the development of a Canadian critical school which wished to establish that the texts constituting a national literature were separate from the metropolitan centre.

As in Canada, the development of a national literature in Northern Ireland is fraught with difficulty. The problems involved resemble those which affected Canada some thirty or even forty years ago, when anglophones might have looked to London, and francophones to Paris, for reliable reference points of national culture (it would seem that the pendulum has now swung back, and Canadians are now looking towards cultural centres like Hollywood or New York for imaginative sustenance). In Northern Ireland, whose fragile culture relies on a preoccupation with historical events, the political construct is still largely of two groups, locked in mutual suspicion and antagonism, looking for support to external metropolitan centres: Protestants might look to London and Catholics to Dublin. Yet the metropolis represents values which the citizens no longer really share: they have more in common with each other than either has with its "grandparent" society. In the case of Northern Ireland Seamus Deane has observed in his introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*:

> Both communities . . . now do feel that the principles to which they are loyal are in grievous danger of being betrayed (or have already been betrayed) by those governments, in London and Dublin, who are ostensibly their custodians. (15)

There is an element of confusion in Northern Ireland concerning cultural identity. The effect of cohabitation of Catholics and Protestants in this region has been the production of a new post-colonial entity, but one which has been insufficiently enunciated and explored.[12]

A further development which affects Northern Ireland and Canada, albeit to differing degrees, is the influence of an increasingly multicultural society on the search for a distinctive identity. In Canada, Multiculturalism has been embraced on a political level, through Parliament's passing the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which was committed to race relations and cross-cultural understanding, and the creation of a Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship (renamed the Department of Canadian Heritage in 1993), devoted to promoting Canadian pluralism and a greater awareness and understanding of human rights, fundamental freedoms and related values.[13]

Multicultural fiction in Canada treats these issues with great insight, and draws immense strength from looking to cultural roots for inspiration. Despite the sometimes "other-worldly" nature of their experience, these writers also consider themselves "Canadian," and their writing provides an arena for dialogue about reconciling different aspects of their identities. Recent trends in immigration prove that ethnocultural diversity is now an integral part of the Canadian experience: at present the majority of Canadians can trace their roots back to origins which are neither British nor French. At the core of many literary productions which can be grouped under the multicultural heading is the breaking of a culture of silence, and the development of a sense of individual identity and self-worth. Although novelist Frank Paci, for example, cannot be said to speak for a monolithic Italian-Canadian experience, his writing about this duality (which he says played a "large role" in shaping him) casts some light upon the attempt to come to terms with two or more identities. As Paci admits, writing "seemed the only way to find out who I was and why I was on earth" (Hutcheon and Richmond 231).[14]

Because many Canadian multicultural writers deal directly with issues of identity and belonging, I believed the theme of "Canadian Post-Colonial Texts and Contexts" to be appropriate for a course at Queen's University. It had the potential to widen horizons beyond the Canadian situation, finding points of contact with a Northern Irish student's own sense of identity and culture, and thus encouraging critical interaction with course content. The texts chosen included a chronological range from 1852 to 1990, and represented a cross-section of Canadian society in terms of race, religion, and ethnic background. The syllabus included Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852); Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (1945); Mordecai Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959); Hubert Aquin, *Prochain Episode* (1973, a francophone novel in translation);

Alistair MacLeod, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (1976); Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (1981); Austin Clarke, *Nine Men Who Laughed* (1986); Rohinton Mistry, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987); and Thomas King (ed.), *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* (1990). In addition, students received seminars on the concepts of multiculturalism and post-colonialism[15] to extend their knowledge beyond literary studies to a general interdisciplinary education, requiring that they comprehend concepts from another discipline "respectfully" and "respectably" in the way outlined by Jill Vickers in "Where is the Discipline in Interdisciplinarity?" (25) Summative assessment of textual knowledge was carried out by means of a 3000-word essay carrying a value of 90 per cent of the total marks for the course.[16]

The video project was related to the textual portion of the course, although its focus was closer to home, and interdisciplinary by nature. Canadian multiculturalism can be studied in the British Isles as if through a telescope, that is, as a set of issues which make a clear geographical distinction between "over here" and "over there". When considered from the perspective of Northern Ireland, the Canadian situation is non-threatening, for it does not impinge directly upon a student's sensibilities. If textual analysis is the only activity put forward for assessment, students may avoid the development of a personal understanding of the material, with the result that passive learning is too easily engendered, and the Banking-Digestive method of education prevails. If, on the other hand, a dialogic methodology is employed, students are empowered to undertake meaningful critical interaction with the issues, thus breaking the culture of silence so endemic to Northern Irish society.

The resources made available to students for their project consisted of five video cameras and a supply of videotape. In any given year the students were required to answer a specific question by means of the video. I have experimented with different questions over the years; in 1992-93, for example, I asked them to consider the question of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland and the nature of the cultural traditions, in a way which built on knowledge acquired from a study of the Canadian model but used local materials. By 1995-96 the terms of reference had altered to, "Using the critical and theoretical apparatus at your disposal, consider how Canada AND Northern Ireland fit into colonial and post-colonial discourse." The guidelines which I provided concerning the focus were deliberately left vague, so that students could take responsibility for their own presentation, and acquire a degree of ownership over the learning process. In order to

provide the students with some starting point, they were given a bibliography of source materials which treated issues of identity and culture in both Northern Ireland and Canada. They university's audio-visual aids unit instructed them on the use of video cameras and a rudimentary editing suite. The total amount of time spent in class on activities relating to the video was four hours (that is, two 2-hour seminars out of a total of twelve); the planning, division of labour, filming, and editing would all be done outside class time, and would take up approximately 25 to 30 hours.

The composition of the class was a key element destined to affect the approach to the project, the material chosen, and (perhaps) the conclusions reached. The course was offered to students in their third (final) year at university; those who attended in 1992-93 totalled five, in 1993-94 fifteen, in 1994-95 ten, and in 1995-96 twelve. I had set a maximum of 10 students per video (allowing for a variety of roles for participants, including acting, filming, interviewing, script-writing, editing, etc.), but the aims could be achieved with as few as four. An incidental factor in each year the course has been offered was the heterogeneity of the group. There was, of course, no way of ensuring that the students came from different backgrounds and represented different points of view. But in the class of 1992-93 (the test case under consideration in this essay), there was one Catholic student from the Republic of Ireland who was in favour of uniting north and south; one Catholic from Northern Ireland with temperate unionist leanings; one Protestant from the north with a pronounced sense of Britishness; one student from a mixed Catholic/Protestant background, who was politically neutral; and an exchange student from Germany, who had few fixed views.

The students met outside class time, and formulated their aims and objectives into a proposal. This was a difficult stage in the learning process, because of the unstructured, disorienting effect produced by Dialogic-Liberating education. The range of activities extended beyond the assimilation of knowledge to encompass the skills which students need to develop in order to review, analyse, synthesize, apply and communicate what they have learned, and so for the students the description of the process seemed daunting. They were forced to develop strategies to link abstract ideas to actual experiences, to retrieve information for themselves, and to choose relevant options of personal interest to explore. It was left to them to determine when, where and how they worked on the project, to share responsibility equally, and to use imagination and initiative to propose solutions to problems. They were assured that they could rely on

me for encouragement, and (if necessary) discussion of progress and expectations.

The students submitted a proposal at the end of the fourth week of the course. Their approach indicated a willingness to listen to one another, and to develop a united approach to problem-solving and to the formulation of conclusions. Their self-developed agenda bore a striking resemblance to the principles at work in Freire's culture circles. Specific roles were not assigned, but there was a commitment on the part of the group to involve each member in every stage of the exercise. They wished to incorporate literature about identity in Northern Ireland: archive footage of the "Troubles"; visual images relating to culture, especially wall murals; vox populi interviews; and an examination of integrated schooling. Opting for a documentary style, they wished to end with a group consensus about Northern Irish identity.

My students condensed their final product, which emerged after twelve weeks of theory and practice, into eight minutes of video tape. There was almost no reference to Canada or Canadian fiction anywhere in the video. It opened with some archive footage of a bomb going off in a crowded shopping area in the centre of Belfast. The students' commentary began with a recognition that Northern Ireland is a region of overlapping identities (primarily Protestant and Catholic), but that barriers, physical and otherwise, had been erected to prevent communities from interacting with one another. It is a place where recurring symbols, such as the shamrock or the harp (depicted in elaborate wall murals painted on gable ends by both communities) function as devices for essential cultural expression, but rather than inviting interchange, they are used as icons of exclusion. They then posed the question, "With such points of cultural identification functioning as obstacles and barricades, is there middle ground?" The students believed that the symbols have infected the minds of more liberal citizens—even those who would support cultural diversity and multiculturalism. They used the image of a corridor in the video to describe the stalemate which exists in Northern Ireland: Protestants block one end and Catholics the other, with no opportunity for easy passage.

The video took a sounding from the general populace in the form of candid interviews, where questions about cultural traditions and individual identity were posed. Individuals described themselves as unionist or nationalist, Protestant or Catholic, and British or Irish. Rationale for use of the label "Irish" was particularly interesting: one interviewee described herself as being "brought up Irish" in Northern Ireland, and believing that

a united Ireland was desirable because the island was "all one land," detached from mainland Britain. Some of the young interviewees recognized that however open-minded they wished themselves to be as teenagers or university students, the influences of parents and community ran very deep.

Religion played a formative role in the perception of identity. Protestants tended to refer to the historical evolution of Northern Ireland, with the plantation of Presbyterian Scots to Ulster in the 17th century as one source of conflict; but they maintained that their fundamentalist Christian faith advocated loving one another. One individual, who described herself as a member of the "Protestant Christian faith," defended the philosophy and tenets of the rabidly anti-Catholic Orange Order by reference to its Christian foundation. Another went so far as to say that he would call himself a Protestant first and a Christian second, as if the label "Protestant" went beyond religious identification to mark out a political position. Such delineation points to the difficulties involved in seeing the conflict in Northern Ireland simply in terms of a religious dichotomy.

When asked about the validity of cultural traditions, respondents acknowledged that each was of equal merit, though it was noted that there was a tendency to highlight differences to fuel conflict. My students believed that Northern Ireland did not do enough to promote itself culturally, and that citizens were unaware of the uniqueness of the indigenous culture; instead they responded politically, implying that the origins of their customs and traditions lay elsewhere (that is, London or Dublin). They also felt that in the rest of the United Kingdom there was a parallel perception of the absence of an identifiable Northern Irish culture.

The students' video also examined issues of ethnicity. In Northern Ireland "ethnic" may be understood as a terminological marker characterizing the culturally distinctive features of a particular group. One individual, referring himself as "Irish," described this collective as an "ethnic group" which he defined as "a self-conscious group of people who are united or closely related by shared experiences." The video pointed out, however, that racial distinctions may also be used as ethnic identifiers. The students explored the multicultural experience in Northern Ireland as another (relatively unrecognized) manifestation of ethnicity. The main visible minorities are Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Vietnamese.[17] Because attention has been focussed on problems affecting the two major communities in Northern Ireland, ethnic minorities have tended to be marginalised, and have found it extremely difficult to develop any sense of

identification with place in the post-colonial sense, due to the persistence of the myths of group purity advocated by the two majority communities.

The narrator of the video closed with a statement to which all the students had contributed:

> Each succeeding generation in Northern Ireland brings new hope and new conflict. The pre-dominant attitude to minorities was that numbers are too small to warrant serious attention. Most of the people we interviewed were ambivalent towards culture. Cultural diversity and multiculturalism as concepts and in practice were unknown and thought irrelevant. Appropriate statistics and legislation as well as grass-roots interaction are clearly needed. Culture in Northern Ireland carries unique dimensions. In this atmosphere pragmatic politics fade as the politics of tribalism take over.
>
> (*Blackout*)
>
> A writer once said, 'I have written and you have read, and your reading is now my judgement'. Well, we have filmed and you have watched, and your viewing is now our judgement.

This brief assessment shows that "Método Paulo Freire" bore fruitful results in this project. The students worked well together, and even developed lasting friendships that breached the religious divide. They had thought deeply about the issues of culture and identity in Northern Ireland and could engage with the problems critically and creatively. They also came to realize that the culture in Northern Ireland was neither pure-bred nor monolithic, and that in this unique society all traditions are vital. Although they began their theoretical and textual examination of post-colonialism from a Canadian perspective, they broke free from the constraints of "looking elsewhere" to focus on "home" and what mattered to them as citizens of their own troubled country. It also shows the global nature of post-colonial issues, and how they can be transplanted from "over there" to "over here," picking up local nuances along the way. Northern Ireland was not used as a point of comparison in the Canadian textual analysis, for fear that it would colour judgements and thus affect and even infect the group dynamic and identity in the video production.

The video implied that if the cultures do not interact there is a destructive potential within the society (a fact emphasized in the 1992-93 video by the constant, ominous background noise of droning army helicopters during the interviews which students conducted). Yet with a heightened degree of

interaction between the various elements, conflict may be contained (if not eliminated) and society may be enriched. The students grounded the video in a respect for all traditions and all perceptions of tradition, and encouraged a recognition of shared cultural values, as part of a search for an effective identifying relationship between self and place and a recognition of differences on equal terms.

Assessment

It must be borne in mind that curriculum design and teaching form only two of the three parts of a course which encourages student-centred learning. In order to judge how students have progressed and evolved as individuals responsible for some aspect of their own learning, I wished to involve them not only in planning the project, but also in the assessment procedure.

Most students come to university from an environment where traditional, summative assessment is the norm. The examinations are largely dependent upon what experienced members of the department regard as appropriate, and students are rarely involved in this process. The objectives of a course are rarely used when setting assignments or examinations, and some courses do not even have stated objectives. In the case of examinations, for example, it may be found that if students are involved in setting questions, the professor develops a clear idea of what students see as important in a course, and shows that they are fully aware of the assessment criteria and the professor's intentions. In project work, student participation in assessment develops a good teacher-student relationship, and ensures that motivation is maintained at a high level. It also provides an excellent opportunity for feedback, and tests course methods as well as course aims.

This method of assessment is in keeping with the praxis, or the informed, reflective action which Paulo Freire advocated. He realized that what he called "authentic thinking" does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication with others (64). As a university educator, Freire was interested in the relevance of learning to the lives of ordinary people, and in interdisciplinary learning that confronted social realities. He believed that universities in developing countries— especially those based on European models— were incapable of combatting social alienation, precisely because the responses or remedies which they offered were being transplanted from other cultures, with little appreciation of the

indigenous culture or context. Building on this idea, I believed that the key to a successful teaching experience was to make the assessment procedure just as relevant to the students' experience as the project itself.

The form of evaluation which I deemed to be most applicable to this video project is known as formative assessment. This method is appropriate if it is desirable to feed information back into the program as it unfolds. In the case of this course, where the definitive appearance of the video is an unknown quantity (unknown to the students before the final editing takes place, and unknown to the teacher before the class presentation), it is necessary to monitor the process at each stage so that successes or failures can be evaluated, and changes to the original proposal made if necessary to ensure a competent, high-quality presentation which has benefited from the evolving and dynamic input of the group. Given that the students themselves developed an original approach to cultural diversity in Northern Ireland and presented to the viewer their own unified vision (relatively uncolored by input from me), it is fitting that they should be involved, as individuals and as a group, in the assessment procedure.

I decided that the best way to proceed was to allow the students several weeks of work on the video, and then to ask them what they saw as important in the learning process. I stressed that there were no fixed rules, other than that the video contributed ten percent to the total marks, and that I wished the students to be open with me concerning their aspirations. In the case of a group project, particularly if time is devoted to it outside formal class hours, the students themselves are the ones best able to answer such key questions as what they have been doing, how they did it, why they did it in a particular way, and how they could do it better. It quickly became clear that they wished to place heavy emphasis on participation, and on shared responsibility, as well as on the ability to communicate their message effectively, with imagination and flair. They made it very clear that they did not wish to assess themselves on the issues of identity or diversity, because they believed that they were too close to the situation, and that their discussions showed their views to be diverse, and sometimes irreconcilably opposed. After negotiation, it emerged that they wished to be responsible for only five per cent of the assessment, involving the appraisal of themselves and their peers, and wished me to be responsible for providing an overall impression of the video. This meant was that the students wished to assess the process, but wanted me to preside over the product. This I happily agreed to, and an appropriate assessment document was drawn up in consultation with them.

After watching the video on the last day of classes, I presented students with the assessment document. Each student was required to assign a value to individual contribution, on a scale of 1 to 5, based on the quality and extent of participation, and the assumption of responsibility. Each then disclosed this mark to the group, and justified it by means of a short speech. At this point discussion was possible, and the mark could be either raised or lowered by the student's peers before being finally fixed. Then, in accordance with the students' wishes, I assigned a group mark out of five, which was to be added to the individual mark to arrive at a score out of 10. It was difficult (if not impossible) to make a quick decision about the content of the video. I felt that I did not have the necessary expertise, and did not wish to pronounce on a subject with which I was more familiar in theory than in practice. I decided, therefore, to assess the relation between process and product, concentrating on readily observable criteria, such as addressing a specific theme (in this case, cultural diversity in Northern Ireland), or the correspondence between the proposal and the final product. Also, as a result of monitoring the progress of the group, I was able to comment with some insight on planning and execution. Likewise, I was able to assess whether or not the project was completed and submitted on time.

The outcome was interesting. In four out of five cases, students awarded themselves full marks in self-assessment; in the other case, a mark of 4 out of 5 was suggested. In discussion with peers, however, all were awarded 5 marks out of 5. When it came to assigning marks for the project, and bearing in mind the amount of work I knew each member to have contributed to a successful outcome, I awarded 5 out of 5 for the product, because I was thrilled with it. I believed that students had learned a great deal about their own situations and about that of others. I was also impressed by the professionalism of the presentation and I knew that they had put far more time into the production than I had allowed for. Their level of commitment was extraordinary, and it showed.

Conclusion

In the context of this course, I believe that the form of assessment used was both appropriate and revealing. Building on the principles of *conscientizição*, group dynamics, and Dialogic-Liberating education, I wished to test the group learning process, and to stay away from judgmental situations. The production of this group video certainly sparked debate

amongst the students themselves, and challenged their long-cherished concepts of identity and belonging. There was, however, no need to communicate personal allegiances to me, the figure of authority: so long as these feelings remained the property of the student group they could feel safe in the knowledge that it was their preserve, and I had no intention of intervening.

In terms of responding to the original objectives, the project was a success. Students achieved a better understanding of a particular post-colonial society, and were able to draw wider parallels and conclusions for other societies in which observably different cultural groups interact. At its most powerful, post-colonialism is a process of radical dispossession. The internecine conflict in Northern Ireland highlights the issues of colonial interference, sectarianism, and racial stereotyping. Its citizens have undergone a traumatic cultural and political crisis so fundamental that they must forge for themselves a new language with which to enunciate their feelings about the problems they face. Most of them are, however, trapped in the culture of silence. As in many societies still affected by the colonial process, individualism has been buried beneath politically produced discriminations and categorizations. Innovative interdisciplinary projects such as the group video can help to foster an atmosphere in which dialogue can flourish. In this particular case students from different backgrounds were given the opportunity to meet and discuss amicably issues which lay at the heart of the Northern Ireland conflict in a situation where the agenda was set by students themselves, with little or no direction from figures of authority. What emerged was creative and thought-provoking, and provided evidence that the Freirean method works, and that it has applications in a variety of national contexts.

In evaluating this course students were asked to compare their experience of my pedagogical methods with those employed in their degree as a whole; the results were most encouraging. They quickly recognized that the video project was unique in its aims and outlook, and they believed, without exception, that it was the only opportunity given to them in their university careers to engage critically with each other about important issues affecting their everyday lives. It was also the first time they had attempted to analyse the Northern Ireland conflict, and to communicate their findings in a visual format, thereby incorporating a level of animation not possible within the confines of the written essay or examination.

Given that the conflict in Northern Ireland will have resonances

for its citizens for some time to come, the video project has a continuing relevance. Significant lessons were learned concerning the capacity for active learning, its applicability to situations outside the confines of a particular course, and the ability of students to engage in self and peer assessment. The central theme can be changed, while still maintaining the spirit of community and cooperation upon which a viable outcome is based. It is clear, given the amount of work put into the project by students in the 1992-93 course, that it is necessary to increase the value of its contribution to the overall mark (this was in fact been raised to 25 per cent for 1993-94). The current video topic, which encompasses both Northern Ireland and Canada, is appealing to students, and provides clues about the kind of outcome envisaged. It implies a general acceptance of the validity of all cultural traditions, the importance of tradition in the creation of a sense of identity, and the importance of group identity as a means of self-fulfilment, endowing an individual with a sense of security in this troubled society. Canada provides a useful model for students; from it they learn about the manifestation of oppositional and complicit post-colonialism within the same society. They also learn about the Canadian penchant for tolerance and the commitment to accommodating diversity, both within the literary canon and in the larger sphere of social and political interaction. The lessons learned are of great assistance to the group in their deliberations over how to approach the video production.

The video itself proved to be a liberating mechanism for my students. Its starting point assumed that difference was not necessarily destructive or damaging, and that Northern Ireland cannot ignore or suppress any of the cultural values which are manifest there. Beyond historical and cultural differences, post-colonial societies are united by their concern with myths of identity and authenticity. The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. In Northern Ireland, citizens must undergo an internal search for a more open, self-critical society, which can cope with cultural diversity and differences in allegiance, identity, and tradition without tearing itself apart. Such projects as the one described here might go some way towards coming to terms with the problem, and understanding what is required to effect a solution.

Practical Applications

It is hoped that in the course of reading this essay teachers might

have thought of ways in which they could adapt the principles and methods employed by the author to best advantage in their own classrooms. This final section offers a number of practical ideas and considerations which might be of further assistance.

The production of videos is something which should be within easy reach of the capabilities and resources of most teachers and institutions, both in Canada and elsewhere. Camcorders can be bought by schools and universities readily, and video tape is a small investment to make in what can be an extremely rewarding group project. Little is required in the way of training, other than an emphasis on maintaining a clearly focussed image, with good sound quality (possibly enhanced through the use of an external microphone). It is recommended that similar students: camcorder ratios (10:1) be maintained, in order to ensure that all participants develop a role for themselves in the productions.

Editing raw footage into a finished product is at the discretion of the project designer. The use of editing facilities (whether rudimentary ones built into many video cassette recorders, or more sophisticated editing suites) allows for greater flexibility— including the elimination of unwanted footage, a greater variety of roles for participants, and the incorporation of titles and background music—but this element adds a great deal of time onto the project, and need not be considered essential. Likewise the duration of the final version can vary: the suggested length of the author's project (8 to 10 minutes) represents the condensation of many hours of video tape but a shorter video (for example, 3 to 5 minutes) might suit the teacher's and students' needs in other scenarios.

~~I participated actively and expended a good deal of effort in completing the project~~ the video is to be assessed, it is desirable to design the project so that students develop a written proposal which outlines how the work is to be carried out to ensure that they work effectively with each other in a group. If this is done, the students have the potential to devise a project in which they can show that they made use of information, worked cooperatively with others, dealt with problems as they arose, organized the effective division of the task into its component parts, learned to manage time, communicated clearly, listened to others, and worked together to concentrate on their chosen focus for the video. Criteria for both individual and group performance can be developed from these goals. Criteria for outstanding individual achievement in the Queen's University project were as follows:

- I participated actively and expended a good deal of effort in completing the project.

I∠

- ∠took responsibility for part of it and honoured the commitments I made. I attended the meetings and worked on the project during its various stages.
- I worked well with other members of the group and valued their contributions.
- My impact on the project showed that I had an excellent understanding of the terms of the question being investigated.

Lower standards can be enunciated through variations in wording of the above (such as "I participated and put good effort into the project.") Fulfilment of these criteria can be checked, for example by a follow-up *viva voce* interview, in which the candidate is asked to justify the award of a particular mark. Criteria for outstanding group achievement in the same project were these:

- The project displayed a coherent argument that clearly addressed the question/topic; it clarified and explained to the viewer the students' understanding of the concepts.
- The answer was directly relevant to the question, and also considered the implications, assumptions, and nuances of the question.
- The video met all of the requirements stated in the project guidelines. It satisfied the criteria and expectations of the project proposal.
- It demonstrated an excellent degree of knowledge in breadth and range of research.
- It showed imagination and flair, looked professional, and showed independence of thought and approach.
- The viewer could hear and see clearly.
- It had a clearly defined, flowing structure, and met the requirements of planning and presentation. It was completed and submitted on time.

It is readily apparent that the criteria for the group mark (awarded to the product) is much more knowledge-based than for the individual mark. The reason for this division should be obvious: it is difficult to discern individual effort within the confines of a group project.

An important consideration for any teacher interested in interdisciplinary approaches to Canadian studies should be the range of

experience and input of the students themselves. If the teacher feels that the concept of a "Dialogic-Liberating" education is important to the needs and attainments of the students, then a variety of areas of experience should be brought in, so as to facilitate this process of emotive discovery. The use of video in the classroom enhances students' own perceptions of their points of cultural attachment and identification. The video is an extension of other popular media such as television and film, and students in a variety of disciplines can often relate intertextually to these areas of experience much more readily than they can to canonical texts, manuals, or guidebooks. Indeed, with its potential to render statements and ideas unequivocally through the immediate appeal to sight and sound, video can embody students' own authoritative statements much more readily than can the printed word. The following are some suggestions:

1. **Studying "Otherness" in Canadian Communities:** Teachers whose classes are composed of students from different backgrounds could benefit from an opportunity for the class members to employ the three-stage Freirean method to assist in understanding themselves and their relations with others. If handled sensitively by the teacher, students could, for example, identify problems existing within their own communities, or between communities; they could then consider why they exist, and could suggest what could be done to change the situation. In this scenario, which is personal and emotive, and has the advantage of drawing on students' own views and experiences, the video could be take the form of a documentary or drama, worked on by students from more than one discipline, addressing questions of cross-cultural interchange on many levels.

2. **Constructing Filmic Lexicons of Central Themes:** In many subjects, there are themes used by teachers to help students understand particular constructions. In Canadian literature, for example, the ideas of "the Garrison Mentality," "the Bush Garden," the "Peaceable Kingdom," or "Two Solitudes" have been invaluable in identifying the concerns of writers. In this model students from different disciplines could be asked to choose one such phrase, and develop a video which provides a visual explication of the term, informed by information and examples from more than one discipline, such as literature and history, history and politics, politics and gender studies, gender studies and environmental studies, etc. If this methodology is followed over an extended period the teachers involved will have built up a library of such lexicons, which can be used to instruct future groups of students in more than one discipline.

3. Examining a Particular Statement: This example most resembles the standard essay question, familiar to teachers at both schools and universities, and in fact used by the author in his project. In this model the teacher provides some direction for students, in the form of a question which they must try to answer in the video; the level of input by the teacher can be controlled to meet the needs of assessment and curriculum design. Setting a question has many benefits: teachers can preserve students' freedom by allowing them to investigate the topic as they see fit, but careful wording can ensure that this element complements other activities and topics the teacher is interested in addressing in the course.

The above examples are interdisciplinary in the way they encourage students within a particular class to subdivide the domains of investigation amongst the group members, and adopt a problem-oriented approach to their project. While the production of a video will work well within the confines of a single discipline, if true interdisciplinarity is to be achieved, the project must transcend the boundaries of a particular body of knowledge: ideally teachers and students from different disciplines would have to interact and share knowledge and experience. While this innovative strategy throws up many issues for educational systems which are assessment driven, cooperation even on the simplest level can be extremely rewarding. Teamwork could be as simple as the communication of ideas between classes in order to get the project started, or as complex as ensuring that there is mutual integration of organizing concepts, methodology, and terminology. If individuals from different fields of knowledge can be brought together to work constructively on a single video, self-consciously pooling their efforts to resolve a common problem, the resulting product will be much richer.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Prof. John Lennox, York University, and Mr. John Othick, Queen's University of Belfast, for their helpful suggestions in preparing this essay for publication.

2. On 31 August 1994 the IRA declared a 'cessation of military operations '; the loyalist paramilitaries followed with a parallel declaration in early September 1994. At the time of writing ~~the IRA has broken the cease-fire,~~ all-party talks are proceeding; the British and Irish governments have set a deadline of May 1998 for their conclusion.

while the loyalists have not.

3. For a full consideration of Ireland's history in the 20th century and a description of the establishment of Northern Ireland see R. F. Foster.

4. For a full discussion of the terminology see the section entitled "What Labels?" in Whyte, 18-22.

5. The term "Planter" is sometimes applied to the descendants of those Scots who were transplanted to Ireland in the early 17th century, and given land appropriated from the native Irish (Gaels) by King James I, as remuneration for military service. For a full account see "The Plantation of Ulster" in Curtis 226-234.

6. See, for example, Spivak 271-313. In this essay she is concerned with how the unrepresentable can achieve subjectivity and agency.

7. For further information on the Antigonish Movement see Coady.

8. For further information see Armstrong.

9. This information was supplied to the author by John Othick, who has taught for the Open University in the Maze Prison.

10. See Mishra and Hodge.

11. For a fuller consideration see Litvack.

12. John Wilson Foster explains that Northern Ireland is distinctive because of its "inability to decide whether it is a region of Ireland or region of Britain. It is, of course, both a fact that has yet to assume a unique cultural form" (12).

13. For further information see the chapter on "Multiculturalism: A Fact of Canadian Life" in Fleras and Elliott 25-52.

14. Prank Paci, interview with Joseph Pivato, in Hutcheon and Richmond 231. For further information on Paci see Leon Litvack, "The Weight of Cultural Baggage: Frank Paci and the Italian-Canadian Experience," in *Difference and Community: Canadian and European Cultural Perspectives*, eds. P. Easingwood, K. Gross, and L. Hunter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, forthcoming).

15. The resource texts on multiculturalism and postcolonialism to which students were introduced were Fleras and Elliott, and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin.

16. Such forms of summative assessment are only appropriate in situations where the curriculum objectives are set, and have little or no scope for change as the course progresses. The goals are clear and measurable, and are relayed to the students without any opportunity for feedback. In general, because of the long and formal process of setting university examinations in the United Kingdom, including their assessment and approval by external examiners, contents are fixed sometimes before the course in question begins.

17. My students noted that the Multicultural Resources Centre in Belfast has found that Chinese outranks Gaelic as the second most spoken language in Northern Ireland after English. Unofficial estimates indicate that there are upwards of 10,000 people of Chinese origin in Northern Ireland. The total population of the region is approximately 1.5 million.

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